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Peter Davis. *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa.* South Africa: Ravan Press, 1996. vii + 214 pages. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1162-9.

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In the Introduction to his book, *In Darkest Hollywood*, independent film maker Peter Davis states: "This book is about the power of cinema, and about the devastating impact of a generic 'Hollywood' that is constantly protesting that it is apolitical, even while it stamps stereotypes and projects behavior that is as profoundly political as it is influential." Davis's critique of Hollywood focuses on what he perceives as the legendary film industry's influence on South Africa's popular culture. Davis, however, resists using the term "cultural imperialism," stating that "people everywhere were not coerced into going to the cinema," but "eagerly allowed themselves to be seduced into an addiction that is well-nigh incurable" (p. 4). But, since Davis likens Hollywood's overwhelming presence in South Africa to empire building, one wonders whether the same explanation of "voluntary seduction" could be used to explain European colonization of Africa. The colonized must have "eagerly allowed themselves to be seduced" into a state of subjugation. This framework would make for an interesting and invigorating reading of cultural domination.

Davis argues that Hollywood's representation of Africa replicates European imperialism in Africa, because Europe's "literature of empire that had come into being during the nineteenth century found its second wind in the cinema" (p. 2), beginning with those made in "the earliest years of the century to the latest." Most of these films "emphasised the supremacy of the white race, directly and indirectly justifying conquest. Imperial and racist images, messages, codes, cyphers, attitudes and behaviour were copied indiscriminately." "Up to the present time, Hollywood perpetuates the ethos of empire," he adds. Consequently, Davis insists that, like Western subordination of Africans even in stories about themselves, Hollywood's portrayals of Africans placed them only at the periphery of the story. Africa, Davis says, "was a vast hunting ground for the white man, and when Hollywood seized on Africa, this was the Africa it offered" (p. 2). In Hollywood's Africa, "the pictures of the native people are scarcely distinguishable from those of the animal trophies."

But Davis is not interested in exploring Hollywood's representation of Africa, that is, the continent. His study is narrowly-focused, specifically on the impact of Hollywood on black South African culture and the "creation" of black South Africa by subsequent film makers through Hollywood's eyes. Consequently, Davis' "principal concern is with an image-bank relating to South Africa, especially the way that black South Africans have been presented on film, how the image-bank changed (or significantly failed to change) during this century" (p. 5). Furthermore, the study is not a "comprehensive history of cinema depicting that country [South Africa]." It is rather a study of "selected genre films," the author asserts. Also, the study does not include Afrikaans cinema or African-language film, because those "categories are relatively narrowcast."

Davis' book provides a detailed documentation and discussion of the history and often unexplained ideology behind several films about black South Africans and South Africa. The book explores nearly ninety years of film making which has transformed South Africa's popular culture. Using a combination of archival research and interviews, he unearths both the personal visions and politics of the film makers, the actors, as well as the interpersonal relationships and conflicts that developed during film making. Although the book occasionally reads like a popular magazine, especially when Davis delves into the private lives of the film makers, much of the information he provides about the historical and political conditions under which the films were made is not readily available to the novice of South African cinema. The filmography at the end of the book identifies about ninety-one films discussed, beginning with the D. W. Griffith's "The Zulu's Heart" (1908), which according to Davis is the earliest Western-made film about South Africa, to "The Power of One," the latest and a conflation of "Rocky" and Robinson Crusoe.

From the inception of cinematic production in and

about South Africa, the film producers and directors were whites (either expatriate or South African), while black South Africans and expatriate blacks were always cast in the roles of characters, a role which Davis describes as "adjuncts to whites." Despite this unequal relationship between the producers and actors/actresses there were a few periods which held out a ray of hope for the emergence of black South African "voice," or presence in the cinema. In the chapter "Towards a Black cinema in South Africa: The Promise of the 1950s," Davis asserts that the 1950s saw various experiments in "black cinema" articulated through a foregrounding of "African" thematic concerns and actors/actresses. For instance, Africans began to play central roles in feature-length entertainment films. He credits this development to the efforts of three "outsiders": script-writer Donald Swanson and actor Eric Rutherford who formed a triad with Gloria Green, the daughter of a wealthy South African Jewish family. These "outsiders" interrogated established Hollywood and white South African cinema traditions, which relegated Africans to the margins, locating them off-focus on the screen or almost outside the frame of the picture. According to Davis, these "outsiders" asked, "why not [have] ... a feature film, a full-length entertainment film, with African actors?"' (p. 22). Conceding that "it is certain the film they made, 'Jim Comes to Jo'burg,' was made with a particular kind of liberal sensibility, a kind that today is sometimes despised" (p. 21), Davis cautions, however, that "it is equally certain that without it, an important part of South Africa's black heritage would be totally lost to succeeding generations" (p. 21). His application of "black cinema," however, is problematic. He assumes that an African thematic content and an all-black cast signify "black cinema," even if the directors and producers are white. The "new" cinema is defined as "African cinema" because, at the time, black South Africans were "thrilled" to see themselves and their culture represented on stage, even when such representations "upgraded" Hollywood's earlier images of the culture.

