

MARTIN BOTHA

SOUTH AFRICAN QUEER
CINEMA: 1985–2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the result of more than three decades of in-depth research regarding the representation of gays and lesbians in African, Asian and Latin American cinema.

From 19–27 September 2014 I participated in *Queer Lisboa 18*, one of the most prominent Queer Cinema festivals in the World. I was part of the international jury and contributed a research article to one of the festival's publications titled *Queer Aesthetics in African Cinema*. Several panel discussions were devoted to the representation of LGBTQ+ identities in African cinema.

21st Century viewers are familiar with the overwhelming presence of LGBTQ+ characters from the USA, Europe, Asia and Latin America on our screens and the internet. Several participants at the film festival/conference however highlighted that it seems not to be the case in Africa

This book is the culmination and consolidation of 30 years of my personal research studies into the South African film industry, from my post-graduate studies to professional research at the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa and film projects at the University of Cape Town. This book is also a product of my work at the University of Cape Town, as well as a year long sabbatical granted by the institution during 2023. From 2006 till 2023 I presented a seminar on Queer Cinema as part of an Advanced Film studies course.

Since 1988 I have been involved in the South African film industry in a multiplicity of roles. From 1990 until 1992 I was part of extensive research for the Film and Allied Workers' Organisation (FAWO) regarding the restructuring of the South African film industry. For this project I studied the film industries of Canada, New Zealand, West Africa, Iceland, Australia, Germany and Italy. From 1993 until 1995 further studies were conducted into the film industries of China, France, Great Britain, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Cuba. I worked closely with the Film and Television Federation on the establishment of a South African Film Foundation for the administration and funding of the local film industry. During April and May 1995 I was co-opted onto the Film Subcommittee of the new democratic government's Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology's Task Group regarding

post-apartheid film policy. At the end of July 1995 I was seconded to the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to co-write the white paper for a future South African film industry. The draft was completed at the beginning of 1996.

I had also the opportunity to serve as a council member of the National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa (between 1999 and 2007), a sub-committee member of the NFVF regarding the establishment of a National Film School, and a director (representing the NFVF and formal training institutions) of the Cape Film Commission (1999-2003). I was also a board member of the Community Video Education Trust (CVET) in Cape Town, a community-based training institution. These roles provided me with an insider's perspective on the film industry of South Africa. The book has also been enhanced by personal diaries with entries on more than 10 000 films, including many South African films, which I wrote between 1975 and 2023.

During the past four decades numerous people had an impact on my research into South African cinema. On the academic side Prof. Hubert Dethier from Belgium, with whom I co-authored a book on the late South African director Manie van Rensburg, has been a great colleague and friend for more than 20 years. On the side of film critics the late William Pretorius's essays and reviews on South African and world cinema, as well as our lengthy conversations remain a great source of inspiration. I am also deeply indebted to Prof. Pieter Fourie, Klaus Eder, Johan Swinnen, Chris Broodryk, Reinert Lategan, Johan Blignaut, Jans Rautenbach, Ross Devenish, Tobie Cronjé, Lionel Ngakane, Louis du Toit, Regardt van den Bergh, Manie van Rensburg, Clarien Luttig, Wim Vorster, Lucia Saks, Laetitia Pople, Ricardo Peach, Moonyeen Lee, Katinka Heyns, Zulfah Otto-Sallies, Jacky Lourens, Mike Dearham, Adri van Aswegen, Astrid Treffry-Goatley and Braam Muller for discussions on South African cinema during the past three decades.

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Moses, M-Net's Jan du Plessis and Bonolo Modisakwane, Ingrid Thomson, Kenneth Kaplan, Oliver Schmitz, Julie Frederikse, Dirk de Villiers, Grethe Fox, Marina Bekker, Wilma Stockenström, Roy Armes, José Gatti, Angela van Schalkwyk, Michael Rogosin, Johan de Lange, Darrell Roodt, Trevor Steele Taylor, Aryan Kaganof, and Oscar Phasha.

