

**Different ways of belonging to totality:  
Traditional African and Western-Christian  
cosmologies in three films**

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**An exploratory literature study**

by  
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### **Declaration**

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## Opsomming

Hierdie studie onderskei tussen *religie as 'n manier van behoort aan die ultiem-werklike en spesifieke religieuse tradisies*. Religie soos hier gebruik, het te make met 'n kosmologiese verstaan van die heelal en met wat eksistensiële as *werklik en sinvol* ervaar word.

Hoewel verskille tussen *religieuse tradisies* algemeen bekend is, is mense se emosionele verstaansraamwerke van die *heelal* so diep gesetel, dat die meeste nie eens beseft dat daar ook op hierdie vlak ingrypende verskille is nie. So gebeur dit dikwels dat konsepte soos *“transendensie” en “verlossing” verkeerdelik as universeel aan alle mense en religieuse tradisies beskou word*. In der waarheid kan kosmologiese komponente (die aard en ervaring van die onmiddellike realiteit; tydsvestaan; die rol van kans teenoor determinisme; die bron van religieuse kennis; ensovoorts) egter op 'n *simboliese vlak verskillend* ervaar word. In die konteks van Religie en Media waarbinne hierdie studie val, asook binne vele ander kontekste, is dit *problematies wanneer akademiese hul eie realiteitsiening en sinservaring op dié van ander projekteer* – veral wanneer hulle hulself uitdruklik voorgeneem het om die teendeel te doen.

John Cumpsty (1991) het drie maniere waarop mense sin maak van die kosmiese totaliteit onderskei en ek bespreek twee daarvan met verwysing na die Westers-Christelike en die tradisionele Afrika realiteitsienings. Hieruit word dit dan duidelik dat algeheel verskillende patrone in 'n kosmiese verstaan moontlik is, elk met 'n eie stel simbole wat sistemies bymekaar aansluit. Saam met Cumpsty se teorie, gebruik ek ook dié van Castells (2005) oor sosiale identiteitsvorming, en dié van Sen (2006) oor die gebruik van die kognitiewe versus die affektiewe in identiteitsvorming om aan te toon hoe kosmologiese simbole verskillend geposisioneer kan word.

Met hierdie drie teorieë in gedagte, ontsluit ek vervolgens die identiteite van die hoofkarakters in drie rolprente hermeneuties. Ek het spesifiek dié medium as 'n bestudeerbare greep van die lewe gekies weens die toenemende gewildheid daarvan in die refleksie, konstruksie en projeksie van eksistensiële sin. Nog 'n rede is die talle voorbeelde waarin interpreteerders van rolprente hul eie kosmiese verstaan op dié van andere projekteer terwyl hulle eintlik pluralisties wil wees.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie was vir my verrassend. Dit bring eerstens, soos verwag, wel helderheid oor die aard van verskille tussen die Westers-Christelike en die tradisionele Afrika kosmologieë, asook hoe dit in die praktyk kan uitspeel aan die hand van simboliese interpretasies.

Die integrasie van die drie teorieë het my egter ook die kans gebied om 'n *metode vir 'n religieus-kosmologiese analise van identiteit te ontwikkel*. Hiervolgens kan 'n ontleder van rolprente op 'n redelike, sistematiese en sistemiese manier tussen sy of haar eie, sowel as 'n moontlike ander, paradigma onderskei. Dit laat die ontleder toe om die eie *paradigma te erken, sowel as respek te betoon teenoor 'n ander paradigma – sonder om die eie op die ander te projekteer*. Daarom verminder hierdie metode veral ook die kans op die gebruik van 'n *dubbele-tekst interpretasie* wat uitsluiting van die ander handhaaf of bevorder.

Hierdie metode, sowel as die bevindinge van die studie, kan veel wyer as die veld van Religie en Media toegepas word, omdat dit te make het met die verstaan van identiteit en verskillende maniere van behoort aan die kosmiese totaliteit.

## Summary

This study distinguishes between *religion as a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real* and *specific religious traditions*. Religion, as used here, concerns a cosmological understanding of the universe and with that which is experienced as meaningful and real on an existential level.

Although differences between *religious traditions* are generally known, most people's emotional conceptual frameworks of the *universe* are so deep seated that they do not even realise that far-reaching differences between people on this level too are possible. It often happens, for example, that concepts such as *transcendence and redemption are incorrectly accepted as universal to all of humanity*. Yet in fact, cosmological concepts (the nature and experience of the immediate world out there, the conceptual understanding of time, the role of chance versus determinism, the source of religious knowledge and so forth) can be experienced differently on a symbolic level. In the context of Religion and Media which is the field of study relevant here, as well as in a number of other contexts, it is problematic when scholars *project their own views of reality and meaning experiences onto those of others* – especially when they expressly articulate their intention as the opposite.

John Cumpsty (1991) distinguished three ways in which a person can derive meaning from the cosmic totality and I shall discuss two of these with reference to the Western-Christian and the traditional African reality views. From this, it becomes clear that radical different patterns of cosmological understanding are possible, each with its own systemically related set of symbols. Along with Cumpsty's theory, I also use the theory of Castells (2005) on the construction of social identities, as well as the theory of Sen (2006) on the use of cognitive versus affective dimensions in identity formation, to indicate how cosmological symbols can be positioned differently.

With these three theories in mind, I subsequently interpret the identities of the main characters in three films hermeneutically. I specifically selected this medium as a segment of life to be studied because of the increasing popularity of the medium in reflection, construction and projection of existential meaning. Another reason for my choice is the many examples where interpreters of film project their own cosmological understanding onto those of others whilst they actually intend to be pluralistic.

The findings of this study surprised me. Firstly and as expected, it clarifies the nature of differences between the Western-Christian and the traditional African cosmologies, as well as how these are implemented in praxis and by symbolic interpretations.

However, the integration of the three theories also afforded me the *opportunity to develop a method for a religious-cosmological analyses of identities*. According to this method, an interpreter of films can distinguish between his or her own paradigm and a possible other paradigm. It allows the analyst *to acknowledge the own paradigm and simultaneously respect another paradigm – without projecting the own onto the other*. Therefore this method diminishes the chances of using *dubble-text interpretation* which maintains or promotes the exclusion of others.

With this method, as well as the findings of this study, one can go much wider than the field of Religion and Media, as it involves the understanding of identity and different ways of belonging to the cosmic totality.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world seems to be characterised by a never-ending quest for peace and justice yet also a history of ceaseless misunderstandings between people and societies at all levels. In making sense of this, humanity tends to attribute coherences and differences between individuals and groups to the role of religious traditions, culture and world views, to mention but a few. But could similarities and differences between people possibly be informed by something that lies at an even deeper level?

In view of this question, this study will probe the symbolic interpretation of constant cosmological factors in processes of identity formation. In this regard, two theoretic ways of belonging to totality will be discussed, namely the traditional African and conventional Western-oriented Christian views. I shall use the work of John Cumpsty (1991) to argue that *deep-seated paradigms inform* belief and behaviour patterns of individuals and groups to find expression in religious traditions, culture, world views and all other expressions of identity in an interrelated, dynamic way. It is hoped that by realising that meaning and existential belonging can be found in *distinctly different ways* one may eventually be inclined to fewer assumptions on what motivates or inspires people. As a result it may also be easier to understand similarities and differences in the perspectives, beliefs and behaviour of oneself and others.

Cumpsty supplies a systematic, logic-coherent framework in which he identifies three “ideal” or “theoretical” paradigms of religion, each characterized by a unique way to derive meaning. I shall refer to these as “cosmologies” (alternated by “reality view”). The two that will be discussed here, are:

- (1) the concept that an active and purpose-driven engagement with the world-out-there in order to shape it, is worth striving towards and provides meaning; and
- (2) the concept whereby experiences in the here and now form part of a pulsating, coherent whole and hence meaning is derived from the texture of daily life, in other words from the quality of the immediate experience.

The ways people choose to belong to totality are forever subject to change. First, the symbols within each paradigm can be positioned in a number of ways. To discuss such variations, especially with regard to social coercion, I shall draw on the insights of Manuel Castells (2005). His theory enables an interpreter to identify why, and for what, identity is constructed. It also allows one to critically reflect on what kind of identity has the potential to break through the seemingly never-ending cycle of producing “more of the same” identities which either resist a particular agenda, or support it. In a next step I shall discuss the use of feelings and reason in asserting conscious and unconscious positions. For this I shall draw on the work of Amyarta Sen (2006). I shall then use the theories of both Cumpsty and Castells, as well as the views of Sen to demonstrate how layers of positioning may impact on belonging to totality, self-image and social interaction. It is within this context of different ways of meaning-making and belonging that I shall finally explore identity choices of individuals by analysing and interpreting simulated life situations in three films.

The medium of film can be regarded as a powerful tool to *mirror* life. It provides readily packaged case studies demonstrating some of the great variety of options people may exercise in their respective views of reality. Yet films can also *influence* the belief and behaviour patterns of viewers and sensitise one to reality views other than the own. This role of films in shaping and changing the interrelated aspects of meaning, belonging, world views and identity, is increasingly recognised by Western-oriented Christian scholars, including those in the field of Religion and Media. I shall argue that the medium of film is increasingly used by Westerners as a platform to construct identity and existential meaning and belonging. This is one reason why this study is relevant to the praxis and thus the domain of Practical Theology.

Another reason why this topic is relevant to the aforementioned domain has to do with relationships between people from different religious traditions. The problem is that even though Western-oriented scholars such as Warren (1997), Deacy (2001), Hoover (2006) and Ortiz (2007) may have every intention to understand others and even articulate their intention as such, they do not necessarily interpret films from the perspective that different ways of belonging and meaning-making are possible. *Their frame of mind seems to be firmly based in their own felt sense of reality and their arguments imply that their own set of cosmological symbols applies to everyone. As a result they unwittingly disregard what feels real and provides meaning to others and hence achieve quite the opposite of what they have set out to do.*

It is therefore necessary to ask why such projection of the own onto others takes place, especially when the agenda is the opposite. Could it be that scholars in Religion and Media – and for that matter a great number of people in influential or any other positions – are not aware that there are wholly different ways to perceive reality and to derive meaning? Could it be that such individuals are not sufficiently aware of the distinctive and decisive roles of reason and feelings in belonging and identity?

My argument will be that the gap, and tension, between the perceptions, values and sense of belonging of a character and those of a viewer require systematic, nuanced and contextual analysis. To address this matter, I deliberately choose a normative, hermeneutical approach which will also include an inner reflection “to wander the *hermeneutic spiral*” to deeper levels (NÅden 2010:74). My aim will be to understand deeply held, existential assumptions that inform behaviour, belief, values, meaning, identity, and so forth (Louw 2005:9,105,109,118) from different perspectives. I shall unlock and unpack layers of information relevant to Western-oriented viewers and to film characters by referring to social, cultural and religious contexts. It is my intention to (1) indicate the extent to which different ways of existential belonging can be identified, (2) reflect on possible positions of existential symbols and (3) highlight the necessity to distinguish between the affective and the cognitive in expressing scholarly views.

If the world requires an agenda whereby understanding of and co-operation with others needs to be sought, it is henceforth in my opinion necessary to reflect on the extent to which knowledge of different cosmologies could be useful to reflect on world views, religious traditions, cultures and identities of others. This research cannot address this matter adequately – the topic is simply too complex and too vast. It will, however, attempt to explore how the practical articulation of constant factors expressed by a combination of symbols unique to each of two coherent, *albeit* theoretic cosmologies, may provide a useful structure from where to understand identity choices portrayed in three films.

The key question posed in this study is:

*Can knowledge of coherent yet theoretic cosmologies be helpful to gain insight into identity formation and social interaction, given that individuals exercise their own choices in respect of who they are?*

This question will be examined from a philosophical-religious perspective and the application will be in the field of Media and Religion in the domain of Practical Theology.



## 2. THE TERM “COSMOLOGY” AS USED IN THIS STUDY

Before explaining the topic, questions and purpose of this research, it may be necessary to briefly clarify what is meant with the term “cosmology” and also to summarise the reason for investigating how cosmologies may influence identity and social interactions.

The Greek word for “order” is “kosmos” and it also denotes “world” and “universe”, in fact “the real world is the order that underlies the world, and (according to the ancient Greek mind) this order can be discovered by the rational mind” (Osborne 2007:74) (my insertion). According to Richard Tarnas (1993:47) it may have been first applied to the world (in this case the Western world) by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras who lived from 582- 507 BCE. Since then the relationship between the intelligence and structure of the universe and the existence and role of humanity has been recorded from many points of view as part of humanity’s quest for meaning.

The arguments of Western philosophers, scientists and religious leaders, for example, were influenced by their perceptions of the earth’s position in the universe. Throughout the classical Greek period, as well as during more or less the fifteen centuries to follow, a framework in which the earth was seen to be flat, static and the centre of the universe was upheld. During the Renaissance period the work of Copernicus and Galileo introduced the concepts of a moving, rotating earth which is part of a vast universe that consists of billions of galaxies.<sup>1</sup> Since then, several scientists have deepened and expanded theories on the earth’s relation to the universe and the resulting philosophical arguments have ranged between the impossibility to understand life on earth to attempts of synthesising paradoxical perspectives.<sup>2</sup> During Western society’s post-modern era the relativity, complexity and plurality of truth became more evident in studies on all levels.<sup>3</sup> Current scientific knowledge of the physical world indicates that no single perspective can any longer be considered final and “(a)ll human understanding is interpretation, and no interpretation is final” (Tarnas, 1993:397).

In this study the focus will not be on disciplines such as astronomy, physics or mathematics, nor will it assume one paradigm as the most advanced or insightful. The focus will be on hermeneutical, qualitative and philosophical ways of understanding humanity’s quest for meaning and identity from the perspective of particular yet different and changeable applications of religion. In addition to referring to the Western-Christian cosmology, I shall also refer to a traditional African cosmology.

In essence, a person’s cosmology or reality view is here seen as a paradigm by which he or she *chooses to belong to totality*. It will be argued that a person’s cosmology *expresses* her or his perceptions and assumptions

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<sup>1</sup> The radical possibility that the earth moves and rotates was already mentioned by some Pythagoreans as well as by Aristarchus centuries earlier, but Copernicus was the first person to develop the astronomical and mathematical consequences of the hypothesis into a theory. This discovery was literally so earth shattering that Copernicus shared his discoveries with only a few trusted people and published his *De Revolutionibus* only at the end of his life in 1543. Nevertheless, in 1616 the Church declared his work “false and erroneous” and banned *De Revolutionibus*. He was not the only one whose contribution to science was condemned by the Church. The astronomer Galileo who invented the telescope was interrogated by the Inquisition and placed under house arrest in 1633. (Tarnas 1993:248-261, Osborne 2007:284-288).

<sup>2</sup> David Hume who lived from 1711-1776 and who distinguished between ideas and sensory impressions argued, for instance, that space and time are only ways of experiencing objects and that “the idea of cause itself, and thus certain knowledge of the world, had to be critically reconsidered” (Tarnas 1992:340). He questioned everything – God, order, causality, personal identity and real knowledge. On the other hand Kant, Goethe and Hegel tried to reconcile certainty and uncertainty, opposites and the whole, the conscious and the unconscious (Tarnas 1993:378-388).

<sup>3</sup> Major theoretical interventions such as, for example, Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, Lorenz and Feigenbaum’s chaos theory, Bell’s theorem of nonlocality, the work of Freud and Jung on the subconscious and the contributions of feminist scholars in various fields are amongst those that point to the necessity of a variety of perspectives when trying to understand life.

of total reality and simultaneously *informs* his or her worldview, culture, religious tradition, identity and therefore beliefs, behaviour, attitude and ethics in every aspect of life, *albeit* in an interactive and dynamic manner (see 4.2). As such, a particular coherent cosmology or reality view will be viewed as a basic, yet an important, *set of cosmic assumptions* and an *existential departure point* from where personal (individual and group) choices could be made (consciously and unconsciously) to construct the many *variations* of people's identities – the latter which is forever subject to change as argued by Castells (2005), Cumpsty (1991) and Volf (1996). This point is rather important so as to emphasise that when the “ideal,” or theoretical types of cosmologies, are discussed at a later stage, the reader should not interpret these paradigms as determining in a rigid way. Cosmologies are not universal laws, sets of rules, or fixed ideas. They change as humanity's perceptions change through different ages. As such they should be viewed as *hermeneutical explanations* of religion and not as part of a *phenomenological* study of religion.

What is important here, is to *establish if all people view total reality from the same cosmological perspective* that presupposes, for instance, transcendence and therefore an “*as yet*” and a “*not yet*” view of reality embedded in a linear concept of time which demands an active shaping of the environment and thus a purpose-driven life.<sup>4</sup> If not, then it is also necessary to reflect if knowledge of the logic, structure and symbolic content of Cumpsty's framework (1991) can help to reduce assumptions and uninformed conclusions by scholars – at least in the field of Religion and Media.

One should not deduce that all belief and behaviour patterns fit neatly into Cumpsty's three paradigms. Cumpsty himself clearly indicates that these are theoretical, ideal types and although they offer a broad, paradigmatic understanding of humanity's sense of belonging to totality, they do not deal in-depth with any specific religious traditions, nor any dogmas, theologies, cultures or any other groupings. As it is, he stresses the fact that very few religious traditions fit seamlessly into the three paradigms (1991:115). Many changes, variations and nuances, due to socio-cultural reasons, are possible and in this regard Cumpsty does reflect on several scenarios which may be expected in times of change (1991:227-252). In essence, he argues that when a person's cosmology, or reality view, changes, “whether in response to socio-cultural change, or with an appearance of spontaneity, it will do so in a manner that seeks the maintenance or restoration of the sense of belonging” (1991:227). Thus, one may assume that at least a number of the symbols from one of the paradigms will be present in a person or in a group's choice of religion, culture and/or worldview, *albeit* in an (uneasy) combination with symbols from another type.

Most importantly, when the two cosmologies or reality views are discussed, it will not be done from a perspective of opposing or competing paradigms nor the intention to categorise. Rather, the agenda is to *establish if knowledge of theoretic cosmologies can help to reduce findings in which the own view of existential belonging is projected onto the reality view of another*. From this follows that knowledge of different ways to derive meaning could potentially, if required, also be helpful in working towards co-operation between people, the attainment of mutually beneficial outcomes and hopefully a more just society.

One could, of course, ignore the potential role of cosmologies and argue that all people in the world choose their identities individually and that, as such, there is no need to investigate the potential role of overarching paradigms on perceptions, beliefs, policy, behaviour, attitudes, interaction, and so forth. Some even argue that all people are “basically the same” and therefore “want the same”. On the surface such arguments may seem enlightened as they reject any approach which may be regarded as a classification of people, but are they in fact not actually rigid or exclusive by deliberately ignoring deeply engrained, yet different ways to make sense of life? What is, for instance, considered a suitable baseline if all people are regarded to be “the same”? Suffice to say here that such an approach would probably represent a position on one end of a spectrum of possible

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<sup>4</sup> As will be explained in chapters four to six, the symbols in a cosmology are linked in a systemic way. An alternative view of the cosmos can for example entail a *reality where there is no other, more ultimate reality, but where all is part of and interconnected in the same whole, time is cyclical, the engagement with reality is based on fitting into it and therefore the texture of life is more important than goals*. Another alternative would entail a cosmology where *the immediate world out there is not affirmed as of the real and therefore requires withdrawal as the mode of engagement with life*.

arguments. On the other hand, an argument that one's identity, behaviour, attitudes, etcetera are determined by, and without exception subject to one's cosmology (in a rather deterministic way), would represent an extreme on the opposite side of a possible spectrum of arguments and would undoubtedly lead to a classification of people.

This literature study will not argue in favour of any of the aforementioned extreme positions. Rather, it will take into account that someone's cosmological paradigm is subject to change (Cumpsty 1991) and also that the identity of a person and a group (and therefore the person's attitudes, behaviour, etc.) is subject to change (Castells 2005, Sen 2006, Volf 1996.) In other words, it will recognise the importance of understanding the potential role of relevant cosmologies as underlying (and often subconscious) paradigms whilst acknowledging the fact that different groups and individuals make up their own beliefs and convictions as to *what feels real and meaningful* in a specific situation – and therefore *worthwhile to belong to or associate with*.

All three aforementioned viewpoints (i.e. ignoring or excluding the role of cosmologies, a deterministic approach to the role of cosmologies and an approach that takes cognizance of both the role of cosmologies and the individual choices of people in real-life situations) will be discussed in more detail in chapters four, five and six.

In essence then, Cumpsty's theoretic framework of three reality views of which two will be the focus here, will be put to the test to evaluate if two of the cosmologies in his framework can add value in understanding different ways of existential belonging and identity formation in practice.

### 3. RESEARCH PARAMETERS

#### 3.1. The purpose of this study

This literature study aims to establish if *two theoretic views of totality and their associated symbols may be useful in understanding how such cosmic sense of belonging informs ways of humanity's self-expression and meaning assignment*. In other words, it will explore and discuss basic mechanisms and strategies people rely on to define their spiritual-religious *experience of meaning* and how these may impact on how they *define themselves and others*.

Films will be considered a suitable medium to explore the formation and positioning of identity in simulated real-life situations and will be used as case studies. By referring to the comments of scholars in the field of Religion and Media, attention will be drawn to some implications of projecting one's own way of meaning-making and belonging onto another.

#### 3.2. Positioning and problem statement

How is the interconnectedness between religious schemata of interpretation and cultural contexts influenced by cosmologies? Investigating the possible influence of two cosmologies on the formation of identity is a highly complex, as well as a potentially contentious topic as it deals with the personal feelings and choices of people.

Miroslav Volf (1996:210) argues that it is increasingly unlikely for societies to be coherently organised because "we cannot avoid living in *overlapping and rapidly changing social spaces*." In his opinion, it's better to let go of the idea of coherent traditions as this presupposes single unified communities. Manuel Castells (2005:424-427) agrees that the power of identity is no longer concentrated in formally organised forms such as the state, capitalist firms, the media, churches or other institutions and organizations. He says the main agency in our current post-modern society's social movements "is a *networking, decentred form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements*, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the informational society". He concludes that "we are at a loss when confronted with the subtle pervasiveness of incremental changes of symbols processed through multiform networks, away from the halls of power" (2004:428) and says it is precisely in this variety that the power of identity will give rise to a new kind of society. This study fully agrees with these viewpoints.

Over and above the opinions of Volf and Castells, there is much evidence that the kind of globalisation that we have been experiencing since the end of the twentieth century is unlike any previous globalising processes the world has experienced in history as known to us.<sup>5</sup> As a result of significant, rapid, vast, complex forces that affect all aspects of society and culture in and from a multitude of directions, very little seems to remain unaffected (Giddens 2002, Held 1999, Singer 2002, World Council of Churches 2005). It

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<sup>5</sup> The Renaissance was also characterized by innovations that had dramatic effects on (*albeit*) Western society's view of reality. At the time, people such as Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Columbus, Luther and Copernicus produced master works or were responsible for major breakthroughs – all within the span of a single generation. Technical inventions and astronomical and scientific discoveries changed the entire physical cosmology. The implications thereof were too dramatic to be accepted by both the Church and mainstream thinking. In an interesting turn of events the new scientific information was, amongst other reasons, rejected in light of Luther's literal approach to the Bible as the only and most reliable source of truth (Aquinas and former church leaders read the Bible metaphorically). Luther's convictions that started a theological reformation eventually also resulted in a bifurcation of reality by Christians. This mindset of separation was later transferred to most of Western thinking (Tarnas 1993).

may well be that the very texture of our existence – or perhaps even the basis of our existence – is under construction as it seems as if change is everywhere, multiple and unavoidable.

The question posed in the very first paragraph of this study is: *Could similarities and differences between people possibly be informed by something that lies at an even deeper level than religious traditions, culture and world views?*

This question is loaded, as it suggests that conceptual patterns on a level deeper than world views, religious traditions and culture, influence how we choose to belong to all-that-are-out-there. It is necessary to put this question and its associated thoughts into perspective.

The agenda here is not to establish whether the cosmologies of *all* Africans and *all* Westerners respectively correspond with two particular cosmologies. Such an approach would be the complete opposite of the insights of Volf, Castells and the aforementioned scholars. It would assume (incorrectly in my opinion) that theoretic patterns alone have the power to define individual choices.

When the theoretical presupposition is linked to the framework proposed by Cumpsty, it will be done to ascertain if not only the symbolic content, but also the *structure, the function, the dynamics* and the *logic* of this framework can be regarded helpful to hermeneutically make sense of the great many varieties people choose to belong to and how they express their identity (see also 5.3 and 6.2 on the role of hermeneutics). In fact, in Cumpsty's own words, his academic task "is not primarily about accurately describing surfaces but about discovering the most enriching mode of engagement with whatever is out there." (1988:101) This response from him came after critique by David Chidester (1988) in which he accused Cumpsty of phenomenological hegemony. Cumpsty (1988:102) replied that studies of religion can be done in a variety of styles, each with its own criteria and that such styles should ideally not be mutually exclusive, but rather complement one another:

"There are *doers* of religion, *observers* of religion, and *explainers* of religion. Each level is absolutely dependent for its success on the levels that precede it. The first level and the last function with models, with normative assertions, and these have their own criteria of validity. What right has the middle level to claim that it and it alone shall be regarded as academic? All that is important is that when people, in the process of doing, observe another tradition, their findings are not confused with those who *seek to observe the other in its own terms*" (my cursivations).

The unfortunate tendency to categorise identities does indeed exist, but this should not be confused with the inner workings and *logic* of Cumpsty's model as I believe Chidester (1988) did. Cumpsty's framework is a contribution to theory and it explains the dynamics of ways in which people can be religious, that is, until other, or simpler, or perhaps more profound, or encompassing paradigm(s) emerge.

Why then is it important to develop an understanding of different ways of belonging to the ultimately-real as expressed in identity and social behaviour? According to Castells (2005:7) "for most social actors, meaning is organized around a primary identity (that is an *identity that frames the others*), which is self-sustaining across space and time" (my cursivation). The age of nationalist resurgence, he says, coincides with the age of globalisation "expressed both in the challenge to established nation-states and in the widespread (re)construction of identity on the basis of nationality, *always affirmed against the alien*" (Castells, 2005:30) (my cursivation).

What Castells<sup>6</sup> says here is that most of us evaluate, judge or understand others in relation to who we regard ourselves to be and that this positioning or perspective affects our social interaction. Relations between the

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<sup>6</sup> The work of Castells (2005) has been used in this thesis firstly for his valuable theory on how identity is formed, and also because he has done extensive research in different parts of the world. He cites examples from the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, the Americas, Asia, the Far East and Europe, but unfortunately to a very limited extent, Africa.

self and others have to do with the extent of compassion and love for the self and for others as well as with how people find existential meaning. Both these aspects – the extent to which another is embraced or not and the desire for fulfilment through a sense of belonging to totality – sit at the heart of what religion and religious traditions are about. Thus there is an overlap of interest between sociology and religion. Both are different lenses on people's interaction with reality.

In fact, the best departure point may be to first understand one's own perceptions and assumptions – in my case the latter is firstly informed by a Western-oriented Christian view of totality as my ancestors hail from Europe. However, as someone who has been born and bred in a country on the southern-most tip of the African continent, I do not view my identity as purely Western-oriented Christian. Like many of my fellow citizens I am very aware of the simultaneous existence of similarities, patterns in differences, as well as uniquenesses in myself and in the people around me. I live with this multiplicity and I strive to make sense of the tension between individualism, freedom and the desire for union. Similar to Nico Koopman (2009:5) I would like to argue that my own identity entails “something more”, something that “refers to an in-between state during which old, certain, clearly defined identities are re-negotiated and the door is opened for the new, imaginative and surprising.”

Therefore, on the one hand this study is part of a personal quest to gain insight into the formation of identity in my own country and amongst my own people in all its diversity within a context of a global society. But this is only one of the reasons for this study as my search goes beyond personal interest. Whilst reading the comments of scholars in the field of Religion and Media, I was impressed by their willingness to not limit their investigations and remarks to a Western-Christian perspective and I was equally disappointed to realise that in many instances, they lack as much insight as I do into different views of reality, including the ultimately-real. *A pattern began to emerge* from the works I have read in this particular as well as in related fields of religion and culture: *the sincere desire to recognise differences alongside a perspective restricted to a Western-Christian cosmology*. Therefore this study is also in response to these impressions and the desire to find a different approach whereby such unintended subtexts are not maintained, an approach whereby different reality views are perceived on their own terms.<sup>7</sup>

It should hopefully be clear at this stage that the intention with this research is not to divide or to categorise, nor to focus on differences *per se*, but to rather *increase the level of understanding, respect and value for respective cosmologies, as well as to capitalize on strengths* so as to eventually develop a deeper understanding of our complex and interwoven reality, to raise our consciousness levels and to reinforce a healthy interaction between people from different groups with the ultimate aim of mutually beneficial co-operation on all levels of life. The Western frame of mind cannot and should not consciously or unconsciously be elevated to a default level, as more appropriate, aspirational, or evolved than another.

I shall use three films for practical investigations and provide a motivation for this in chapter six, but it is necessary to say at this point that what this study tries to explain is not restricted to certain films. It can be applied to and tested with any and all films. Media, which includes film, represents a view of life. It can reflect, affirm, inspire, confuse, disturb, reveal and project. The stories of films relate to how humanity imagines itself in space and time, how we choose to associate with all of life and how we search for, define and maintain existential meaning. As such, all films can be considered relevant texts in the interpretation and explanation of religion and culture.

It should also be noted right at the outset that even a hermeneutical approach which tends to be open-ended and indeterminate can limit or expand one's interpretation of life. Generally, most people are inclined to recognise and view life through their own (often understood as the only possible) framework. As researcher I am very aware of the tension between my own comfort zone and my willingness to open myself up to other views. Therefore my hermeneutics should be regarded as mere that – interpretations *within contexts*

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<sup>7</sup> Saying one thing yet maintaining another, has bearing on almost everything where joint decisions, co-operation and mutuality are relevant as in policy-making and amongst people in their day-to-day lives. Although my interests extend to the dynamics of governance, the latter does not form part of this study.

*known to me*. Nevertheless, I trust that the analyses of films will highlight the existence of more than one way of meaning-making and cosmic belonging and as such contribute to a pluralistic scholarly culture, or at the very least, to discussions on pluralistic hermeneutics.

### **3.3. Summary: purpose and positioning**

Developing knowledge and especially a sensitivity for reality views outside the scope of the own within an ever changing world, is probably a dynamic life-long journey. Yet it is hoped that this study may contribute to at least an awareness that brings one a step closer to answers in the quest for more meaningful relationships with the own and with others.

The study will explore deep-seated patterns in *cosmological views* and how these views potentially play out in the construction of identity in selected films. It therefore deals with matters of attitudes, perceptions, perspectives and feelings – which in turn may influence how and for what identity is constructed.

Thus, in short, the purpose and positioning of this study is *to uncover different ways of existential belonging, to contextualize these reality views and to ascertain if the structure and logic of two theoretic cosmologies are helpful in gaining insight into how people may choose to belong to totality and construct their identities in real life. Films will be used as case studies.*

### **3.4. Research questions**

The key question posed in this investigation is:

*Can knowledge of coherent yet theoretic cosmologies be helpful to gain insight into identity formation given that individuals exercise their own choices in respect of whom they are?*

In order to answer the abovementioned, the following needs to be investigated:

- If the felt sense of reality can be expressed in different ways, are such views of reality expressed randomly? Can possible coherencies and/or constant elements be identified?
- How can the answer to the above theoretically be applied in respect of traditional African and conventional Western-oriented Christian views?
- What is the relationship, if any, between the construction of identity and cosmologies?
- If there is a relation between the construction of identity and cosmologies, to what extent can theoretical cosmologies be helpful in a religious-philosophical understanding of identity formation and social interaction in real life situations?

### **3.5. Research topic**

The topic of the study revolves around *how constant cosmological factors*, or what John Cumpsty (1999:218) regards as “non-negotiating symbols” *in respect of two cosmologies* can be helpful in an attempt to understand the great variety of *choices in identity in a structured way*.

The study will focus on what Cumpsty describes as:

- the “Secular World Affirming” paradigm with specific reference to a Western-Christian cosmology whereby an active and purpose-driven engagement with the world-out-there in order to shape it, is worth striving towards and provides meaning; and
- the “Immediate Experience Affirming” paradigm with specific reference to traditional African views whereby experiences in the here and now form part of a pulsating, coherent whole in which

meaning is derived from the texture of daily life, in other words from the quality of the immediate experience.

