



New Afrikaans-language cinemas / Nuwe Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigtings

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Introduction

This issue of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* offers four investigations of contemporary Afrikaans-language cinemas. The emphasis in this issue is on ‘the new’: new ways to interrogate Afrikaans-language films, or Afrikaans-language films that in a new way deal with themes or content that had not been explicitly addressed in Afrikaans-language cinema. Such is the variation of the themes and aesthetics of contemporary Afrikaans-language filmmaking that it is best to refer to Afrikaans-language *cinemas* in the plural. This plurality confirms the degrees of range and differences—in themes, aesthetics, intended audiences—that constitute contemporary Afrikaans-language filmmaking.

Keyan Tomaselli is particularly astute about the use of the plural ‘cinemas’ instead of the singular ‘cinema’, where cinemas “implies the study of form, political economy and the regional, national and local historical contexts a within which industries and their associated productions practices and aesthetic regimes are located” (“Africa, Film Theory and Globalization: Reflections on the First Ten Years of the ‘Journal of African Cinemas’” 18). Such an understanding of cinemas foregrounds the multiplicity of Africa and Africans “exuding thousands of identities, languages, ethnicities and societies exhibiting myriad values” (“Africa, Film Theory and Globalization” 18). The variation and difference that Tomaselli refers to above also apply to the context of the smaller, yet dynamic, Afrikaans-language film industry, which has increasingly shed a historically dominant conservatism (of politics, gender and sex) in favour of more progressive approaches to and representations of being and living in South Africa.

Some contemporary Afrikaans-language films are increasingly focused on the socio-political forces that shape life in South Africa, and that inform the identities of various Afrikaans-speaking individuals.


Consider this limited sample of Afrikaans-language films from 2016 to 2020: the crime drama *Noem my Skollie* (2016); the historical drama *Krotoa* (2017), with its critical lens on South Africans history and race; the social realism of *Tess* (2017); the queer dynamics of *Kanarie* (2018), *Die stropers* (2019) and *Moffie* (2019); the celebration of individual liberation and actualisation in *Wonderlus* (2018); the politically incisive science-fiction *Wesens* (2020) with its emphasis on emergent technology in place and mythmaking. These films often provide a reckoning with the past; give voice to marginalized communities (see also the socio-politically grounded thriller *Nommer 37*); promise aesthetic innovation; and display a considerable concern with gender, specifically masculinity. Taking the above titles into account, one might propose an Afrikaans-language queer cinema, for instance, as well as an Afrikaans cinema of critical historical retrospection.

A selective cursory glance at Afrikaans-language films from 1994 to 2022

In his report on the notion of an African film history, Michael Eckardt notes that “South Africa experienced all stages of the historic development of film and cinema almost simultaneously with Europe or the USA” (75). South African film history is no less impressive than those of other national cinemas. Martin Botha recounts how “[i]deology and capital came together to create a national cinema that would reflect South Africa during the Verwoerdian regime of the sixties” (4). The myriad challenges that politically liberal South African filmmakers faced have been well-documented and will not be recited here.

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Throughout seismic political change, Afrikaans-language films have persevered. *Paljas* (1997) was a major milestone, bringing Katinka Heyns back into the film scene five years after *Die storie van Klara Viljee* (1992) in a country that had publicly entered a new political era. Between Heyns's films, another Afrikaans-language film made headlines: the satirical comedy *Lipstiek dipstiek* (1994), written and directed by Willie Esterhuizen.

Esterhuizen would prove to be one of the most enduring of Afrikaans filmmakers. His ability to work in limited locations with a minor budget is a boon to producers (he is still behind the camera for Afrikaans television series for kykNet). Esterhuizen's films were often maligned for indulging juvenile sexual innuendo. The similarly sexually playful *Kaalgat tussen die daisies* (1997) directed by Koos Roets did not achieve the same box-office heights as Esterhuizen's film. Martin Botha takes *Lipstiek dipstiek* to task for its flamboyant stereotypes, while *Kaalgat tussen die daisies* in the end completely nullifies its gay representation when it is revealed that a major gay character was an undercover policeman pretending to be a drag queen during an official police investigation (Botha 5). In some of the most popular South African films from 1980s and 1990s, the comedies of Leon Schuster, audiences were subjected to numerous "homophobic and derogatory fag jokes and references" (5) and racial stereotypes.

