

### **Queer African Cinemas.**

Lindsey B. Green-Simms.

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Lindsey Green-Simms has been a leading interlocutor in queer African studies with a specialisation in queer African cinemas. *Queer African Cinemas* (2022) buttresses the comprehensive work that she has done in examining the representation of queer lived experiences in and through African films. Her previous work has focused on representations of queerness in West African cinemas, with a particular focus on Nollywood films (films produced in Nigeria) (see “Hustlers, Home-wreckers and Homoeroticism: Nollywood’s Beautiful Faces” [2012] and “Queer African Cinema, Queer World Cinema” [2018]). *Queer African Cinemas* marks an important and considerable expansion of this work by focusing on other regions of the African continent such as East Africa and South Africa. Green-Simms does not attempt to include North Africa in this book, because of the particular “linguistic, cultural, historical, and political differences that North Africa” presents, which makes this region fall beyond her “field of expertise” (214). Incidentally, my own work has focused on the “marginalisation, muting, and omission of the Maghreb from discourses that attempt to articulate non-conforming gender and sexual identities in Africa” (Ncube, “Renegotiating the Marginality of the Maghreb in Queer African Studies” 624) by focusing on queer representations in films from the Maghreb (see also Ncube, “Skin and Silence in Selected Maghrebian Queer Films”).

In *Queer African Cinemas*, Green-Simms is interested in how contemporary films reflect and draw on resistance to understand queer lived experiences on the continent. As she argues, to understand “all the complexities of resistance in queer African cinema, one needs to look both at and beyond the text and to the politics of production, consumption, and distribution” (7). Part of the complexity that she deals with in this book involves bringing into conversation films which have diametrically opposed visions of queer lived realities. It is a messy and daunting enterprise to read films that are largely homophobic together with “life-affirming” films. Green-Simms finds such a relational opposition to be generative in making queer lived realities possible and liveable. For example, reading a generally queer-affirming film such as *Rafiki* against some palpably homophobic Nollywood films is important in showing how these films practice, and confront each other’s, forms of resistance. Through such confrontation, it becomes possible to discern that “resistance does not follow any neat or discernible path, that it is never as simple as simply showcasing forms of agential resistance or celebrating transgression against power” (8).

Green-Simms’s central argument hinges on three broad questions. The first question asks, “What happens when intimacy, pleasure, small gestures of unruliness, practices of survival and fleeing, or even of negotiation, are imagined as conditions or resources for resistance?” (21). The second question focuses on “What happens when we see resistance not as the opposite of subordination and complacency but as something that is entangled with it?” (21). The last of the three questions is interested in understanding “What happens when we take the [...] framing of resistance as something that might be routine or vague, as something that hovers in the spaces of the meanwhile” (21). In thinking through these questions, Green-Simms proposes different “registers of resistance” (21). She considers the act of “registering” in its diverse nuances. For example, to register can refer to the process of taking stock and recording different kinds of resistance that are exemplified in African films. Registering is also taken to mean different sonic ranges. Engaging with the work of Tina Campt, Green-Simms engages with the ways in which there is an adjusting of senses to affective frequencies that are often captured in silent forms of art. For Green-Simms, “the lower frequencies, or registers, and inaudible expressions of interiority are also part of resistant practices and present in many queer African films” (21). In the different iterations of registering, there is an evocation of the idea that “just

as resistance can operate at different frequencies, so too can it register different meanings” (23). Ultimately, for Green-Simms, registering also serves “to indicate the way that the resistance might mentally register, or make sense, to a particular audience member” (24). The resistance captured in films is understood in different ways by different viewers. This points to the importance of being attuned to the politics of not just the production of queer films but also how they are consumed.

*Queer African Cinemas* is composed of four core chapters which each focus on a particular region of Africa. The first chapter is “Making Waves: Queer Eccentricity and West African Wayward Women”. The second is entitled “Touching Nollywood: From Negation to Negotiation in Queer Nigerian Cinema”. “Cutting Masculinities: Post-apartheid South African Cinema” is the penultimate chapter whilst the last is entitled “Holding Space, Saving Joy: Queer Love and Critical Resilience in East Africa”. In each of the chapters, Green-Simms is attentive to the historic and cultural specificities of each of the geographic regions. In such attention to the regional specificities, the book “reaches out to different sites to understand the multiple complexities and registers of resistance” (31) and heeds the call by Chiang and Wong (5) that queer (African) scholarship “must attend to the uneven temporal and spatial calculus of queerness congealing within the grids and gradations of geographical regions.”

Of the four chapters, I found the chapter on South African cinema offered fresh and insightful readings of three films which have previously attracted significant critical and academic attention: *Skoonheid* (2011) directed by Oliver Hermanus, *Inxeba* (2017) directed by John Trengove and Christiaan Olwagen’s *Kanarie* (2018). These films examine the violence of queer masculinities in different contexts in South Africa, during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. In examining these films, Green-Simms concentrates on the multifaceted and enduring enmeshment of class, homophobia, race, and masculinity in South Africa. She uses the concept of “cutting” to consider the “moments of breaking away or cutting away in the cinematic sense, but also to think about that which is left out or cut out, that which is cut short, that which cuts through, and that which is literally cut or wounded” (32). For example, the film *Inxeba* centres on ulwaluko, the traditional rite of passage of Xhosa people, which includes the circumcision of young men. Through an analysis of one of the queer protagonists in the film, Kwanda, Green-Simms shows that the

definition of masculinity is not based solely on the cutting of the foreskin. Rather, for Kwanda being a man involves “being the type of man he wants to be and psychologically liberating himself from versions of manhood he finds to be violent and problematic” (144). The analysis of *Inxeba* shows how it is possible to resist, or queer, traditional conceptions of masculinity. In Green-Simms’s argument, the space of ulwaluko has the potential of engendering affective relationships in which men can “care for and nurture one another” (144). The film explores how the characters of Vija and Xolani transgress the space of ulwaluko by forging a queer relationship, transient as it may be. Green-Simms argues that the three films discussed in this chapter offer manifold examples of how “cutting” makes it possible to “perform ways in which globally circulating queer male South African feature films simultaneously break away from and are contained by hegemonic racial and gendered structures” (32). *Queer African Cinemas* complicates our understanding of resistance as not simply transgressive but also as generative in the way it requires us to consider how “the precarities and vulnerabilities of queer African life exist alongside modes of survival, practices of care, and aspirational imaginaries” (9).

Read in conjunction with other recent books on queer representation in literature and film such as Keguro Macharia’s *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora* (2019), S. N. Nyeck’s *African(a) Queer Presence: Ethics and Politics of Negotiation* (2021) and Serena Dankwa’s *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana* (2021), Green-Simms’s book makes an invaluable intervention in the field of queer studies broadly and queer African studies in particular. *Queer African Cinemas* has a rich and robust theoretical underpinning, which, coupled with its innovative readings of the selected contemporary films, means that it explores in an engaging and accessible way how African queer worldmaking is inextricably linked to diverse iterations of resistance.

#### Works cited

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