The work of Castells (2005) and Sen (2006) will be used to describe possible positions in belonging and the construction of identity and henceforth be applied to film analysis.

In short, the research topic can be articulated as:

*Different ways of belonging to totality. Traditional African and Western-Christian cosmologies in three films.*

### 3.6. Definitions

Throughout this study it will be imperative to clearly distinguish between especially three terms:

- *Religion* as a sense of belonging to totality and a dimension shared by all human beings.
- *Cosmologies* as patterns or paradigms of interpreting religion as a sense of belonging to totality. At least three totally logic, coherent patterns or paradigms can theoretically be distinguished. In practice many variations do exist.
- *Religious traditions* which refer to specific faith and spiritual traditions, dogmas, theologies and so forth.

All these, as well as other relevant terms will now be defined in more detail.

- The term *religion* will be understood in terms of the definition used by John Cumpsty (1991:161) as *the quest for, realization or maintenance of, a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real*. In other words, the term religion describes the universal human drive to – positively or negatively – be positioned in relation to totality. This concept should not be confused with “religious traditions”.
- *Cosmology*, alternated by *reality view*, here refers to specific sets of symbols that explain personal (individual and group) choices, assumptions and values of understanding, sensing and relating to the universe, the divine and all which humanity perceives to exist. These choices, assumptions and values are consciously and/or unconsciously employed by humanity to construct the many variations of identities, the latter which is forever subject to change due to the interpretation or replacement of symbols. Thus a “cosmology” or a “reality view” is an explanation of the essence and structure of being which can be distinguished from phenomenological observation. Two theoretic paradigms will be discussed in the context of religion as defined by Cumpsty, as well as two real-life cosmologies namely the traditional African cosmology and the Western-Christian cosmology which can both be explained by Cumpsty’s theoretic reality views. One could from a religious-cosmological perspective and for the sake of clarity, say that humanity’s general desire for belonging (religion) gives rise to different cosmological interpretations of all-that-are-out-there. The latter are, in turn, translated into symbolic interpretations and expressed as dogmas, theologies, religious and spiritual traditions and further complicated by individual choices and positions.<sup>8</sup>
- *Religious traditions* in turn, will refer to faith traditions, and other specific forms of worship and spirituality. Hence they can be seen as differentiated applications of cosmologies.

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<sup>8</sup> Cumpsty describes his three paradigms as three “religion types” as they represent three ways of belonging to totality. Thus, in essence they explain patterns of what feels real on a cosmological level, although he doesn’t use such terms. In my opinion, the term “cosmology” reduces the possible confusion between “religious traditions” on the one hand and patterns of more fundamental, deep-seated cosmological symbols on the other and therefore I prefer to use the term “cosmologies” alternated by “reality views”.



- A *world view* is here not regarded as similar to *reality view* or *cosmology* as the latter is regarded to be more encompassing. “World view” refers to just that – a view of the world or of planet earth, whilst “reality view” refers to totality and thus all-that-are-out-there (and here).
- Neither the concept *Western* nor the concept *African* refers to race or ethnic groups. The broad distinctions made here are based on what people may choose to belong to. Both terms refer to those individuals and groups whose felt sense of total reality is influenced by a sharing of history, religious traditions, culture, sentiment, geographical space, ethos and/or any other relevant form of association. In this regard, Louw (2008:147) for example argues that “Africa...does not denote so much a continent, race, ethnicity or merely culture.” Africa, according to Louw, is both a philosophical concept and a spiritual category. The terms “Western” and “African” have here been selected as the sharing of a geographical area over a long period and can generally be considered a significant factor that may link people together in philosophical, spiritual or other ways. It should, however, not be regarded as exclusive nor divisive. Any person from any background and for any reason, may associate with the ethos of any of these groups. Hence these terms are used in their descriptive sense and not as evaluative. They will both be unpacked hermeneutically when the relevant two cosmologies are discussed in the context of life-like situations (see chapter six).
- The term *secular* is also used descriptively and not in an evaluative sense whereby it implies “religion as failure”. “Secular” here rather refers to the opposite of “profane” (the sacred and the ultimately-real) and thus denotes “a mode of being in this world”. Yet I cannot ignore my own reservations on using it, as the unfortunate association of “secular” with “failed religion” is quite an established one. Cumpsty (1991:117,364-368) also acknowledges the difficulty of using this term, as well as critique he received about it. I considered alternatives and the best one to “Secular World Affirming” seems to be “Bi-polar Reality Affirming”. Yet the latter may summon its own set of undesirable associations – for example from a psychological perspective. In the end I decided to retain Cumpsty’s terminology – in this instance until a better alternative is suggested.
- The term *culture* is here viewed in its broadest sense, namely “everything that humanity does and produces as an expression within the space and time of this world”, including philosophy, politics, art, education, technology, science, media, trade and so forth, as well as every kind of interaction and relationship with the self and with fellow human beings, animals and the environment. However, my focus will be on identity formation and social interaction portrayed in three films. Although the concepts can be distinguished from one another, *culture* exists and interacts dynamically and systemically with one’s *cosmology* and with being *religious*.
- The term *symbol* is here used to refer to impressions, assumptions, conventions, associations and values that express a person’s or a group’s conceptualisation of totality. It will be explained that each cosmological paradigm consists of a set of constant factors (or symbols) that are symbolically interpreted according to what feels real.

### 3.7. Assumptions

It is assumed that:

- The terms *Western-oriented Christian*, as well as *conventional Western*, refer to the main stream sense of belonging in the Western world, influenced predominantly by Christianity. By contextualizing Christianity (*albeit* very generically) I recognize that not all kinds of Christianity are embedded in the same reality view and that there is no uniform kind of Christianity which can serve as a baseline. *Western-oriented Christian* will be alternated by, and sometimes abbreviated to *Western-Christian*, *conventional Western*, *Western-oriented* or simply *Western*. All these terms will be used to refer to real-life reality views that can be explained by the theoretic cosmology described by Cumpsty (1991) as “Secular World Affirming”.

- The traditional African sense of belonging to totality is mostly associated with the cosmology Cumpsty (1991) describes as “Immediate Experience Affirming” or as “Nature Religion”. It may be abbreviated as *African way*, *African paradigm* or *African view*, *African-oriented* or *African*.

### 3.8. Research method

The style of critical-analytical hermeneutical exploration as a non-objectivist epistemology and as fundamentally interpretive by nature, will be used to interpret simulated life experiences.

This will be done in an attempt to logically clarify paradigmatic differences thereby contributing to a theory for the interpretation of films. Hence there are deductive yet also pluralistic and non-conclusive dimensions to this study.

The choice for a hermeneutical approach<sup>9</sup> links with recent developments in both Philosophy and in Practical Theology. Reader (2008:6) aptly points out that the field of Practical Theology used to be dominated by a clerical, official paradigm. Practical and Pastoral Theology, in turn, were dominated by Psychology and related fields of therapeutic knowledge. However the current “hermeneutical model of pastoral engagement” (2008:11) challenges practical and pastoral reflection. The “monogamy of space” of the earlier modern age has since been transformed into the “polygamy of space” (2008:11), while the categories rural and urban made place for the categories of local (integration) and global (fragmentation). This trend is in line with other developments where the “post-modern mind may be viewed as an open-ended, indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual and cultural currents” (Tarnas 1993:395).

As this literature study is in the domain of Practical Theology<sup>10</sup> and in the field of the Philosophy of Religion and Media, the research will be qualitative, inter-disciplinary, systemic, and will investigate how the theory is, or is not, embodied in praxis. It will draw on the disciplines of religion, media and philosophy and to a lesser extent on cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and literary critique.

The selected films are all available on DVD.

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<sup>9</sup> Hermeneutics (derived from *hermeneuein*) refers to the skill or art of explanation and interpretation as an attempt to understand the meaning of different texts within the vibrant fibre of inter-textuality. This process includes verbalization, speech, translation and the communication of a message. (Smit 1978:276)

<sup>10</sup> The Department of Practical Theology and Missiology of the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University (in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany) initiated the multi-disciplinary MPhil degree in Religion and Culture. The concept of praxis is inherent and fundamental to an understanding of Practical Theology. The term praxis does not merely refer to practice or practicalities. In Practical Theology, praxis refers to the dimension of meaning and intention embedded in behaviour and belief patterns. As such, praxis embodies human identities that are influenced by social and cultural contexts. In light of the aim of this study, i.e. the understanding and interpretation of identity within the context of belonging to totality, I shall argue that social texts (films) and contexts are paramount to Practical Theology as an endeavour to deal with the religious dimension of being human.

It is also important to note that the term “Practical Theology” should not be associated with all religious and spiritual traditions in the world. The intention of this study is not to focus on God-based religious traditions as presupposed by the term “theology”. Yet the intention is also not to exclude such traditions. It may be best to regard this study as a contribution to the dynamic interface between religion (including all God-based and non-God-based spiritual traditions and expressions) and culture (all other expressions of humanity).

#### **4. TWO WAYS OF BELONGING TO TOTALITY: THE SAME CONSTANT FACTORS WITH DIFFERENT SYMBOLIC MEANINGS**

Until now this document has dealt with general reasons why this research may be necessary, as well as its positioning and approach. It is now time to probe more deeply into the matter of differences and similarities between people in the context of this study's topic of different ways to relate to totality.

I shall start by discussing theories before embarking on an investigation of case studies in chapter six. My introductory comments will be on how Western perspectives often ignore differences between people from other parts of the world, such as Africa, and hence create or maintain exclusion. These comments will set the scene for explaining patterns of similarities and difference, as all differences between people are not random.

I shall also explain the systemic relation between various layers of patterns such as religion, cosmologies, religious traditions, cultures and world views. This will be done from the perspective that – viewed from a religious-cosmological perspective – religion (as a sense of belonging to totality) can be seen as universal, but not the other patterns. Cosmologies, religious traditions, cultures and world views, in turn, are patterns of differences. I shall argue that of these, cosmological belonging may be the most deeply seated.

From here the discussion will move to an in-depth discussion of the features and symbols of two theoretic cosmologies. I shall unpack both the “Secular World Affirming Cosmology” and the “Immediate Experience Cosmology” (Cumpsty 1991) into constant factors with symbolic content and summarise them in a table<sup>11</sup> with reference to Cumpsty's third paradigm, the “Withdrawal Cosmology”.

All these perspectives and interpretations rate among those which influence belonging to all-that-are-out-there and hence impact on the hermeneutical analysis of identities.

The discussion of theories will continue in chapter five.

##### **4.1. All the world is not the same**

The August 1999 edition of the National Geographic was titled “Global Culture”, an apt theme at the turn of centuries. This edition was dedicated to discussing globalization and the editorial commented that “...world cultures seem to become homogenized. But for the moment, at least, it is still arresting to see the juxtaposition of different societies” (Allen 1999:2). It is now eleven years later and ten years into the twenty-first century. Which trend seems to be dominant – more homogenous and coherent traditions, or an increase in differences between individuals and groups?

The answer is interesting as both trends seem to continue, each with their own dynamics, whilst simultaneously impacting onto one another.

There seems to be a growing realization that a one-sided promotion of globalism,<sup>12</sup> capitalism, cosmopolitanism, and technological advances are frequently implemented to the detriment of local

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<sup>11</sup> See Table 1, paragraph 4.6.

<sup>12</sup> “Globalism” is here differentiated from the term “globalization”. “Globalization” refers to a historical process characteristic of developments through several centuries. “Globalism,” in turn, is understood as the “ideologically questionable process driven by the self-interest of powerful individuals, corporations, nations and power constellations, through which large sections of the world population are being left behind in the process of ‘development’. The greatest force behind globalism is neo-liberal capitalism” (Boesak 2010:1).

identities across the world, resulting in disinterest, disempowerment, fundamentalism, political upheaval, poverty, unbalanced ecologies, etcetera (Held 1999, Kobia 2003, Singer 2002, Stiglitz 2002, Terreblanche 2002, World Council of Churches 2005). I accept Castells' (2005) overarching understanding that the focus on, or the demand for *local identities*, seems to become more urgent along with, and in response to, *globalism*. His core argument is that technological advances, capitalism and globalization do not necessarily result in social advances nor in unity. According to his logic people are increasingly in favour of cultural singularity and the desire to exercise control over their own lives and environment, which, in turn, results in social diversity. On the other hand, globalization seems to continue at an unprecedented pace. The point relevant for this study in Religion and Culture – and specifically films – is to ask how knowledge of cosmologies can help us to overcome those kinds of differences that contribute to *unnecessary assumptions between, and on behalf of*, particular groups or traditions.

The global revolution, according to Giddens (2002), has everything to do with how we view ourselves and others. In this respect Giddens (2002:62) refers to the “democratization of emotions”, in other words the necessity of mutual respect and a place for diversity within the global community. I shall argue that if, and when, the reality views, cultures and uniquenesses of local communities are ignored, diminished or even levelled with the attributes of another, or if they are in some way treated disrespectfully, then the way will be paved for apathy, insensitivity, misunderstandings, distance, suspicion, oppression, rejection, hostility and all other forms of exclusivity.

According to Volf (1996:242-243) it is especially tempting for Western-Christians to forget “that there is no single truth about some important matters”. He links the desire to find a *single, right way* with the interpretation of Christianity which entails a linear concept of time<sup>13</sup> whereby a day will come when God will reveal all and set the records straight in divine judgment. He differentiates between this (Western-Christian) God’s omniscience and humanity’s limited understanding of reality. With reference to Corinthians 13:12 he comes to the conclusion that we should be modest about the claims we make on truth or a single right way. We know “in part,” he says, as our knowledge of the world will always be fragmented and “our limited knowledge is shaped by the interests we pursue and filtered through the cultures and traditions we inhabit.”

It is very important for Western-oriented Christians to realize that what provides meaning to them, cannot be assumed to be what provides meaning to others. This applies to leadership and scholarship in all fields of society, also when we interpret and communicate stories such as films that relate to people outside the own group. It also has bearing on our interaction with one another. We cannot merely assume that someone else who is also a Christian automatically shares our own view of reality, especially when we advocate for an understanding and an embracing of others.

On what basis can one then argue that it is relevant to consider similarities *and* differences between individuals and within groups in our current society?

Various opinion leaders in society seem to think that not only differences, but also similarities, are relevant in how belonging and identity are articulated and lived. Taylor (in Volf 1996:18-20) and later also Castells (2005) and Sen (2006) argue that if what people may regard as distinct social constructions such as

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<sup>13</sup> Osborne points out that Herodotus who in approximately 450 BCE started to chronicle the past, was the first Greek to do so. Before him, there seemed to be no need to write about the past, as time and history were not something that “stretched behind and in front of them like an endless road; it was a living, dynamic entity that infected every morsel of the present.” This view of time, Osborne says, was something the ancient Greeks held in common with almost every culture except by Western society, and as such he says “it is our (modern Western) view of the past that is peculiar” (2007:57) (my insertion). Tarnas (1993:165) supports this idea that a linear concept of time is unique to the Western world. He says that the Greco-Roman mind still used to view time more cyclical (as a large part of the world still does). The Western strictly linear concept of time gradually developed as a result of the narrative built on the historical appearance of a Redeemer and his eventual reappearance to save humanity in a future apocalyptic age along with a dramatization of the human in relation to the transcendent.

language, culture, religious traditions or gender are ignored, rejected, diminished or oppressed by a dominant or majority identity, such situations give rise to imbalances, in for example, power and wealth. Charles Taylor (cited in Volf 1996:18-19) published an important article in 1994 in which he distinguished between the “politics of equal dignity” and the “politics of difference”. In the first, the emphasis is on what people *share on a universal level*, such as rights and immunities. The second approach recognizes unique attributes which distinguishes people and groups from one another and hence deals with matters of identity.

However, whether one refers to *patterns* in particular relations as “differences,” or as “similarities,” depends, of course, on the perspective from where one argues. If one argues from a global perspective, including all people and what they commonly share, one could use the term *politics of difference* as Taylor does when referring to uniquenesses that link individuals together in groups. Yet if one argues from within a particular group, and from amongst those who associate themselves with the relevant social structure or reality view, one could, in my opinion, also refer to a *politics of similarities*.

Joseph Stiglitz (2002), Nobel Prize winner and former chief economist of the World Bank, offers another and possibly a more impartial way of referring to the particular attributes of a society – he refers to the “*asymmetries of information*” (my cursivation) when arguing that global institutions such as the IMF,<sup>14</sup> the WTO<sup>15</sup> and the World Bank (at that stage all governed exclusively by Western countries from the Northern hemisphere, i.e. Europe and the USA) should always take local circumstances and views into account when suggesting changes to a country’s economic policy, as opposed to simply recommending (or prescribing) a one-size-fits-all first world-based approach. In essence, he argues, the same economic model that works for instance in the USA and Europe cannot simply be applied to countries in other parts of the world such as the East, South America and Africa. It is always necessary to consult and involve local experts and role players so as to recognize and address a country’s specific needs and interests, as well as to create sustainable results. At the time when his book was published, his appeal was very necessary as is also evident from the Agapé document produced by the World Council of Churches (2005) that argues against a globalised paradigm of Western domination, and for “a vision of a just, compassionate and inclusive world...rooted in viable alternatives...with *democratic participation at all levels*” (2005:2) (my cursivation).

More specifically with regard to Africa, the Kenyan scholar Samuel Kobia (2003:48-50) is of the opinion that a meaningful democracy also necessitates a moral dimension and therefore the economic conditions of the majority of the people need to be considered. According to Kobia, politicians will not solve the dilemma of meaningless democracies in Africa – it would rather be successfully addressed by ordinary people through relational dimensions. Therefore the “tapestry of relationships which sustain the life of each and all the members of the community” (2003:49) should be on the agenda for the desired change or any development.<sup>16</sup> What this means, is that a *projection* of views and perceptions on how life is supposed to be by actors from one part of the world onto those of another part, is not desirable, respectful or even effective. To the contrary, the views and perspectives of a local population are essential for any kind of problem solving and co-operation. These principles are also aligned with the views of Castells (2005), Stiglitz (2002) and Terreblanche (2002). It implies that endeavours require serious consideration of both similarities and differences between people.

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14 International Monetary Fund.

15 World Trade Organization.

16 In my opinion, even well meant initiatives can maintain a discourse of polarization whereby one party is seen to be more “privileged” or “civilized” or “in need” than another, for it is precisely such perceptions that could have initiated the original misunderstandings or injustice. Such situations are far more complex and the real challenge is to move away from polarization and distance. For even when an action seems to be justified (Group A needs, for instance, to receive retribution after they have suffered injustices from Group B), the sentiments between the parties may not improve (Group B is still viewed as superior and/or not good). As such the cycle of labelling will remain and yet another round of apathy, insensitivity, misunderstandings, distance, suspicion, arrogance, oppression, rejection, hostility or exclusion will eventually surface.

In this regard, Tim Kelsall explores how using, what he aptly calls the “social grain” of African societies, can assist in recognising and addressing the needs of this continent’s people in an attempt to understand how “development efforts (can) be redirected so that they stop working against, and start to build upon, the extant notions of moral obligation and interpersonal accountability in the region” (2008:1). Within the context of good governance, he identifies and explores a core, and deep-seated set of beliefs, values and thinking patterns concerning power, accountability and social morality that are durable and that act as powerful drivers of behaviour in Africa. He calls these patterns of “thought, organization, and accountability in Africa that have been both widely distributed in space and durable across time” the “*social grain*” (Kelsall 2008:2-3) (my cursivation), whilst highlighting the role of family, ethnicity and religion. His key question revolves around whether “successful institutions in Africa work with the grain of traditional society, or...against it” (2008:21). He argues that the answer to this question is not clear, as there are many factors that may impact on the answer. For instance, does it differ from country to country or not? Could it apply to some sectors, but not to others? Are there blends that we’re not even aware of? Yet one can deduce that there seems to be sufficient unanswered questions to at least prompt more research that could incorporate culture, world views and cosmologies. Kelsall (2008:21) concludes that:

“All of these questions need to be answered before we can know whether there is anything of value to the idea that development in Africa will be accelerated by going with the grain or, more specifically what forms of going with the grain should be encouraged. Hopefully, the search for answers will yield insights into the problematic of African development that have never been considered before.”

I appreciate Kelsall’s plea for aligning any external initiatives with the social grain of a particular society. Yet it is important to highlight that my argument here with regard to interaction between the Western world and Africa is not in favour of “African development” *per se* as the latter can be perceived as highly contestable and can be argued from many perspectives (see 4.4.2). Development, Kelsall correctly argues, does not always imply progress.

The “search for answers” in Kelsall’s aforementioned words may indeed bring insights if this search focuses not only on what forms of grain (in this study interpreted as constant factors and their symbolic interpretations) from the traditional African perspective should be recognised, but *also* on what behaviour and belief patterns (again constant factors and symbolic interpretations) from the Western-Christian perspective may be at play in an interface between people from the two cosmologies

More than well intended developmental initiatives, retribution and the de-politicising of a continent are required in electing a politics of differences – and one in respect of similarities – amongst people, depending on one’s perspective. Kobia’s plea (2003:48-50) for a moral dimension in a democracy was affirmed in 2003 by Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in his foreword to Kobia’s book titled The courage to hope (2003). Raiser strongly motivates that an *ethical reconstruction* based on accountability to people and their needs, and as such the *affirmation* of “human dignity and the sanctity of life” is necessary as:

“Neither the traditional discourses of ‘liberation’ or ‘development’ nor the propagation of an ‘African renaissance’ is able to achieve the fundamental paradigm shift away from the dominance of market values and the struggles around ‘ethnicity’ towards a recovery of the communitarian ethic of African tradition.”

Indeed, the *nature of the discourse and the actual language* used in discussions concerning each other is of critical importance. Volf (1996:74-76) refers to exclusionary language and cognition as “symbolic exclusion” and says that the *practice* of exclusion goes hand in hand with the *language* of exclusion. Such exclusion can range from violence, dominance, and assimilation to abandonment. However, whether the exclusion is a result of ignorance, a failure of knowledge or a wilful misconception, it remains exclusion. The following words of Castells (2005:34) come to mind: “...what really matters, both theoretically and practically, is, as for all identities, how, from what, by whom, and for what it is constructed.” Hence my

argument that it is necessary to *deliberately and consciously* engage with a particular situation in such a way that meaningful and balanced conclusions are arrived at which distinguishes between one's own perspectives and those of others, and to simultaneously seek solutions for shared objectives.

Within the context of this study, one should ask what would be an appropriate role for scholars in the field of Religion and Media when they comment on films. In other words, *what kind of discourse, approach or positioning* has the potential to simultaneously affirm human dignity and the sanctity of life in, for example, both the Western world and in Africa? How does one recognize what feels real to both the self and to others? Is such recognition at all possible? Is it possible to break through what seems to be a perpetuating cycle of unintended sweeping statements and assumptions about others (as will be explained in 5.1) that result in unnecessary misunderstandings and estrangements?

The principle whereby the views and sentiments of a local population, a culture, a continent and the cosmology of people should be recognised, respected, actively sought and valued is not only applicable to macro-economic, ecological and governing policies – it applies to all facets of life, including meaning-making and the sense of belonging to the ultimately-real. The mere recognition that the whole world does not (nor has to) abide to one single view of reality, is in itself an important and necessary realization, and in my opinion a relevant point of departure in studies and practices dealing with films that portray people who hail from different continents and possibly different cosmologies. As our contemporary network society is increasingly characterized by a multitude of ever changing and in-between identities, as opposed to clearly defined homogeneous groups, it seems fair to say that interpretations that take cognizance of the reality view of a particular group have a better chance to respect, value and incorporate possible social, moral and spiritual resources, and choices of individuals and groups, and thus uphold democratic principles.

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#### **Conclusion:**

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*Ignorance of the perspectives of others gives rise to their exclusion, expressed in forms ranging between the very obvious and the very subtle. Examples of a one-sided promotion of agendas within the context of globalism in an African context were cited. Such imposing of ideas and views can be regarded as detrimental, counter-productive and undemocratic.*

*Understandings of the own and of others need not only be acted out, but also articulated in a language of inclusion. This applies to all fields of life, including the interpretation of films in the context of Religion and Media.*

*Clarifying whether it's best to speak of differences, similarities, the a-symmetrics of information or the rights of the majority of people, is therefore much less of an issue than a willingness to recognise that all the world is not the same and that differences, as well as similarities, require respect.*

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Since it has been established that the recognition of differentiation is imperative in a fair and just society, the next logic step would be to explain the theory of the two cosmological paradigms relevant to this study as a way to understand some patterns of differentiation. When I do this, it will be with reference to, and in the context of, a general theory of religion.

Yet this study is about belonging to totality and as such it is necessary to first provide the context within which these cosmologies will be explained. Hence I shall explain the dynamic relationship between religion, cosmologies, religious traditions, world views and culture before providing a more detailed explanation of the structure and elements of the two cosmologies.

Understanding the relationships between the various dimensions will be critical for following the logic of the rest of the arguments in this study, and during the course of the forthcoming discussion I shall often refer back to paragraph 4.2.

#### **4.2. A systemic relation between religion, cosmologies, religious traditions, world views and culture**

If everything is not the same for all, then what contributes to differences in the context of this study?

Apart from obvious differences between individuals as a result of personal choice, it is also possible to distinguish between *patterns of differentiation*. In other words, all differences between people are not random.

I shall in this paragraph and in 4.3 refer to three broad and deeply embedded patterns of differences and I shall call them cosmologies (see also chapter two). These patterns theoretically explain three ways by which humanity chooses to belong to all-that-are-out-there.<sup>17</sup>

When I distinguish between these meta-paradigms (cosmologies), as well as between more differentiated patterns (religious traditions, world views and culture), the layers should not be understood in a strictly hierarchical way. Rather one can imagine them as not all-encompassing, never static or rigid, but as dynamic, moving, twisting, overlapping, interrelated, multi-dimensional<sup>18</sup> fields or domains of interpretation which may be moulded and changed by human interaction. Although the fields or domains can be distinguished from one another, none of them exist in isolation of the other. Therefore, the parts that will be discussed here need to be viewed within the context of a bigger picture – that is a religious-cosmological view of the universe and the ultimately-real.

In essence then, when I describe the conceptual layers and how they relate to one another, I do not attempt to use a mechanistic approach which depends on immutable laws. My intention is not to unravel the parts and in so doing build an understanding of ways to explain religion. Such an approach would be limiting and neglect the dynamic multi-faceted relationship between what is perceived as parts and as the whole. The whole in this instance is just as important as the parts, as change within this system could occur at any point. Therefore I also do not subscribe to simple cause-effect relationships or to the independent existence of concepts or components. Moreover, it is not possible to guarantee a study which is totally objective. I, as the observer, become part of the system when I position the concepts and their relations in a systemic and a hermeneutic way.

To start with, one may think of the concept of “**religion**” as an overarching field, one which is deeper or more encompassing (but not more important)<sup>19</sup> than any of the other. This is, if the term “religion” is understood in accordance with the definition used by John Cumpsty in his seminal work on religion and belonging. Cumpsty (1991:161), after careful consideration and a detailed motivation, defines religion as “*the quest for, realization or maintenance of, a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real.*” The depth dimension refers to humanity’s primal urge to understand the ultimately-real and relate to it. *This is an existential task shared by all human beings*, even atheists as they also position themselves in relation to the universe. The sense of belonging to all-that-are-out-there, according to Cumpsty’s logic, always starts at an

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<sup>17</sup> Two of them will be unpacked theoretically in 4.4 and in praxis in 6.5.

<sup>18</sup> More than three dimensions may be possible. A fourth dimension is an abstract concept studied by mathematicians and philosophers for almost two hundred years.

<sup>19</sup> None of the dimensions or fields should be regarded as more important than other in matters of inclusion, exclusion, similarities and differences. All of them are realized and embodied only in the attitudes, positions, beliefs and behaviour of people. Any person, despite his or her religious-cosmological view, world-view, religious tradition and culture can choose to practice a life of inclusion and respect for the self and others.



inner personal level, and as such refers to views that shape perceptions, interpretations and the basic way people choose to relate to the ultimately-real. It applies to all people, even those who do not regard themselves as “religious”.<sup>20</sup>

Within the overarching quest for, realisation and maintenance of belonging to the ultimately-real, Cumpsty identified three broad theoretical patterns or paradigms by which humanity makes sense of such belonging. Cumpsty refers to them as “three logically coherent types of religious tradition” (1991:175), but I am careful to not employ terms such as “types” or “religious” to limit perceptions of classification on the one hand and confusion with religious traditions (the latter to be put in context below) on the other. Therefore I prefer using the term “**cosmology**” (alternated by “**reality view**”) (see also chapter two) for these meta-paradigms as they are expressed through cosmological concepts such as *the experience of the immediate world out there, the perceived nature of reality, the conceptualising of time, the mode of engagement with the world out there, the possibility of chance or determinism*, and so forth.

In each of the three cosmologies fundamental, deep-seated concepts are uniquely symbolically interpreted.<sup>21</sup> In the forthcoming discussion, I shall distinguish between such theoretic cosmologies and practical interpretations thereof in the Western-Christian cosmology and the traditional African cosmology. Suffice to say here that a cosmology is *more encompassing and deeper embedded* than any culture, religious tradition, identity or worldview, precisely because it is about a person’s perceived position in all of reality and about patterns of belonging to totality. Another point that will be repeated but is worth noting here, is that *the three logic-coherent and theoretic cosmologies share the desire for a world inspired by love, and all of them conceptualise some form of life after death*.

Within the broader framework of a shared urge for belonging to totality and differentiations between three cosmologies, humanity expresses their religious association further and more detailed through specific **religious traditions, faiths, spiritualities, forms of humanism, dogmas, theologies** and so forth, whether they are institutional or not. Such detailed religious interpretations are also extended to associations with the rest of the world, such as **culture and world views**. Hence the domains of neither religion nor cosmic belonging are restricted to any kind of deliberate relation with the ultimately-real. *It impacts on all levels of human life, on all aspects of society, on all aspects of culture and on all people’s worldviews, attitudes and practices*.

I shall argue that all of these fields and dimensions are relevant and important, and that all act as critical variables. This is to say that all impact on, and in turn, are impacted on by the behaviour, beliefs, views and positions of groups and individuals. The information contained in each of these fields also impact on one another to participate in the formation of identities. Expressions and concepts with regard to the ultimately-real are intertwined with social relationships and behaviour patterns in humanity’s everyday existence.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Cumpsty (1991:244) asserts that the symbolic meaning within the context of a particular religious tradition “may in time become part of the world-view of even those who are not recognizably religious. It can become enshrined in the very structures of society, not least the education processes.” He also states that the way in which the ultimately-real is conceived “will not only radically affect the mode of belonging and all other consequential symbols, it will have major personal and social consequences as well” (1991:194).

According to Cumpsty (1991:227) “the relationship between socio-cultural experience and religious tradition is a two-way one. Change could be triggered at any point in the system.” Such change may, in my opinion, happen on multiple levels. In line with systems thinking (Dostal & Osler 1993) one can expect

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<sup>20</sup> Cumpsty (1991:172) argues that humanism is also an expression of being religious and that the only exception for being non-religious, “is that it is chaos, without integrity or meaning”.

<sup>21</sup> Hence the focus in cosmologies is on symbols, on what feels real, and not on “truth”.

<sup>22</sup> Proof for my arguments will be supplied through the information gained from the case studies.

many interactions, multiple causation and emergent properties in the interaction between cosmologies, religious traditions, world views and culture, all impacting dynamically on identity. One should not think of these fields and dimensions as opposite or independent poles as this may presuppose a two-dimensional or a bi-polar view. Therefore I refer to a depth dimension when trying to articulate the profound and existential role of cosmologies in relation to, and overlaid by, religious traditions, cultures and world views.