After the release of *Paljas* in 1997, not a single Afrikaans feature film was released into commercial cinemas for a number of years (Steyn 67). Although it underperformed at the box-office and underwhelmed critics, it was Gustav Kuhn's drama *Ouma se slim kind* (2007) that signaled the return of the Afrikaans feature film and heralded a new era in Afrikaans cinema. This period drama identified the dominant 1940s Afrikaner culture as the cause of the failure of any promise of non-racialism in South Africa (Botha, *South African Cinema 1896–2010* 188). For most part, from 2007 until 2014 Afrikaans cinema was artistically and creatively limited. While Jans Rautenbach and Manie van Rensburg's politically dissident voices in Afrikaans filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s were innovative and ambitious, this new era of Afrikaans cinema seemed primarily devoid of sophisticated and powerful political commentary. Mainstream Afrikaans cinema churned out a deluge of nostalgic musicals (*Liefeling* 2010; *Ek lief jou* 2011; *Platteland* 2011; *Pretville* 2012) that often featured popular singers in their cast, as well as more of Willie Esterhuizen's scatological comedies (*Poena is koning* 2008; *Vaatjie sien sy gat* 2008; *Stoute boudjies* 2010).

A number of high-profile literary adaptations updated for contemporary audiences such as *Wolwedans in die skemer* and *Ballade vir 'n enkeling* banked on the (nostalgic) popularity of its source materials on Afrikaans radio and television. However, this period also delivered the first of the company Bosebok Ses Films' feature films, *Roepman* (2011), adapted from the novel by Jan van Tonder; Katinka Heyns's latest return to cinemas, the Eugène Marais-drama *Die wonderwerker* (2011); the culturally subversive entertainment-industry spoof *100 Meter leeuloop* (2013); and, arguably most significantly, Oliver Hermanus's exploration of Afrikaans identity, queer desire and repression in *Skoonheid* (2011).

Before *Skoonheid*, a number of South African films had explored queer identities in South Africa. Melanie Chait's short film *Out in Africa* (1989) was the first South African film to openly deal with queer liberation struggles in South Africa (Botha, *South African Cinema* 242). Other notable queer-themed films of the 1980s included two 1988 releases, Cedric Sundstrom's horror *The Shadowed Mind* and Helena Nogueira's drama *Quest for Love*. However, "Afrikaans characters were always heterosexual, and although a film like *Forty Days* hinted at the 'perverse' homosexual subcultures of Hillbrow, it remained virtually unsaid" (Botha 4). After 1994, Jack Lewis and John Greyson's *Proteus* (2003) was a landmark queer film. Jesse Arsenaault lauds this South-African Canadian co-production for its multiple levels of queering, especially its queering of South African history and its archives, and of particular landscapes such as Robben Island. The film is about the real-life intimate, sexual relationship between a Khoi man, Claas Blank, and the white sailor Rijkhaart Jacobsz, whom he meets on Robben Island in 1735 (Lewis). Anachronistically navigating its period trappings, *Proteus* "places queerness within South Africa's historical narrative where it has been effaced and queers the landscape of South Africa's history by putting a same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa's post-apartheid national identity (and, I add here, a particularly masculine identity bound up with anti-apartheid heroism)" (Arsenaault 41). The film foregrounds how history, identity and language itself are, as Botha (*South African Cinema* 247) puts it, unstable sets of signifiers. For Arsenaault, *Proteus* shows how queer desire can constitute new subjectivities (56).

2015 was a turning point in Afrikaans feature filmmaking, with the release of Jans Rautenbach's elegiac *Abraham* and Brett Michael Innes' *Sink*, as well as Sara Blecher's adaptation of the non-fiction bestseller *Dis ek, Anna* (2015). In 2016, *Johnny is nie dood nie* was awarded top awards at the annual Silwerskermfees. The nostalgia and cheap laughs popular in previous years had been challenged, if certainly not wholly replaced, by a more aesthetically sophisticated and politically astute filmmaking that addressed identity in South Africa across a

number of dimensions including gender, race and class. In 2020, only two major Afrikaans feature films made it to commercial and established art-house cinema screens due to COVID-19 necessitated lockdowns and restrictions: the period drama *Toorbos*, based on the novel by Dalene Matthee, and the light romantic drama *Vergeet my nie*. The science fiction found footage film *Wesens* also saw a limited release in 2020.

The continuing COVID-pandemic and national lockdown periods meant that in 2021, only two Afrikaans feature films reached mainstream cinema screens: the critically maligned, commercially underperforming comedy dramas *Kaalgat Karel* and *Klein Karoo 2*. In 2022 the ecological drama *Gaia* and the drag-thriller *Stiekyt* would garner critical acclaim on the festival circuit. *Stiekyt* was at the centre of the controversial, bizarre decision by the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) to not enter a South African film into the Best International Feature Category for the 2023 Academy Awards (Vourlias).

