
Reviewed by Mircea Lazar (Independent Scholar)

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Commissioned by Caitlin Barker (Michigan State University)

In *Queer African Cinemas*, Lindsey Green-Simms artfully melds together the fields of African, film, and LGBTQ studies to produce a groundbreaking study of films by and about queer Africans. In so doing, she advances a new understanding of the field of queer African film studies—one that is fundamentally rooted in the African continent and eschews the Western progressivist lens through which numerous scholars of the Global North have previously studied and written about the lived experiences of LGBTQ Africans. Green-Simms's primary argumentative innovation rests in the novel way she frames queer African resistance. Rather than the active, overt embodiment of LGBTQ resistance commonly depicted and celebrated in the West, African forms of queer resistance are often practiced from a position of vulnerability. Green-Simms call this “Afri-queer fugitivility,” a fascinating concept that expands our understanding of resistance to include taking flight, blending in, hiding, loving in the face of violence, and dreaming of a better life in a far-off land, among others. This framework of differing registers of resistance provides the reader with a roadmap to understanding queer African film that centers African histories, experiences, and embodied realities.

In her introduction, Green-Simms identifies three main categories of films by and about queer Africans: international art films, popular melodramas produced for local audiences, and documentaries by and about LGBTQ African communities. She traces the roots of queer African film to the 1997 Guinean film *Dakan*, hailed as the first West African film to depict and explore LGBTQ identities. Critically, Green-Simms also contextualizes the development of this media against the backdrop of rising tides of anti-queer violence and political homophobia—often cheered on by elected officials in search of a scapegoat or by American missionary groups engaged in furthering an activist agenda. Green-Simms makes it clear that contemporary depictions of homosexuality as “un-African” are paradoxical because that would render the experience of being a queer African an impossible reality (pp. 5, 37).

Each of *Queer African Cinema’s* four chapters focuses on a different region of sub-Saharan Africa and takes a unique approach to conceptualizing the queer films of that region. In chapter 1, Green-Simms directs her attention to West Africa and the filmmakers of Senegal and Ghana. On page 38, she makes a particularly incisive and illustrative observation that clarifies the key difference between the Francophone and Anglophone countries of this region: whereas films in French-speaking countries employ depictions of nonconforming women to further their critique of a cor-
rupt, postcolonial state, films in their English-speaking counterparts primarily deploy such portrayals in furtherance of a religious—particularly Pentecostal—ethic. In this chapter, Green-Simms argues that the visibility of lesbian women in these films, combined with their “eccentric” ways of being and interactions with the occult, provide an entry point to audiences to identify with queer readings and understandings of these depictions.

Chapter 2 takes a primarily historical look at the Nollywood movies of Nigeria’s thriving film industry. In so doing, Green-Simms argues that such films have typically included queer characters in order to make a conservative argument about the destructive nature of homosexuality, portraying it as something that must be feared. Nevertheless, it has provided a degree of visibility that can make queer Nigerians feel as if they are not alone. Since the 2014 signing of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, the Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS) has produced films that more directly challenge homophobia from a uniquely Nigerian context. For example, in We Don’t Live Here Anymore (2018), there is no outright declaration of support for homosexuality, and yet it is nevertheless clear that the gay characters are the real victims and that they have strong moral compasses—something that is very important in Nigerian society (pp. 111-112).

Chapter 3 examines South African LGBTQ films, many of which depict primarily male Afrikaners. While these films typically do not include robust representations of women’s perspectives, they do challenge hegemonic masculinity and homophobia—and they are particularly free to do so given South Africa’s liberal laws on LGBTQ rights. Nevertheless, the stark racial inequities of South African society are on full display, as it is primarily whites who are free to engage in more overt forms of queer empowerment and resistance.

Finally, chapter 4 investigates East African film from a different angle. Here, Green-Simms primarily discusses two queer film festivals, one in Kampala and the other in Nairobi, and the ways in which these physical gatherings of queer people constitute a form of visible contestation in countries known for brutal homophobic reprisals. She also situates two queer music videos in this same context. Quite compelling is Green-Simms’s discussion of Art Attack’s “Same Love (Remix)” video (20126), which retains Macklemore’s same-sex marriage advocacy while jettisoning his neoliberal, non-intersectional approach that sees the fight for racial justice as having occurred primarily in a previous time and place (pp. 174-176).

Green-Simms’s primary contributions in Queer African Cinemas lie in the ways she centers queer Africans and their lived experiences. By introducing the concepts of differing registers of resistance—including vulnerability—as well Afrique queer fugitivity, Green-Simms seeks to decolonize our perceptions of LGBTQ Africans by arguing that not all forms of resistance are overt and not everyone has the privilege, opportunity, and economic security to be out and proud. At the same time, she does so without ignoring the important transnational connections between queer Africans and LGBTQ and progressive communities outside Africa. Her research methods go beyond simple text and film analysis to include lengthy in-person fieldwork, including many interviews; this is something that lends tremendous credence to her work, particularly given the author’s position as an American scholar. In addition, Green-Simms’s artful descriptions of so many African films provides both a powerful counterweight to the erasure of queer African experiences, and it constitutes a compelling historical document for future research and study on this topic.

A couple of small organizational items may have improved the overall readability of the text. While Green-Simms discusses laws and attitudes in different African countries throughout the book whenever relevant to the discussion, it would have been helpful to have a brief summary of these in the introduction. Some elements of
chapters 2 and 3 depart in nature and scope from the rest of the text in ways that could have been better elucidated. The first half of chapter 2 chronicles the history of Nollywood films that depict homosexuality in a negative light. The author seems to argue that visibility is almost always preferable to invisibility, but this is deserving of further elaboration. This would have been an excellent spot for a discussion of Ashley Currier’s visibility/invisibility hypothesis—vis-à-vis African film—and the ways in which activists use both in order to advance their aims.[1] In chapter 3, it would have been warranted to include a more extensive discussion of the ways in which the experiences of queer white South Africans differ radically from those of other LGBTQ communities on the continent, making comparison to them challenging.

For far too long, queer African stories and experiences have gone unseen and untold. *Queer African Cinemas* is a welcome addition to a growing corpus of work on this subject.[2] It will be a valuable resource to future scholars for years to come.

Notes


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