Specific examples of how cosmic belonging can inform cultures, religious traditions, worldviews and identities will be discussed in the case studies in 6.5, but it may be relevant to mention at least one practical example here:

Nobel Laureate, retired Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, is a member of the Anglican Church. He is also someone who passionately merges the traditional African spiritual concept of “ubuntu” with his Christianity. In fact, in heading up South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission he used this concept to position not only his personal beliefs, but also his official and public persona in facilitating the process of interaction with victims, legitimisers and perpetrators of the apartheid era, representing all the main cultural groups in South Africa. On writing about his personal experience during the course of the hearings he not only refers throughout his book *No Future Without Forgiveness* to the role and importance of “ubuntu”, but in addition explains how he *deliberately* used this concept as a guiding principle in his dealings throughout the Commission’s hearings (Tutu 2000:31,103,166,196,274). It should be noted that Tutu argues overtly from a Christian perspective, but the concept he describes as “the bundle of life” (2000:196), or as “I am human because I belong, I participate, I share” (2000:31), and as being “interconnected in this network of interdependence and togetherness” (2000:166), is, in his own words, the traditional African spiritual concept of “ubuntu”. “Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good” (2000:31) – he says.

As will be explained in 4.4.2 and in the case studies in 6.5, the concept of “ubuntu” may be linked to symbols embedded in the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology as described by Cumpsty. These symbols are altogether different from the ones associated with what Cumpsty refers to as the Secular World Affirming cosmology (the latter may be associated with the Western-Christian tradition). From this example of Archbishop Tutu, it is evident how close and direct cosmological symbols, religious traditions and cultures can interact, and that the symbolic language of one spiritual tradition can be integrated into another *without necessarily changing the underlying cosmological paradigm*. This is not to say that all, or any symbols associated with one cosmology, can be integrated or combined with those of another. The challenges of integrating symbols of one cosmology into another will be further discussed in 4.4, and especially in 4.4.3, 6.5.2 and 6.5.3.

When change occurs, a system – be it a cosmology or an identity – evolves over time. However the analyses of the case studies (see chapter six) will indicate that it *is much easier to, for example, change one’s identity or one’s positioning of a theology than it is to change more deeply held perceptions such as one’s cosmology or view of total reality*.

The fact that religious understanding can change relatively often as opposed to a cosmology emerges from, for example, Louw’s (2005:161-165) discussion of how the Christian faith tradition shifted over the years from a kerygmatic approach (the nature of human beings are essentially corrupt as opposed to a higher and spiritual realm) based on the theology of Augustine towards the phenomenological doctrine of inner human potential (human beings are essentially and intrinsically good) influenced by the more empirical approach to human science and emphasis on human experience by Schleiermacher. This then shifted towards the contemporary understanding of a hermeneutic paradigm, with its focus on human beings “in terms of existential experiences within (a) network of relationships”. As a result of this dynamic relationship, different Christian God images are possible such as the God of orthodoxy, the God of deism, a mysterious, pluralistic all-embracing God of mysticism and pantheism during the period of Romanticism, the “death of God” as phrased by Nietzsche during the modern period and the current open, hermeneutical enterprise in a post-modern Western society (Tarnas 1993:391-399).

Castells (2005) – whose theory on identity will be used in this study (see 5.2 and 6.5) – discusses a number of examples which demonstrate the close interaction and reciprocal influence of social phenomena, culture

and religion. He distinguishes **religion** as one of the elements that *constitute* cultural self-definition, along with ethnicity, nationality and gender as contributing factors. Castells (2005:63) states, for example, that in the case of “African Americans” religion can play a role in the formation of a cultural-political identity. In this case he argues, ethnicity is not the distinctive feature, as one might have expected, but religion and gender (male domination): “Ethnic materials are integrated into cultural communes that are more powerful, and more broadly defined than ethnicity, such as religion or nationalism, as statements of cultural autonomy in a world of symbols”.

It is important to note that religion and religious traditions do not only serve as a means to an end. Neither should be reduced to mere justifications for a certain world view or position of identity, as this would imply a simple cause-effect relationship between religion and/or religious traditions and the formation of identity. This would mean that one would be able to “point a finger” to religion, or a religious tradition, and label it as a “cause” for a specific *position* and thereby absolve the responsibility of the people involved. Religion and religious traditions cannot be reduced to self-contained entities with independent lives of their own. In my view religion, associated cosmological paradigms and religious traditions *can mutually inform identity, but cannot position it as negative, positive, destructive, constructive, resistant, legitimising or innovative*. Reality views are *embedded* – consciously or unconsciously – in religious convictions and vice versa. In short, not one of these dimensions exists without human perspectives and intervention, and none can be used to merely be “attached” to justify a certain matter. Reality views together with religious traditions, culture and world views are *sources of reference* for a chosen identity, but they do not determine the interpretation of attitudes or the positioning thereof. Only people exercise choices and thus choose positions that result in, for example, exclusion, inclusion, respect, disrespect, and so forth.

Troskie (1997:92), by referring to the *interaction between religion and everything else* notes Cumpsty’s view that the world’s largest faith traditions all try to reconcile experience with a cosmic understanding of reality. But if our existence is characterised by so much change (as in contemporary society), a gap or discrepancy develops between the experience of reality and the prevailing symbolic framework of understanding in a religion. This is why a religious tradition that does not keep abreast of people’s (changing/ new/ contemporary) experience of reality can become obsolete and in need of revision towards a more appropriate framework of reference that represents functions of being. Or, if reality changes to such an extent that it no longer makes sense within the symbolic framework of understanding (religion), it could happen that people reach back towards a view of reality that had offered security in the past, such as the many examples of exclusiveness, fundamentalism and extremism across the world, as Castells (2005) notes. This is why Cumpsty (1991:107) says that “symbolic discourse is not true or false, but dead or alive” (“symbolic discourse” here refers to religious traditions).

## **Conclusion:**

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*Most – if not all – people share a basic urge for religion which is the drive to understand the ultimately-real and relate to it. On a cosmological level, the desire for a world inspired by love, as well as the idea of some continuation of life after death are theoretically also universal. However, over and above these similarities, much differentiation – at least from a religious-cosmological perspective – is possible and likely.*

*Firstly, different patterns of belonging to totality are possible and these broad meta-paradigms can theoretically be explained by coherent cosmologies or reality views. Secondly more differentiated group-based associations such as world views, cultures and religious traditions can be described. All these dimensions function as dynamic fields of information, overlapping and influencing one another in multiple ways when combined with human interaction and consequently resulting in a great variety of interpretations and identities.*

*All these dimensions or fields of information are important although some are more deeply embedded than others and hence more difficult to change.*

*To ignore these patterns or to ascribe all differences (or similarities) to only one component such as religion or religious traditions would be short-sighted and inaccurate. Neither can*

*all differences between people's identities be described as ad hoc. Also, none of these dimensions nor their interpretations may be labelled as a cause for a specific positioning as multiple factors are at play in constituting an identity.*

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The discussion will now turn to a focus on two theoretic cosmologies described by Cumpsty (1991). As an introduction, I shall explain why they can be regarded as coherent and what this means in practice.

### 4.3. Coherency in theoretic models of cosmologies

Cumpsty explains three different modes by which humanity can experience reality. These paradigms (cosmologies or reality views), each have a respective set of symbols which expresses the symbolized reality and the inherent logic of the particular cosmology. Each represent a unique and an integrated way to associate with the ultimately-real, but therefore also with all-that-are-out-there as argued in 4.2.

The three cosmologies together form the basic, yet *theoretical*, framework of his theory on religion. Cumpsty is of the opinion that these three ways can be considered as the *only logically coherent paradigms* in conceptualising an ultimately-real (1991:172). One should add here that Cumpsty's theory can, in the light of post-modern insights, not be regarded as final and complete as it is quite viable for new cosmologies to emerge in (what we experience to be) the future.<sup>23</sup> It is also possible that humanity will grow to understand those parts of our past that cannot yet be explained by historians.<sup>24</sup> However, the agenda here is not to provide an overview of all possible cosmologies, but rather to test if altogether different ways of meaning-making indeed exist and if knowledge of such ways is useful in viewing the self and others.

There are fundamental differences between Cumpsty's three theoretic cosmologies and thus *three distinct ways to derive meaning*, as is most evident in their unique and pertinent modes of engagement with totality:

- Adherents of the "Secular World Affirming Religion" (SWA) type would opt for an *active shaping* of the world-out-there such as exemplified by those who (consciously or unconsciously) accept the reality view expressed by Islam, Judaism and Christianity (the three religions belonging to the Abrahamic family of religions) and possibly Zoroastrianism in its more monotheistic phase.

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<sup>23</sup> The current understanding of plasticity in the nature of reality "begins with the assertion that reality itself tends to unfold in response to the particular symbolic framework and set of assumptions that are employed by each individual and each society" (Tarnas 1993:406). This understanding has immense implications for the human situation, as it suggests that humanity can participate in the creation of reality together with the ultimately-real. However, this perspective warrants its own in-depth study and does not form part of the current discussion. Whether it will be possible to eventually explain an approach of co-creation as a combination of the SWA and IEA types or whether it constitutes an entirely new cosmology, needs to be clarified.

<sup>24</sup> The historian Roger Osborne (2007:29-30) refers, for example, to the "massive and deeply mysterious series of stone monuments whose scale, variety and meticulous construction have challenged our understanding of the world that our ancestors occupied and created." Examples include Stonehenge in England, the Grand Menhir in Brittany and passage graves at Newgrange and Knowth in Ireland. These and other stone arrangements were erected in prehistoric Europe inhabited by indigenous hunter-fishers and incoming pastoralists and to date it is not clear how these stones that weigh hundreds of tons could have been erected between 6 000 and 4 000 years ago. Although not mentioned by Osborne, examples of such mysterious constructions are found in other parts of the world too – in Tiwanaku in Bolivia, Machu Picchu in Peru and in Africa. There are many hypotheses, but no one really knows by whom and how these constructions were erected.

- Another option, the “Immediate Experience Affirming” (IEA) type, entails the affirmation of the existing order of things. This is the conviction to *fit into* what is perceived the natural rhythm of totality as in the traditional African way, the religions of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, those religions of China which have not been influenced by Buddhism, the most generally adhered to form of Hinduism and the perspective represented in popular astrology.
- Yet another choice (the “Withdrawal Religion” type) would be to physically and affectively *withdraw* from the immediate world-out-there which is perceived to be deceptive as portrayed in Vedanta Hinduism, Buddhism and certain forms of mysticism. This option will not be discussed in this study and may merely be mentioned from time to time.

The first group feels that life needs to be shaped and moulded, as these adherents belong to a *not yet fully present reality*. The second group, whose views are embedded in an Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology, feels *as one with a present reality and seeks to maintain it*. The last group belonging to the Withdrawal cosmology assumes that what humanity experiences on earth is *part of an overall oneness, but it still needs to be realized* (Cumpsty 1991:118-124,193-195).

By saying that only these three possibilities exist, Cumpsty doesn’t mean that symbols of a particular cosmology cannot be combined with the symbolic content of another, as this often happens in practice. What he means, is that there are only three modes by which one theoretically can belong to totality, that each mode consists of a set of interrelated symbols, and that the three modes especially in engaging with reality, are mutually exclusive. The coherence is expressed by one symbol necessitating another and the latter necessitating the next symbol and so forth. As such he describes the three cosmologies as “ideal” based on the interdependency of the symbols within each paradigm, and as “theoretical” in terms of how belonging to everything-out-there in his opinion can be conceptualised or imagined.

However, in real life none of his paradigms necessarily matches the exact and actual options of an individual or a group, as there are far too many choices and interpretations available in the world. The practical interpretations of the three paradigms include many permutations as evident in the great variety of belief systems, cultures, groups and identities on earth. Hence Cumpsty recognizes that his theoretical distinction cannot be the only way to describe all the various religious traditions on earth. “Few religious traditions fit without remainder into any of these types but the types provide a useful framework for locating, and therefore observing movements within, actual traditions” (1991:115). Each of these belief systems, cultures, groups and identities can be understood in terms of a cosmology, but the fit is not always easy.

Moreover, change is always possible, yet cosmological change tends to not happen in a haphazard way. “If religion is the quest for, realization or maintenance of belonging to the ultimately-real, then it follows that when religion changes, it will do so in a manner that seeks the maintenance, or restoration, of the sense of belonging” (1991:224). This statement by Cumpsty also implies that change will first happen on the level of one or more symbols within a cosmology as part of maintaining or restoring belonging. It will therefore be very difficult to change entirely from one cosmology to another in a single step.

## Conclusion:

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*Fully logic and coherent cosmologies without any deflections are theoretically possible, but in practice symbols from one cosmology often co-exist with some of those of another.*

*It is relevant to explain and understand the ideal relations between the symbols within a specific cosmology, as the inherent logic and the interconnectedness between the symbols may help one to systematically reflect on, explain, compare and predict some possible deviations in real situations.*

*When change happens it will be for a reason that relates to the need to belong to totality and it will in all likelihood be possible to explain the change in the context of religious symbols.*

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### 4.4. Two theoretic cosmologies – a brief explanation

I shall, in line with Cumpsty's theory, comprehend the traditional African cosmology in terms of the "Immediate Experience Affirming" type, and the Western-Christian cosmology in terms of the "Secular World Affirming" type. The reasons for doing so will be hermeneutically unpacked in the case studies (see 6.5).

These two paradigms and their symbols will now be described in terms of those factors which may have bearing on this research. With a view to eventually (in the case studies) understand possible variations on these cosmologies, it is helpful to first explain the logical pattern and coherence between the symbols within each cosmology *as if each of them is an undivided whole*. Hence the next two paragraphs (4.4.1 and 4.4.2) will focus on such a theoretical, yet very basic description of the two relevant cosmologies with the understanding that some possible hybrids or variations may be explored in chapter six.

Another point with regard to the discussion that follows is the possibility that describing the two cosmologies in isolation from one another may be less meaningful, as it will lack context. Therefore it may be more explanatory to describe the symbols in the context of one another within a description of a specific cosmology. This will enable me to demonstrate not only the very important interdependencies between the symbols, but to also discuss the interdependencies and thus the dynamic of a particular cosmology in comparison to the symbols and dynamics of the other cosmology. Therefore each cosmology should be read so as to improve the understanding of its own, as well as the other's attributes.

Also, some of the symbols, such as the social features, will only be fully introduced in the discussion of the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology, as it may at that stage be easier to understand them when the reader has been able to develop a basic understanding of each paradigm.

All of these symbols are abstract concepts. From my own experience of internalising them, I know that it is important to understand the systemic links between all the symbols. For they too act as critical variables, in other words they influence and are influenced by one another in multiple ways. Therefore I shall conclude 4.4 with a comparative summary of all the symbols in the format of a table. However, for a full understanding of the two cosmologies, their symbols and the internal dynamics of each paradigm, Cumpsty's book Religion As Belonging: A General Theory of Religion should be read in its entirety.

Finally, the discussion in 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 summarises Cumpsty's explanations (1991:171-225) and therefore references to him in these two sub-paragraphs will only be indicated where he is quoted or another author is indicated.

With regard to those cosmologies that inform Western-Christian and traditional African reality views, Cumpsty (1991:171-218) explains the relevant cosmological symbols as follows:

#### 4.4.1 Secular World Affirming (SWA) cosmology

The Secular World Affirming cosmology affirms total reality *as real, but as secular*, and therefore the immediate world of experience is viewed to be distinctly different from the divine.

In this cosmology, *transcendence* is necessary to move from the secular to the divine. Cumpsty refers to this reality view as “dualistic”. The argument here is that it is important to realise that two distinctly different realities – *that which already exists, and that which has not yet been realized* – are at stake. This gap between the as yet and the not yet is defined spatially (by the ultimate-reality being above), or temporally (by its being future). Therefore “the reality to which one would belong ultimately is not now *fully* available and that which is now fully available is not that to which one would belong ultimately” (Cumpsty 1991:178).

As such this particular cosmology is characterized by a vision of a better or an ideal future, developing from creation to destiny, and therefore by a *linear concept of time*.<sup>25</sup> According to Tarnas (1883:321) this concept of “linear historical progress toward ultimate fulfilment” is “perhaps the most pervasive and specifically Judaeo-Christian component tacitly retained in the modern world view” of Western society. Such perception of time, with a clear beginning and end (of the world), would entail to work towards a better tomorrow – in other words to *shape* the environment, one’s own life, etcetera, and not to *maintain* things as they are nor to *affirm* daily life as of the real and as part of the ultimate (as in the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology). Here the emphasis on time is linked to the expected fulfilment of future events. In Christianity this fulfilment is encapsulated in the eschatological hope for the coming kingdom of God that is awaited in the future, even though God may already be experienced in the present reality. Louw (2005:41-58) describes this tension between the *as yet* and the *not yet* in, for example, Christianity as “bi-polar”.<sup>26</sup>

Cumpsty too says that the interpretation of the Secular World Affirming cosmology, as expressed by Christianity, Judaism and Islam, shaped the predominant reality view of the Western world. Even those Westerners who do not regard themselves as religious tend to apply the concepts of a future vision linked with the conviction of humanity’s responsibility to *actively engage with reality in order to shape it*.

Therefore adherents of this cosmology (whether religious or not) are generally keen to contribute towards whatever is considered as progress, and they tend to be outcomes-driven and regard results (“*the end*”) as something worth striving towards. They derive meaning from bringing about changes for what they believe will bring a better future in a number of ways, ranging from a self-centred approach to altruistic contributions. Their evaluation of experience could also include texture (as in the IEA reality view). On this point, Cumpsty says that goal orientation and texture orientation are not supposed to be viewed as two distinct categories, but should rather be considered as the two ends of a spectrum (1991:189). He unfortunately does not explain why he regards texture to be a symbol in the SWA cosmology, but elaborates on goal orientated traditions. Relevant here, is that creation is generally regarded to have *purpose or destiny* and so Westerners experience meaning by trying to achieve goals that will bring “relief” (or redemption). Their contribution in improving a situation generally allows them to feel that life has meaning, although meaning could also be found in “*worthwhileness*,” or by being part of a *grand plan* as a result of having a place in an overall *purpose*.

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<sup>25</sup> See footnote 23.

<sup>26</sup> Louw stresses that the bi-polar tension between the uniqueness of God and the uniqueness of humanity cannot be dissolved or synthesized, but it can be complemented by a pneumatological perspective. The latter can facilitate a point of reception (“*insprekingspunt*”) (2005:56). In this regard he also points out the relevance of a hermeneutical approach to unlock incidents of coherencies and tension between God and humanity.

As the individual derives meaning from participating in a *grand plan with purpose*, he or she is willing to sacrifice much of present texture, in other words individual suffering will be regarded as meaningful as it contributes to the realizing of a greater purpose. However, fulfilling the *grand plan* from a social perspective is ideally *not an individual action* in this view of reality.

In the Secular World Affirming view of social relations it is regarded the ideal to belong to a group consisting of like-minded people in group action. These organised or structured groupings may be overtly secular, or religious, such as churches. In other words the end point of being *communal* can only be realised through organised group actions such as institutions or movements. Cumpsty calls this social feature of *communal belonging* in the Secular World Affirming cosmology *solidary* and says that it contrasts sharply with the *centered communal belonging* of the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology that always starts at the individual. Other social features in this cosmology include social coercion which is expressed by positions ranging between *love* and *greed*, and social cohesion which constitutes a *belief pattern*.

*Change* within this paradigm has a positive connotation when it is used to mould reality in alignment with what is regarded as the ideal. Thus the typical engagement with reality can be expressed as to “*take-hold-and-shape*” (Cumpsty 1991:195). (In the IEA cosmology belonging to the ultimately-real is assumed and needs not to be sought but rather needs to be repaired or maintained.)

Also important here is that the relationship with the (transcendent) divine *needs to be sought and is always personal*. The individual is involved in the coming together of the real and the ultimately-real, as he or she should either seek it or at least not hinder its coming. What, in fact, is in each instance regarded to be the particular content or contributing events that will bring this and that together to consequently experience the final goal of transcendence and the ultimately-real, obviously differs through the ages, or amongst people, in accordance to what feels real.

Knowledge of the ultimately-real in this paradigm is so unique that literal language cannot be used to describe it. If one is able to describe the transcendent, one would actually destroy the transcendence, or the gap between this and that. Cumpsty thus argues that religious knowledge in this cosmology takes place through *revelation – albeit* in different forms which will not be discussed here.

The *linear time concept*, the attempt to secure relief or redemption through the *meeting of goals and an individual quest for belonging to the ultimately-real* in the Secular World Affirming cosmology, implies that there is always the possibility of *new beginnings, of chance* and therefore of hope. This concept of hope is rooted in the concept of transcendence and the uniqueness of the divine:

“Transcendence, the wholly otherness of the divine, and its consequent personal character, creates a sense of freedom for humankind...this includes the possibilities of miracle (as distinct from magic) and of being forgiven, picked up and allowed to start again, the consequences of individual and corporate shortcomings having evaporated or having been absorbed by the divine” (Cumpsty 1991:179).

The concept of life after death, if answered affirmatively by a religious tradition (and all three cosmologies assume theoretically that it is), will also be answered differently by each. In the Secular World Affirming cosmology, eternal life is *to be with God or to go to heaven*.

The intertwined connection between the various factors discussed here (the experience of the world out there, the nature of reality, the role of chance and determinism, how belonging is gained, the nature of the ultimately-real, time, the test of quality of experience, the mode of engagement, and so forth) demonstrates how interrelated and interdependent the symbols are in order to – at least from a theoretical perspective – exist in a logic, coherent manner.



This same principle of interconnectedness to form a coherent whole also applies to the other two cosmologies, of which the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology will subsequently be discussed in brief.

#### 4.4.2 Immediate Experience Affirming (IEA) cosmology

As explained in 4.4.1, Cumpsty argues that in the Secular World Affirming cosmology the immediate world-out-there is perceived as real but not as ultimate. In the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology that same immediate world-out-there is perceived to be the *real and it is affirmed as such* by the adherents of this cosmology, such as in the traditional African reality view<sup>27</sup> as there is no “other” reality that is considered more ideal.

Hence this means that there is in the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology no ultimate that still needs to be realized. There are no bi-polar tension or dual realities – totality is perceived to be *monistic*, all is one and part of, or derived from the same whole, in other words “it coheres in itself” (Cumpsty 1991:120) and consequently there has to be an explanation for every event. Reality is understood as a given entity to be respected and beyond certain limits humankind should not interfere with the environment.

Also due to its monistic nature, there is no gap between gods or powers and other entities, religion is not separated from the cosmos or life in general (Cumpsty also uses the term “Nature Religion” when referring to this cosmology.) Hence the nature of the ultimately-real is *not regarded as strictly personal nor as strictly impersonal* – there are simply no rigid distinctions in this regard.

As there is no distinct beginning nor ending within this monistic universe, time is perceived to be *cyclical*. Time is not experienced in terms of historical events, but rather in terms of nature such as seasons, the human life cycle and significant local experiences. What happened in the past has bearing on the present, as well as on the future. “Care is always taken to link the present, concerned as it always is with the future, with what has gone before. Reality is one” (Cumpsty 1991:187). Therefore relations with others include those who have passed on – the *ancestors*. One could thus say that the latter continue to be part of reality, time is always here, never there. The need for eternal life too is to remain – perhaps as a spirit or as an ancestor, therefore in a different state, but still as part of the same reality. The spacial and temporal dimensions that are so important in the SWA view, do not apply here.

Change in this cosmology is experienced as a feature of all life, and it is understood as “cyclical, or at least rhythmical, or pulsating” (Cumpsty 1991:185), and whatever changes there are, occur *within* the system. As a result there are *no chances nor new beginnings* and the resulting association with freedom such as in the Secular World Affirming cosmology.

Thus the cosmos is a closed system of cause and effect, in other words, whatever happens here has an impact on what happens there. Every action is believed to have an impact on the whole: “the relationship with all else is assumed, it needs only to be maintained or at worst restored” (Cumpsty 1991:121). When there is sickness, disharmony, or fragmentation these can only be understood as “temporary existential experience” (Cumpsty 1991:180), as belonging is assumed to already be fully realized and it need not be sought. Relationships that need to be repaired within such a monistic view of reality include not only things in addition to people, but also the recently dead.

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<sup>27</sup> According to Cumpsty the traditional African religions, as well as the great majority of those religions of China that were not influenced by Buddhism, can be explained by the symbols and the dynamics of this paradigm. Rey (Horsfield, Hess & Medrano, 2004:81), in turn, describes the IEA reality view in terms of Latin-American telenovelas, where the visuals create a pattern for rituals and daily life. The religious systems on several island groups in the Pacific Ocean may also be regarded as examples of this cosmology (Smart 1998:166-180).

Another important aspect is that the part *within* the whole is regarded an important aspect of belonging. Each part within the whole is real and immediate and it has its own purpose within that whole. The whole in itself has no goal, but it can have a *pattern* and it is this pattern that forms the ground of meaning. There may also be the sense of a vital force that flows through all things and as such this too contributes to the pattern. Thus, the strong association with a pattern implies a sense of identity with the whole, as opposed to the possibility of a dynamic complementary belonging (or identity) to the ultimately-real as applicable in the Secular World Affirming cosmology, due to the personal nature of the ultimately-real. As adherents of this reality view derive meaning from *belonging to a pattern within a cyclical reality view*, the *texture of everyday life experiences* is regarded as of the utmost importance. Hence the quality of life is judged by its present texture as opposed to the attainment of some future goal. The ideal is to experience harmony, health and prosperity. Here too the ground of meaning can come from a sense of *worthwhileness* as in the Secular World Experience cosmology, but the difference is that it is not in the grandeur of purpose, as in the latter, but rather in the *grandeur of pattern*.

In all of this, the community plays a central role, and *harmony* is imperative although there is also space for *individual purpose* in making ethical choices. To adherents of this cosmology it's not sufficient to believe that finally, one day, things will be better. The quality of each day and of each encounter, is important. In the Secular World Affirming cosmology, texture and goals are used to measure the quality of experience. However, in the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology only *texture and thus the experience* of daily life can be used to test the quality of experience.<sup>28</sup> Therefore their mode of engagement with reality is one of acceptance and to *fit into the rhythms of life*.

In such a situation where the *present experience* is so highly regarded, possible of acceptance and without obvious or attainable goals, *wisdom* (as opposed to *revelation* in the SWA view of reality, or the *discovery* of a path in the Withdrawal cosmology) is the natural form by which religious knowledge is acquired and experienced.

The nature of the ultimately-real as constructed in each of the three cosmologies, as well as the manner of belonging to it, give rise to *social values* and as such influences social involvement and interaction. In the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology, the individual belongs to the ultimately-real by way of belonging to his or her community, to both those still alive and those who have departed, starting at the individual centre and the well known, and expanding towards all that which is known and unknown. The individual and his or her transitions through life, is defined and affirmed through the community. This social feature can be described as *centered communal belonging* and it contrasts sharply with the *solidary communal belonging* of the Secular World Affirming cosmology which implies organised group action. Another social feature in cosmologies can be called *social cohesion*. This factor is symbolized by a *pattern of behaviour* in the IEA cosmology as opposed to a *belief pattern* in the SWA cosmology. Finally, *social coercion* is symbolically translated into *love or fear* in the IEA reality view as opposed to *love and greed* in the SWA reality view.

Considering the strengths of both cosmologies may give rise to questions. Can one, for example, take the best of both and combine it into one system that will enable a better world? The forthcoming

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If social construction, as in the Secular World Affirming cosmology, calls for the meeting of goals with the understanding that the present texture and experience of daily life may be sacrificed for the ultimate goal, it conflicts with the desire to maintain meaning from the *present texture and experience* of daily life as in the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology. Therefore, individuals, who for example need to work together but who hail from different positions in these cosmologies, may not agree on the paths to be pursued if they don't understand that they have different views on life and consequently seek meaning in different ways. If one group, for example, wishes to promote an agenda without sufficient regard for how the process is being managed, another group may not experience the initiative as meaningful, worthwhile or successful. When a specific view is imposed on those of others, it may disregard the needs of others and contribute to distance between people in all its many nuances.

summary will reflect on theoretic similarities between the two cosmologies and the extent to which the best of one can be combined with the other.

#### 4.4.3 An active *shaping of* versus *fitting into* reality: summary

Paragraph 4.4 dealt with ideal, coherent and theoretic cosmologies. As such, this part of the discussion has aimed to explain the logic of and coherence between the symbols as if both paradigms were without any external influences or disturbances and therefore totally in balance within themselves. I trust that the explanations assisted in creating an understanding that the different paradigms bring to the table different, yet important, aspects with regard to humanity's choice of belonging to totality.

Values and cosmological symbols as employed in social construction or maintenance as are relevant in the formation of identity, are inextricably bound to the extent that they are impossible to ignore or deny. To explain this further, one could consider two possible ways to engage with nature as cited by Cumpsty (1991:197-198). The one can be called the "natural" way, whereby people may die if there is not enough food available for a population, or when there is illness. The other may be called the "un-natural" way whereby strategies are employed to optimize natural resources in order to produce sufficient food and to manage family planning and diseases. Almost all Westerners, whether religious or not (in other words whether they acknowledge any association with an Abrahamic faith or not), will find the latter option axiomatic as it entails the shaping of the environment. In fact, they will probably assume that this is the "better," or even the "only right" way, without realizing that such a position is actually a deeply-held cosmological (and therefore a religious) conviction. Yet if the "un-natural" way is forced onto others without also offering the rest of the reality view that gave birth to such mode of engagement, the action of convincing others to employ the "un-natural" way may be regarded as highly irresponsible, or even as imperialistic, or arrogant as it offers only one symbol from a cosmology without sensitivity for another cosmology. In all likelihood such an action may contribute to the distortion and destruction of the reality view in place – one that was the cement of society.

Clearly neither of the two approaches are better than the other. For example: Cumpsty argues that the Immediate Experience Affirming, as well as the Withdrawal cosmologies, tend to promote social neglect, at least from the Secular World Affirming perspective. The West, in turn, initiates developmental activities in Africa and other parts of the world and sends technology and medicine to those who are ill and impoverished. However, to:

“...have an aspirin requires an extractive industry, a power industry, a chemical industry, and a distributive industry, quite apart from all the necessary financial and educational back-up. This suggests that it is all or nothing in many areas of life” (Cumpsty 1991:198).

One can expand on this comment made by Cumpsty in 1991, especially in view of the ecological footprint of the so-called developed world versus that of the so-called developing world.<sup>29</sup> Cumpsty concludes that neither of the two paradigms can be argued to be the best. Could it perhaps be possible to find some balance between the two cosmologies, or use the best of both?

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In my opinion the whole notion of what can be considered as “developed,” is not a clear-cut case. Whose agenda is taken into account when something is labelled as developed or as developing? To what extent should citizens of the world promote development and to what extent not? Which development decisions and actions may be harmful to the planet? What is more important – ecological harmony or a new industry, job creation and prosperity? I share the sentiment of Louw (2008:148) that the concept of Africa should not be politicised and am of the opinion that the same principle should apply to all parts of the world, be it Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia, etcetera. There are far too many variables at stake in any cosmology and the positioning thereof, and a great variety of interpretations and applications are possible, even when only one symbol within the same cosmology is at stake.

Does one at this stage conclude that the two cosmologies are mutually exclusive or are there any similarities between them? Cumpsty (1991:194) asserts that there is a common essence to be found in all three paradigms: “It is the quest to know the nature of the ultimately-real and to be related to it”. This quest has major implications for all other kinds of belonging and identity in life, and it impacts significantly on personal and social arrangements.

One may now be inclined to suggest an approach whereby the best of each paradigm for a specific situation be combined with the best of another paradigm, where, for example, two groups which hail from two cosmologies are in need to co-operate. Wouldn't it indeed be wonderful if one could combine the best of each of the three paradigms into one in order to improve life on earth?

This would mean that one would then be able to combine, or at least overlap, the *goal orientation* of the Secular World Affirming cosmology and the *community spirit* of the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmology with the *individual self-discipline* of the Withdrawal cosmology. Yet, Cumpsty argues that this is not possible, as each of the three systems is coherent in themselves and thus – at least from a theoretical perspective – mutually exclusive in terms of their basic orientation to the environment as expressed by the symbol called “mode of engagement with the world-out-there”. These three modes of engagement may be “the most important factor in locating a person or culture within the paradigms, for in addition to its visibility and its exclusiveness, it is hard to avoid” (Cumpsty 1991:195). Therefore, he says, it is not possible for a single person to simultaneously *withdraw* and to *take-hold-and-shape*, nor to *fit-into-the-rhythms-of-life* whilst engaging in any two of the aforementioned modes, nor to combine any other combination of these modes of engagement effectively. With this explanation, it becomes easier to understand why Cumpsty argues that the three modes of engagement of the respective paradigms are distinctly different and mutually exclusive.