Towards selected new Afrikaans-language films

In their articles, the contributors to this theme issue honour the primary task of theory, which, as Eugenie Brinkema reflects in her perceptive review of Brian Price's monograph *A Theory of Regret*, consists of "contemplation, speculation, to look at something (otherwise; *in a new light*)" (185, emphasis added). For Nico Baumbach, the film theorist's work is overtly ideological: the figure of the film theorist analyses the work of ideology and also how such work on ideology enables or facilitates new cinematic ideas (163).

The articles in this issue are demonstrations of theory, description, and ideological critique. From diverse backgrounds and in distinct voices, a number of the authors in this issue are emerging scholars who may not be able to speak Afrikaans and watch Afrikaans films without subtitles, yet encounter resonances with the films' themes and ideological intricacies. These authors wrestle with the complexities of 'Afrikaner' and 'Afrikaans' past and present, demythologizing and challenging historically dominant ideas about gender, identity and nationalism.

In their critical engagements with selected Afrikaans-language feature films, the authors pay particular attention to the formal or stylistic qualities of the films in question, and describe these forms and creative expressions to the reader. As Timothy Corrigan notes, "films have innumerable qualities and ways of being rhetorically described" (473); Corrigan himself follows Lesley Stern's discussion of description where description is "always rhetorical" as all films are "live in the world" and "open out onto other films, worlds, histories, political landscapes" (qtd in Corrigan 473).

Thomas Nagel in his essay "Sexual Perversion" (1969) maintained that "the object of sexual attraction is a particular individual, who transcends the properties that make him attractive" (8). Nagel's description here applies to the film *Skoonheid*, where middle-aged Francois becomes infatuated and then obsessed with the younger man Christian, whom Francois sees as irredeemably free and thus irresistible. Emmanuel Wanyonyi considers this film from a slow cinema lens, offering a different way to contemplate the film's representation of queerness and repression. Wanyonyi correctly notes that *Skoonheid* has already enjoyed much scholarly attention in its depiction of repressed queer desire.

Wanyonyi's reading of the film as slow cinema, and of locating its protagonist Francois at the centre of the film's deliberate character and plot indeterminacy, opens up a new way in which to think about and engage with this landmark film. Structured as a thriller indebted to Alfred Hitchcock, *Skoonheid*'s intrigue unfolds slowly as its insular protagonist experiences a crisis of existence in his yearning to be free from a particular inheritance of repression and conservatism. For Wanyonyi, the queer dynamics that drive the film and its protagonist are however only part of *Skoonheid*'s vitality. Wanyonyi argues that *Skoonheid* invites the viewer's active contemplation of the film's thematic emphasis on alienation, incommunicability and the existential quandary.

In addition to the queer currents of *Skoonheid*, a focus on contemporary Afrikaner masculinity and its discontents are at the centre of two contributions to this issue: Gibson Ncube's examination of queerness, libidinality and religion in the feature film *Kanarie* and the documentary film *Skeef*, and Danel Boshoff and Annemi Conradie's exploration of various forms and performances of masculinity in the film *Die stropers*. As these articles are explorations of identity expressions and negotiation, these queer-centered articles flank Danielle Britz and Chris Broodryk's investigation of post-heroism in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers*.

Kanarie sets its story of a young white gay Afrikaans man, Johan Niemand, who joins the South African Defence Force (SADF), in small-town Afrikaner religious conservatism. (The surname "Niemand" directly translates as "nobody", which emphasizes the fluidity of this character's becoming and the unfixedness of his identity.) Gibson Ncube's exploration of queer identities in *Kanarie* and *Skeef* highlight the tensions of being queer

and religious in a context where homosexuality and the Afrikaans churches remains an unresolved subject. Ncube maintains that these two films “gesture, in generative ways, to how queerness and Christianity can be rendered compatible within Afrikaans-speaking societies of South Africa”. In his sensitive engagement with both films, Ncube finds the encouraging presence of queer agency, and locates the libidinal as crucial in “the transgression of heteronormative Christian norms”.

The small-town conservatism in *Kanarie* is echoed in the covert family tensions in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and the rural, farm-based repression in *Die stropers*. In the film *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux*, the farm is where long-hidden family secrets are finally revealed, and a hero is demythologized when his failures are finally exposed. Julie Reid’s investigation into contemporary (counter) mythologies of race identifies the figure of South African rugby legend Francois Pienaar as a “good white” in Clint Eastwood’s film *Invictus* (2010). That Pienaar is a “good white” is beyond a doubt as he “accepts the new dispensation, shows sympathy for the past suffering of Mandela and attempts to quell the racial animosity shown by his white team-mates” (56–7). As Jesse Arsenault points out, “figures like Mandela embody a sort of politically aseptic and supremely benevolent form of masculinity in part because of their heteronormativity” (40). (It helps that in addition to this sanitised depiction of Mandela, Eastwood peppers the film with feel-good soundbites about a ‘new’ South Africa and shared humanity.) Even in this American-made film, viewers encounter the Afrikaans white man in heroic form; this is likely due as much to the American propensity for emotionally uplifting sport films about heroes defeating the odds as it does with a broader depiction of white heroism in contexts of profound racial inequality such as South Africa.