I have been continuously indebted to my life partner of 42 years, Leon van der Merwe, for sustained encouragement regarding my career. My book is dedicated to him.

A huge thank you to Inger Smith for the permission to use a still from her film *Love Poem* for the cover page.

INTRODUCTION

South African film history is captured in less than 20 books. Developments in early South African cinema (1895–1940) have been chronicled in Thelma Gutsche's *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa: 1895–1940* (1946/72). Other significant studies include Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South Africa* (1989), Johan Blignaut and Martin Botha's *Movies Moguls Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979–1991* (1992), Martin Botha's edited volume, *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema After Apartheid* (2007), Jacqueline Maingard's *South African National Cinema* (2007), André le Roux and Lilla Fourie's *Filmverlede: Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse speelfilm* (1982), Peter Davis's *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (1996), Martin Botha and Adri Van Aswegen's *Images of South Africa: The Rise of the Alternative film* (1992), Tomaselli's compilation of revised and reworked papers and chapters published elsewhere, *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* (2006), Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela's edited volume, *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (2003), Martin Botha's *South African Cinema 1896–2010* (2012), Lucia Saks's *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation* (2010), Litheko Modisani's *South Africa's Renegade Reels: The Making and Public Lives of Black-Centered Films* (2013), Cara Moyer-Duncan's *Projecting nation: South African cinema after apartheid* (2020), as well as Leon van Nierop's *Daar doer in die fliek* (2016).

With the exception of Botha (2012), Green-Simms (2022), Ncube (2023) and a few postgraduate studies **almost nothing** has been written about the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in South African cinema. LGBTQ+ is commonly used to refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. It is something of an umbrella-term, aiming to integrate a variety of non-conforming or minority genders and sexual identities. However, the term is problematic, since it may be falsely understood as signifying homogeneity in a group that is massively diverse. The experiences of, for example, people who identify as lesbian vary tremendously, and are in-

fluenced (although not neatly dictated by) factors such as age, nationality, culture, class, race, political and religious beliefs, and so forth. Its use in this book is for the sake of convenience, and in doing so, the author by no means intends to ignore or downplay the multiplicity or specificity of individual identities and experiences. In his seminal article *Global Queering and Global Queer Theory: Thai [Trans]genders and [Homo]sexualities in World History* [Autrepart (49), 2009, p. 15-30] Peter A. Jackson challenges discourses with regard to the globalisation of homosexual and transgender identities.

Firstly, he referred to research, which has critiqued early accounts that explained global queering primarily in terms of the spread of Western, especially North American, sexual and gender cultures. Transnational similarities amongst queer cultures are indeed emerging. However, diverse new queer identities have also developed in other parts of the world like Asia that are not converging towards Western forms. Queer theory is one of the most contested movements in contemporary sexual politics and several scholars such as Jackson argues that global queering requires both empirical studies queer cultures beyond the West and a re-assessment of Western-derived queer theory. For the purpose of this book the term “Queer” is utilised to signify a space of inquiry from which various notions of gender, sexuality and identity (amongst others) are questioned. Furthermore, the term is utilised in referring to a variety of non-conforming or diverging identities and practices that oppose and fall outside of normative hegemonic notions of gender, sexual orientation and identity. These concepts are discussed in Chapter One.

Despite South Africa’s progressive constitution which prohibits discrimination against gays and lesbians, as well as a strong gay movement, South African cinematic images of gay men and women are limited and still at the margin of the South African film industry. One ends up with less than 20 short films, a few documentaries and less than 10 features with **openly** gay and lesbian characters in the past 127 years of South African cinema (see the FILMOGRAPHY). Under apartheid gay and lesbian voices in film and television were silenced. In a 20-year study of the representation of gays and lesbians in African, Asian and Latin American cinema Martin Botha (2003b; 2012; Botha & Swinnen 2010) has noted that homosexual experience is unique in South Africa, precisely because of South Africa’s history of racial division and subsequent resistance. South African gay and lesbian identities have been formed by a long history of racial struggle.

These gay identities were also deformed by an oppressive system, which classified homosexuals into those with freedom and those without. Apartheid