His argument makes logic sense – at least theoretically – and I would think that such a point of view stresses why respectful co-operation between people from different paradigms, where all parties are able to enrich processes of development, policy formulation and so forth, is so important in a global agenda, but also on local levels in a diverse community. How the application of Cumpsty's mutually exclusive modes will develop in what we increasingly experience as a multidimensional world where paradoxical truths are simultaneously possible,<sup>30</sup> is, however, yet to be determined.

For now there are two more matters on which all three theoretic paradigms agree in addition to the shared quest to know and belong to the ultimately-real. The one is that they allow for the continuation of a sense of belonging to the ultimately real, in other words some form of life, after death.<sup>31</sup> The other is that all three reality views aspire to a world in which all humanity's actions are motivated by love. But apart from these three similarities, one is faced with much diversity.

### **Conclusion:**

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*Humanity shares the urge to know and relate to totality, but how they choose to do so, may differ. In this respect, Cumpsty's framework explains the Secular World Affirming and the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmologies each as logic, coherent entities with mutually exclusive modes of engagement with totality.*

*The respective symbols are often – if not always – seamlessly transferred to everyday life without necessarily realising that the assumed or perceived “ways-in-which-things-work” are*

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<sup>30</sup> See footnote 23.

<sup>31</sup> In the Withdrawal cosmology with its belief of cyclical dissolution through reincarnation a person *continues to belong to the ultimately-real* in death.

*actually deep-seated cosmological views, each of them an expression of religion. Moreover, the symbol sets of the respective paradigms differ quite radically from one another, as both sets have perceived strengths and weaknesses. The solution seems not to combine whatever is regarded as “the best symbols” into one cosmology, but rather resides in respectful co-operation between parties.*

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#### **4.5. Conclusion: cosmological symbols act as constant factors**

Already some progress has been made with regard to establishing an understanding of two coherent cosmologies which may respectively be associated with the traditional African view and a Western-oriented Christian view.

Cumpsty’s framework of theoretic cosmologies can indeed be regarded as logic and coherent as the symbol sets of both the cosmologies (as well as those of the Withdrawal cosmology) can be linked to the same set of constant factors. These factors are consistently present in the structure of a cosmology and theoretically always require symbolic interpretation. If a symbol is omitted it will be due to a reason inherent in the logic of a specific cosmology.<sup>32</sup>

However, whereas Cumpsty (1991:218) uses the term “non-negotiating symbols”, I shall call the various facets by which cosmologies are constructed “constant factors”. I do not disagree that these elements are “non-negotiable”. All of them have to be present in a cosmology or absent for a reason. Without all of them, the coherence of belonging to totality, in whichever way, will be compromised. Rather, I choose to use different terminology to once again limit confusion between “non-negotiable symbols” with the actual symbolic interpretations in cosmologies. Also, by calling them “constant” instead of “non-negotiable” I express their consistent appearance in all three theoretic views of reality.

The constant factors have all been explained in 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 together with their respective symbolic interpretations.

They are:

- The experience of the immediate world out there
- The perceived nature of reality
- The perceived nature of the ultimately-real
- Belonging to the ultimately-real
- The conceptualising of time
- The mode of engagement with the world out there
- The test for the quality of experience
- The possibility of chance or determinism
- The ground of meaning
- Social features, including the relationship between the individual versus the communal, social cohesion and social coercion
- The source of ethics
- The modelling of survival
- Acquiring religious knowledge

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<sup>32</sup> Social coercion, for example, does not feature in the Withdrawal cosmology because the experience of the world cannot be affirmed as of the real and therefore the preferred mode of engagement with such non-real world-out-there is to withdraw from it. Hence social coercion does not apply here.

It is important though to realise that although these factors are constant, *the symbolic interpretation* of each of the factors is appropriate to the logic of each paradigm and within each paradigm, the *applications can also vary in position*. Even though the constant factors can be interpreted differently and be positioned in a variety of ways, they serve as a set of tools or a logical and systematic structure whereby belonging to totality can be analysed. In other words, the interpreter knows upfront what factors always come into play when analysing a cosmology.

It will be important for the rest of the discussion to remember that when one speaks about a specific cosmology, one refers to but *one set of symbols* and its interpretation. I believe it is precisely this perspective that goes astray when someone assumes that the way totality operates is the same for all (see paragraphs 4.1 and 5.1.). When in the forthcoming discussion I refer to a “religious-cosmological perspective”, I am referring to the *overarching desire to belong* translated into a *set of cosmological symbols*.

Accepting then that adherents’ expressions of both the traditional African and the Western-Christian views are characterized and shaped by the symbolic interpretation and positioning of constant factors, one can conclude that an understanding of these factors and symbols may be helpful in understanding identity, social relations, as well as differences and similarities between people.

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**Conclusion:**

*The logic structure of Cumpsty’s framework for religion is characterised by one set of constant factors which can be interpreted in different ways. Knowing upfront which factors play a role in a cosmology can be most useful when interpreting specific and real-life views of reality.*

*The information gained in 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 leads to the conclusion that the logically coherent cosmologies and their associated symbols may be considered a theoretical “base-line” which can assist in systematic and systemic explanations of how people in real life choose to belong to totality and thus find meaning.*

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For purposes of an overview, clarity and as a summary, I shall henceforth list all the constant factors in relation to both cosmologies’ respective symbolic interpretations in Table 1. This will be done with reference to a table compiled by Cumpsty (1991:218). I have changed the headings of the columns to distinguish between constant factors and symbols. Table 1 will be a useful summary for reference, especially when reading chapter six.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The column called “Withdrawal cosmology” is merely included for the purpose of reference.

#### 4.6. Summary of constant factors and three theoretic sets of symbolic interpretations

**Table 1: Constant factors and symbolic meanings expressed in three paradigms**

NON-NEGOTIABLE CONSTANT FACTORS	SYMBOLIC MEANINGS EXPRESSED IN THREE PARADIGMS		
	IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE AFFIRMING COSMOLOGY	WITHDRAWAL COSMOLOGY	SECULAR WORLD AFFIRMING COSMOLOGY
<i>Experience of the immediate world out there</i>	Affirmed as of the real	Not affirmed as of the real	Affirmed as of the real but not ultimate
<i>Nature of reality</i>	Monistic	Monistic	Dualistic
<i>Chance and determinism</i>	Chance excluded	Chance excluded	Chance, new beginnings
<i>Belonging to ultimately-real</i>	Assumed: must be maintained or repaired	Assumed: needs to be realized individually	To be sought individually
<i>Nature of ultimately-real</i>	Without rigid distinction between personal and impersonal	Without rigid distinction between personal and impersonal	Personal
<i>Time</i>	Cyclical: biological, maybe astral	Cyclical: rhythmic, aeons	Linear
<i>Test of quality of experience</i>	Texture only	Texture only	Goals and texture
<i>Ground of meaning</i>	Grand Design (pattern)	Grandeur	Grand Design (purpose)
<i>Mode of engagement with world out there</i>	Fit into	Withdraw from	Take hold and shape
<i>Social features:</i>			
<i>Individual or communal</i>	Communal: centered	Individual: universal	Communal: solidary
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Behaviour pattern	Behaviour pattern	Belief pattern
<i>Social coercion</i>	“Love” “Fear”	n/a	“Love” “Greed”
<i>Source of ethics</i>	Harmony, individual purpose	Realisation, oneness	The end, the above
<i>The modelling of survival</i>	Ancestors	Reincarnation	To heaven
<i>Religious knowledge</i>	Wisdom	Discovery of path	Revelation

All of what has been said so far refers to theoretic situations where perfect coherency is possible. More important and relevant of course, is to investigate to what extent Cumpsty's theory applies to practical real-life situations.

However, I am not yet fully prepared to embark on an investigation of real-life examples. If I move from here to the praxis, I shall move directly from understanding meta-paradigms to choices on the level of individual identities. Therefore I shall, as a next step, discuss two more theories, both by innovative and respected scholars. The one, Amartya Sen, is a recipient of the Nobel Prize for economy. Of the other, Manuel Castells, it has been said that if there was a Nobel Prize for Sociology it would have been awarded to Castells (Marginson 2004). Chapter five will introduce their respective theories which allow permutations and deviations from the theory of meta-paradigms.

I shall eventually combine some insights of Cumpsty (1991), Castells (2005) and Sen (2006) in the analyses of case studies. I hope that this approach will enhance the hermeneutical analyses.

Finally, before embarking on the practical work, I shall explain why the medium of film is regarded most suitable for practical work in the context of this study's topic.



## 5. REASON, FEELINGS AND POSITIONING IN ARTICULATING SYMBOLS

*Knowledge of the theoretic differences in cosmological belonging, along with an understanding of the systemic relation between religion, cosmologies, religious traditions, world views and culture, prepares one for a hermeneutical analysis of real-life examples. Yet such understanding is but one necessary step.*

Dealing with existential cosmologies expressed in individual ways, requires knowledge and tools to engage with both the totality and the particular. In this chapter I shall discuss two more theories before analysing specific identities in chapter six.

To deal with different cosmologies in their own terms, it is necessary to distinguish between *feelings and reason* as Amyarta Sen (2006), an economist from India, does when he speaks about identity construction. When I discuss his theory I shall do so with reference to the comments of scholars in Religion and Media to demonstrate how easy it is to project one's own felt sense of reality onto others despite the intention to not do so.

The last theory which I shall discuss before the case studies in chapter six, will identify three agendas for constructing identity. The theory of the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (2005) is guided by answering *for what and why identities are constructed*. He probes deeply into the reasons for personal and social positioning within a network society and these positions along with Cumpsty's theories on cosmologies and Sen's viewpoint on the roles of feelings and reason will be used to analyse film characters in chapter six.

This chapter concludes the section on theory. My last point here before embarking on the practical interpretation will be to motivate why I regard the medium of films as suitable for hermeneutical exploration in the context of this study.

### 5.1. Applying feelings versus reason in film analysis

Although people may generally agree on the need to respect diversity and democracy, the world is nevertheless characterized by the promotion of singular views and policies (of especially the Western civilization) (see 4.1). This discrepancy has – amongst other factors – to do with the gap between what feels real and what makes logic sense, which may, in turn, lead to one text or agenda being overridden by another. I shall argue in this paragraph that the gap (or discrepancy) between what makes *rational sense* and our deep-seated *felt sense of reality*, contributes to oversights and misinterpretations, *even amongst those of us who have no such intentions*. In other words, the difference between what we perceive from a logical perspective (our reason) and our respective *symbolized realities (our feelings)* gives rise to the articulation of *contradictive messages*, or texts, which *unintentionally* feed assumptions, hidden agendas, disagreements and so forth.

It needs to be emphasised (see also 4.2 and 5.1) that cosmological or reality views are deep seated, and not necessarily articulated or realized consciously or rationally. In fact, how an individual and groups understand the totality, *how they make sense of it*, how they *experience meaning* in life, how they *choose to belong* and how they *construct their own identities and view the identities of others*, are frequently initially *not based on reason* according to Cumpsty but rather on a “felt sense of reality” (1991:134-140). He argues that the sense of belonging to all-that-are-out-there always starts at an inner personal level. It is about *what feels real and such feelings precede the symbolized reality*. If one can accept this reasoning as sound, it means that it will be very difficult to ever exclude or overestimate the role of feelings in the construction of identity, religious traditions, world views, and so forth.

Viewers and interpreters may, however, *albeit* frequently, unwittingly and in fact with all intention to do the contrary, project nothing but personal views of reality onto the contents of texts such as films. It is, of course, every person's privilege to interpret any message from a personal and subjective perspective. Marsh and Ortiz (1997), Johnston (2000), Kreitzer (1999) and Marsh (2007) all deliberately apply a theological Christian perspective and thus their own reality views, when they analyse films.

Warren (1997), in turn, intends to reflect wider than Christianity when he introduces the aim of his book: “I intend this book for persons of any religious background – Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc....anywhere where I use the term ‘religious,’ I am consciously intending the idea as applicable to any religious tradition” (1997:4). Yet all his examples are derived from his own religious tradition and as such he projects his own *real felt sense of reality and thus excludes reality views that cannot be theoretically explained by a SWA-based cosmology*.

Similar to Warren, Deacy (2001:9) also projects his own cosmological understandings when the latter accepts that a need for “redemption” is *intrinsic to human nature* in “the universal human experience of sin, alienation and suffering”. He argues that redemption is “a rudimentary and pervasive human concern” and that this concept assists humanity to understand “a great deal about human existence” (2001:138) when, in fact, *redemption presupposes an immediate world out there that is not ultimate and thus can be explained by the SWA cosmology, but not by the IEA cosmology* where the immediate world out there *is affirmed as of the real* (Cumpsty 1991:161).

Hoover<sup>34</sup> (2006:36) does the same when he mentions the concept of “transcendence” in the same breath as “that which is *intrinsically* religious, spiritual, transcendent, or deeply meaningful” (my cursivation) although he continues to say that the measurement of these things are increasingly difficult. *Transcendence too, presupposes an immediate world out there which is not ultimate, as explained by cosmologies associated with the SWA view of reality, but not by the IEA reality view*. Gräß (2008) also views the concept of transcendence as an integral part of being religious. He describes his view of belonging to totality in beautiful terms, but one needs to understand that these words and concepts will not feature in a cosmology which is informed by the IEA paradigm:

“(T)o be religious means to be open for experiences of self transcendence. It means to find your authentic identity and your place in the universe, to get awe for the tremendousness of a world which is not totally in our own hand(s), to respect each human being as related to a metaphysical dimension and finally to find God as the representative entity of this transcendent dimension” (my cursivation).

In her contribution on “World Cinema”, Ortiz (in Johnston (ed.) 2007:73-84) mentions an American “sense of superiority over other peoples” (2007:83) in reference to the Nazi minister of propaganda Goebbels and motivates strongly for opportunities for religious and theological dialogue that includes others. Such “others,” she says, are regarded as “foreigners” in the United States of America and hence films with subtitles are viewed by Americans as “somehow primitive, less developed, of lesser quality, may be a fallacy resulting from such presumed Western or American superiority” (2007:83). These comments by Ortiz – at first glance – seem sound. She also refers to Miroslav Volf’s point of view that difference needs to be embraced and that even when there is conflict, the solution to peace starts with the self and not with others. She clearly motivates for a way by which the viewing of non-American films can facilitate a positive awareness of diversity:

“Can cinema help us wake up to the unconscious/subconscious bias against the unfamiliar language or the different visage of our neighbor? Can it even foster a breakthrough of an awareness of the *common search for transcendence shared between religious communities*? It is through these identity issues – which reflect the kind of societies in which we live – that theologian Miroslav Volf advises theologians to be responsible agents for peace and respectful relationships” (2007:81) (my cursivation).

Yet Ortiz’ passionate and sincere plea refers to *a common search for transcendence shared between religious communities* – without substantiating why this may be the case nor how it applies to all religious traditions. In the next paragraph she refers to the “still-smouldering ashes of genocidal

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<sup>34</sup> Also see footnote 38.

struggles in...Botswana". I am not aware of any recent genocide in the peaceful country of the Batswana people. Thus Ortiz, within the space of two paragraphs, advocates for plurality, assumes incorrectly that her felt sense of reality applies to all other religious communities and provides incorrect facts on an African country. Her own argument is crippled by her assumptions and incorrect facts. Her intention is noble but her execution is not acceptable.

It is these kinds of well intended yet broad-brushed and incorrect remarks, in a book that aims to provide a new and more advanced focus on theology, religion and film in a perspective wider than the USA, that should urge a re-read of Volf's book on exclusion and embrace. In my opinion, his award winning work provides extremely valuable insights and his words should not be quoted in such a way that it diminishes his message.

Volf (1996:74-75) describes different kinds of exclusion such as well known *extreme* forms of exclusion and *domination* and then more nuanced forms such as *assimilation* whereby others are expected to fit into the dominating or existing way of doing things, as well as *rejection* by not taking cognizance of others. He also identifies a subtle yet very damaging form of exclusion, namely *symbolic exclusion* whereby we refuse to engage with others in such a way that we really learn to know them but rather choose to serve our own interests.<sup>35</sup>

It seems to me that yet another and an even more subtle way of exclusion is possible in addition to those identified by Volf (1996). I shall call this form of exclusion double-text interpretation. This happens when someone expresses his or her desire to engage meaningfully with others and simultaneously – mostly without realizing it – maintains a subtext of exclusion in examples and practical work because the person is convinced of the cause but does not make the effort to distinguish between his or her own cosmology and what provides existential meaning to others. In essence, someone who excludes others by practicing double-text interpretation decides to include them and simultaneously projects his or her own *felt sense of reality* onto those of others. How can an armchair approach implied by the letters of Sara Anson Vaux (in Johnston (ed.) 2007:88-103) ever engage meaningfully with the identity of others? We need to continuously question ourselves and realize that even though we try, it is quite possible that we don't really know others and that our efforts to understand are insufficient.

It needs to be recognised that it is extremely difficult to not simply project one's own reality view (which is rooted in feelings) onto an analysis at the cost of others, even when it is the intention not to do so. When the intention is to seek understanding of the other but the analysis is nevertheless largely done from the perspective of the own cosmology, the interpreter acts as a mere legitimising agent of the own and hence the objective of an improved understanding of the other is defeated. It is therefore in my opinion crucial to distinguish between what could be considered as a default position in the own cosmology and what is actually required in scholarly comments on, for example, films that portray non-Western-oriented personifications – that is, if the aim is an improved understanding of others.

The economist and Nobel Prize winner Amyarta Sen (2006) distinguishes between the roles of the affective and the cognitive. He argues strongly in favour of using one's *reason* when making choices with regard to identity, especially when deciding on behalf of someone else what another's identity encapsulates. According to Sen (2006:150) allowing one aspect of an identity to have "priority over other affiliations involving politics, profession, class, gender, language, literature, social involvements, and many other connections" represents a reductionist position which could lead to exclusivist, irrational and/or destructive behaviour.

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<sup>35</sup> From a communications perspective, the exchange of information between Volf and Ortiz is a good example of where a message has been well constructed and well delivered (his book is highly acclaimed and won awards). Yet Ortiz did not understand Volf's message on symbolic exclusion as he intended it.

He mentions the “illusion of destiny”<sup>36</sup> (Sen 2006:17) when referring to a perception that is divisive instead of recognising diverse and plural identities. He argues that one’s religious tradition is not one’s destiny and stresses the fact that multiple factors come into play in constructing individual choices. When “the relevance of all other affiliations and associations” are, for instance, ignored and a person is defined in terms of his or her sole identity, as say a Jew, a Tutsi or a Serb, “(t)his is where the nastiness as well as the conceptual confusions are made to creep in” (2006:176). How we see ourselves is of critical importance and it can play a positive role if the agenda is:

“...a constructive search for the ways and means of reducing global injustice. That search is critically important in itself, and that must first be the first – and main – thing to say about it. But it can also have a very substantial role in taking us away from the confrontation of sharply divisive identities. It makes a difference how we choose to see ourselves” (Sen 2006:148).

His appeal for a balanced approach, whereby all the many varied aspects of someone’s identity is taken into account, as opposed to the classification of a person, or a group, in terms of a single ethnic, religious, political or some other aspect of identity, is certainly justified, yet this is not humanity’s instinctive response to total experience, except of course where a religious tradition is in itself pluralistic such as certain forms of Hinduism. However, I would like to argue that should an interpreter of films be *in a position of influence*, such as religious leaders and academic scholars, and moreover have the desire *to increase the understanding* of identities and traditions other than the own, it would be short-sighted to only rely on one’s own feelings when interpreting films.

When Johnston (2000:83-84) discusses cultural differences between the Western world, Asia and Latin America he points out that “(t)here is something new that a movie can provide a Christian. More than dialogue is called for. The theologian must be receptive to encountering spirit in a new guise and only then turn to respond from the viewer’s own theologian point of view” (2000:56). What may be necessary if one truly wishes to increase an understanding of others is, in my opinion, to consciously expand one’s knowledge of different cosmological concepts and to deliberately balance one’s own feelings with rational information of other paradigms.

Following on the abovementioned argument, my approach in chapter six will be to be aware of both my own and another cosmology whilst *distinguishing* between two relevant paradigms. This allows one to incorporate both *feelings, as well as reason*, and as such remain true to a personal cosmology, as well as seek an understanding of the other.

However, even when one encounters spirit in a new guise, as Johnston puts it, or even when one asks – like Oswalt (in Martin & Oswalt 1995:159) – how the interaction and relationship between films and religion helps to “understand contemporary society, cultural values, and individual beliefs,” there may be yet another relevant question that needs to be posed. If one wishes to understand others better in order to, for example, create a more just society, or a more peaceful world in which all have food, shelter and basic facilities, a world in which human rights are respected and the ecology is nourished, it may be necessary to also recognise and understand *what is required to develop those kinds of identities* that are able to bring about such transformation.

For an understanding of this, I shall now turn to the insights of Castells on the construction of identity.

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Both the concepts “illusion” and “destiny” are found in what Cumpsty refers to as the “Withdrawal religion type”, in other words the third theoretic cosmology. In this paradigm, the experience of the world-out-there is not affirmed as of the real (it is an illusion) and religious knowledge is attained by discovery of a path (destiny). These symbols feature prominently in the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, the film awarded an Oscar for Best Foreign Film during 2009’s Academy Awards ceremony. What is interesting here is that Sen deliberately departs from the default position in the Withdrawal cosmology by calling “destiny” an illusion, yet he also affirms such cosmology by labeling the destiny as an “illusion”. Nevertheless he consciously and deliberately steps out of any possible temptation to project feelings onto the identity of others.

## Conclusion:

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The discussion highlighted multiple examples of exclusion in the form of double-text interpretation. This is a subtle kind of exclusion, often disguised under the intention of goodwill. In the examples cited here, especially scholars from a Western-oriented background transfer and project religious concepts such as “transcendence” and “redemption” onto the religious understanding of others. They do so as they regard that what provides meaning to them, as universal to all of humanity.

However, both “transcendence” and “redemption”, for example, presuppose a view of the immediate world out there that can be affirmed as of the real, but not as ultimate as applicable in a SWA-based view of reality, but not in an IEA-based reality view. In a discipline such as Religion and Media where the interpretation of films is often required, such an introverted perspective limits understanding of and respect for others.

However, one can understand the tendency to project an existential meaning component onto others. It sounds logic that the same existential quests are shared by all human beings. For if one does not assume this, one’s own sense of what provides meaning or belonging may feel jeopardised. Hence it is most difficult to ignore one’s own feelings when having to interpret someone else’s reality view. Yet it is imperative to distinguish between one’s own perceived felt sense of reality and those of others when advocating respect for others.

To do so, requires at least a rational decision and some rational knowledge, if not also the willingness to expand one’s own level of consciousness and to always remember one’s own cosmology is but one of (changeable) ways of belonging to totality.

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The final layer of theoretic differentiation which I shall discuss before turning to the case studies will pertain to the formation of identity. Thus, the discussion on theory that started at very broad levels of differentiation (meta-paradigms) and continued to the distinction between the affective and the cognitive, will be concluded with the finer distinction between three ways of identity formation.

Similar to all the other layers, this dimension also requires personal choice. I shall argue that changing and redefining the layer of identity is much easier than making changes on the felt sense of reality, in other words in one’s cosmology or even to a symbol within one’s cosmology.

## 5.2. Different interpretations of symbols impact on the positioning of identity

Within the context of the two relevant theoretic cosmologies under discussion (see 4.4 and 4.6), I mentioned three constant factors that feature on a social level and thus are essential to the construction of identity. They are:

- The social factor of *individual versus communal* belonging which is communal in both cosmologies, yet they differ in respect of the locus of control. In the IEA view this feature is symbolically expressed as *centered in the communal*. This means that belonging begins with the most immediate (the individual) and from there moves to that which is less known (everything else). In the SWA view belonging is *solidary in the communal*. This, in turn, requires organised group action by like-minded people (Cumpsty 1991:196-197).
- Secondly, the factor of *social cohesion* which is symbolized by the *pattern of behaviour* in the IEA cosmology as opposed to being symbolized by a *belief pattern* in the SWA cosmology. A *belief pattern* may entail logic, conscious cognitions, whereas a

*behaviour pattern* is mostly aimed at maintaining the status quo and *texture* of experience is highly regarded (Cumpsty 1991:200-201).

- Thirdly, the factor of *social coercion* which can symbolically be translated into *love or fear* in the IEA reality view, and to *love and greed* in the SWA reality view. The symbol of love is shared by both cosmologies, as well as by the Withdrawal cosmology. Cumpsty (1991:202-203) is of the opinion that “(a)ll religious traditions...including forms of humanism...look forward for the time when all the actions of humankind (are) motivated by love” (also see 4.5).

Being social features, they are all key concepts in understanding identity formation. Yet they all interact dynamically with one another *and* with all other symbols adopted by any individual or group and hence *all the symbols associated with each person's paradigm* could be of relevance to a religious-cosmological discussion on identity.

The symbolic interpretation and personal positioning of each constant factor could have a range of meanings depending on the agenda and choice of a person. Even though all three cosmologies, including forms of humanism, aspire to a world in which all humanity's actions are motivated by love, such a position is, however, no automatic choice. Symbolic interpretations of *social coercion*, such as “love”, “fear” and “greed,” can result in positions ranging from fundamentalist, exclusive and imperialist approaches to inclusive, pluralistic and post-paradigmatical ways, as well as all possible nuances in between (Esack 1993, 1998, 1999; Lochhead 1988, McCarthy in Twiss, Summer and Grelle 2000). Miroslav Volf (1996:20) mentions in the introduction to his book *Exclusion and Embrace* that “(i)t may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference”. What then drives humanity's perceptions on identity and difference?

In describing such social diversity, Castells (2005) provides valuable insights into positioning when he distinguishes between three types of *collective identity* based on the purpose or the *raison d'être* of a particular identity. He explains identity formation as “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority *over other sources of meaning*” (Castells 2005:6) (my cursivation). He also argues that identity as a source of *meaning* needs to be distinguished from a person's roles which relate to functions (for instance as an employee, a mother, a partner, etc.). Moreover, he is of the opinion that identity can change and he identifies three ways by which identity could be constructed. Castells describes the three categories as follows:

*“Legitimizing identity:* introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination vis-à-vis social actors [...]. *Resistance identity:* generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival [...]. *Project identity:* when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity, that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (Castells 2005:8) (my cursivation).

He argues that as all identities are subject to change, one kind of identity may develop into a different one. *Resistance* movements may, for instance, change into *projects* and once the latter starts to dominate a community's institutions they may turn into organized and *legitimising* identities.

These three categories may be used to not only discuss collective identities, but also individual identities if such individuals generate or influence collective adherence. This principle was aptly demonstrated by Ulrike Auga's (2007) distinction between the social positioning of two literary intellectuals in a given historical context. In her discussion on Nadine Gordimer and Christa Wolf she argued that both writers acted as “public intellectuals within processes of transformation” in their respective countries (South Africa and Germany) (2007:192). According to Auga “(i)ntellectuals tend to be at the forefront of, and...shape” social movements or collective identities (Auga 2007:197).

Likewise, it is relevant to reflect on how intellectuals from Western society influence collective identities. How do they, for example, interpret the positioning of film characters when those characters are not Western-oriented? In paragraph 5.1 I referred to Western scholars' assumptions that lead to double-text interpretation. In chapter six I shall continue to comment on how film characters may or may not inspire Western-oriented critics and viewers. My core argument shall be that Western-oriented intellectuals tend to maintain their own existential perspective based on feelings and therefore inhibit the opportunity (and project) of increased understanding and peace amongst people with different reality views.

This lack of insight into the existential orientation of others is increased in the context of film. As I shall explain in paragraph 5.3, the medium of film can no longer be regarded as merely instrumental in meaning-making and belonging. In contemporary Western society film should now be regarded a platform where the formation of identity, culture, worldviews and reality views of viewers, and thus collective identity, are facilitated. For this reason too, it becomes relevant to hermeneutically reflect on the identity of film characters. I will do so in the context of the multi-dimensional, systemic field of information which humanity applies in belonging.<sup>37</sup>

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### **Conclusion:**

*All symbols in a cosmology play a role in the construction of identity. Each symbol can be positioned differently according to personal choice.*

*The three reasons identified by Castells (2005) for constructing collective identity may also be used to reflect hermeneutically on how Western-oriented scholars Western society's assumptions as well as influence and/or maintain this society's assumptions on behalf of others.*

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All the theories discussed thus far will add value once they are used to interpret real-life examples. For this I intend to use films. I shall use the next paragraph to first motivate why film can be regarded an ideal medium for interpretations of examples that resemble real life situations. In the second place I shall motivate why films are most appropriate for hermeneutical analyses.

### **5.3. The hermeneutical value of film analyses**

In the production of films, techniques such as sound, light, dimension and camera perspective are deliberately applied to involve and influence the senses of interpreters, and thus their perceptions of life. Browne (in Marsh & Ortiz 1997:19), for instance, refers to "interpreting the language of life" when watching films. Specifically with regard to the Western world, Brie and Torevell (in Marsh & Ortiz 1997:171) point out that films are viewed as a credible source of information as Westerners regard sight as their most important sense. Hence Westerners learn to trust what they observe visually.

With the advent of new technologies which allowed the affordable reproduction of films in the format of videos and DVDs as well as downloads from the internet, these texts became readily available to a wider group of viewers across the globe. Films can now be watched more than once, frames can be

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It is not my intention to use the theory of Castells on social identity as an instrument of measurement in any way. When applying the three types of identity he distinguished, I shall do so in an attempt to reflect on the possible positioning of a specific film character within his or her context, as this may shed light on one more layer of information in the hermeneutical analysis.

frozen, soundtracks can be bought and film experiences feel even more authentic with the introduction of 3D technology.

These developments have encouraged the scholarly studying of films, also from the perspective of religion and religious traditions.

Much of what has been written to date in the relatively new discipline of Religion and Media (see Deacy 2001, Flesher & Torry 2007, Horsfield, Hess & Medrano (eds.) 2004, Johnston 2000, Johnston (ed.) 2007, Marsh 2007, Marsh & Ortiz. (eds.) 1997, Martin & Ostwalt 1995, Warren 1997) has to do with the interaction between the two domains. Cosmological belonging – that which is worth hanging onto – is shaped in an interactive, dynamic way by everything that humanity does and as Warren (1997) asserts, it does not necessarily require affiliation to a religious tradition. I agree with Warren and wish to add that all films can be considered relevant texts in the interpretation and explanation of cosmological belonging. As was argued in chapter four, religious meaning understood as a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real need not be expressed in terms of, or with reference to any specific religious tradition. Thus, even though a person may or may not have a religious or a spiritual experience when he or she watches a movie, *all* films produced by humanity portray a sense of cosmic belonging and henceforth carry messages of humanity's relation with the ultimately-real. This applies even when the characters are not human as such films still represent views of reality.

Broadly considered, it seems fair to accept that the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between religion and film forms part of the larger, systemic interaction between religion, cosmologies, culture, worldviews, religious traditions and the rest of life. Films resemble and portray life and contemporary technology enables the studying and review of examples. Thus, on a *technical and practical* level, film is an ideal medium to study examples from life.

Yet being readily available for studies, as well as being a medium which participates in the multidimensional construction of humanity's perceived place in totality, may not be enough to elevate films as a medium worthwhile for a *hermeneutical discussion* in the context of this study. For the necessary motivation, I shall henceforth consider the role films play in meaning-making, as well as the ironic juxtaposition embedded in the nature of the medium.

Hoover draws attention to the matter that one should not only investigate the significance of the relationship between media and religion. He suggests that the really "important questions may be in the realm of meaning-making rather than the 'impact' of media on *behaviour*" (2006:40-41) (my cursivation).<sup>38</sup> As such he chooses to focus on the reception of media by conducting fieldwork with different kinds of audiences so as to understand their respective experiences and practices: "(m)edia and commodity culture are now integrated into practices of meaning and identity in profound and irreversible ways" (2006:3).

Marsh (2007:153), in turn, whilst stressing the same point, asserts that "...though religion, in formal terms, may be sparsely represented in film, and sometimes treated in hostile terms by viewers, the necessity to reconnect spirituality/religion/theology with film watching *because* it is a site of meaning-making could not be more urgent" (my cursivation).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hoover seems to be unaware of how important *behaviour patterns* are for deriving spiritual and existential meaning in cosmologies such as the traditional African reality view and those associated with the Withdrawal cosmology. For the sake of the flow of the argument I do not elaborate on this point here. However, this observation should be read in conjunction with the points made in paragraph 5.1.