It is this particular representational strategy that Danielle Britz and Chris Broodryk address in the Bosbok Ses film *Stuur Groete aan Mannetjies Roux*, bringing to the film the conceptual framework of post-heroism developed by Thomas Elsaesser. The authors demonstrate that this film stands in contrast to many other South African films centred on a noble hero figure often seen serving national(ist) interests, by instead presenting a post-hero whose personal and public failures serve as an entry point for greater political exploration. This type of exploration is also central to the thematic dynamics of the other Bosbok Ses film *Verraaiers*, which takes place during the South African War. Here, too, key characters emerge as post-heroic figures who embody and invite multiple perspectives about major national events and themes such as the war and the notion of treason.

The queer-centred film *Die stropers* has a somber aesthetic that often evokes a claustrophobia similar to Jason Xenopoulos’s *Promised Land* (2002). Similar to *Promised Land*, *Die stropers* also sets its narrative events on a farm in South Africa. Adriaan Steyn observes that the farm remains, for a number of Afrikaners, “the bastion of a unique way of life” (68). In certain Afrikaans-language feature films such as the thriller *Die laaste tango* (2013) and the romantic comedies *Semi-soet* (2012) and *Vrou soek boer* (2014), the farm is the site of heteronormative romantic activity or nostalgia (68–70). Steyn finds that these (and many other) films construct the farm and countryside as “authentic and wholesome” (70), in contrast to the comparative moral devaluation of urban spaces (also see Keyan Tomaselli’s discussion of the rural-based *Eden* film, its nostalgic sheen and its character types in *Encountering Modernity*, 143–4).

This dichotomy in Afrikaans-language films is an established representational strategy that found an invigorated resonance with some contemporary South African audiences. However, the films discussed on the following pages explicitly or implicitly challenge the idea of the farm, countryside or rural space as somehow more “authentic and wholesome” than the city. In *Skoonheid*, the mundanity of Bloemfontein and surrounds cannot completely repress queerness (later in the film, Cape Town is briefly shown to embrace queer identities). In *Kanarie*, Johan Niemand traverses small-town conservatism and military hypermasculinities towards queer self-actualisation. In *Die stropers*, the cultural purity and disciplined labour leave a space for overt and covert subversion, as queer masculinities threaten to destabilise traditionally dominant forms of masculinity.

Emphasising the site of the farm and the socio-cultural conservatism of rural Afrikaans communities, Danel Boshoff and Annemi Conradie critically discuss the ways in which agents in such conservative contexts can offer productive (if latent) resistance to the idealized heteronormative masculinity traditionally associated with the Afrikaner. In *Die stropers*, adoptive brothers Janno and Pieter embody different responses to Afrikaner conservatism’s insistence on heteronormativity. As Boshoff and Conradie put it in their article, “their [Janno’s and Pieter’s] navigation of hegemony in this white, Afrikaner community through resistance and consent, might point to a claiming of space for queer identities and the continued transmutation of hegemonic masculinity”.

Conclusion

The arguments put forward in this theme issue open up a range of further research possibilities related to identity expression, representation and negotiation in contemporary Afrikaans-language cinemas. Beyond such a critical textual engagement with Afrikaans cinemas, there is also the political economies of Afrikaans filmmaking that could benefit from renewed scholarly interest. In addition, the films discussed in this issue are all traditional cinema releases; however, across television and digital media, there are new Afrikaans-language cinemas that arose in tandem with specific technologies as well as major events such the lockdown periods during the national response to the COVID-19 global pandemic—for example, kykNet's *storiefilms* (story films).

I would like to thank Jacomien van Niekerk for her sustained support and patience in guiding this issue to completion. I could not have asked for a more committed and clear-sighted colleague. I extend my gratitude to the former Dean of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, Vasu Reddy, for suggesting this themed issue to me and the editor. Finally, I would like to thank the contributors to this issue for their collectively lucid and critically informed engagement with what is considered 'new' in selected films in Afrikaans-language cinemas. The feedback we received from peer reviewers was without exception generous and acute.

Finally, I also give thanks to those colleagues who urgently wanted to contribute to this themed issue, but whose developing thought and scholarship were too severely impeded by post-COVID health and wellbeing challenges, as well as by the neoliberal nature of the tertiary higher education sector, to do so.

