

A tête-à-tête with director of *Mlungu Wam* Jenna Bass

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

3 Oct 2022

Horror film *Mlungu Wam* will be shown publicly in South Africa for the first time in October.



Source: Picture Supplied.

Set in post-apartheid South Africa, the psychological thriller is about Tsidi, a single mother who moves in with her estranged mother Mavis, a live-in domestic worker who cares obsessively for her catatonic white 'Madam'.

Bizcommunity caught up with director Jenna Bass to find out a bit more about the challenges filmmakers continue to face.

■ **What were you trying to communicate with this film?**

The kinds of films that interest me - in watching and making - are those that communicate several things, rather than just one message. That's probably because I believe life is complicated, and to do it justice, you have to show how things interlink and often get messy.

With *Mlungu Wam*, we wanted to make a film that sheds new light on the conversations around inequality and generational trauma that we may have had before, but have become numb to... and in so doing, remind ourselves of the actual horror we have normalised in our society.

■ **Why is it being shown publicly in October?**

You can watch films in all kinds of places and ways and still enjoy them. However, *Mlungu Wam* is a film that inspires a lot of emotions and thoughts and we believe that the very best experience of viewing the film is to share it with others - in the moment of watching it, but also to decompress afterwards, finding new meaning in the conversations that happen when you watch films communally. But also, October is perfect for watching the film around Halloween time!

■ ***The film came out last year, but is only being shown to SA audiences now. Why?***

Distributing films is usually a really long and complex process - especially for small, indie films like this. We rely on a strong festival run to get distribution, and this takes time.

We then have to negotiate the distribution itself - focusing on international first because at the moment there's less chance of a return at home - we hope we can change this in the future, especially if our release goes well.

■ ***What are the challenges that filmmakers face in SA?***

Distribution, as mentioned before, is a huge obstacle, even if you have a few films behind you. We have really very few avenues to not only reach audiences but to prove that making films is a sustainable business proposition. Each successful film we make challenges this, but it's a long, hard road.

In addition, I don't see the film industry as being any different from our society at large... it's equally as dysfunctional and in many of the same ways. There is a lack of access, resources and authentic transformation... The film industry will always struggle to truly transform until these changes are meaningfully visible in the environment it operates in.

■ ***What have been the highlights since it has been shown at festivals?***

Seeing how a small, low-budget film that is almost entirely in isiXhosa and deeply immersed in the specifics of local culture can resonate with audiences worldwide. It proves how wrong people are when telling young filmmakers that only generic storytelling can travel.

Also, we've loved seeing how the film has been embraced by such a variety of festivals and their respective audiences - from festivals that specialise in horror, African cinema or human rights - it proves that a single film can contain all of this and mean many things to different people.

■ ***How long did it take to bring the film to life?***

Approximately two years.

■ ***What are the plans for the future? For Jenna and the film.***

We'll be sharing the news about *Mlungu Wam's* streaming release very soon.... but it's still definitely worth coming out to watch it in person!

Me and Babalwa Baartman who is the co-producer and co-writer of the film have a new project in the works called *Eziko* - an Eastern Cape-set Afro-noir.

Tickets can be found [here](#).

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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