<sup>39</sup> The way in which Marsh in this instance referred to "religion" will for the sake of this study be understood as "religious traditions" in line with the study's set of definitions.



Horsfield (2004:23,27), with reference to Schleiermacher, has a similar departure point when he asserts that the relationship between religion and media – especially films – *has become part of the construction of culture* and therefore *the role of media, including films, can no longer be considered merely instrumental*. This new relationship, he says, represents an important shift in contemporary thinking. Religious meaning is not created by the producers of messages, but rather through an interaction between the text or message, the context and the receiver. Therefore despite all efforts to craft and communicate any particular message, the ultimate meaning of such message depends on the interpreter (Horsfield *et al.* 2004:30) (my cursivation).

These views of Hoover, Marsh and Horsfield that the various ways by which religious meaning may be derived from media are in need of urgent and serious investigation, are indeed valid. How we think of ourselves and others impact on everything we do in life. In fact, media, particularly films, “have become the practical marketplace where individuals...gain information, communalize their concerns, and build meaning, identity and worldviews” (Horsfield, Hess & Medrano 2004:xix).

As a communications consultant by profession, I accept these principles on how messages are interactively constructed and received as generally recognised by communication industry experts. However, as a scholar in Religion and Culture, it is my opinion that this general rule, or phenomenon, does not need to be treated deductively so as to guide the behaviour of all under all circumstances. For if I lose sight of humanity’s pervasive quest, realisation and maintenance of a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real (Cumpsty 1991:161) and the existence of wholly different cosmological paradigms when I watch a particular visual story, I shall project, glance over and make unwarranted assumptions such as “this is how the world works for everybody”.

What is interesting, is that it seems as if *the very same medium which allows the public in general and scholars in particular to derive meaning by projecting their own felt sense of reality, also allows one to be exposed to another’s way of belonging to totality, to respect it and to learn from it for reference to real life experiences*. That is, if one is open to such growth. This then, is one of the most important reasons why films are useful for the hermeneutical analyses of life. Films create a safe zone where one can move out of one’s own comfort zone, it provides the opportunity to reflect and review, to contemplate and study. It allows one to not only project and be focused on the own need for meaning. Rather, it offers insight into what a film’s character portrays and the possibility to hone in on what gives meaning to the character. It facilitates growth, understanding and respect. It is a tool whereby people can embrace one another.

In fact, the dynamic, multi-dimensional and continuous flow of interaction between a viewer and a character in the process of film watching calls for various layers of interpretation in unlocking messages. Without necessarily realising it on a conscious level, many variables are factored into what is perceived to be portrayed.

Just considering the viewer already points to a number of information layers which may be activated in watching the movie. The viewer, with his or her background and context, participates in constructing the message. He or she, for example, will have an association with a particular cosmology which may not be a hundred percent identical to any of Cumpsty’s theoretical cosmologies. For every shift in the interpretation of a symbol there will be a reason which constitutes yet another layer of information. The viewer can also be an adherent of a religious tradition, belong to a culture and have a specific world view. His or her identity may be that of a project actor, a legitimising actor, or that of resistance. In addition to all these facets, the viewer’s role is relevant too. The person may, for example, be in an influential or leadership position and hence interpret and formulate views which are considered credible and representative. As each of the layers of information in a specific person are activated whilst watching a film, they appeal first and foremostly to instinct, and thus feelings, and only secondly – if at all – to reason. The character on the other hand will also be someone with an association with a cosmology which may not be ideal in the theoretic sense, be an adherent of a religious tradition or a

form of humanism, belong to a culture, and so forth.<sup>40</sup> What the character may represent, may be close to the framework of the viewer, or it may differ.

The point is that between these two actors, a great variety of interpretations is possible for many reasons. These layers of interpretation from multiple perspectives, combined with the extent to which reason and feelings are employed, are best addressed through hermeneutical analyses. Hermeneutics deals with complexities, nuances and contexts, it recognises that interpretations can shift and is never final. A hermeneutical analysis also deals with what is most appropriate under specific circumstances. My appeal here is for scholarly comments to clearly distinguish between feelings and reason in their interpretations, especially when their expressed intention is phrased as such.<sup>41</sup>

The hermeneutical analyses of films, as a reflection of humanity's questions, failures, tragedies, trials, courage, fears, love, greed, destiny, wisdom, discoveries, beliefs, behaviour and aspirations, can shed light on how, and for what reason, belonging and identity are constructed and imagined. By unlocking a form of art, it can also express new and perhaps desired ways in the quest for meaning, as well as emerging trends in the real felt sense of reality of a particular era, religious tradition, culture, world view and so forth. In short, films portray life and its existential meaning as known to humanity and it invites its viewers to participate in this richness.

## **Conclusion:**

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*The information gained from chapters four and five indicates, from a religious-cosmological perspective, a universal dimension. This is humanity's shared urge to understand and relate to the ultimately-real and in the process of doing so, to also make sense of all that are out there.*

*Apart from this shared dimension, much diversity exists. It is, however, possible to explain some patterns of similarities within the diversity. All these layers of information act as critical variables in the construction and understanding of identity. Several layers of variables which could assist in the hermeneutical analyses of films from a religious-cosmological perspective are considered here:*

- *Fully coherent, logic yet different ways of meaning-making and belonging to totality as expressed in theoretic cosmologies.*
- *Real-life interpretations of cosmologies expressed in how people choose to belong to totality.*
- *Different positions of the same symbol within the same cosmology, depending on for what and why an identity is constructed.*
- *Symbols from one cosmology that are combined with those of another cosmology.*
- *Differentiated interpretations of cosmologies expressed in religious traditions, world views and cultures. (All religious traditions share the desire for a world characterised by love and they all recognise some form of life after death.)*
- *The reasons for constructing identity.*
- *The respective roles of the affective and the cognitive in meaning-making.*

*When these layers of variables are combined in unique and individual ways, a multitude of changeable identities are possible. All of the abovementioned, as well as the interaction*

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<sup>40</sup> Yet another layer of interpretation becomes possible when a scholar's audience(s) is/are also considered.

<sup>41</sup> In an ideal world, we all will at all times be able to respect both the own and the other's view of reality.

*between the various layers, will be taken into account when analysing identity choices in examples that resemble real life situations.*

*Due to their appeal on several senses and the strong visual impact, films are ideal for portraying life situations. Contemporary technology also enables the studying of films.*

*Moreover the medium can be regarded as most suitable for hermeneutical analyses of finding and expressing existential meaning for the following reasons:*

- *Films play an active role in meaning-making in contemporary life to the extent that they participate in the creation of culture and its interconnections.*
  - *Interpreting identity in film is complex due to multiple levels of relations and perspectives such as that of the viewer, the character(s), as well as all the abovementioned variables. This means that the interpretation can only be contextual, never conclusive and forever shifting as new insights develop.*
  - *The analyses of film offer insight into existential belonging. Yet how humanity views life always shifts and this movement is not only forward as generally believed in the Western world. Therefore a contemporary film on a specific issue may differ significantly from a film on the same topic that was produced sometime earlier or later. Shifts in the various views of humanity can be traced through a study of films – yet the interpretation of any trends may differ from one interpretation in one era to that of another.*
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## 6. FILM ANALYSIS: THREE CASE STUDIES

Throughout the discussion it was highlighted that a great many varieties of identity are possible as a result of personal choices. The first part of this study explained two different yet theoretic ways of belonging to totality and also mentioned a third. Therefore, and as a next step, I shall briefly discuss more variables that influence identity and meaning.

These explanations of theories will – in the second part of the study – be complemented by hermeneutical observations of the cosmological belonging portrayed by the main characters in three films. All three films have been released since 2000 and portray events that took place in the past twenty years. By doing so, it may be possible to determine if an understanding and knowledge of Cumpsty's theoretic framework can assist in a structured and systematic understanding of the Western-Christian and traditional African cosmologies as expressed by individuals in contemporary societies.

In essence then, the theory will now be tested in three case studies.

### 6.1. From theory to praxis: criteria for analyses

In this section, I shall apply all three theories discussed in chapters four and five to the praxis. I intend to use all three theories as I suspect that they will enhance my ability for nuanced and contextualised interpretations.

Therefore, I shall in each case start by **identifying which of Cumpsty's (1991) theoretic cosmologies (IEA or SWA or both) may be represented** and then **provide reasons why either the traditional African or the Western-Christian cosmologies, or a combination of both or some other cosmologies are present**. I shall subsequently ascertain **possible deviations in symbols** and also try to understand **the position of each symbol** – for instance whether it is positive or negative. From there I shall move to **formulating what identity (resistance, project or legitimising) the character portrays** in terms of Castells' (2005) theory.

I hope that this approach will clarify whether Cumpsty's IEA and SWA cosmologies are useful or not to explain, unpack and understand the traditional African and Western-Christian cosmologies. I also hope that such a systematic approach will shed light on not only existential belonging, but also on the formation of identity.

Throughout this process, I shall **focus on distinguishing between my own perspective (and feelings) and those of others (a reasonable approach)** as advocated by Sen (2006).

For ease of reference, *cosmological symbols*, whether positively or negatively portrayed, will be indicated by the using italics.

Reference to Table 1 in 4.6 is recommended for keeping track of the various constant factors and their different symbolic meanings.

### 6.2. The relevance of case studies in a hermeneutic exploration of belonging to totality

The key question posed in this study, is:

*Can knowledge of coherent yet theoretic cosmologies be helpful to gain insight into identity formation given that individuals exercise their own choices in respect of whom they are?*

With this question as guideline, I shall use the case studies to answer the following:

- Is Cumpsty's framework helpful in understanding how individuals choose to belong to totality in real life?
- What kinds of identity are portrayed by the main characters in each of the three films?
- What appeal does a cosmological analysis make on the researcher given her Western-Christian orientation?

These three points will, as discussed earlier, be answered from the perspectives provided by Cumpsty, Castells and Sen with most of the focus on the theory of religion proposed by Cumpsty.

My approach to the analysis will not be phenomenological but rather hermeneutical, in other words it will be fundamentally interpretive. None of my insights or any of the theories can be considered as final. Therefore I shall try to maintain a self-critical view on my own understandings and be aware that truth and reality can, as in post-modern scientific theories, be "radically ambiguous" (Tarnas 1993:397). This is not to say that this study cannot be regarded useful, for the very essence is to demonstrate that *different paradigms do exist and that awareness of them is necessary*.

The analysis of the third film, *Tsotsi* (2005), will be longer than those of the other two films. This is not only because it may be regarded the best of the three films (it was awarded an Oscar) and is rich in its variety of symbols, themes, motives and juxtapositions. I was also able to locate two scholarly articles on the film and in view of this study's position on the respective roles of feelings and reason in film analysis the comments and insights of these articles needed to be critically reviewed.

### 6.3. Reasons for selecting the three films under discussion

My agenda in this study is to not only reflect on how *meaning may be derived* from media (in this case films) but also to consider how meaning *might be projected* onto the contents of films and in so doing, miss an opportunity to increase one's awareness of diversity and possibly even the opportunity to critically evaluate one's own place and position in the whole.

My selection of the three films was not done randomly, but rather intuitively, yet I was simultaneously able to rationally justify my choice in terms of the objectives of this study (see chapter three and paragraph 6.3.).

In saying this, I wish to stress that I could have chosen a number of other films and provided sound reasons for selecting them too. In fact, my initial list included nine films, all of which could have been used in this study.<sup>42</sup> Any film will reflect a sense of belonging to totality and therefore can be discussed from a religious-cosmological perspective as explained in paragraph 4.5. However, the reasons for using the specific three films, are as follows:

- All three films were released since 2000 and deal with contemporary issues.
- All three the selected films are realistic drama films clearly situated in specific countries, two of them based on true stories. Dealing with such clearly defined spaces based on real life contexts, simplifies the analysis. It makes it easier for the viewer to interpret the cosmological dimensions, as well as to understand identity choices. This, however, doesn't mean that any fictional and non-realistic characters such as animals, futuristic or animated characters could not have been used.

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<sup>42</sup> Other films that I considered include *District Nine* (2009), *As it is in Heaven* (2004), *The Departed* (2006), *Son of Man* (2005), *Avatar* (2009) and *Blood Diamond* (2006). I do make recommendations for studies in more films in paragraph 8.1.

- The first two films to be discussed here, *Erin Brockovich* (2000) and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), were both selected by my lecturers, Professors Jeremy Punt and Johan Celliers, as part of an earlier assignment in Religion and Media in this programme.<sup>43</sup> When I did the analysis at the time, I realized that the two films, both based on true stories, could be used to explain what motivates or provides meaning to adherents of respectively the SWA and the IEA cosmologies (see paragraphs 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). Therefore I included them here for a closer look at the reality views of the main characters.
- The third film, *Tsotsi* (2005), was awarded an Oscar for the Best Foreign Film at the 2006 Academy Awards ceremony. As I am South African and am writing about the traditional African cosmology, I felt that I would be avoiding my own country's issues if I did not also study a local production. In fact, when it was on circuit, I, like many of the people I know in South Africa, had no desire to see it as I felt that the context of the story was "too close to home" and that it would be too difficult to stomach yet another story about a broken society, crime and violence. I should also admit that I avoided *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) when it was on circuit for the very same reasons. In a sense then, I rented these two DVDs as part of this and earlier research because I felt obliged to do so and I wasn't looking forward to the experience of watching them. To watch *Tsotsi* (2005) was a rational decision based on my sense that to deliberately ignore something that feels uncomfortable would not be in line with the ethos and argument of this thesis. I was embarrassed, and utterly humbled after watching both *Tsotsi* and *Hotel Rwanda*, realizing my own preconceived expectations. Both films enriched and inspired my understanding of life in countries on my own continent. Both were also challenging to analyse as they confronted me with stark realities, real-life complexities and nuanced variations in symbolic understandings. This was especially the case with analysing *Tsotsi* and I have subsequently also discussed the latter in an assignment in the module Religion and Anthropology for the same degree programme.<sup>44</sup>
- I would have preferred to have discussed more than three films and to include at least a European film too so that a single American film would not be the only one chosen from a Western-Christian society. However, this study's objective does not require a statistical representation of films from certain parts of the world. Even for such an approach, four instead of three, or even nine or twelve films, would not have been sufficient.<sup>45</sup> In the end I chose not to include a European film too in an attempt to balance variety with depth and the length of this research assignment. As the analyses will indicate, elements of the Western-Christian cosmology also feature in the other two films under discussion.
- I deliberately included more than one film that portrays characters in an African background, as I am personally less familiar with the traditional African cosmology and I was keen to see to what extent such view of reality is portrayed in the selected films.

From the abovementioned it is clear how both reason and feelings (the latter expressed in the resistance that I had to overcome in selecting *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Tsotsi* (2005)) can influence one's own agenda and research. I am fully aware of this and do not wish to hide my initial hesitance of engaging in these (what I used to perceive as) uncomfortable stories.

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<sup>43</sup> I discussed six films in this assignment with the aim to interpret a contemporary understanding of the other.

<sup>44</sup> In this assignment, I investigated the possibilities of shifts in cosmological belonging.

<sup>45</sup> My interest in how cosmologies are formed, expressed and interpreted, doesn't end with this research. There is always the option to expand the number of case studies in future after the completion of my degree.

My perceptions are yet another example of how easy it would be to submit to a subtext of “please let this pass, engaging with cinema is supposed to make me feel good”. As I have argued throughout this study, feelings need to be balanced with reason and there may be times when feelings need to be recognised as such and then be combined with the ability to also consider another’s experiences and viewpoints. In other words, rational decisions (that is, if such decisions do not already “feel right”) are required for research in the field of Religion and Media.

#### **6.4. A brief introduction to the selected films**

The discussion on the first two drama films should be viewed in relation to one another. The interpretation of *Erin Brockovich* (2000) will draw on the Secular World Affirming cosmology which may be associated with the Western-Christian reality view, whilst the interpretation of *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) will take cognizance of both Western-Christian and traditional African reality views.

Both films are based on true stories and in both instances the main characters encounter situations in which they choose to help others against all odds in matters regarding basic human rights. Regarding both films, one can ask: What motivates the identity choices of Erin Brockovich (in the film with the same title) and Paul Rusesabagina (in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004))? What provides meaning to them? How are their identities articulated and possibly changed?

The third drama film, *Tsotsi* (2005), was produced in South Africa. It is a modern-day adaptation of an unpublished novel originally written by Athol Fugard around 1959 and later extensively edited by Stephen Gray after which the edited version was published by a Johannesburg firm, Ad Donker (Barnard 2008:548).<sup>46</sup> Although this is not a true story, the context of a displaced person in a township outside South Africa’s financial metropole, rings true. So too do the themes of poverty, crime and violence in juxtaposition with affluence and well-being as a reflection of the country’s disparities. Key questions here are: What happens to the cosmic belonging of a person in circumstances of neglect and disillusion? What position(s) is/are taken by the main character? What informs the character’s concept of meaning? What kind of identity does he embody?

The analysis will in all three instances be done from a religious-cosmological perspective (see paragraph 4.5) and therefore will not deal with, advocate, justify or critique any specific religious tradition. I shall start with what is most familiar to me (my own real felt sense) and thus with the film *Erin Brockovich* (2000). This is not to say that my positioning and identity are similar to the character of Erin, but rather that most of the symbols in my own cosmology are likely to correspond with the symbols of her view of reality.

I shall summarize this chapter and draw relevant conclusions only after all three films have been discussed.

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<sup>46</sup> Only the film will be discussed in this study.

## 6.5. Analysis of three films

### 6.5.1 A purpose-driven approach in *Erin Brockovich* (2000)

In this film, based on a true story, Brockovich discovers a systematic cover-up of industrial poisoning of water supply that threatens the health of an entire community in the southern California town of Hinkley. The film revolves around her struggle against the American West Coast energy giant Pacific Gas and Electric Company known as PG&E and the effect thereof on her own life.

Erin's personal view of reality as portrayed in the film corresponds largely to the SWA cosmology. This means that symbolic meanings included in this theoretic cosmology are not mixed with those of another paradigm. The character's interpretation of these symbols is of course aligned with her own life choices and identity.

She is portrayed as a young and beautiful American woman with different roles in life such as an unemployed single parent of two toddlers, neighbour, lover and later also as an employee and an investigator. Her identity is expressed through how she enacts these different roles, but also through her own frustrations and aspirations. As the film starts, Erin is seen as someone who used to be a beauty queen and since has had two unsuccessful marriages; she seems unable to find (any) job, she struggles to find reliable babysitters, a vehicle collides with her car and her resulting claim for damages is unsuccessful. In short, Erin seems to be unable to *shape* her life into what she regards as an acceptable and successful format.

What she regards as success, needs to be understood in line with how the Western cultural psyche has been permeated through the ages with the Christian world view. Since the classical Greek period the religious goal in the West was to search for an essential unification with the cosmos and the ultimately-real. During the first few centuries of Christianity, the largely Judaeo-Christian structure of theology was on a metaphysical level still largely Platonic. In Christ, the Logos became human and he mediated the quest for access to transcendence (Tarnas 1993:102-104). Since the later classical period encompassing the Greco-Roman era, through to the early Middle Ages, Christianity again – generally spoken – influenced Western conceptions by, for example establishing a monotheistic hierarchy in the cosmos; by reinforcing the Platonic spirit-matter dualism; by accepting a logic in history that was linear and apocalyptic rather than cyclical; by projecting or transforming the pagan Mother Goddess mythology onto the Virgin Mary; by de-emphasising or even negating a person's rational and empirical faculties in favour of spiritual, emotional and moral dimensions; and by accepting the absolute authority of the Church and the Bible as the one and only truth (1993:165-166).

The religious zeal of these earlier times was replaced by the advent of the modern era which started with the Renaissance. This era was characterised by a search for freedom from all possible kinds of oppression and “modern man set out on his own, determined to discover the working principles of his new universe, to explore and further expand its new dimensions, and to realize his secular fulfilment” (Tarnas 1993:290). He further explains that “the Protestant work ethic, along with the continued emergence of an assertive and mobile individualism, had played a major role in encouraging the growth of an economically flourishing middle class tied to the rise of capitalism” (1993:246). This secular fulfilment included the objective to better align nature to humanity's will and is also, according to Tarnas, expressed by an economic vigour, propelled by the opening up of new markets, new financial strategies, technology and the accumulation of wealth in the new world. Cumpsty describes this specific mode of engagement with the world-out-there exemplary of the SWA reality view as one of *taking hold of the environment and shaping it*. This modern reality view also describes what is here defined as a Western-Christian cosmology.

Erin in her own eyes is clearly not successful nor is she happy. Her behaviour underscores a *belief* in a *linear concept of time* whereby it is possible to move from a *not-so-ideal situation to a brighter, ideal future* characterised by freedom, prosperity and happiness. These are all deeply spiritual concepts rooted in the Judaeo-Christian traditions which have in the Western world been transferred, and also



“transformed into a secular faith” (Tarnas 1993:321). This implies that one can save oneself by *future fulfilment* and this is what Erin wishes to do – she wishes to redeem herself by getting a job and being successful.

Her response to her inability to find a job is to project her anger and frustration onto those around her verbally (in strong language) and non-verbally (by for instance kicking a car). In fact, she enacts distance between herself and others and hence creates a world which she perceives to be against her. Such a perception of a world which turns against one is typical of a world view where there is no longer meaningful dialogue with nature, one where the *reality is affirmed as of the real, but not ultimate*. This kind of *dualistic* conceptualisation is, in turn, a result of a bifurcation within reality itself that has been transferred to the rest of (secular) life. “This dichotomy in reality, modelled temporally and spatially, is expected to be overcome when this and the above come together and reality is experienced in its fullness” (Cumpsty 1991:174).

Erin’s character embodies the bifurcation, a lack of unification, a world that is against her on also a physical, exterior level. Her beautiful body is dressed in very short skirts and revealing tops which on the one hand attract attention, yet on the other hand her attitude communicates that there is a huge distance between her and others; therefore figuratively it says “stay away”. She tells her new neighbour (who later becomes her boyfriend): “*I don’t need any sugar... I don’t need you.*”

At this stage her positioning is one of resistance against the world and everyone else who could be blamed for her circumstances (as she apparently sees it). Her behaviour displays what Tarnas (1993:376) refers to as the modern Westerner’s “brute unconsciousness – a struggle for survival, for ego integrity, for civilization.” It also resembles her belief that she, as an *individual*, needs to seek a solution for her displacement.

Erin’s environment too reflects the schism in her own *dualistic* view on the nature of reality. Her *experience of the world-out-there as being not ideal* is mirrored by the reality experienced by the residents of Hinkley. They, as Erin and most Westerners at the dawn of the twenty-first millennium, live in a world whose values are dominated by the power of science, technology and prosperity. Their experience of alienation from nature due to an agenda of *greed* embodied by the cover-up of the poisoned water by PG&E is so severe and so literal that their health and their lives are at stake. Thus the theme of *dualism* and *separation between reality* (nature) and modern Western expectations of a *more ideal reality* (transferred from the concept of the ultimately-real) does not only play out in the character of Erin, it is an embedded motive in the film.

Erin believes in the possibility of a better future as she keeps on fighting for improved circumstances for herself and her children. Her cosmology offers significant strengths – to persevere despite suffering as long as there is a clear and desirable *end goal*, to recognise the *individual role* in cosmic belonging, in short, she *seeks a new beginning for herself*. She recognizes that it is her *own responsibility* to achieve these objectives and actively seeks it – in line with the *belief pattern* of the SWA cosmology (Cumpsty 1991:179) and a Western-oriented view. After her accident claim is rejected, she loudly demands employment as compensation from her lawyer (Edward Masry) in full view of everyone in the open plan office: “*I’m smart, I’m hard-working, and I’ll do anything, and I’m not leaving here without a job...* (then much softer and in a pleading tone) *Don’t make me beg.*”

As a filing clerk in Ed’s office, Erin comes across some files on a pro bono case involving real estate and medical records of the energy giant PG&E. As she begins to investigate the particulars of the case, she becomes convinced that the facts do not add up and persuades her employer to allow her further research as she feels that something *needs to be done to improve the situation*. Western-oriented viewers will be able to associate with these symbols and validate the courage displayed by the character of Brockovich.

The synchronicity between Erin’s personal situation and the circumstances of the town’s inhabitants dramatises the storyline and intensifies the feeling that *life needs to be moulded and shaped in line with what is regarded the ideal*. What led to the crisis in Hinkley (immoral human intervention) may

possibly be redeemed by the same symbol (*active engagement with the world-out-there*), but positioned differently (moral human intervention). Erin will be in a position to redeem the situation and herself by taking on the company who was responsible for the water poisoning and covering up the evidence of doing so. But will she succeed? Will she reduce her own sense of separation by reconciling more dimensions of being human in herself as she becomes more successful? Or will she re-apply the old mode of struggle for survival and ego integrity even when taking on a good cause and succeeding at it? The answer becomes clear as the story unfolds.

At this point, Erin's attention starts to turn from defending herself to becoming involved in the issues of others, and thus the distance between herself and those around her – at least those whom she regards as her clients – becomes smaller. When she realizes that there is a systematic cover-up of the industrial poisoning of the town's water supply, she *engages even more actively* with the matter and aims to involve as many affected people in the community as possible. She visits those who have already been affected and does everything necessary to investigate and petition in order to build a case which can bring the company to justice for being responsible for extensive illnesses diagnosed amongst the residents of Hinkley. Such organised group action (or class action), as initiated by Erin, is a typical social feature of *solidary movement in the communal sense* as in the theoretical SWA cosmology (Cumpsty (1991:197) and here it is articulated as part of a Western cosmology.

Erin's manner of dress is a visual motive throughout the film, and thus serves as a means of identifying various positions with regard to others. Earlier in the film she resisted fitting into so-called acceptable business dress when she remarked: "*As long as I have one ass instead of two, I'll wear what I like, if that's alright with you...and you might want to rethink those ties, Ed.*" However, at the stage when she visits people who suffer from health problems as a result of the poisoned water, she dresses in a less revealing and provocative manner and thus reflects a sensitivity and respect for others. She is now in the role of someone who campaigns for a better future on behalf of others. She has clear *goals* and *purpose* and her experience provides her with a sense of worthwhileness. But when she wants to *intimidate* in order to be seen as powerful (sometimes even aggressively in a negative positioning of the *active moulding in engaging* with the world) or *manipulate* to gain confidential information, she also dresses accordingly by again wearing a blouse with a plunging neckline.

Her character therefore still resembles a typical modern Western reality view whereby *intellectual mastery, an ethics of achievement and material improvement* are associated with "success" over and above other aspects of human nature such as the emotional, aesthetic, ethical, volitional, relational, and the imaginative, which are generally regarded as less relevant in Western societies as these may distort objective understanding (Tarnas 1993:287). This behaviour too is in line with the theoretic SWA view, as well as a Western cosmology which *source of ethics is based on the end or the above*. This ethics also calls for *an active mode of engagement with the world out there* and Erin *shapes* her interaction through what she wears. In short, she is on a *personal*, yet now an altruistic quest and focused on improved circumstances – here symbolized by the expectation of sufficient financial compensation for those who fell ill as a result of PG&E's activities. All these symbols applied by Erin provide meaning to her life and it gives her a sense of existential belonging.

Does this, however, mean that her positioning has changed? Is her behaviour, her level of social coercion, motivated by *love or by greed*? Erin has shifted from resisting anyone who seems to threaten her own existence and desires, to resistance on behalf of a community which has been compromised by the activities of an energy company. She puts all her energy and time into resolving this matter and neglects her children and her boyfriend as a result of her engagement, yet she pleads with him: "*For the first time in my life, I've got people respecting me... please don't ask me to give it up.*" Her reality view allows her to willingly sacrifice other relationships for this higher cause (*the end or the above*). In the Western-Christian cosmology, social cohesion is not achieved through a *behaviour pattern* (as in the traditional African cosmology), but rather through a *belief pattern*. This implies that as long as

there is a *good cause*, sacrifices are accepted as part of life's *texture* and even necessary.<sup>47</sup> Her quest, her focus, on *shaping a better tomorrow* for others, becomes a driving force and provides meaning in her life even though it necessitates certain sacrifices.

Erin's cosmology remains the same even though her interpretation of the constant factor of social coercion (expressed by *love or greed*) extends to include caring for others outside her immediate circle. Moreover, no variations between the theoretic SWA cosmology and her interpretation of the Western-Christian cosmology could be found. She remains someone who *actively and purposefully engages* with the world-out-there which she perceives to be *dualistic*, but she has shifted from a position of feeling not valued, to a position where she confidently takes on a worthy cause on behalf of others. This positive development has relevance to only one of the character's roles, namely her professional life. In her personal life she remains an individual who is sceptic, defensive and flares up easily as demonstrated when Ed hands her her payment which proves to be far more than she had expected.<sup>48</sup> One could speculate whether her angry reaction to Ed's tongue in the cheek remark that her pay check may not be quite what she had expected, represents a level of *greed* or not. Suffice to say that her behaviour throughout the film (also portrayed in other interactions not mentioned here), do not convey a consistent agenda of *love*.

It is not possible to conclude from the film that her entire character has developed into what resembles a project actor as described by Castells (2005). Yet she has redefined her (own) position in society and even though her professional actions may have started as resistance against injustice, they became clearly beneficial to the community and contribute to the unmasking of abused corporate power and marketing. In this particular role she contributes positively to creating a culture of transparency and fairness. If these attributes can be considered as "new" in the particular period in American history, her professional contribution may be regarded to have the attributes of a project. Should she continue to unmask the abuse of corporate power and in the process seek the transformation of the overall social structure, the character may, from a social perspective, be regarded a project actor. This is, however, not portrayed in the film, as it deals only with a single situation.

This study does not focus on any religious traditions but rather on the human quest, realisation and maintenance of a sense of belonging to totality (Cumpsty 1991:161). Although the contents of the film is not positioned in terms of any religious tradition, it is interesting to note that the reality view of the main character clearly portrays a Western-Christian paradigm which may be associated with the SWA cosmology.

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<sup>47</sup> The contents of the films *The Departed* (2006) by Martin Scorsese and *Der Untergang* (2004) by Oliver Hirschbiegel are excellent examples of the extremes to which an individual may go if someone believes that certain actions serve a higher purpose. In the first film one of the characters (Billy Costigan) acts as an undercover agent to increase his credibility and consequently infiltrates a crime syndicate. For this, he drops out of the police academy, compromises a relationship and does time in prison to fake assault. None of this happens easily, he struggles severely with the fact that he lives a lie. In the end he loses his life, but a Western viewer may feel that Billy's actions were worthwhile as it served a higher good.

In the second film which depicts the final ten days of Adolf Hitler's life in a bunker in Berlin at the end of World War Two, several of the characters decide to take their own lives when it becomes clear that Nazi Germany can no longer win the war. Frans and Magda Goebbels do not only take their own lives, but also those of their five young children as they see no future for them without National Socialism. Although the Nazi sentiment may be generally criticised in the Western world, the symbolic interpretation of constant factors such as the basis of meaning, the source of ethics and the mode of engagement with the world out there are in both films all aligned with the SWA and the Western-Christian views of reality.

<sup>48</sup> The case was eventually settled in 1996 for \$333 million, at the time the largest settlement ever paid in a direct action lawsuit in U.S. history. There were 634 plaintiffs.  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erin\\_Brockovich\\_%28film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erin_Brockovich_%28film%29))

**Table 2: Symbolic interpretation of the main character in *Erin Brockovich* (2000)**

The symbols applied in Erin’s Western-Christian cosmology are:

<i>Constant factors</i>	<i>Symbolic interpretation in Erin Brockovich (2000)</i>
<i>Experience of the immediate world out there</i>	Experienced as real but not as ultimate, needs to be improved
<i>Nature of reality</i>	Dualistic
<i>Chance and determinism</i>	Chance, new beginnings
<i>Belonging to ultimately-real</i>	Not expressly articulated, but implied as a personal and an individual quest
<i>Nature of ultimately-real</i>	Not expressly articulated, but implied as a personal
<i>Time</i>	Linear
<i>Test of quality of experience</i>	Goals (to improve and move beyond the current) and texture (suffering is acceptable)
<i>Ground of meaning</i>	Grand Design (purpose)
<i>Mode of engagement with world out there</i>	Take hold and shape, a deliberate and active moulding of the circumstances and the environment
<i>Social features:</i>	
<i>Individual or communal</i>	Communal: solidary
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Belief pattern
<i>Social coercion</i>	”Greed” and “love”
<i>Source of ethics</i>	The end, the above

The portrayal of Erin’s character provides a good example of how faith-based (*belief patterns* symbolise social cohesion) symbols can be transferred to the rest of life which may not be experienced by a person as religious, but in fact is according to Cumpsty’s mentioned definition (see paragraph 3.6). (Social cohesion is not symbolised as *belief* as in the IEA and Withdrawal cosmologies, yet the same transfer happens, this time just expressed in *behaviour patterns*.)