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Inleiding

Hierdie temanommer van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* bestaan uit vier ondersoeke na kontemporêre Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigtings (in Engels *cinemas* genoem). Die klem in hierdie uitgawe is op 'die nuwe': nuwe maniere om Afrikaanstalige rolprente te ondersoek, of te kyk na dié wat op 'n nuwe manier temas of inhoud hanteer wat nog nie eksplisiet in Afrikaanstalige rolprente aangepak is nie. Die temas en estetika van kontemporêre films in Afrikaans is so gevarieerd dat dit die beste is om na Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigtings in die meervoud te verwys. Hierdie pluraliteit bevestig die grade van omvang en verskille wat betref die temas, estetika en beoogde gehore van kontemporêre Afrikaanstalige rolprentproduksie.

Keyan Tomaselli is besonder skerpsinnig in sy gebruik van die meervoud *cinemas* in plaas van die enkelvoud *cinema*, waar *cinemas* "die studie impliseer van vorm, politieke ekonomie en die streeks-, nasionale en plaaslike historiese kontekste waarbinne industrieë en hul gepaardgaande produksiepraktyke en estetiese regimes hul bevind" ("Africa, Film Theory and Globalization: Reflections on the First Ten Years of the 'Journal of African Cinemas'" 18).¹ Sodanige begrip van *cinemas* belig die veelheid van Afrika en Afrikane "wat duisende identiteite, tale, etnisierte en samelewings uitstraal wat talle waardes vertoon" ("Africa, Film Theory and Globalization" 18). Die verskeidenheid en verskil waarna Tomaselli hierbo verwys, is ook van toepassing op die konteks van die kleiner, maar tog dinamiese, Afrikaanstalige filmbedryf, wat toenemend 'n histories dominante konserwatisme (van die politiek, gender en geslag) afskud ten gunste van meer progressiewe benaderings tot en voorstellings van bestaan en leef in Suid-Afrika.

Sommige hedendaagse Afrikaanstalige rolprente fokus toenemend op die sosio-politieke kragte wat vorm gee aan die lewe in Suid-Afrika, en wat die identiteit van verskeie Afrikaanssprekende individue rig.

Wat is dan nuut in die Afrikaanstalige rolprentwese? Dit is in hierdie opsig moontlik om te verwys na onder meer die volgende voorbeelde van Afrikaanstalige films van 2016 tot 2020: die misdaaddrama *Noem my Skollie* (2016); die historiese drama *Krotoa* (2017), met sy kritiese lens op Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis en op ras; die sosiale realisme van *Tess* (2017); die queer-dinamika van *Kanarie* (2018), *Die stropers* (2019) en *Moffie* (2019); die viering van individuele bevryding en aktualisering in *Wonderlus* (2018); die politieke insiggewende wetenskapsfiksie *Wesens* (2020) met sy klem op ontluikende tegnologie in plek en mitevorming. Hierdie films behels dikwels 'n afrekening met die verlede; gee 'n stem aan gemarginaliseerde gemeenskappe (let ook op die sosiopolitiese gegronde riller *Nommer 37*); belowe estetiese vernuwing; en gaan krities om met geslag, spesifiek manlikheid. Met inagneming van bogenoemde titels, kan 'n mens byvoorbeeld 'n queer Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigting voorstel, asook een wat krities omgaan met die verlede.

'n Selektiewe, oorsigtelike blik op Afrikaanstalige rolprente van 1994 tot 2022

In sy verslag oor die idee van 'n Afrika-filmgeskiedenis, merk Michael Eckardt op dat “Suid-Afrika alle fases van die historiese ontwikkeling van film en filmtradisies byna gelyktydig met Europa of die VSA meegemaak het” (75). Die Suid-Afrikaanse filmgeskiedenis is nie minder indrukwekkend as dié van ander nasionale filmgeskiedenis nie. Martin Botha vertel hoe “[i]deologie en kapitaal bymekaargekom het om 'n nasionale filmtradisie te skep wat Suid-Afrika tydens die Verwoerdiaanse regime van die sestigerjare sou weerspieël” (4). Die talle uitdagings wat politieke liberale Suid-Afrikaanse filmmakers in die gesig gestaar het, is reeds goed gedokumenteer en sal nie hier bespreek word nie.

