

The New Paradise?

By Karen van Schalkwyk

Jerusalem Entjha is a new South African film currently in production in Hillbrow, one of the country's most infamous and dangerous areas.



Travelling through the slum, one is reminded of a place on the brink of an apocalypse. People refer to Hillbrow as little Lagos. Ironically, *Jerusalem Entjha*, in Sotho, means the new paradise. Producer Tendeka Matatu of Muti Films says many people from all over the continent travel to Hillbrow as they see the possibility of a better life: is it not strange that in such a world there can still be hope? But a feeling of deprivation invades the senses, as in this world the best that most people can hope for, is to make a quick buck selling crack, their bodies or cheap orange chips. They may also be intimidated by people like the protagonist of *Jerusalem Entjha*, Lucky Kunene, a self-made millionaire through the illicit world of crime. Whatever this place represents, it is a perfect dramatic backdrop for a contemporary SA feature film.

The script for *Jerusalem Entjha* was written by Ralph Ziman, a South African now living in Los Angeles. Ziman, whose credits as director/writer include *Hearts and Minds* and *The Zookeeper*, also directs *Jerusalem Entjha*, and explains how the story came about.

"I had been looking to do a contemporary SA film for a number of years. I heard a story about a guy who had arrived with his posse on a Friday afternoon in an abandoned building in Johannesburg/Hillbrow. Only the ground floor was occupied by shops – he basically held up the tenants and announced that he was now the new owner.

"He had literally hijacked the building and within a matter of hours 3 000 people moved in. It was reported that he continued his hijacking spree and was making up to R15m-25m a month. It was this story that inspired me to tell the tale of my protagonist, Lucky Kunene, who becomes one of the most feared and prominent gangsters in Hillbrow. The film is an epic gangster action film."

Ziman adds that for him it was also important to do a crime action film "that portrayed the distinctive nature of crime in SA, the level and the frequency of it."

To make this SA crime issue real and not just fiction, Matatu explains that since they began shooting the film, they have been held up, one crew member has been assaulted, "and the police refused to protect us during our night shoots. They are simply too afraid to come into this area after dark. We also have gangsters working on the film as they know the street laws."

Ziman says that while the film deals with current issues, "our aim is to create an entertaining story that does not simplify the issues but engages and reflects the complex nature of the characters. Lucky is a criminal but he is also charismatic. It tells the story of his aspirations, failures and desire for a better life, human nature really. My vision is to create a cinematic experience and to explore themes of humanity, morality, crime and possession."

As most directors maintain, the key to any film is authenticity, and Ziman is no exception. "To make a story believable you have to be authentic. One way we achieve this is not to change the locations too much. For instance, if we shoot in a brothel we actually use the beds and artefacts that are there. We also did not want to create sets that reflect Hillbrow. Our actors and crew are all South African and this is crucial to the overall feel and mood of the film."

Ziman explains that casting the right actors was extremely important. "The lead, Rapulana Sepheimo, was my natural choice as he has an innate charm that is also found in Lucky. He is a great actor, as are the others. I have been extremely blessed to have such a great cast and crew."

Matatu, whose credits include producer on *Max and Mona* and associate producer on *Wah-Wah*, says that the budget for the film "is roughly US\$2m. All the investors are offshore, with most of the finance coming from the US.

"I met Ralph in June last year. We discussed the film and by January 2006 it was green lit and we were ready to go. We will do our off-line post in SA but processing

and telecine in Italy, which it is up to 70% cheaper than doing it here and we have exchanged our territory rights for services rendered. Megan Gill (*Tsotsi*) is our editor and we are extremely thrilled that she will be editing the film."

Matatu explains that they have another well-known South African working on the film. "Our composer is Alan Ari Lazar, who also lives in LA, and who is perfect for the job and will do brilliant work on the music which is a combination of Kwaito, Gospel and orchestra."

The philosophy behind the film, Matatu says, "is to spend everything on the screen. We are aiming for exceptional production value and believe that we have achieved this so far. The film is shot on Super 16mm and Super 35mm."

Ziman adds that because the film production value is so high, "we often shoot with up to seven cameras on the action sequences. The action is crucial to the film and we have had helicopter shots, falls out of buildings, car chases, you name it. For me it was also crucial to get as much coverage as possible and therefore the use of seven cameras capturing different angles."

Cinematographer Nicolas Hofmeyer adds: "We decided to shoot Super 16mm and Super 35mm because for the wide shots we could get more detail if we shot in 35mm and for the dialogue shots on 16mm. The camera work and lighting is mainly dictated to by the location and setting. We wanted to retain the realness of the location and therefore use lots of natural light and mainly top lighting. The reduction of complicated set-ups also adds to the pace and energy of the film.


"We were also inspired by the photographs of Guy Tillum, who spent months photographing people in Hillbrow."

Hofmeyer elaborates further: "We also often shoot with two cameras on the same axis on different lenses, this also gives us options in the edit. We are shooting on three Aatons, two 16mm cameras and one 35mm camera. The film is visceral and comes from

the gut."

Ziman adds that because Hofmeyer comes from a documentary background, "this adds a documentary sensibility to the film. Nick was my first choice as DOP and I have to say he has done a fantastic job."

Ziman says that he believes the film will do well with local and international audiences. "It is a great story with explosive action told in an entertaining way. Without wanting to sound arrogant, I would pay money to see this film. After all, if you don't believe in your own product, there is no point."

Matatu concludes: "This is Muti Films' first film production and it has been a wonderful experience. All people involved have been 100% committed to making this a great film and we believe it will achieve what we set out to do, namely to make a great film that audiences want to see." 

CAST

Lucky Kunene – Rapulana Sepheimo
 Zakes Mbolelo – Ronnie Nyakale
 Leah Friedland – Shelly Meskin
 Nazareth – Jeffrey Sekele
 Tony Ngu – Prince Osuchukwa Swart
 Swart – Robert Hobbs
 Nomsa – Bubu Mazibuko
 Young Kunene – Jafta Mamabolo
 Young Zakes – Motlatsi Mahloko
 Josh Friedland – Daniel Buckland
 Sithole – Kenneth Nkosi

CREW

Writer/Director: Ralph Ziman
Producer: Tendeka Matatu
Executive Producers: Mark Vennis, Gary Phillips, Ronnie Apteker
DOP: Nicolas Hofmeyer
Editor: Megan Gill
Composer: Alan Ari Lazar
Art Director: Flo Ballack
Associate Producers: Jewels Satterfield, Mtutu Matshoba
Line Producer: Edwin Angless