Viewers from a Western-Christian orientation, whether religious or not, will in all likelihood associate positively with Erin’s *quest to not accept things as they are, but to create a better world for herself and others by an active and purpose-driven engagement with, and shaping of the world-out-there – despite obstacles and circumstances which may require sacrifices – especially when it is done for a worthy cause and solidary action*. They may also forgive Erin for her shortcomings as the *future still bears hope and the chance of new beginnings*.

### 6.5.2 The crisis of texture in experience in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)

The second drama film plays off in the context of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. About 800 000 people were brutally murdered over a 100-day period, mostly with machetes, when Hutu militia spearheaded the near total extermination of members of the Tutsi minority. For scale and speed the killings were the most efficient in recorded history yet at the time it went almost unnoticed by the rest of the world.<sup>49</sup> Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu married to Tatiana, a Tutsi, saved over a thousand helpless refugees during the genocide by granting them shelter in the hotel he used to manage on behalf of a Belgian firm. The film is based on these real life events as the hotelier attempts to save his fellow citizens from the killers.

The *social fabric* of Rwanda, as in many other countries in Africa, was severely distorted by centuries of inappropriate yet *active, purpose-driven engagement* with the continent and its people in order to *shape* it according to the needs of countries that subscribe to a Western-Christian cosmology.<sup>50</sup> According to a Nigerian journalist now based in New York, Dele Olojede (2004) the focus on ethnic distinction between Hutus and Tutsis was cultivated by Europeans since the mid-1880s during a time when an anthropology of so-called race science was in fashion in Europe.<sup>51</sup> However, Olojede aptly points out:

“What the visitors failed to notice was that these were in fact not distinctive ethnic groups by any conventional definition. They spoke exactly the same language, observed the same rituals and followed the same system of social organization. They also observed a highly fluid system of social mobility, so that a Tutsi who fell on hard times could become Hutu, and vice versa. There were Tutsi chiefs and Hutu potentates. They also intermarried extensively, so that over time it became increasingly difficult to tell for sure who was what” (2004:15).

The abovementioned views of Olojede are confirmed by Immaculée Ilibagiza (2006:20), a Tutsi survivor of the 2004 genocide.

Olojede (2004), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for a series of articles ten years after the Rwandese genocide, explains that Germany was initially allotted Rwanda in 1885 at the Berlin Conference that partitioned Africa among European powers. However, Rwanda became a Belgian protectorate after World War One and the latter used the ruling elite, the Tutsis, to continue to run the country. When they instituted a system of identity cards that specified each person's ethnicity, it “froze in place every Rwandan's identity and social mobility was effectively halted.” This system remained in place until after World War Two when the Tutsi elite started to demand the end of Belgian colonialism. The Belgians then shifted their allegiance to the Hutu, and “in a

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<sup>49</sup> After a number of countries called for the withdrawal of their contingents, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was left with 270 soldiers supported by less than 200 local authorities. Lieutenant-General Dallaire, despite orders to withdraw from Kigali, refused to abandon the country and withdraw from Kigali. Understaffed and abandoned, UNAMIR did the best it could “with what forces remained and they did manage to save the lives of thousands of Tutsis in and around Kigali and the few areas of UN control. Lieutenant-General Dallaire requested the immediate insertion of approximately 5,000 troops, but his request was denied.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Assistance\\_Mission\\_for\\_Rwanda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Assistance_Mission_for_Rwanda))

<sup>50</sup> Examples of such inappropriate engagement in Africa include slave trading, colonialism and the superficial implementation of nation-state models as discussed by Kobia (2003) and Clark (Horsfield *et al.* 2004); the effect of the Cold War and the resulting search for natural resources, as well as globalism as discussed by Stiglitz (2002).

<sup>51</sup> This sentiment also influenced anti-Semitism – as portrayed in the Jewish Museum in Berlin which I visited in the summer of 2009.

bloody 'Hutu Power' revolution in 1959 the Hutu began a decades-long purge of the Tutsi from all facets of Rwandan life" (2004:15). Therefore, when the context of the Rwandan genocide is considered, it should be done in the light of centuries of interaction between actors from a Western-Christian paradigm and those from a traditional African paradigm and not only from the context of globalisation and globalism. It will be important to understand the extent to which the possible clash, merge, disintegration or combinations of these in the meeting of the two cosmologies can be traced in the life of a character such as Paul at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Kent Williams (2005) compares the main character in *Hotel Rwanda* with Oscar Schindler<sup>52</sup> due to the "saintly" way in which he protects Tutsis and moderate Hutus in the hotel he manages on behalf of a Belgian firm: "Paul Rusesabagina and his hotel are the very symbol of hope, a beacon of light in a country overcome with darkness." However, according to Williams, Paul's motivation to create a safe haven for refugees at the hotel remains unclear as the film doesn't answer this question, except possibly for the words uttered by Paul's wife, Tatiana, when she says: "You're a good man, Paul".

Williams is a film critic and his interpretation may be regarded as typical of someone who perceives reality from a Western view without considering other views of reality. From this perspective it may indeed be possible to interpret and derive meaning from the film through concepts such as "hope" and "redemption" similar to that in *Schindler's List* (1993).<sup>53</sup> Yet such interpretation would entail the projection of the felt sense of reality in the own (Western-Christian) cosmology without taking cognizance of the possibility of a traditional African view of reality being portrayed. This is what Sen (2006:150) warns against when he rejects allowing one aspect of a person's identity to have "priority over other affiliations involving politics, profession, class, gender, language, literature, social involvements, and many other connections". In my opinion Sen's argument can be used to avoid interpreting someone else's cosmological belonging and identity based on one's own perspective and elevating it to some decisive criteria. This same imperialistic mode of thinking, to assume that what one experiences and feels as real is the same than what someone else affirms as the real, will surface again in the discussion on Tsotsi. Interestingly enough, all of these assumptions were made by people from Western institutions. Could this point to Western critics generally not being aware that cosmologies other than their own do exist? Or, if they are aware of other cosmologies, they find it very difficult to not project their own views onto others (see also paragraph 5.1).

Paul's character is constructed through his position as manager of a hotel for the international market in the capital city of Rwanda, Kigali. When the film starts, the viewer is aware that it is April 1994.<sup>54</sup> Paul is portrayed as an aspirational figure when, for instance, he tells his Hutu incumbent, Dube, how he uses expensive Cuban Cohiba cigars to impress businessmen. That he is skilled in negotiations becomes even more evident when he, despite his own political opinion, accepts a T-shirt from Hutu militia as he and Dube are caught up in a demonstration by extremist anti-Tutsi militia on their way to the hotel from the airport where they have collected the cigars. It is clear that he is also adept in understanding what international guests – who mostly hail from a Western background – desire and that he is able to guide his staff to act accordingly. He, again

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<sup>52</sup> William's comparison is echoed by the free encyclopaedia, Wikipedia: "The film...has been called an African *Schindler's List*." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel\\_Rwanda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel_Rwanda)).

<sup>53</sup> This well-known film by Steven Spielberg was released in 1993 and received numerous awards. It tells the story of a German businessman who risked his own life to save the lives of more than a thousand Polish-Jewish refugees during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories.

<sup>54</sup> On 6 April 1994, a plane carrying the Rwandan president, a Hutu, was shot down. Following that incident, extremist Hutus from the Interahamwe started with the killings and a plan to destroy the entire Tutsi civilian population. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel\\_Rwanda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel_Rwanda)).

to the admiration of young Dube, advises the chef to innovate a locally interpreted dish when the quality of the freshly delivered crayfish proves to be less than expected. Paul is clad in business attire, able to befriend and impress Westerners in senior positions, such as the commander of the United Nations peacekeeping force. The impression created up to this point is that Paul is successful, especially in the eyes of those who prefer a so-called international image above a local, ethnic image. These attributes, all established in the opening scenes, are important in understanding and interpreting the identity which Paul's character portrays.

Paul's social standing seems to resemble that of the ruling class in Rwanda, the Tutsis, even though he is in fact a Hutu, and he is indeed married to a Tutsi woman, Tatiana.

That Paul's character in the film doesn't conform to those of the other Rwandese characters portrayed (he acts neither as a typical Hutu nor is he a Tutsi, and seems to fit seamlessly into the world of European and American officials and tourists) poses questions with regard to his cosmology in the context of this article. Has he perhaps replaced the traditional African reality view (which can be traced to the IEA cosmology) with a view of reality which is closer to the Western-Christian cosmology?

Based on the contents of the film thus far, one may suspect that Paul associates with the Western-Christian cosmology by being *goal-oriented, driven to take hold and shape his environment and clearly aspiring towards the ideals* of a Westernized civilization. The way in which he negotiates the ethnic tension in Rwanda by not allowing it to affect him as explained above, and still realizing his own interests, can be considered as atypical in terms of the political climate at the time in this African country. Yet his positioning may also be considered in line with traditional African ethics by which *relationships need to be repaired, disharmony avoided and religious knowledge attained through wisdom*:

“(T)he sole source of ethics... is developed by general agreement, that is, by wisdom, rather than logically from an overall goal, for the real is now. Each entity has its own purpose within the whole which must be respected” (Cumpsty 1991:206).

It is necessary to allow the story to unfold further before expressing an opinion about Paul's cosmology and identity portrayed in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004).

As word spread about the murders early in April 1994, Paul tries to ease the anxiety of family members by explaining that there is no reason to leave the country. But when members of his wife's family disappear and Tatiana, his own children and their neighbours, need to flee for safety, he is gradually forced to face the realities. At first he only wants to attend to his own family, but Tatiana pleads with him to offer shelter to the others too. After bartering with a senior officer, Paul brings the refugees to safety in Hôtel des Mille Collines. In the following days and weeks when the United Nations' refugee camp becomes either too crowded or too dangerous to be safe, more refugees flee to the safety of the hotel. Even in these circumstances, whilst coping with an overly full hotel and diverting Hutu soldiers, Paul is dressed in a neat dark suit with a stark white shirt and tie and aptly acts the role of a dedicated manager in effective control of a fully booked hotel, down to the crossing of the last T necessary for the hotel's administration. The viewer gains the impression that Paul is able to continue his work as hotel manager, his guests now being refugees crowded into rooms.

It is only when, in a shocking scene, he *physically and texturally experiences* the result of brutal murders that he can no longer contain his anguish. Late one afternoon, Paul forces the unwilling Dube to accompany him to a supplier of the hotel (who unsuccessfully urges Paul to join the militant Hutus) in order to secure food for the refugees. When they return a little later with their freight, it is already dark. They follow the same road home. At some point the vehicle appears to be off the road, apparently bumping over what feels to be rocks. A stressed Paul shouts at Dube to immediately get it back on the road. What they subsequently discover strips Paul of all visible

signs of being in control. He is forced to *affirm the horror of the immediate experience*. The same road which was deserted and clear a few hours ago, is now littered with lifeless, massacred bodies, causing the vehicle's difficulty to move smoothly.

Back at the hotel and in the privacy of his bathroom, the viewer sees a completely distressed Paul. After a shower to clean himself of the blood and grit as a result of clearing the road of dead bodies, he dresses himself anew in a stark white shirt with a tie. But he cannot go through with it. He can no longer uphold the image of a competent hotel manager who hopes that help will arrive. The *immediate experience* of acute horror amongst his own people has been brought home to him in a very literal way. He has to face, and *affirm, the present*. Yet the very ground of his meaning, the *pattern of life*, the *source of ethics expressed through harmony*, has been shattered. With his back pressed against the bathroom wall the distraught man slides down to the floor whilst tearing the clean, white shirt and tweaked tie from his body to reveal the dark skin of his upper body.

In an undistorted traditional African reality view “(t)he entire universe participates in the one life of God and there exists a *network of relations* between God, human beings and the cosmos, with the *human being at the center*” (Ukpong in connection with traditional African spirituality, 1999:112) (my cursivation). In traditional African spirituality, in which the symbols correspond with those in the IEA cosmology, *every action impacts on the whole*. An individual *belongs to the ultimately-real by way of belonging to his or her community*. The relationship between God, humanity and nature is *interdependent, without rigid distinction between the personal and the impersonal* and thus *monistic* (as opposed to dualistic in the Western-Christian view). Thus, when the vital force that flows through all things is disturbed or halted or killed, as experienced in this film by Paul, it represents more than horror – in essence it is a spiritual crisis.

When reality changes to such an extent that it no longer provides meaning within the symbolic framework of understanding, people generally tend to reach back towards a view of reality that had offered security in the past (Castells 2005). Hence also Cumpsty's comment that “symbolic discourse is not true or false, but dead or alive” (1991:107). In this dark moment, under severe stress, Paul is acutely aware of his identity crisis: “*They told me I was one of them, and I... the wine, chocolates, cigars, style... I swallowed it. I swallowed it, I swallowed all of it. And they handed me their shit. I have no... no history. I have no memory. I'm a fool, Tati.*” To which his wife answers: “*You are no fool. I know who you are.*”

Paul now realizes that an image of so-called style, success, competitiveness and a pursuance of more, as portrayed by a negatively positioned *goal-oriented secular interpretation* of a Western-Christian cosmology, can be hollow. The image that Paul aspired to here may also be explained by a one dimensional positioning of the source of ethics in a Western-Christian cosmology where *the end or the above guides belief patterns*. In short, the *quality of his experience* with Western-Christian oriented symbols was now tested – and it failed.

Williams' conclusion that it is not clear why Paul creates a safe haven for refugees needs to be reconsidered in the context of the traditional African view of reality. It was, indeed, his wife who pleaded with Paul at first, and his first act of providing safety to refugees may have been to address her needs. Yet it could also have been due to a deep seated felt sense of reality based on *a centered communal belonging*, prompted to life by Tatiana's heart-rending request. Whichever of these two options apply is indeed not clear. Yet after the scene in the bathroom it becomes very clear that Paul's social values are now consciously, and deliberately, expressed again by way of *belonging to his community, starting at the individual centre and the well known, and expanding towards all that which is known and unknown*.

It is, indeed, difficult for someone from a Western-Christian orientation to understand how Paul's new positioning, also based on the African concept of “ubuntu”, is not inspired by the symbols of their own cosmology:



“For the Westerner, the maxim ‘A person is a person through other persons’ has no obvious religious connotations. He/she will probably interpret it as nothing but a general appeal to treat others with respect and decency. However, in African tradition this maxim has a deeply religious meaning” (Louw 1998).

To interpret Paul’s heroic behaviour as a symbol of redemption, or as a kind of Messianic figure, as Western film critics tend to do, would reflect a Western-Christian view because it would then imply that the *experience of the immediate world out there is not ultimate*. However, such interpretation would be devoid of the relevant, and appropriate, perspective of an IEA cosmology as expressed in a monistic, traditional African spirituality where the *immediate world is affirmed of the real and where the nature of the ultimately-real entails that there is no rigid distinction between the personal and the impersonal*. In fact, it may, at the very least, be regarded as disrespectful to ignore considering this perspective and simply project symbols known to the Western-oriented viewer onto what happens in this film.

It is important to understand the distinction between a *belief pattern* (in the SWA cosmology as expressed for example in the Western-Christian reality view) and a *behaviour pattern* (in the IEA cosmology as expressed for example in the traditional African reality view), even though the outcome or result may in both cases agree on, for example, a path of respect and dignity. In the IEA cosmology, it is critical to *maintain, or restore, belonging*. This may be expressed through the attainment of *harmony and individual purpose* which is regarded as the source of ethics. In the SWA cosmology, *striving towards the end, or the above*, is regarded as the source of ethics. Given Paul’s words to Tatiana, and the fact that he rids himself of his suit, white shirt and tie in the midst of the (his) crisis, it might be more appropriate to interpret his identity as expressed by his *behaviour*.

After the dramatic scene in the bathroom, Paul rolls up his sleeves and uses his creativity to find ways to move the people in the hotel safely to a refugee camp, giving preference to the interests of others above his own. He has recommitted himself as African, someone for whom the integrity of his own existence, his sense of belonging to totality, can only be meaningful if he *realizes himself through fellow people*. Finally, after an unselfish, yet unsuccessful attempt to lead several refugees, including his family, out of the hotel to safety, the story unravels and concludes as all members of the Rusesabagina family reach safety in a UN refugee camp. In a post-script to the film, the viewer is informed that Paul and his family relocated to Europe after the genocide.

Paul’s character portrays both the positive and negative, yet traumatic, effects and results of a severely damaged *tapestry of society* when more than one reality view with different sets of aspirations and symbols, are mixed in an incoherent way.

**Table 3: Symbolic interpretation of the main character in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)**

The symbolic meanings portrayed by the main character in this film can be summarised as follows:

<i>Constant factors</i>	<i>Symbolic interpretation of the main character in Hotel Rwanda (2004)</i>
<i>Experience of the immediate world out there</i>	Initially possibly affirmed as of the real but not ultimate in line with Western aspirations, later affirmed as of the real
<i>Nature of reality</i>	Monistic
<i>Chance and determinism</i>	Unclear to which extent chance and, new beginnings are possible after the genocide
<i>Belonging to ultimately-real</i>	Not expressly articulated, but at first implied as a Western-oriented individual quest and later repaired as in a traditional African view
<i>Nature of ultimately-real</i>	Without rigid distinction between personal and impersonal
<i>Time</i>	Cyclical
<i>Test of quality of experience</i>	Goals and texture (as a-typical in an African view)
<i>Ground of meaning</i>	Grand Design (pattern)
<i>Mode of engagement with world out there</i>	At first take hold and shape (a-typical to an African view), later fit into
<i>Social features:</i>	
<i>Individual or communal</i>	Communal: centered
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Behaviour pattern
<i>Social coercion</i>	Possibly an element of “greed” as in a Western view in the beginning, later “love”
<i>Source of ethics</i>	Harmony, individual purpose
<i>Religious knowledge</i>	Wisdom

Although the expressed topic of this film is not linked to any religious tradition but rather to a political and social view on what happened in Rwanda in 1994, the role of reality views, and thus the “*quest for, realization or maintenance of, a sense of belonging*” to all-that-are-out-there, including the ultimately-real (Cumpsty 1991:161), forms the essence of the story. As such this is a film about religion.

Paul’s character, as it developed in the latter part of the film, may be considered to represent a project actor because he reclaims his traditional African spirituality amidst a resistance movement of national scale and during an era in which individuality and power were increasingly seen as preferred ways of expression. Paul refuses to be limited by ethnic considerations and power play – he first and foremost recognizes his *interconnectedness* with others and enacts this *wisdom* (as opposed to *revelation* which serves as religious knowledge in the Western-

Christian view) in extremely difficult circumstances. As such his character seeks the transformation of society.

Yet he also *refuses to fit into the reality* of the genocide. When life became unbearable he *opted to take control* of the situation. Whether this *active engagement with the world out there* as a result of a reality that became unbearable represents a shift to the Western-Christian view of reality, or whether his *behaviour* applies to only this situation and therefore *all of reality is still affirmed as of the real* as in the traditional African perspective on reality, is not clear to me. Like so many other Rwandese people from both the Hutu and the Tsutsi sides, Paul and his family left their country after the genocide and the viewer is left to speculate on the impact of this terrible true story.

### 6.5.3 A paradigm under pressure: *Tsotsi* (2005)

The film plays off in a post-apartheid South Africa, in other words after 1994. Hence one can once again expect interplay between cosmologies and cultures as in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). Despite the official ending of apartheid, society is rife with examples of extreme polarities between the haves and the have-nots. *Tsotsi* (a local word for a thug or a villain) is a teenage gangster from a slum area in Soweto, near Johannesburg, South Africa. After fleeing from an abusive home as a young boy and growing up homeless, he stays above the poverty line by leading a corrupt and violent life of intimidation and robbery, seemingly without emotion. After hijacking a car, he discovers a baby in the back seat and the film unfolds along this storyline.

The trailer to the film starts with the words “Life can change” introduced to the screen as silent text overlaid on a backdrop of focus scenes from the film. This theme is then explained, or expanded on, by introducing more silent text over rolling visuals, the text this time in two colours with emphasis on the second part of each of the respective phrases:

*“We do not choose  
our beginning  
We do not choose  
our end  
But in the moments between  
we choose who we are”*

With these words, the notion of two reality views (as in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)) is introduced: First an application of the SWA perspective of *chance and the possibility of new beginnings* (chance is excluded in the IEA cosmology) and second an application of the IEA view that the *texture of life*, those moments between the beginning and the end when we choose who we are, matters to the extent that they make life worthwhile.

Investigating a possible coming together of two reality views as suggested in these phrases, could provide an appropriate angle of incidence for discussing the film *Tsotsi*. If one hasn't seen the trailer, the use of mobiles in the film also provides a queue for investigating the possible coming together of different views. The mobiles in the film are made of everyday material – strands of wire, pieces of broken glass, scraps of rusted tins and reels of cotton, yet they sparkle as they catch the light. The parts in the assembled pieces can symbolically be seen as the ordinary moments of life which become worthwhile only when grouped together. *The texture of an experience* can for example be rusted and sad, or colourful and filled with light, or playful and filled with joy, as portrayed in the film. As such they suggest that the very *texture of everyday experiences* (as in the traditional African cosmology) can be woven together in such a way that they offer *something more, something new, another chance* (as in the Western-Christian view of reality), thus something which is meaningful despite sadness, neglect, brokenness and distortion. From my own Western-Christian perspective I would very much like to say that the aesthetic

rearrangement of everyday objects results in symbols of *transcendence*, but we'll have to return to the film itself before deciding if such a viewpoint (based on a felt sense of reality and not on reason) is relevant here.

This film presents the opportunity to discuss the cosmological and identity choices of social actors in a country of diversity. The film tells the story of an unlawful, street-wise gangster who is feared by those who operate within the law. The main character, seemingly hardened by his hardscrabble existence, is at first only known as "Tsotsi". Here, at the start of the story, he can certainly not be considered as an actor legitimising any recognised or official institution, but rather as an actor with an identity of resistance. His violent street attitude and behaviour in a shanty town and its surrounds is exemplary of social coercion embodied by *fear* in the IEA cosmology (both *love* and *fear* are viable options). It should be noted once more that social cohesion in the traditional African context is explained by *behaviour patterns* and not by *belief patterns* as in the Western-Christian view. The relation between individual and communal structures is symbolised as communal: centered in the IEA reality view and in traditional African spirituality this relation is expressed as being human through others.<sup>55</sup>

The opening scenes introduce a township close to the financial capital of South Africa. In this township most dwellings consist of informal make-do structures from corrugated steel, wood and bricks. From here the camera moves to a pair of dice thrown onto worn cardboard in one of the shacks. The introduction scenes have suggested that a range of socio-economic and political issues may be at stake and that life seems to be a gamble, in other words, you have to take what you get, which could be interpreted as *engaging with reality by fitting into it*. The viewer's eyes are guided to see poverty in the township in juxtaposition to the profile of the city of Johannesburg, the latter the hub of corporate business in South Africa. The story will unfold through layers of such juxtapositions that represent different positions of the traditional African cosmology such as between *love and fear*, references to Jesus<sup>56</sup> in situations of violence, as well as *social harmony in the context of social disintegration*. If, and to what extent there is interplay between the Western-Christian and the traditional African cosmologies, will become clearer as the story unfolds.

Tsotsi, with his three hoodlum compatriots, Boston (the teacher), Aap (the even-tempered overweight) and Butcher (the murderer), "do jobs". The very first "job" the viewer encounters, is the robbery of a dignified older black man on a train that shockingly turns into silent murder when Butcher pushes a sharpened bicycle spoke into the man's heart whilst the train continues its journey. Minutes before he boarded the train, the man bought a tie for himself from a small stall on the station as well as a fine blue scarf, presumably for his wife. Standing in the train, he didn't even suspect trouble when the bodies of Tsotsi and the other three pushed up closely against him. In fact, he chuckled kindly as he looked down on them. His position, *albeit* very briefly portrayed, yet significantly positioned right at the beginning of the story, is one of trust and a positive attitude as portrayed in a traditional African-oriented *centered communal belonging*. The man's source of ethics is portrayed as *harmonious*, also typical of a traditional African cosmology. His character is contrasted with the group of thugs who is about to rob and murder him and who seems to be without any awareness of ties that *bind them with the rest of their society*.

The analysis should pause for a moment on the last point. What does the *behaviour* of Tsotsi and his friends signify? At this stage, one can suspect that their *behaviour* indicates a negative

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55 From this point and for the sake of the flow of the argument, all symbols in the discussion on *Tsotsi* (2005) may be assumed to belong to the traditional African cosmology unless otherwise indicated.

56 Reference to any Christian terms does not imply that a person's cosmology is dominated by the SWA view of reality or by the Western-Christian cosmology.

positioning of social coercion (*love versus fear*) in the traditional African cosmology. It also seems that *centered communal belonging* and the source of ethics (*harmony, individual purpose*) do not characterise their behaviour. Is this then a movie about the traditional African view that is positioned in its positive context by some characters and negatively by others? It is not as simple as that. Neither is it a tale of redemption as suggested by so many commentators in Western-oriented publications (Barnard 2008, Dargis 2006, Dovey 2007, White 2006).

For Tsotsi and his friends the dice (as suggested by the film) decided where they fit in and that they are not part of the establishment. But it is about more than not having enough money. After the horrible murder on the train, Tsotsi and his friends are drinking beer in a shebeen. Boston, at this time known to the viewer as “Teacher Boy”, asks Tsotsi for his real name. Instead of giving an answer, Tsotsi slowly swivels backwards and forwards on his chair whilst staring intently at Boston. The latter (who puked on the steps on arrival at their home station after they robbed and Butcher murdered the innocent, kind man) insists to know Tsotsi’s name, saying that after six months together he should reveal what his real name is, for every person has one – as received from his mother. He proceeds: “*Decency, Tsotsi. You know the word? Decency. I had a bit of it, so I was sick. En daai groot man (and that big man) with the tie... he had a lot. And now? He’s dead*”<sup>57</sup> (my insertion).

The term “decency” here used by Boston, should, within the traditional African view, be understood as respect – as finding *existential meaning through being with others* as encapsulated by the “ubuntu” concept (see paragraphs 4.2 as well as 6.5.2). As such this concept is an expression of all of the social features of the traditional African view, “the individual belongs to the ultimately-real in belonging to his or her community ... and with it to the immediate world of experience” (Cumpsty 1991:196). Thus there is *no rigid distinction between the personal and the impersonal in belonging to the ultimately-real*.

Boston yearns after this source of meaning and insists that his peers affirm too that their very basic belonging to all-that-are-out-there have been distorted to the extent that it *cuts through their very own beings*. Despite quieting attempts from his gang mates, Boston directs more prying questions to Tsotsi. When he still doesn’t get any reaction he breaks his empty beer bottle on the table between them and cut himself with the blunt glass so that a thick line of blood streams from his forearm. Whilst pointing with his finger to the cut with streaming blood, Boston says that *this* is what he felt like on the inside when the old man on the train was killed earlier that afternoon. “*Has anything ever made you feel like this?*” he asks Tsotsi ... perhaps his father or mother... “*Jesus, Tsotsi, what about a dog?*” At this stage the viewer doesn’t know that it was precisely an encounter with his very ill mother (presumably suffering from AIDS), and his dog whose back was broken after two kicks from his angry and dominating father that led the young David to run away from home one night, ending up as a street kid. What we do see, is how Tsotsi finally responds to Boston’s provocation by jumping up and attacking him severely, beating him to the floor.

These two matters, firstly that Tsotsi *is not acknowledging or affirming his own name*, and secondly the lack of decency (read as a *lack of spiritual interconnectedness with all that exists*), position the main character as a person who has lost his own humanity. In traditional African terms, this implies losing the essence of one’s spirituality. As both Barnard in her literary critique (2008) and Dovey in his cultural study (2007) argue, this story (and hence also Tsotsi’s identity) portrays the result of systemic damages to the social fabric of black South Africans over many years that are aggravated by contemporary issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, violence against children and women as well as the increasing gap between rich and poor in the

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The language used in this film includes *tsotsitaal* (tsotsi language), a hybrid mix of Zulu, Xhosa, the Sotho languages, Afrikaans and English, which is spoken in the townships and mines near Johannesburg.

world. I agree with Barnard and Dovey that these matters need to be borne in mind in searching for clues to understand the positioning of Tsotsi's identity.

I shall try to explain the religious-cosmological position of the main character and investigate the extent to which there is interplay between the cosmologies at stake.

After beating Boston to the floor, the nineteen-year old Tsotsi runs away into the rainy night. This behaviour is in line with his response to the emotional confrontation, years ago, when the young boy David<sup>58</sup> ran away from his parents' house. As Tsotsi now runs across the field between the township and a suburb of the city through pouring rain, the visuals cut directly to flashbacks in his mind without using any fading or sepia effects to show a time difference. Thus, the technique integrates time, what happened then has bearing on now and what happens now is connected to then. Time loses its rigid *linearity* as in the Western-Christian cosmology and becomes *cyclical and even biological* as in the IEA cosmology.

The directness of this technique links the David of then, with the Tsotsi of now.<sup>59</sup> Fluid, (rain here, the crossing of a stream, as well as breast milk elsewhere, all used throughout the film) symbolises the unconscious. It becomes a medium through which he is reconnected with not only his emotions, but also to what he has suppressed as a result of his trauma and hurt as a child when the *texture of his immediate experience* became so unbearable that he *could no longer affirm it as of the real nor fit into this reality* and consequently had to run away. Fluid has multiple symbolic meanings, according to Cirlot (2001), and can be viewed as a symbol for the beginning and end of all things on earth, as intuitive *wisdom*, the mother-*imago* and the universal congress of potentialities:

“Immersion in water signifies a return to the pre-formal state, with a sense of death and annihilation on the one hand, but of rebirth and regeneration on the other, since immersion intensifies the life-force” (2001:364-365).

Whilst the story can be seen as commentary on socio-economic and political matters, I am of the opinion that its primary focus is the story of an existential quest by a young man who is confronted with where, how, for what and why he belongs to totality. The distorted and unhappy positioning of his existential belonging, brought to the surface under severe pressure, makes Tsotsi run – just as when, as a child he ran from home after being confronted with *disharmony and the unbearable behaviour* of his father, thus making David's understanding of reality unbearable. Boston's insistence that there is *not enough decency* in their lives, now reminds the young adult David of his loss of cosmic belonging. Therefore, not only in a literal sense but also figuratively, he “runs from home” – that place where he thought he belonged as it used to make him feel safe.

What allows someone to say that, given the context of the divide between rich and poor, “Tsotsi – *in a highly unbelievable plot turn* – returns the baby to its wealthy (African) parents”? (Dovey 2007:157) (my insertion and cursivation). Dovey interprets the film from institutional, historical, socio-political and aesthetic perspectives and highlights the film's implied favouring of a neoliberal class division instead of the effects of systemic social and economic exploitation. In his words, the film also “focuses on certain forms of contemporary violence at the expense of another, very important kind of violence in South Africa: violence against women and children.”

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<sup>58</sup> The name giving in this film reminds me of the youth novel by the Danish writer Anne Holm, “I am David”. The latter tells the story of a boy who ran away from home, being on the run for a very long time before finding his name and existential safety. This story though, was told from a Western perspective.

<sup>59</sup> Viewers from a Western-Christian oriented background may be curious to know if there is a link between these two names. Yet such curiosity needs to be recognized as stemming from the own reality view.

In conclusion he questions “whether *Tsotsi*, a film about redemption, has its own redeeming features” (2007:143). These socio-economic issues raised by Dovey may all be justified, yet his argument, as will be pointed out in the rest of the discussion, ignores the cosmological positioning of the film and as a result his view of what provides meaning to others does not recognize the traditional African spirituality.