Die Afrikaanse rolprentbedryf het seismiese veranderinge oorleef. *Paljas* (1997) was 'n belangrike mylpaal, wat Katinka Heyns vyf jaar ná *Die storie van Klara Viljee* (1992) teruggebring het na die filmwêreld in 'n land wat 'n nuwe politieke era betree het. Tussen hierdie twee films trek 'n ander Afrikaanstalige film die aandag: die satiriese komedie *Lipstiek dipstiek* (1994), uit die pen van Willie Esterhuizen wat ook die regie behartig het. Esterhuizen sou een van die mees blywende filmmakers in Afrikaans word. Sy vermoë om in beperkte ruimtes en met 'n skamele begroting te werk, is 'n seën vir vervaardigers (hy is steeds agter die kamera vir Afrikaanstalige televisiereekse op kykNET). Esterhuizen se films is dikwels aangevat vir die uitbeelding van kinderagtige seksuele innuendo daarin. *Kaalgat tussen die daisies* (1997) onder regie van Koos Roets wat op soortgelyke speelse wyse seksuele temas aangeroei het, het nie dieselfde loketsukses as Esterhuizen se film behaal nie. Martin Botha kritiseer *Lipstiek dipstiek* vir die gebruik van flambojante stereotipes, terwyl *Kaalgat tussen die daisies* uiteindelik sy gay-voorstelling verydel wanneer onthul word dat 'n prominente gay karakter 'n geheime polisieman is wat tydens 'n amptelike polisie-onderzoek voorgee dat hy 'n fopdosser is (Botha 5). In sommige van die gewildste Suid-Afrikaanse films uit die 1980's en 1990's is gehore onderwerp aan die komedies van Leon Schuster met hul talle “homofobiese en neerhalende grappies en verwysings na *fags*” (5) en rasse-stereotipes.

Ná die vrystelling van *Paljas* in 1997 is nie 'n enkele Afrikaanstalige speelfilm vir 'n aantal jare in kommersiële teaters vrygestel nie (Steyn 67). Alhoewel dit onderpresteer het by die kaartjieskantoor en resensente nie juis daardeur beïndruk was nie, was dit Gustav Kuhn se drama *Ouma se slim kind* (2007) wat gedui het op 'n terugkeer van die Afrikaanse speelfilm en het dit 'n nuwe era in die Afrikaanse rolprentbedryf ingelui. Hierdie periodedrama het die dominante Afrikanerkultuur van die 1940's uitgesonder as die oorsaak van die mislukking van enige belofte van nie-rassigheid in Suid-Afrika (Botha, *South African Cinema 1896–2010* 188). Van 2007 tot 2014 was daar meestal 'n tekort aan kreatiewe en kunstige visie in die Afrikaanse rolprentwese. Jans Rautenbach en Manie van Rensburg se politieke andersdenkende stemme was innoverend en ambisieus in Afrikaanse rolprentvervaardiging in die 1970's en 1980's, maar in die era wat daarop volg, was die Afrikaanstalige filmbedryf hoofsaaklik sonder gesofistikeerde en kragtige politieke kommentaar. In die hoofstroom van die bedryf het 'n oorvloed nostalgiese musiekblyspele die silwerdoek gehaal (*Liefeling* 2010; *Ek lief jou* 2011; *Platteland* 2011; *Pretville* 2012) wat dikwels gewilde sangers in hul rolverdeling ingesluit het, sowel as meer van Willie Esterhuizen se skatologiese komedies (*Poena is koning* 2008; *Vaatjie sien sy gat* 2008; *Stoute boudjies* 2010).

'n Aantal hoëprofiel literêre verwerkings soos *Wolwedans in die skemer* en *Ballade vir 'n enkling* wat bygewerk is vir hedendaagse gehore het staatgemaak op die (nostalgiese) gewildheid van die bronmateriaal op Afrikaanse radio en televisie. Hierdie periode het egter ook die volgende rolprente opgelewer: *Roepman* (2011), aangepas uit die roman deur Jan van Tonder; Katinka Heyns se jongste film, die Eugène Marais-drama *Die wonderwerker* (2011); die kultureel ondermynende vermaakbedryf-*spoof* *100 Meter leculoop* (2013); en waarskynlik die belangrikste, Oliver Hermanus se verkenning van Afrikaneridentiteit, queerverlange en onderdrukking in *Skoonheid* (2011).

Voor *Skoonheid* het 'n aantal Suid-Afrikaanse films reeds queeridentiteite in Suid-Afrika ondersoek. Melanie Chait se kortfilm *Out in Africa* (1989) was die eerste Suid-Afrikaanse film wat openlik die stryd om queerbevryding aangepak het (Botha, *South African Cinema* 242). Ander films uit die tagtigerjare met dié tema is die riller *The Shadowed Mind* van Cedric Sundstrom en Helena Nogueira se drama *Quest for Love*, albei uit 1988. Volgens Botha (4) was Afrikaanse karakters egter altyd heteroseksueel, en hoewel 'n film soos *Forty Days* in die rigting van die 'perverse' homoseksuele subkulture van Hillbrow geskimp het, is dit so te sê verswyg. Ná 1994 was Jack Lewis en John Greyson se *Proteus* (2003) 'n belangrike queerfilm. Jesse Arsenaault loof hierdie Suid-Afrikaans-Kanadese koproduksie vir sy veelvuldige vlakke van queering, veral die queering van die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis en sy argiewe, en veral landskappe soos Robbeneiland. Die film handel oor die werklike intieme, seksuele verhouding tussen 'n Khoi-man, Claas Blank, en die wit matroos Rijkhaart Jacobsz, wat hy in 1735 op Robbeneiland ontmoet (Lewis). *Proteus* verken op anachronistiese wyse die gegewe van die periode en “plaas queerheid binne