A similar muddying of terms is also evident in the discussion of "buddies," Davis' term for the friendships and collaborations which developed across the color line in the films produced outside South Africa in the 1960s and later. These interracial friendships which developed despite the increased racial divisions within South Africa are noticeable in films such as "Dingaka" (1964), "The Wilby Conspiracy" (1975), "The Gods Must be Crazy" (1980), "Cry Freedom" (1987), and "A Dry White Season" (1989) to mention only a few. Davis explains that the cross-racial friendship existed only in a "fictive South Africa that bore little resemblance to reality" (p. 61). He adds that "the stories showed a South Africa where black/white friendship existed, by misrepresenting the harsh facts of real South African life."

Ironically, the seemingly collaborative interracial environment which the films depicted were often ruptured by the intrusion of the political and social realities of apartheid South Africa into the lives of the black cast members. Many of the black South Africans and expatriate blacks experienced various forms of racial discrimination, ranging from denial of accommodation in hotels to police harassment. Even as these actors and actresses were being recognized internationally, apartheid South Africa was denying their humanity. In addition, these black artists did not have the power to write or direct stories about their people.

On the contrary, in his concluding remarks, "A parting of the ways," Davis perceives an improvement in the representation of black South Africans since D. W. Griffith's "The Zulu's Heart" (1908). These improvements are evident especially in films produced by white South Africans. He cites "Shaka Zulu" (1986), "The Gods Must be Crazy" (1980), and "Mapantsula" (1988) as examples of films which end with choices for the Africans, pointing out that the choices made "are not those that whites in the films would prefer" (189). These choices, according to Davis, suggest "an advance in the way South Africa and its black inhabitants were perceived, at least by white South African film-makers" (p. 190). Certainly, while "Mapantsula's" anti-apartheid message may be appealing, the other two films generally draw harsh criticisms from audiences, although Davis seems to suggest otherwise.

Interestingly, while admitting that "Shaka Zulu" appropriated the old stereotypical divisions of Africans into the "Savage Other" and "Faithful Servant," Davis identifies this film as a "progressive" representation of Africans, because Shaka was "endowed with a personality, as opposed to making him a cypher." Truly, the film's representation of Shaka as a corrupt, dictatorial, maniacal, and blood-thirsty leader would make an ideal prototype for African leadership and identities in future films! The film was the project of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which under the apartheid government engaged in various forms of media propaganda for the then South African government. Davis' conclusions also seem to accept the refashioned "Noble Savage" or "Man Friday" of "The Gods Must be Crazy." We are invited to laugh and overlook the old exotic images of Africa–wild animals, landscapes, strange and warring peoples for the

sake of entertainment, especially, when the "Noble Savage" is given a personality and choice. One can not resist wondering about the impact of Jamie Uys' closeness to the apartheid hegemony on his construction of the Africa and Africans seen in his film.

Structurally, the book is divided into several chapters, although it is often unclear whether or not Davis meant these divisions as chapters. The chapters are occasionally separated by a collection of photographs of actors, film makers, and shots from some of the movies under discussion. In spite of these minor structural and perspectival weaknesses, the book is an invaluable resource of information on films about South Africa, especially those films which now may be archived or lost. In addition, Davis' interviews with several of the film makers, as well as his insightful discussions of the histories which inform both the subject matter, tone, and perspectives, help to foster more comprehensive interpretations of some of these familiar films. Above all, this book, indeed, reveals the overwhelming presence of Hollywood in South Africa's cinema culture. In general, *In Darkest Hollywood* is also a commentary on the consumption of Hollywood and American popular culture by many African national governments and their citizens.

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