Maybe this interpreter projected his own real felt sense onto the film; maybe he focused on the outer events whereby the drenched *Tsotsi*, on arrival in the privileged suburb, first spots the opportunity to rob a car, shoots a woman and ends up kidnapping her three-month old baby too. For on the surface *Tsotsi* indeed does all these terrible things and continues to lie, to apply force and even to kill one of his own mates (Butcher) in the run of the story before he “redeems” (Dovey 2007) his behaviour by apologizing for beating up Boston, for being disrespectful towards a crippled man, and by returning the stolen baby to its parents. Looking though at the inner events as guided by shifts in the character’s view of reality, the plot consistently, through all levels of *behaviour*, builds up to unfolding in a plausible and convincing manner aligned with the traditional African cosmology. Moreover it portrays existential healing in the character’s life.

After running from the township, *Tsotsi* is now in a privileged suburb where he capitalises on an opportunity to hijack a car. As he has never learnt to drive, he brings the stolen luxury vehicle to an abrupt and unfortunate halt when he realises that he has not only stolen a car but that there is also a baby on the back seat. At first he walks away from the damaged car and the baby, but because he remembered his existence as David, he feels obliged to turn around and fetches the baby. This is not only a turn to the baby, it initiates a turn towards taking others into account, and therefore also a turn to and for himself. It is a turn towards *recognising all of time as opposed to blocking out the past*. In short, this turn signifies the start of his healing on a religious-cosmological and hence an existential level.

Yet such remembering and the consequential turn is not an even process and there are many examples in the film of his struggle to find a place where he, with his awakened emotions, can feel at home and safe again.

In a later scene and after harassing an old, crippled and half-blind man who was injured in an accident on a gold mine, he follows him to where he stays under the highway bridge and harasses him again, demanding that he get up and walk. Eventually he asks the elder: “*Why do you go on if you live like a dog?*” whereupon the man answers: “*I like to feel the sun on the street. Even with these hands... I can still feel the heat.*” This is the old miner’s way of saying that he, despite his abject circumstances, still experiences existential belonging in the *texture of his daily experiences* (in line with how the quality of experience is measured in the traditional African cosmology) and that he *fits into* reality. He can *affirm his experience of the world out there as of the real*, to him it feels worthwhile. To *Tsotsi*, it no longer does after his childhood experiences, so he angrily rejects the man’s answer by walking away and leaving the crippled man to find his own way to collect his income for the day scattered on the ground after *Tsotsi* has toppled the tin box of coins. Here too are layers of information in juxtapositions. The man with the broken back (one is reminded of *Tsotsi*’s dog) answered *Tsotsi* on how a crippled person’s life can still be worthwhile, whilst the viewer at this stage realises that *Tsotsi*’s shooting of the young black mother also crippled her for life.

Which of these make sense – the crippled man who still enjoys feeling the sun, the dog who was in all likelihood left on its own to starve to death or the mother who lives after being shot but feels she cannot do so without her child?

The answer to how life can still be worthwhile when your back is broken and you have no home is not clear to *Tsotsi*. In his current felt sense of reality there is no viable alternative to *confirm reality as of the real*. After the encounter with the crippled yet content man he returns, still with his head down, to the township as dawn breaks. It is a new day and the visuals imply that there may be *another opportunity* (in line with a Western view) to connect with intuitive *wisdom* (the

source of religious knowledge in the African paradigm), the mother-*imago* and the universal congress of potentialities (Cirlot 2001:364-365). Tsotsi's decision to force a young mother, someone he bumped into just as he arrived home after the eventful night, to feed the abducted baby develops into a nurturing experience for him too. It is in Miriam's house that he encounters the mobiles made of bits and pieces of everyday material. She is dressed in a contemporary and beautiful adaptation of traditional clothes and as such represents the positive richness of the African heritage. She is also able to see the colourful glass mobiles' light and colours reflected on him. At this stage he is unable to see the different colours of light; to him it's just pieces of broken glass.

By watching her feeding the baby, his journey to reconnect with his inner self and with a positive positioning of a traditional African view of reality, is afforded momentum. In other words, after the severe trauma he has experienced (and created) in his own life and in those of others, he is slowly, very slowly starting to realise his own hunger for a nurturing, meaningful existence. This inner awakening by identifying with the newly born, the nurturing by a kind-hearted woman who doesn't want any money for looking after the baby and eventually her prompting that he returns the baby to its parents eventually leads to his yearning for the *restoration of decency* in his own life. "Decency" as Boston in another scene explains to the more sophisticated criminal Fela, is about "(r)espect for yourself, it's got fuck all to do with your standard of living".

Tsotsi reconnects with the past by allowing the emotions of his innocent childhood and the unfortunate parting from his parents to surface. He also *recreates the possibilities of the present and the future by projecting the potential of new life, a fresh start, onto the baby*, expressed for example by naming the baby "David," thus after himself and taking it (still in the brown carrier bag he used to carry it from the stolen car) to the sewer pipes in which he used to stay after he ran away from home as a child. In this scene there are brief, harrowing scenes of other pipe inhabitants – real AIDS orphans who were recruited as actors. The *possibilities of then, now and tomorrow become merged*, what happened in the past has bearing on the present and on the future. Time is now presented as *cyclical*, as typical in the traditional African view of reality and no longer as a flight away from events that are best left behind in favour of a search for a better tomorrow. Therefore, although the concept of a new beginning is introduced, it is done within a *monistic view* of life and not *dualistic* where *reality cannot be affirmed as the ultimate* as in the Western paradigm.

As *time and space become more integrated* on a cosmological level, it motivates Tsotsi to reposition his *behaviour*. Being able to not only recollect the traditional African time concept but also to integrate it into the present, allows him some coherency in his view of everything, as well as the ability to slowly, very slowly move his "moments between" into a more positive direction. Thus, even though he subsequently kills his fellow gangster, this deed was (from his perspective) a lesser transgression than allowing Butcher to kill yet another innocent man, the father of the abducted baby. He subsequently apologises for his earlier and vicious attack on Boston ("I'm sorry, my brother") and offers to help him to complete his studies. He tells Aap that the days of doing "jobs" are finally over and on his way to return the baby, he gives the crippled, half-blind man at the station some proper money and now shows true respect.

To what extent does the concept of *chance and new beginnings* play a role in Tsotsi's turnabout? It appears as if two constant factors (the *time* concept and the concept of *chance versus determinism*) are here being placed next to one another in a situation of severe pressure in Tsotsi's life. The stressful situation he finds himself in calls persuasively on his symbolic understanding of reality as well as on the position of his identity. Previously, in his distorted traditional African view he blocked out parts of time and re-established himself as a gangster. At this stage in the film he *re-affirms time as cyclical* when he *acknowledges all his experiences* and no longer flees from whatever happens in the present but chooses to *fit into reality and affirm it as of the real*. Yet the symbol of *new beginnings, of chance* as in the Western-Christian view is also suggested. Is this an example of symbols from different cosmologies that co-exist *albeit*



uneasily within one paradigm? The rest of the film needs to be considered too before an answer is proposed.

Tsotsi's life is in crisis and he realises that carrying on the way he has, has brought no fulfilment. He discovers that he can, by changing and choosing his own position from resistance to something more positive, yet again *affirm the immediate world out there as of the real*. However to do so, *change* is necessary – the kind that will allow a *new beginning and offer hope* – and therefore presupposes a *linear time* concept as in the Western-Christian view of reality which is informed by the SWA paradigm. As Tsotsi leaves Miriam's house for the last time (with the suggestion that he will return the baby in the viewer's mind after Miriam's firm request and Tsotsi's implied acceptance), one sees a lightly coloured dog (not dark like the one of his childhood that was kicked until it was left crippled) walking on all four its paws from the alley in the direction Tsotsi goes as he departs.

I am not convinced that the end of the film can be interpreted as transcendent as Barnard (2008:561,567) suggests. She singles out the soundtrack at the end of the film as the only element in the ending that “more or less forces us to take the meaning of the story affirmatively” (2008:560). Who is the “us” she refers to? What is their view on reality? Barnard bases her argument on relevant matters such as the discrepancy between rich and poor in the country and argues that the film is an “unsatisfactory...political allegory” when Tsotsi “becomes part of humanity” only by surrendering to the police and “thus accepting his identity as criminal...rather than outlaw” (2008:560). Barnard is correct in saying that the systemic inequality which framed Tsotsi's life is not solved by the ending, and so is Dovey (2007) in his critique on unresolved social issues. However, when Barnard concludes that the ending of *Tsotsi* (2005) is for this reason unsatisfactory, she too overlooks the spiritual dimension of the film despite her attempt to find existential meaning in the end by referring to the heart-rending sound track:

“The song resolves, finally, into a dominant chord, with all the attendant feelings of transcendence and...national or human community. In this chord the audience may savor the satisfying sense of closure and social resolution to which the development plot gestures but leaves quite vacuous in terms of real potentiality for the *Bildungsroman*'s protagonist.”

That transcendence can be understood or sensed as a symbol for existential relief or home-coming, is indeed so, but her argument, in my opinion, is (possibly unconsciously) based on her own Western-oriented cosmology and hence on feelings and not on the character's African perspective. It therefore does not provide an adequate conclusion in an analysis for a *Bildungsroman* where the aim is to investigate *all* dimensions in the coming-of-age of a character *and* subsequently from the perspective of the latter. This example yet again stresses the relevance of distinguishing between one's own feelings and rational knowledge of another's view when interpreting identity.

It is in my opinion best to find the answer to what motivates the ending in what is portrayed in the film. Whether there has been a shift in the character's symbolic interpretation of multiple constant factors, thus raising the possibility of a cosmological shift from an African to a Western paradigm too, doesn't seem evident. For if we, as the trailer says and the pair of dice suggests, cannot choose our beginning or our end, if our choice matters only in moments in between, then *totality remains one whole and stays monistic*. And if the past offers a solution to the present and the future, then *time is cyclical* within this whole, and existential belonging can be derived from *immediate experiences* that can be *affirmed as of the real*. In other words, there is *nothing to transcend* and no reason to seek such transcendence.

Possibly the key to understanding the reality view portrayed in the film lies in the last scene in the use of the word “*brother*”, here used for the fifth time in the film. This time it connects the privileged, young black father with the disadvantaged, young Tsotsi who can here choose to run away or hand over the baby. For someone from a Western-Christian view of reality, it will be

easy to argue that this scene visually resembles some kind of Christian figure, as Tsotsi is now for the first time clad in a white shirt (even though it's night and one would argue that he wanted to return the baby unobtrusively). As the lights of the police and security vehicles reflect on his shirt, his arms stretched out as on a cross as he slowly raises them above his head, one could, based on the visuals, draw such a comparison. But even so, resembling a Christian image doesn't mean that it portrays a Western-Christian view of reality, it could be an African-Christian cosmology, thus still within the parameters of the traditional African paradigm.<sup>60</sup> This point is rather important. It demonstrates that different religions can be adopted by different individuals who all associate with the same cosmology.

It is the calming yet demanding tone of the father's voice who takes control of the situation and addresses Tsotsi as (possibly unexpected for the unsensitised ear) "brother" that allows tears to finally stream over the cheeks of the young man and facilitates a symbolic "home-coming" even though he is about to be arrested. Tsotsi is now, with full emotion – and *appropriate to the moment – present* and able to return the baby willingly, and with tenderness, to its parents. His existential relief and belonging and his source of ethics *do not come from transcendence which presupposes an end or the above, but rather from restoring individual purpose and harmony in being a responsible person within a community*. The situation implies the possibility that he experiences that same dignity within himself, *as a person with others*,<sup>61</sup> thus affirming the traditional African view. Tsotsi stays and raises his arms above his head to surrender and this, together with the return of the baby and his choice to no longer "do jobs", imply that his identity may no longer be that of the unlawful and thus resistance.

Barnard (2008:559) highlights that the director, Gavin Hood, actually filmed three versions of the end – one where Tsotsi flees and escapes, another where he is killed in a shoot-out with police and a third where he surrenders to the authorities after handing over the baby. She concludes that the last one is the only one that fits the logic of the film. Yet Dovey (2007) (from a Department of African Languages and Cultures in London) does not find it plausible due to the lack of redemption of the socio-economic disparity between the two young black men, one who has a family and lives in a nice house and the other who has none of this. I have argued that the choice of belonging to totality is firstly based on what feels real to the character and not to the interpreter, and that Tsotsi's quest for cosmological belonging and shift in the positioning of his identity from destructive to more positive is convincingly portrayed throughout in the film. For a conclusion on whether Tsotsi's cosmology shifted from one paradigm to another, and whether he accepted a new category of identity as differentiated by Castells (2005:8), one needs to reflect more on the final scenes.

Although the baby has been returned and Tsotsi has been captured, the end of the film on a cosmological level – and even on an ideological level as Dovey (2007:160) states when he says that the film avoids ideological pressure – is left open. Yet I do not agree when Dovey concludes that this avoidance of an ideological answer is all that saves the film as this is at least a convincing act of redemption. His entire argument has been based on *Tsotsi* (2005) being a film about redemption. Yet redemption can only provide meaning when *the reality cannot be affirmed as of*

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<sup>60</sup> The film *Son of Man* (2005) provides a good example of how the life of Christ can be interpreted from an African perspective. This film was awarded the Veto-Jury by seven Belgian students representing a number of faculties of the Catholic University of Leuven. They commented as follows on granting the award: "We selected a film which stimulates viewers to think and which does not leave them feeling indifferent. Musical beat, rapid rhythms, alternation of several styles and original shots ensure that the film is always stimulating. It is a film of a 'best-seller', but nothing is obvious in it; the story as we know it is turned upside down". ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son\\_of\\_Man\\_%28film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_Man_%28film%29))

<sup>61</sup> See also previous comments on ubuntu in paragraph 6.5.2.

*the ultimate* as, for example, in the Western-Christian cosmology whereas I have indicated in the previous paragraphs the opposite – that Tsotsi is now able to *affirm his reality* again and able to stay in the moment and to act appropriately in accordance with what feels real to him, the traditional African cosmology. Hence quite the opposite is true when arguing from Tsotsi’s perspective and not from the Western-Christian reality view.

It is true that we do not know how the events and Tsotsi’s life will turn out. Yet it seems as if the identity of Tsotsi’s character moved from a sense of disillusioned and distorted IEA belonging as expressed in the traditional African reality view, to a positive positioning of the same cosmology. He, for example, recognises the *cyclical nature of time* and *reconnects with others after reconnecting with himself* by apologizing in three instances (to Boston, to the crippled man and by returning the baby). However, it also seems as if his symbolic interpretation of chance and determinism now shifts from a situation where *chance is excluded* to one where *new beginnings are possible* in accordance with the SWA cosmology as embodied by the Western-Christian paradigm. In this moment there may be an element of Tsotsi redeeming himself, but this act remains within the overall context of the traditional African paradigm as it allows him to *affirm his reality*. Therefore one cannot conclude that this is a film about redemption as Dovey (2007:143) states, or redemption and transcendence as Barnard (2008:561,567) says, but rather a film about finding existential belonging which turns out to be an affirmation of the traditional African view *albeit* now with the incorporation of one symbol from the Western-Christian paradigm.

**Table 4: Symbolic interpretation of the main character in *Tsotsi* (2005)**

Tsotsi’s character searched for worthwhileness in life through a complex set of symbols which refer to both the Western-Christian, as well as a traditional African paradigm:

<i>Constant factors</i>	<i>Symbolic interpretation of the main character in Tsotsi (2005)</i>
<i>Experience of the immediate world out there</i>	Initially a struggle to affirm it as of the real and with no viable alternative, later affirmed as of the real in a positive way
<i>Nature of reality</i>	Monistic, yet very distorted
<i>Chance and determinism</i>	At first chance is excluded, later chance and new beginnings as an (albeit uncomfortable) addition to the traditional African set of symbols
<i>Belonging to ultimately-real</i>	Distorted belonging shifting to an assumed belonging which needs to be repaired to an actual restoration of belonging, all in line with a traditional African view
<i>Nature of ultimately-real</i>	At first implied as personal – but unsuccessful, later implied without rigid distinction between personal and impersonal
<i>Time</i>	Cyclical, possibly astral
<i>Test of quality of experience</i>	At first goals as in a Western-Christian view, then texture
<i>Ground of meaning</i>	Grand Design (pattern)
<i>Mode of engagement with world out there</i>	Fit into

<i>Social features:</i>	
<i>Individual or communal</i>	At first communal: solidary as in a Western-Christian view shifting to communal: centered typical of a traditional African view
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Behaviour pattern
<i>Social coercion</i>	At first “fear”, later “love”
<i>Source of ethics</i>	At first individual purpose albeit negatively, later individual purpose and harmony
<i>Religious knowledge</i>	Wisdom

Here too, the film does not subscribe or advocate any religious traditions. Yet when religion is considered as a sense of belonging to totality, the film is indeed deeply spiritual – that is – when the viewer gives preference to film’s voice.

Both Barnard from the University of Pennsylvania (2008) and Dovey from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London (2007) provide valuable insights into issues related to the movie – either things that were or were not addressed and could have been, given the complexity of the South African society. Yet I am of the opinion that their respective conclusions of why the film unravels the way it does are based on a Western-oriented cosmology and not on what is portrayed in the film itself. Barnard uses the arguments of *redemption* and *transcendence* whilst Dovey strongly argues for *redemption*. By doing so, they miss the very essence of what the story is about.

One could argue that as their interpretations fall respectively in the fields of literary critique and cultural studies and not in Religion and Media, they as a result do not focus on cosmological views. However, they both articulate views that reflect a cosmic belonging. I suspect that they do not recognise their remarks as cosmological statements. Moreover they assume that reality for all of humanity is *dualistic* and *not ultimate* and therefore requires redemption and transcendence, and that no other cosmic belonging, not even theoretically, is possible. I further suspect that they do not realise that these perceptions are deeply held religious views that have been transferred to their own (Western-Christian) view of life. Therefore I also think that they do not realise that they succumbed to their own *feelings* to argue their respective points. But shouldn’t someone who analyses a film as a *Bildungsroman* (in other words a novel that follows the spiritual, moral, psychological, intellectual and social development and growth of the main character, usually from childhood to maturity) and someone in cultural studies consider the main character’s point of view on reality? Especially when they use loaded terms such as “transcendence” and “redemption”? Didn’t the film queue us to investigate who the characters are in the middle of atrocities and as citizens of a diverse society – one that is simultaneously strongly influenced by Western-oriented *and* traditional African-oriented reality views?

This is precisely the point: Most of us, even those who are supposed to “know better”, literary, cultural, spiritual and religious influencers included, maintain a distance between people by not recognising different ways of belonging to totality.

It is ironic that both Dovey and Barnard, through the cosmological positioning of their arguments, unintentionally participate in the maintenance of distance between people when on a surface level their comments have the exact opposite in mind. In my opinion, the arguments of both scholars are examples of what I refer to as *double-text interpretation* as a form of exclusion (see paragraph 5.1) – as both consciously advocate issues on behalf of another yet

unconsciously project their own views of reality onto the other as if what provides meaning to them, provides meaning to the character too.

Was Tsotsi's identity of resistance transformed into that of a project actor, someone who transforms society? This is not evident from the film. However, in the eyes of his friends and other thugs, he may have started a positive process and he certainly transformed his own position to an actor who builds a new identity by redefining his position in society and by doing so seeking a more fulfilled and integrated life. He also acts in according to the law and thus reflects adherence to the law. From a perspective whereby one looks at Tsotsi only, he may be regarded as a project actor with legitimising elements, but as it is not clear how his new identity will impact society, one cannot call him a project nor a legitimising actor in the way Castells (2005:8) defines these categories (see paragraph 5.2). None of the material circumstances in the lives of the many tsotsis and their township brothers and sisters have changed. Yet the spiritual healing of one person was portrayed and this restores existential belonging – here by being able to once more *affirm the texture of life as of the real and by fitting into what is real*. Perhaps there was also a change in the perspective of the viewer on how a paradigm, if positioned brother-like as in the deeply spiritual traditional African view of “ubuntu”, can create the kind of circumstances that facilitate healing in a broken society and prevent future damage to societies as a result of forced changes and the disintegration of reality views without viable alternatives.

Finally, systemic damages to a society require systemic restitution and healing. Given that no single cosmology can be considered as the best or the only one with existential answers (see paragraph 4.4.3), adherents of the Western-Christian paradigm with its features of redemption, transcendence and an active shaping of life in a reality which is not regarded as the ultimate, can join their brothers and sisters – they who find existential satisfaction and belonging by *fitting into a monistic reality* where everything is *interconnected*, and if they are able to *motivate their actions by love*, they will be able to find solutions *to the benefit of all*. It is at this point where it is indeed relevant, as a Western-oriented viewer, to be reminded of one's own set of symbols and one's own choice and responsibility.

## 6.6. Perceiving reality in three films: summary

I have discussed three drama films in this study. The aim was to establish if Cumpsty's framework that explains paradigms for belonging to totality (1991:218) can help to hermeneutically understand belonging to totality in real-life situations. As such the discipline of Religion and Media became part of the discussion, as well as cultural and social contexts and consequently the formation of identity.

I have complemented Cumpsty's work with the theory of Castells (2005) to distinguish between resistance, legitimising and project identities, and have tried to distinguish between my own feelings and an approach based on reason with a view to focus on the perspective of the characters portrayed in accordance with the theory of Sen (2006).

Thus my analysis was guided by Cumpsty's framework with (what I refer to as) a set of constant factors which are present in both the SWA and the IEA cosmologies, *albeit* with different symbolic interpretations. (For the sake of clarity, I shall mention some of these symbols in respect of each character in the summaries of each film and also list all the symbols in relation to the constant factors in Table 5 towards the end of this chapter.)

To ascertain the value of the hermeneutical analyses of the three case studies, three questions mentioned earlier now require answers (see 6.2):

- *Was Cumpsty's framework helpful in understanding how individuals choose to belong to totality in real life?*

Cumpsty's structure allowed me to not only hone in on specifics, but to link specifics in a coherent way and to explain some possible circumstances in which a symbol from one

cosmology may be incorporated into another as in *Tsotsi* (2005). This systemic approach whereby the links and relations between facets of belonging are sought and recognised, is also useful in the sense that one cannot, like Williams (2005) with *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) or Dovey (2006) and Barnard (2008) with *Tsotsi* (2005), single out only a few factors to measure how convincing a film or a character was (Williams and Dovey used redemption and Barnard transcendence and redemption).

By using several cosmological factors and by understanding that each of these factors has multiple symbolic meanings that tend to correspond with the logic of an entire reality view, one is less inclined – figuratively speaking – to keep stirring the sugar in one’s own cup of tea instead of asking the other what he or she would like to drink.

- *What kinds of identity are portrayed by the main characters in each of the three films?*

The theory of Castells too helped me in a structured and guided way to identify for what and why the characters constructed and changed their identities. I shall mention the respective identities again in the summaries pertaining to each film later in this paragraph and in Table 6 (see 7.2).

- *What appeal does a cosmological analysis make on the researcher given her Western-Christian orientation?*

I have tried to be aware of both the theoretic paradigms, as well as the praxis of the Western-Christian and the traditional African cosmologies. I have also tried to distinguish between all these paradigms.

It is true that I was influenced in my expectations of each film as to which cosmologies I may encounter in a particular film. In *Erin Brockovich* (2000), for example, I expected to meet a character portraying a Western-Christian cosmology as explained by the theoretic SWA paradigm. Likewise I was curious to see if the cosmologies in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and in *Tsotsi* (2005) were purely traditional African as explained by the theoretic IEA paradigm or not and if they were perhaps influenced by the Western-Christian paradigm. Although I haven’t discussed the Withdrawal type cosmology here, I have borne its symbols in mind too in case they would be applicable, but as I suspected, they did not feature in any of the three films.

In trying to counter my own expectations and what feels real to me, I tried to distinguish between my own view of totality and what could possibly be seen as the respective characters’ points of view. This was easier said than done, for even my own view of totality is not that clear cut as for example the cosmology of Erin’s character. I faced many questions. I was, for example, not sure to what extent there would be similarities between the views of the main characters in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Tsotsi* (2005). The systematic analyses helped me to understand that both Paul and Tsotsi/David reached back to their original cosmological belonging in situations of severe stress. I was also not sure if the African continent’s history of slave trading, colonialism, the superficial implementation of nation-state models and apartheid (in South Africa), as well as contemporary globalisation, had an impact on people’s sense of belonging to totality and to which extent these issues would surface in the analysis. In the end I referred to the most critical issues (the effect of apartheid, poverty and AIDS in South Africa, as well as the role of colonialism and Belgium’s role in Rwanda), but only to provide context. This is not to say that one cannot elaborate on the respective roles of these issues on cosmological symbols and identity – they indeed interact dynamically with religion – but I tried to limit the discussion to the essence of the study which is to establish if Cumpsty’s theoretical framework of religion is useful for explaining modes of belonging to totality.

The analysis of *Erin Brockovich* (2000) helped me to understand that what I refer to here as the Western-Christian cosmology, is very close to, if not identical, to what Cumpsty described as the SWA view of reality. However, it should be noted that my interpretation of the Western-

Christian cosmology coincides with modern views of totality and that earlier periods of Christianity, the Old Testament or any other time periods and theologies were not investigated.

After these general comments, I shall now summarise the cosmologies, the characters' respective identities and my own process of balancing feelings and reason with respect to the theories of Cumpsty (1991), Castells (2005) and Sen (2006) in each of the three films.

#### *Erin Brockovich:*

The objective was not to evaluate if any of the characters acted out sound faith-based symbols or principles, but rather to explain if a reality view is informed by symbolic interpretations of constant cosmological factors. Questions that were posed here, as well as in the other two films included: What is the nature of the ultimately-real and what is the experience and mode of engagement with the world-out-there? How is time viewed? What provides meaning in social interaction, and so forth.

*Erin Brockovich* (2000) portrayed the Western-Christian view of reality in a rather uncomplicated way as there seems to be no influence from other cosmologies. Erin affirms her reality as of the real but not ultimate and actively shapes her environment in an individualistic way to create a better future. She has clear goals, she thrives by discovering a purpose in life and finds meaning in initiating a solidary movement together with the residents of Hinkley and she views her work as an opportunity to start again in life. Her view is governed by a dualistic framework set in a linear perspective of time and she displays a mix of love and care (for her children and for the residents of Hinkley) and greed (in her reaction towards Ed when receiving her pay check). All these symbols are aligned with both the Western-Christian cosmology, as well as the theoretic SWA cosmology.

Erin's identity basically remains the same as her identity shifted from resistance to that of a project actor in her professional life only.

As researcher, I experienced the analysis of the cosmological aspects of this film as relatively easy and straightforward as the symbols could all be coherently linked to a single paradigm and coincided with a view of reality that is familiar to me.

Having said all of this, commenting on the positioning and thus the specific application of another's interpretation of symbols, remains a challenge and I'm especially aware of this in view of the fact that Erin's character is based on a true story.

#### *Hotel Rwanda:*

Both films situated in Africa portray the traditional African cosmology as can be explained by the theoretic IEA cosmology, yet there are in both also the possibility of symbols from the Western-Christian cosmology. It was evident here, as well as in the previous film that a cosmology can be interpreted both positively and negatively and as two sets of symbols can be considered in both *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and in *Tsotsi* (2005), the understanding of the characters' identities is more complex than in, for example, *Erin Brockovich* (2000).

In this second film the main character, his family and the entire Rwandese community suffered severely from the negative positioning of a distorted traditional African cosmology. This distortion is embodied by, for example, *intimidation and fear, as well as by not being sure if the world-out-there is as good as it gets or whether one should rather aspire to a more ultimate life. The disintegration of community life due to individual choices and the involvement of European countries, the latter without sufficient sensitivity for the local social fabric and spirituality, also play a role. Some incoherencies that can arise in such stressful situations were distilled in the character of Paul. His eventual cosmological choice amidst the crisis after initially clearly aspiring to a Western image, is to reclaim his African spiritual*

heritage within the situation by *affirming the immediate world-out-there, by trying to repair his belonging, as well as harmony between people, by testing the quality of his experience by texture only, by relating to others through his behaviour, by applying wisdom*, and so forth. What the eventual effect of the horrific experiences in the lives of Paul and his family will be on cosmic belonging, was not portrayed by the film.

Paul's identity shifts from being a legitimising actor in which he did not challenge a system, to becoming a project actor who redefines his position in society by no longer acting as a hotel manager in a suit with a white shirt, but as a human being through being with others and taking the lead in the struggle for survival. His position as project actor is even more significant in view of his Hutu ethnicity which he uses to positively influence his Hutu hotel staff to protect Tutsi survivors.

Analysing the character of Paul was extremely difficult to me as I had to avoid the obvious gaps of reasoning from my own cosmological perspective. I also realise that the politics in Rwanda was and still is very complex and that this film is but one view on what transpired. The theories of Cumpsty, Castells and Sen helped me to formulate reasonable arguments for Paul's possible cosmology and position.

#### *Tsotsi:*

The third film, *Tsotsi* (2005), also portrays the *disintegration of a social fabric* and here the disintegration is closely linked to socio-economic and political marginalisation. Here too, the incoherencies as a result of forced and sudden socio-economic and cultural change, are evident in the behaviour of the main character. As in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), the main character in *Tsotsi* in the end *seeks to restore his belonging to the ultimately-real and everything else* by choosing for, or rather reaching back to his identity of origin, in other words his traditional African heritage. Yet this time, as he transforms his identity to a more positive position, symbols from two reality views (*chance and new beginnings* in the Western-Christian view and most of the symbols of the traditional African view) seem to co-exist in his cosmic belonging. These symbols do not naturally fit together, for *the chance to start anew* is here not simultaneously associated with a *linear view of time* as one would expect, but instead feature along with emphasis on a *cyclical view of life*. Rather, the *new beginning* is an opportunity to *reposition the texture of life*. The latter could simply be my own impression, but possibly this is also how *Tsotsi* sees it? Can one ever reach a final conclusion where deeply held existential views of another are at stake?

*Tsotsi's* identity is at first portrayed as that of resistance. He *cannot affirm his reality* and chooses to build "trenches of resistance of survival" (Castells 2005:8). It is not clear if he develops into a legitimising or into a project identity. The former would mean that he subscribes to formal and institutional conventions of a society and maybe he does as he chooses to hand himself over. However on a more existential level, the possibility exists that he developed into a project actor by transforming himself and his broken society to once again embrace being a human through belonging, participating and sharing in a network of interdependence and togetherness (Tutu 2000:31, 166) as embodied by the traditional African view of reality.

As this film deals with the painful and very complex realities of my own country, analysing it rationally was extremely difficult and I once again struggled with differentiating between my own felt sense of reality and what in all likelihood motivates the character of *Tsotsi*. It was helpful to debate the points of other scholars as this helped me to clarify my own feelings and rational views.

Finally, I could review my own set of cosmological symbols and develop an increased sense of appreciation for the traditional African view of reality combined with the symbol of hope and new beginnings. In this sense then, my rational decision to employ a systematic and logic-analytical approach to understand the cosmology of another, allowed me to deepen my



understanding of another way of meaning-making to the extent that it also made an appeal on my own affective faculties. This is true of my experience of both *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Tsotsi* (2005).

In an attempt to provide an abbreviated and comparative overview of the essence of all of the various symbolic interpretations, I compiled Table 5.

### 6.7. Summary of symbolic interpretations of constant factors portrayed in three films

This table summarises and compares the positions and shifts in the symbolic interpretations of all three characters' reality views.

The various symbolic interpretations of the constant factors indicated here may also be compared with Table 1 in paragraph 4.6 (Cumpsty 1991:218) to track any alignment with and variations from Cumpsty's theoretic paradigms.

Moreover, Table 5 may be used in conjunction with Table 6 in 7.2 where all the processes in the study's methodology are combined.