Suid-Afrika se historiese narratief waar dit verwerp is en verkeer die landskap van Suid-Afrika se geskiedenis deur 'n romanse tussen twee mense van dieselfde geslag en verskillende kulture en rasse in 'n ruimte te plaas wat deurslaggewend is vir Suid-Afrika se nasionale identiteit ná apartheid (en hier voeg ek by, 'n besonder manlike identiteit vervleg met anti-apartheidsheldisme)" (Arsenault 41). Die film belig hoe geskiedenis, identiteit en taal self, soos Botha (*South African Cinema* 247) dit stel, "onstabiele betekenisstelle" is. Volgens Arsenault wys *Proteus* juis hoe queerverlange nuwe subjektiwiteite kan vorm (56).

2015 was 'n keerpunt in die vervaardiging van die Afrikaanse speelfilm met die vrystelling van Jans Rautenbach se elegiese *Abraham* en Brett Michael Innes se *Sink*, sowel as Sara Blecher se verwerking van die niefiksie-topverkoper *Dis ek, Anna* (2015). In 2016 word *Johnny is nie dood nie* bekroon met toekennings by die jaarlikse Silwerskermfees. Die nostalgie en goedkoop humor wat in vorige jare oorheers het, is uitgedaag, indien nie selfs heeltemal vervang nie deur 'n meer esteties-ge sofistikeerde en polities skerp rolprentkuns wat verskeie aspekte van Suid-Afrikaanse identiteit, waaronder gender, ras en klas, verken. Weens die inperkingsmaatreëls wat COVID-19 meegebring het, is slegs twee belangrike Afrikaanse speelfilms in 2020 uitgereik, naamlik die periodedrama *Toorbos*, gebaseer op die roman deur Dalene Matthee, en die ligte romantiese drama *Vergeet my nie*. Die wetenskapsfiksie film *Wesens* het in 2020 'n beperkte vrystelling beleef.

Die voortslepende COVID-pandemie het tot gevolg gehad dat slegs twee Afrikaanstalige films in 2021 hoofstroomrolprentteaters bereik het: die komediedramas *Kaalgat Karel* en *Klein Karoo 2* het kommersieel onderpresteer en erg onder kritiek deurgeloo. In 2022 is die ekologiese drama *Gaia* en die fopdosriller *Stiekyt* gunstig by rolprentfeeste ontvang. *Stiekyt* was sentraal in die omstrede, bizarre besluit deur die National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) om nie 'n Suid-Afrikaanse film in te skryf vir die Best International Feature Category vir die 2023 Academy Awards nie (Vourlias).

Op weg na geselekteerde nuwe Afrikaanstalige rolprente

Die bydraers tot hierdie temanommer huldig die primêre taak van teorie. Eugenie Brinkema se waarneming in haar oorsig van Brian Price se monografie *A Theory of Regret* is dat teorie bestaan uit "nadenke, spekulatie, om na iets te kyk (anders; in 'n nuwe lig)" (185, beklemtoning bygevoeg). Vir Nico Baumbach is die werk van die filmteoretikus openlik ideologies: die filmteoretikus ontleed die werk van ideologie en ook hoe sulke werk oor ideologie nuwe filmiese idees moontlik maak of fasiliteer (163).

Die artikels in hierdie uitgawe is demonstrasies van teorie, beskrywing en ideologiese kritiek. Die bydraers tot hierdie uitgawe is opkomende kundiges wat uit uiteenlopende agtergronde en in verskillende stemme skryf. Sommige van hulle kan moontlik nie Afrikaans kan praat of Afrikaanse films sonder onderskrifte kan kyk nie, maar tog vind hulle aanklank by die films se temas en ideologiese verwickeldhede. Hierdie skrywers worstel met die kompleksiteite van 'Afrikaners' en 'Afrikaans' van die verlede en hede, terwyl hulle die histories-dominante idees oor gender, identiteit en nasionalisme demitologiseer en uitdaag.