**Table 5: Symbolic interpretation in three films**

<i>Constant factors</i>	<i>Symbolic interpretation</i>		
	<i>Erin Brockovich (2000)</i>	<i>Hotel Rwanda (2004)</i>	<i>Tsotsi (2005)</i>
<i>Experience of the immediate world out there</i>	Experienced as real but not as ultimate, needs to be improved	Initially possibly affirmed as of the real but not ultimate in line with Western aspirations, later affirmed as of the real	Initially a struggle to affirm it as of the real and with no viable alternative, later affirmed as of the real in a positive way
<i>Nature of reality</i>	Dualistic	Monistic	Monistic, yet very distorted
<i>Chance and determinism</i>	Chance, new beginnings	Unclear to which extent chance and, new beginnings are possible after the genocide	At first chance is excluded, later chance and new beginnings as an ( <i>albeit</i> uncomfortable) addition to the traditional African set of symbols
<i>Belonging to ultimately-real</i>	Not expressly articulated, but implied as a personal and an individual quest	Not expressly articulated, but at first implied as a Western-oriented individual quest and later repaired	Distorted belonging shifting to an assumed belonging which needs to be repaired to an actual restoration of belonging, all in line with a traditional African view
<i>Nature of</i>	Not expressly articulated, but implied	Without rigid distinction between personal and	At first implied as personal – but

<i>ultimately-real</i>	as a personal	impersonal	unsuccessful, later implied without rigid distinction between personal and impersonal
<i>Time</i>	Linear	Cyclical	Cyclical, maybe astral
<i>Test of quality of experience</i>	Goals (to improve and move beyond the current) and texture (suffering is acceptable)	Goals and texture (as atypical in an African view)	At first goals as in a Western-Christian view, then texture
<i>Ground of meaning</i>	Grand Design (purpose)	Grand Design (pattern)	Grand Design (pattern)
	<i>Symbolic interpretation</i>		
<i>Constant factors</i>	<i>Erin Brockovich (2000)</i>	<i>Hotel Rwanda (2004)</i>	<i>Tsotsi (2005)</i>
<i>Mode of engagement with world out there</i>	Take hold and shape, a deliberate and active moulding of the circumstances and the environment	At first take hold and shape (atypical to an African view), later fit into	Fit into
<i>Social features:</i>			
<i>Individual or communal</i>	Communal: solidary	Communal: centered	At first communal: solidary as in a Western-Christian view shifting to communal: centered as in an African view
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Belief pattern	Behaviour pattern	Behaviour pattern
<i>Social coercion</i>	‘Greed’ and ‘love’	Possible an element of ‘greed’ as in a Western view in the beginning, later ‘love’	At first ‘fear’, later ‘love’
<i>Source of ethics</i>	The end, the above	Harmony, individual purpose	At first individual purpose albeit negatively, later individual purpose and harmony
<i>The modelling of survival</i>	Not discussed	Not discussed	Not discussed
<i>Religious knowledge</i>	Not discussed	Wisdom	Wisdom

All three the main characters in the respective films experience crises in their lives. Their personal quest, realisation and maintenance of belonging to totality, inspire the viewer and allow reflection on one's own cosmological belonging, identity and the embedded source of meaning.

It is important to note that I have not exhausted the discussion on any of these three films. This may in any case be impossible given the nature of a hermeneutical analysis. If the analyses have perhaps spurred a reader on to see more tangential points between the character and relevant cosmologies, or to make his or her own notes, then the interactive and participative nature of a hermeneutical discussion on a topic as existential as belonging to totality, has been demonstrated and experienced.

Despite its limitations, I nevertheless hope that these explorations enable the reader to clearly distinguish between two fundamentally different ways of belonging to totality where symbols could or could not be replaced with a symbol(s) from the other cosmology.

The combination of Cumpsty's framework (1991) with the theories of Sen (2006) and Castells (2005), allows one to incorporate both feelings, as well as reason in a multi-layered way. One is able to stay true to a personal cosmology, as well as seek an understanding of the other. However, it requires the researcher – to at least at a rational level – recognise that different ways to derive meaning are possible. Such an approach may facilitate the meeting of perspectives and symbolic worlds, not because they are or should be the same, but because they pose pertinent questions, allowing one to critically reflect on what an ideal reality view and an ideal world could be like.

## Conclusion:

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- *Not one of the films discussed here can be associated with a specific religious tradition, yet all three contain clear religious symbols that can systematically be associated with coherent, theoretic cosmologies in Cumpsty's theory of religion.*
- *This clear presence of cosmological symbols, even when not linked to specific religious traditions, demonstrates the transfer of symbolic meaning from religion (as the quest, realisation and maintenance of belonging to totality) to all views of life.*
- *The common thread between the three characters' cosmologies is that they are all (different) symbolic interpretations of the same constant factors as summarised in 6.7.*
- *Moreover, the analysis clearly indicated how the traditional African cosmology is explained by the IEA reality view and likewise the Western-Christian cosmology by the SWA view. It could not establish any deviations between the symbols in Cumpsty's theoretic framework and the two actual cosmologies, but it was possible to identify influences of symbols from one cosmology onto those of another.*
- *Based on the evidence set out in the three case studies and highlighted again in the summaries, one can assert that it is much easier for a person to change a role or even an identity than to change his or her symbolic understanding of one or more constant factors. The main character in Erin Brockovich (2000) was able to shift but one aspect of her identity and definitely not her cosmology. Both endings in Hotel Rwanda (2004) and Tsotsi (2005) allude to possible changes in identity and in symbols. It is even more difficult to change one's view of totality. The latter would entail that the majority of symbols in one's own cosmology switch to symbols of another cosmology and a person's entire felt sense of reality will then be different to what it used to be. There were no examples of such major existential change in this study.*
- *In all three the case studies, Cumpsty's framework (1991) was useful as it provided a structured and logic set of tools to systematically and systemically analyse and explain belonging.*
- *Likewise, the theory of Castells (2005) was useful to describe how cosmological symbols could be positioned differently, and the theory of Sen (2006) allows one to distinguish between and simultaneously be aware of the own and other cosmologies.*
- *The use of contemporary realistic drama films provided simulated life experiences in the format of visuals, sound and stories which served as defined and packaged "slices" of life. This may assist in communicating the findings of this study, as well as in verifying, debating and expanding its contents.*
- *This investigation, as well as the points raised in paragraph 5.1 provides evidence that scholars in the discipline of Religion and Media (with specific reference to films as discussed here), as well as scholars in fields such as Literature and Cultural Studies need to consciously distinguish between their own sets of cosmological symbols and those portrayed in films. This is necessary to avoid double-text interpretation which maintains exclusion.*
- *Such distinction, in turn, presupposes systematic knowledge of the contents, logic and structure of the own and other reality views with their respective associated symbols.*

## 7. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS: TOTALITY PORTRAYED IN THE PARTICULAR

### 7.1 General comments

The first conclusion in this study was that whether one speaks of differences, similarities, the a-symmetries of information or the rights of the majority of people, can be debated, but it is essential to recognise that all the world is not the same, that a great variety of identities exist, and that this necessitates a language of inclusion.

In trying to explain and create awareness for different ways to belong to totality, I used the concept of religion, defined as “*the quest for, realization or maintenance of, a sense of belonging to the ultimately-real*” (Cumpsty 1991:161). Religion defined in this way refers to a universal need of humanity to be positioned in relation to the ultimately-real and all of life.

As a next step I introduced the term “cosmologies” to refer to Cumpsty’s “religion types” and “constant factors” to refer to what Cumpsty (1991:218) calls “non-negotiable symbols”. A particular cosmology refers to a person’s participation in total reality and as such it encapsulates and contributes to explaining religious traditions, culture, world views as well as identity.

To understand particular cosmologies, I used Cumpsty’s framework and its three theoretic cosmologies and tried to gain an understanding of two, namely the Secular World Affirming and the Immediate Experience Affirming cosmologies. These theoretic paradigms exist as logic, coherent entities with mutually exclusive modes of engagement with totality. This means that wholly different ways to derive meaning and to belong to totality in a spiritual-religious manner are possible. Such belonging to totality is not based on random choices as at least some coherency can be expected in a person’s choice of symbols. However the paradigms all three share the desire for a world where all actions are motivated by love, as well as the idea of life after death.

The logic structure of Cumpsty’s framework, as well as the two theoretic paradigms under discussion and their constant factors may be considered a “base-line” with interdependent symbols which can assist in an *explanation* of how people with Western-Christian and traditional African reality views choose to belong to totality and find existential meaning. The symbols are seamlessly transferred to a person’s view of totality, also in the paradigms of those people who do not subscribe to a religious tradition. Thus, although fully logic and coherent cosmologies in all likelihood exist only on a theoretical level, it was shown that their inherent logic and structure are helpful to systematically explain actual cosmologies.

This is necessary as individuals continuously verify and, if necessary, reposition their identities, because ultimately what is at stake is *what is experienced or perceived as real*. This process occurs through developing an “other” (not necessarily a “new” or even “better” or “more precise”) symbolic understanding of the reality of the known (for example, yourself and those closest to you, your culture including your scientific praxis, your religion and cosmology) and the still unknown. Moreover, the same symbol in the same cosmology can be positioned differently and symbols can be replaced by those from another paradigm, adding greatly to the variety of possible identities. A living view of reality is “open”, that is to say there is always room for renewal, change and adaptation of identity as demonstrated by the cosmologies portrayed in the three films. Without this kind of adaptability the particular reality view could become irrelevant, belonging to such cosmology will cease and the cosmology will have no adherents.

All of the dimensions such as religion, cosmologies, religious traditions, cultures, world views and identity are related to one another and impact systemically on one another. Thus, they are multi-dimensional, changing and never static. Yet the more differentiated the dimension, the easier it is for change to occur. Therefore change is more likely to occur on the level of individual identities than on organised levels, and it is even more difficult for change to occur on a cosmological level. Hence it is unlikely that change at the level of a felt sense of reality will occur rapidly. Even if a person’s belonging were to be destroyed as a result of, for example, a trauma or crisis, for example, it is often a painful and protracted process to reconstruct a new “felt sense of reality”. A person’s first impulse, as Castells (2005) points out, is rather to

respond conservatively, or to protect that which is known or felt to be already acceptable. Cumpsty (1991:227-252) refers to this process as the restoration or maintenance of the sense of belonging.

In order to understand the reality view and identity of others, one needs to first understand your own cosmology and identity. There is no “right” or “best” cosmology or “general rules” for all. The Western-Christian and the traditional African cosmologies, for example, offer insights into how a better world can be created, but they do so in different ways. Likewise, different groups and individuals make up their own beliefs and convictions as to what feels real and meaningful in a specific situation – and therefore worthwhile to belong to or associate with.

Table 6 on the next page summarises how a particular identity – as discussed in the case studies by using the aforementioned method – can be constructed within and as part of the overarching totality.

The explanations in the last column of Table 6 with regard to the respective roles of the affective and the cognitive have been done from my personal view of reality, and for the purposes of this summary I have restricted it to a pure Western-Christian view of reality.

## **7.2 Summary of method**

The table on the next page can be read in conjunction with Table 5 in 6.7 as well as with the description of the method 7.3.

**Table 6: Summary of method applied for the hermeneutical analysis of three films**

	THEORETIC VIEWS OF TOTALITY Constant factors interpreted symbolically	PORTRAYED IN THE PARTICULAR	INTERPRETED I.T.O. FEELINGS AND REASON
<b>RELIGION</b>	<b>Belonging and identity of Erin Brockovich (<i>Erin Brockovich</i>, 2000)</b>		
	<b>SWA cosmology</b>	The cosmology portrayed by Erin’s character expressed as a Western-Christian view corresponds with the theoretic SWA cosmology, the latter explained by Cumpsty (1991:169-212). No disturbances could be identified in respect of the constant factors and their symbolic interpretations. Her positioning within this cosmology remains that of resistance although she starts to act as a project actor in her professional capacity.	If viewed from a Western-Christian view, the interpretation seems seamless. Hence there is no tension between the feelings and the reason of an interpreter from such perspective.
	<b>Belonging and identity of Paul Rusesabagina (<i>Hotel Rwanda</i>, 2004)</b>		
	<b>IEA cosmology and elements of the SWA cosmology</b>	Paul’s cosmology is dominated by the traditional African view which can be explained by the IEA cosmology (Cumpsty 1991:169-209), although his communal interaction is first portrayed as <i>solidary</i> in line with the social features of a Western-Christian view and not as <i>centered</i> as typical of the traditional African view. Yet in the midst of his spiritual crisis the symbolic meaning of this social feature returns to his cosmology of origin, the traditional African view when it is portrayed as <i>centered communal</i> . What exactly his positioning is during the start of the story could be argued from many perspectives, but eventually he emerges as a project actor.	An interpreter, whose cosmology is rooted in the Western-Christian reality view, should on the one hand, consider a possible approach whereby Paul <i>moulds the situation</i> in his immediate environment and become a “saviour” in accordance to a Western-Christian perspective. On the other hand, if reason is applied to the interpretation, it may be more plausible to view Paul’s behaviour in light of his spiritual need <i>to be a person through others</i> in line with the traditional African view.
	<b>Belonging and identity of Tsotsi/ David Madondo (<i>Tsotsi</i>, 2005)</b>		
<b>IEA cosmology and elements of the SWA cosmology</b>	Tsotsi or David’s view of reality can be linked to the traditional African view, but his cosmology is distorted to the extent that he struggles to affirm it as of the real and experiences an existential crisis. His position is extremely negative and based on unlawful resistance. However, he is, through the course of the story, able to realign his view of reality and <i>affirm it as of the real</i> . His positioning also becomes more positive, at least recognising some laws of his country and possibly transforming (realigning in traditional African terms) himself.	From a Western-Christian perspective it would be very easy to identify themes of redemption and transcendence in this film. However, such findings are not substantiated by the film itself. If reason is applied, it is clear that the film guides us to see Tsotsi’s cosmology to be informed by the traditional African cosmology. Yet the Western-Christian concept of <i>chance and new beginnings</i> may have been integrated in such a way that it overlaps, <i>albeit</i> uneasily, with the <i>cyclical time</i> concept in the traditional African view.	

### 7.3 Findings

The study led to five findings:

#### 7.3.1 *Unintentional exclusion with regard to reality views seems to appear regularly in scholarly comments:*

This study has identified a subtle, yet deeply discriminatory, form of exclusion in commentary on films in related fields (Theology, Religion, Media, Culture Studies, Literature). These fields all deal with issues of identity and existential belonging. I have described this form of unintentional exclusion as *double-text interpretation*.

Ironically none of the scholars quoted in this respect intended to promote exclusion – to the contrary, they all advocated for justice, human rights and plurality. Yet they all assumed that what provides meaning to them is universal and also provides meaning to others.

It would be unfair to ascribe such *double-text interpretation* to only those who have been quoted in this study. It may be more correct to assert that Western-oriented persons in general may be inclined to unconsciously project their own sense of belonging to totality onto others.<sup>62</sup>

#### 7.3.2 *Conscious decisions, as well as knowledge are required when commenting on what provides meaning to another:*

The interpretation of, for example, films (but also other texts and human interaction) will be more nuanced and meaningful when informed by, and sensitised to, different ways of belonging to totality.

As a first step, it is necessary to deliberately distinguish between one's own assumptions versus one's intentions, as well as one's own feelings and reason. However, it is not easy to ignore one's felt sense of reality when having to interpret another's reality view. Yet it is not necessary to ignore any of these dimensions. What is required, is to clearly and systematically distinguish between the own and another's set of cosmological symbols or perceived felt sense of reality.

This, in turn, requires at least a rational decision and some knowledge, if not also the willingness to expand one's own level of consciousness to always remember the universal (religion) whilst dealing with the particular (a cosmology with symbols expressed in religious traditions, cultures and world views) as expressed in reality (portrayed by the identity of a person or a group).

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<sup>62</sup> Whether or not this tendency is also present amongst those from other cosmologies has not been investigated here.



7.3.3 *A step-by-step method to analyse films can be replicated in other research studies that investigate existential belonging:*<sup>63</sup>

The method developed here can be used for a scientific, systematic, hermeneutic exploration of any films as well as other texts and case studies.

The steps may be summarised as follows:

- (1) Selection of text(s) or case studies.
- (2) Gaining knowledge and understanding of:
  - what I have described here as “constant factors” in Cumpsty’s (1991) framework of religion;
  - the symbols and their relationship with one another within each of the three theoretic cosmologies (although the Withdrawal cosmology was not discussed here);
  - theoretic similarities and differences between the theoretic paradigms;
  - the relevant real-life cosmologies;
  - the systemic relationship between religion, cosmologies and symbolic interpretations in real-life contexts such as culture, religious traditions, world views and individual identities; and
  - Castells’ (2005) three categories of social identity, but with a more systemic view of the relationship between religion and religious traditions in relation to constructing identity.
- (3) Analysing the selected text(s) or case studies systematically, ascertaining:
  - the symbols portrayed in a character’s view of reality;
  - any variations or deviations from the relevant theoretic paradigm(s);
  - contextual reasons for the abovementioned; and
  - the positioning of the character’s identity.
- (4) Differentiating consciously and deliberately between the own and the other’s cosmology throughout the process. Distinguishing between the own and the other’s felt sense of reality (Sen 2006), however, incorporating *both – albeit* appropriately.
- (5) Reflecting on learning experiences and the impact thereof.

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<sup>63</sup> The findings of this study, including the hermeneutic method to analyse existential belonging and meaning-making is most relevant to students in Practical Theology, especially those who will work in diverse, complex communities such as South Africa. However, students in other parts of the world, where communities increasingly become heterogeneous due to migrating patterns and other forms of globalisation, will also benefit. *All theologians who need to provide spiritual guidance within diverse congregations, or facilitate spiritual growth between members of diverse reality views, or are involved in interreligious dialogue, will benefit from gaining a structured and systematic understanding of constant factors and symbols in theoretic, as well as in real reality views/cosmologies.* Hence the knowledge gained and the method developed in this study may assist in empowering ministers and other spiritual leaders in dealing with diverse communities – this could also apply to intercultural and interfaith discussions, leadership and co-operation. (See also the recommendations in 8.3.)

<sup>63</sup> See also previous comments on ubuntu in paragraphs 4.4.1 and 6.5.2.

7.3.4 *The medium of film is par excellence suitable for theological and spiritual hermeneutical analyses:*

The medium of films involves several senses and creates life-like images. It is a popular medium which is readily accessible to many people in multiple forms. By nature of its resemblance to real life, as well as by being in the public domain, it invites interpretations from a wide variety of viewers. Moreover, *film can no longer be considered as merely instrumental or as mere entertainment, but rather as formative in the construction of culture and existential belonging.* As such the role of this medium is important to theologians and other spiritual leaders.

Yet humanity and scholars in religion tend to view life through paradigms and lenses that are familiar to the self, often not realising that alternatives are possible and indeed exist for others.

It is precisely this tension between *a viewer's own paradigm, perceptions, experiences, affective, cognitive and other dimensions, as well as personal choices* combined with the *multiple fields of information embedded in a film (cosmologies with symbols, identity choices for resistance, legitimising or projects and positioning that ranges between positive and negative, cultural contexts, and so forth)* that create the multi-level hermeneutic challenges and opportunities for understanding life and belonging to the ultimately-real. In short, films provide a safe zone where one can move out of one's own comfort zone, reflect on diverse identities and discuss meaning-making and belonging to the divine.

7.3.5 *The intention to increase one's religious understanding of others contributes to an improved self-understanding:*

A circular, or perhaps a spiralling process, is initiated once one opens up for understanding others. Studying cosmologies with constant factors and sets of symbols allows one to gain a glimpse of the felt sense of reality of another. What is realised on a rational level may become internalised on an affective level, or it may distil established concepts. The arguments may be logic, structured and scientific, yet the possibility of personal growth cannot be negated. In the end, this topic facilitates a deeper understanding of, and awe for, the universe and the ultimately-real.

The key question posed in this research was:

*Can knowledge of coherent yet theoretic cosmologies be helpful to gain insight into identity formation, given that individuals exercise their own choices in respect of who they are?*

It seems indeed as if an answer to the abovementioned may be "yes" in respect of the life experiences portrayed in the case studies, as well as on the basis that the underlying questions mentioned in 3.4 have all been answered by combining the theories of Cumpsty (1991), Castells (2005) and Sen (2006) in the hermeneutic approach summarised in Tables 5 and 6.

In response to the first paragraph of this study, I have argued that coherences and differences between individuals and groups should not only be ascribed to the role of religious traditions, culture and world views. Rather, similarities and differences between people are constituted on multiple and interrelated levels of which cosmic belonging, or in Cumpsty's terms, the quest, realisation and maintenance of belonging to totality, may be the deepest of the levels<sup>64</sup> mentioned here.

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<sup>64</sup> See the last bullet point under paragraph 8.2.

I have tried to articulate deeply embedded concepts which relate to real life in a practical way. To me, this is a journey on which I have treaded the first few tentative steps. Raising one's level of consciousness can never simply be a theoretic, an academic or a reasonable thing to do. To always be aware of the infinite, the whole or totality whilst dealing with the particular, does require a shift in one's own real felt sense. But doing so can start with a dedicated decision to be exposed to, and to willingly engage with the unknown until such rational decision merges with what feels real. Various ways of achieving this exist. Increasing one's knowledge of different ways to belong to the ultimately-real is but one way.

Thomas Kuhn (1922-), as referred to by (Tarnas 1993:360), pointed out that scientists rarely challenge existing paradigms but rather subject existing paradigms to testing. Maybe this is what I have done here. Yet at least I have tried to deal with more than one paradigm.

The essence in trying to improve the moral quality of life is not which religion, or which cosmology or paradigm is the best, but rather how and for what reason all expressions of reality views such as religious traditions, world views and all other aspects of identity, are applied. Religion and cosmic views can *explain* belief and behaviour patterns, but people, in real life, can *embody* active reconciliation, respect and care. As Castells (2005:280) phrases it: "the power of identity seems to become magic when touched by the power of love."

I sincerely hope that this contribution will lead to critical reflections and further research – also into new frontiers and possible emerging reality views in the post-modern era and beyond – as humanity's consciousness of totality develops, or perhaps return to what it used to belong to.

## 8. REFLECTION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND EVALUATION

### 8.1 Methodology

The research *methodology of interpretive hermeneutical exploration* was most appropriate to interpret simulated life experiences portrayed in films. This methodology as well as the *critical-analytical and application of the theories of Cumpsty (1991), Castells (2005) and Sen (2006)* proved to be very useful.

It enabled the interpretation of texts, and also the development of *a systemic hermeneutical method*. This method may be replicated for the studying of more topics in related fields such as other films (and other texts and case studies) and other cosmologies. It may also be replicated for studying other real-life encounters where knowledge of other cosmological paradigms and identities are required.

This will hopefully contribute to refining and/or affirming the method. It may also broaden the usage of the methodology and hopefully contribute to understanding religious-cosmological diversity. I shall suggest some topics that could be studied in 8.2.

### 8.2 More studies on different ways of belonging to totality portrayed in films

It has been said all along that this study cannot be regarded as encompassing. More research on different ways of cosmic belonging, meaning-making and identity formation from different perspectives, is necessary. The suggestions below are mere examples of studies which could be undertaken to build on this research:

- More films with potentially a traditional African view, a Western-Christian view – including films from different parts of the world such as Europe, North America and Australia – as well as films from diverse societies representing the relevant two views of reality such as South Africa, could be investigated.
- Case studies of different positions within the same cosmology would complement this research. Analyses of for example the films *The Lake House* (2006), *As it is in Heaven* (2004) and *Avatar* (2009) may reveal interesting shifts in the consciousness of a post-modern Western-Christian view.
- The theoretic IEA and SWA cosmologies could be linked with other real cosmologies and religious traditions articulated in different parts of the world. An investigation of, for example, Islam in the Middle East versus Islam in Indonesia may for instance portray the same religious tradition yet different cosmologies. Another example would be to discuss the Maori cosmology (as for example portrayed in *The Whale Rider* (2003)) along with films with a traditional African or a possible South-American cosmology.
- Examples of the Withdrawal cosmology warrant yet another investigation and may be discussed on its own or along with the theory and examples of other cosmologies as suggested in the previous bullet point.
- Themes such as violence could be discussed within one or more paradigms. Analyses of films such as *Blood Diamond* (2006), *The Departed* (2006), *Son of Man* (2005) and *Hero* (2002) could shed light on interpretations of all three of Cumpsty's (1991) theoretic paradigms.

### 8.3 Evaluation and impact of this study

Although the practical work in this study was conducted in the field of Religion and Media, the actual objective was to establish if the understanding of another can be analysed systematically from a religious-cosmological perspective. Thus, the application of the knowledge gained from this study is potentially much wider than the field of Religion and Media.

The following recommendations are suggested:

- This study, its findings and recommendations, first need to be critically reviewed by scholars in religious and theological studies, as well as by those who concern themselves with the interface between religion and culture.
- If the findings of this study are accepted, it may be necessary to include the perspectives and findings in curricula for students in Practical Theology. This may be necessary, especially for students in diverse, complex communities such as South Africa. Yet it should also not exclude students in other parts of the world where communities increasingly become heterogeneous due to migrating patterns and other forms of globalisation. Students may benefit from gaining a structured and systematic understanding of constant factors and symbols in theoretic, as well as in real cosmologies. This may empower them for intercultural and interfaith discussions, leadership and co-operation, if not widen and/or affirm their own paradigms of totality.
- The discussion in 5.1 indicated that scholars who advocate pluralism and/or inclusion nevertheless practice *double-text interpretations* which maintain or aggravate distance between people. It is regarded as imperative that practitioners in the various disciplines of religion and theology who advocate for a pluralistic global society that recognises the interests of others, familiarise themselves of the existence of different paradigms. These practitioners and scholars should familiarise themselves with especially those cosmologies relevant to their own societies so that they are able to position their own comments, leadership and influence appropriately.
- More generally, I would like to recommend that the findings of this and similar studies, as well as relevant case studies are communicated to not only students and scholars in religion and theology, but also to the general public. This is but one reason why more case studies would be beneficial. Such communication could possibly occur in the form of academic and general publications, as well as in viewing and discussion groups.
- The analysis of scholarly comments on *Tsotsi* (2005) has indicated that an understanding of different cosmologies, as well as the ability to distinguish between one's own felt sense of reality and the felt sense of reality of another, have bearing not only on religious interpretations, but also on cultural and literary studies, and hence the findings of this study may be of relevance to scholars in those fields and/or in multi-disciplinary interpretations.
- Consideration needs to be given to how awareness of, and insight into cosmologies, constant factors and symbolic meanings may contribute to an improved understanding between individuals and groups who belong to the traditional African and the Western-Christian views of reality. More research, as well as other communication strategies, then need to be developed.
- One needs to ask if the underlying principles of this study have relevance to fields of public life such as policy making and economic strategies. If so, consideration should be given as to how the information could be suitably packaged, repositioned or used for further research. As a next step it could be worthwhile to investigate the theory and praxis of the relevant cosmologies with a focus on selected symbols in a specific context. For example, a study of the social feature which can – from an economic perspective – be expressed

through the concepts of “mutuality”, “solidarity” and “ubuntu” may be useful in a country such as South Africa in its current process of developing social security arrangements.<sup>65</sup>

- In view of post-modern thinking, I do not wish to assume that a person’s sense of belonging to totality, to the ultimately-real and to the cosmos, represents the deepest or the most profound of all dimensions of being human. Although I am unsure what other dimensions or fields of information may be accessible to humanity, I do not wish to rule them out. Humanity’s understanding and consciousness of itself and the universe – both inward and outward – may expand or shift. This matter too may be the topic of a next study.

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<sup>65</sup> National initiatives on social security such as the Reform of the Retirement Fund Industry, as well as a policy for National Health Insurance in South Africa are currently underway.

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## **(b) Films:**

- American Beauty*. 1999. Dir.: Sam Mendes. Written by: Alan Ball. Perf.: Kevin Spacey, Annette Bening. United States. 122min. English. Prod.: Bruce Cohen, Dan Jinks. DreamWorks (US), United International Pictures.
- As it is in Heaven*. 2004. Dir.: Kay Pollak. Written by: Kay Pollak. Perf.: Michael Nyqvist, Frida Hallgren, Helen Sjöholm. Sweden. 132min. Swedish, English. Prod.: Anders Birkeland, Göran Lindström. Sonet Film.
- Avatar*. 2009. Dir.: James Cameron. Written by: James Cameron. Perf.: Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Stephen Lang, Sigourney Weaver. United States of America. 162min. English. Prod.: James Cameron. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Blood Diamond*. 2006. Dir.: Edward Zwick. Written by: Charles Leavitt. Perf.: Leonardo DiCaprio, Djimon Hounsou, Jennifer Connelly, Michael Sheen, Arnold Vosloo. United States, Germany. 143min. English. Mende, Krio, Afrikaans. Prod.: Marshall Herskovitz, Graham King, Paula Weinstein, Edward Zwick. Warner Bros.
- The Departed*. 2006. Dir.: Martin Scorsese. Screenplay: William Monahan. Perf.: Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson, Mark Wahlberg, Martin Sheen, Ray Winstone, Vera Farmiga, Alec Baldwin. United States, Hong Kong. 151min. English. Prod.: Brad Pitt, Brad Grey, Graham King. Warner Bros.
- District Nine*. 2009. Dir.: Neill Blomkamp. Written by: Neill Blomkamp, Terri Tatchell. Cinematography: Trent Opaloch. Perf.: Sharloto Copley, Jason Cope, David James. United States of America, New Zealand. 112min. English, Nyanja, Zulu, Afrikaans. Prod.: Peter Jackson, Carolynne Cunningham. TriStar Pictures.

- Erin Brockovich*. 2000. Dir.: Steven Soderbergh. Written by: Susannah Grant. Cinematography: Ed Lachman. Perf.: Julia Roberts, Albert Finney. United States of America. 130min. English. Prod.: Universal Studios (USA), Columbia Pictures (non-USA).
- Hero*. 2002. Dir.: Zhang Yimou. Written by: Feng Li, Bin Wang, Zhang Yimou. Perf.: Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Chen Daoming, Zhang Ziyi, Donnie Yen. China, Hong Kong. 99min. Mandarin. Prod.: Zhang Yimou. Beijing New Picture Film Co.,EDKO Film.
- Hotel Rwanda*. 2004. Dir.: Terry George. Written by: Keir Pearson, Terry George. Perf.: Don Cheadle, Sophie Okonedo. United Kingdom, United States, Italy, South Africa. 121min. English, French. Prod.: Lions Gate Entertainment, United Artists.
- The Lake House*. 2006. Dir.: Alejandro Agresti. Written by: David Auburn. Perf.: Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock, Shohreh Aghdashloo, Dylan Walsh, Christopher Plummer. United States of America. 105min. English. Prod.: Roy Lee, Doug Davison. Warner Bros.
- Schindler's List*. 1993. Dir.: Steven Spielberg. Written by: Steven Zaillian. Perf.: Liam Neeson, Ben Kingsley, Ralph Fiennes, Caroline Goodall, Embeth Davidtz. United States. 195min. English, Hebrew, German, Polish, French. Prod.: Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures.
- Slumdog Millionaire*. 2008. Dir.: Danny Boyle. Written by: Simon Beaufoy (based on the novel by Vikas Swarup). Perf.: Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, Madhur Mittal, Anil Kapoor, Ayush Mahesh. United Kingdom. 121min. English, Hindi. Prod.: Pathe Pictures.
- Son of Man*. 2005. Dir.: Mark Dornford-May. Written by: Not known. Perf.: Andile Kosi. South Africa. 86min. Xhosa with some English. Prod.: Dimpho di Kopane. Distributor unknown.
- Tsotsi*. 2005. Dir.: Gavin Hood. Screenplay: Gavin Hood. Adapted from Athol Fugard, *Tsotsi* (1980). Perf.: Presley Chweneyagae, Terry Pheto. South Africa. 94min. Tsotsitaal, isiZulu, isiXhosa, English, Afrikaans, Setswana, Sesotho. Prod.: Peter Fudakowski. Miramax Films.
- Der Untergang*. 2004. Dir.: Oliver Hirschbiegel. Written by: Joachim Fest, Bernd Eichinger, Traudl Junge, Melissa Müller. Perf.: Bruno Ganz, Alexandra Maria Lara, Corinna Harfouch, Ulrich Matthes, Juliane Köhler, Thomas Kretschmann. Germany, Italy, Austria. 155min. German, Russian. Prod.: Bernd Eichinger. Constantin Film, Newmarket Films.
- The Whale Rider*. 2003. Dir.: Niki Caro. Written by: Niki Caro. Adapted from Witi Ihimaera. Perf.: Keisha Castle-Hughes, Rawiri Paratene, Vicky Haughton, Cliff Curtis. New Zealand. 101min. English, Maori. Prod.: John Barnett, Frank Hübner, Tim Sanders. South Pacific Pictures, ApolloMedia, Pandora Film. Buena Vista International.