In hul kritiese betrokkenheid by geselekteerde Afrikaanstalige speelfilms gee die skrywers veral aandag aan die formele of stilistiese kwaliteite van die betrokke films, en beskryf hierdie vorme en kreatiewe uitdrukkings aan die leser. Soos Timothy Corrigan opmerk, "beskik films oor 'n magdom kwaliteite en maniere om retories beskryf te word" (473); Corrigan gebruik Lesley Stern se formulering wat beskrywing beskou as altyd retories aangesien alle films "lewendig in die wêreld is" en "oopmaak na ander films, wêreld, historiese, politieke landskappe" (aangehaal in Corrigan 473).

In sy opstel "Sexual Perversion" van 1969 het Thomas Nagel aangevoer dat "die voorwerp van seksuele aantrekkingskrag 'n spesifieke individu is, wat die eienskappe oortref wat hom aantreklik maak" (8). Nagel se beskrywing is hier van toepassing op die film *Skoonheid*, waarin die middeljarige Francois verlief raak op en dan geobsedeer raak met die jonger man Christian, vir wie Francois as onherroeplik vry en dus onweerstaanbaar beskou. Emmanuel Wanyonyi analiseer hierdie film vanuit die invalshoek van "slow cinema" en bied 'n ander manier om na te dink oor die film se voorstelling van queerheid en onderdrukking. Wanyonyi merk tereg op dat *Skoonheid* reeds baie intellektuele aandag geniet het in die uitbeelding van onderdrukte queerverlange.

Wanyonyi se interpretasie van die film as "slow cinema" en van die plasing van die protagonis Francois in die kern van die opsetlike onbepaaldheid van die karakter en plot van die film, ontsluit 'n nuwe manier om na te dink oor en te reageer op hierdie rigtinggewende film. Gestruktureer soos 'n riller en beïnvloed deur Alfred Hitchcock, ontvou *Skoonheid* se intrige stadig namate die bekrompe protagonis 'n bestaanskrisis ervaar in sy verlange om vry te wees van 'n bepaalde erfenis van onderdrukking en konserwatisme. Vir Wanyonyi is dit die queerdinamiek wat

stukrag aan die film en sy protagonis gee, egter slegs deel van *Skoonheid* se lewenskragtigheid. Wanyonyi voer aan dat *Skoonheid* die kyker uitnooi om op aktiewe wyse na te dink oor die film se tematiese klem op vervreemding, onmeedeelbaarheid en die eksistensiële dilemma.

Benewens Wanyonyi se analise van die queeronderstrominge in *Skoonheid* is die fokus op kontemporêre Afrikaner manlikheid en die ontevredenheid daarmee die middelpunt van twee bydraes in hierdie uitgawe: Gibson Ncube se ondersoek na queerheid, libidinaliteit en godsdiens in die speelfilm *Kanarie* en die dokumentêre film *Skeef*, en Danel Boshoff en Annemi Conradie se ondersoek na verskillende vorme en voorstellings van manlikheid in die film *Die stropers*. As verkennings van identiteitsuitdrukking en -onderhandeling, verskyn hierdie queersentriese artikels weerskante van Danielle Britz en Chris Broodryk's se ondersoek na post-heroïsme in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* en *Verraaiers*.

Kanarie se verhaal van 'n jong wit gay Afrikaanse man, Johan Niemand, wat by die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag aansluit, speel af op 'n klein dorpie af wat gekenmerk word deur die godsdienstige konserwatisme van die Afrikaner. (Die gebruik van die van "Niemand" beklemtoon die vloeibaarheid van hierdie karakter en die onvastheid van sy identiteit.) Gibson Ncube se ondersoek na queeridentiteite in *Kanarie* en *Skeef* beklemtoon die spanning wat daarmee gepaard gaan om queer en godsdienstig te wees in 'n konteks waar homoseksualiteit en die Afrikanerkerke 'n onopgeloste vraagstuk bly. Ncube voer aan dat hierdie twee films "op generatiewe maniere daarop dui dat queerheid en Christendom versoenbaar is binne Afrikaanssprekende samelewings van Suid-Afrika". In sy sensitiewe benadering tot albei films vind Ncube die bemoedigende teenwoordigheid van queer-agensie en identifiseer hy die libidinale as deurslaggewend in "die transgressie van heteronormatiewe Christelike norme".

Die kleindorpse konservatisme in *Kanarie* herhaal in die verborge familiespanningspunte in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* en die landelike, plaasgebaseerde verdrukking in *Die stropers*.

In die film *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* is die plaas die plek waar die lang verborge gesinsgeheime uiteindelik onthul word, en 'n held ontmitologiseer word wanneer sy mislukkings uiteindelik ontbloom word. Julie Reid se ondersoek na kontemporêre (teen-)mitologieë van ras identifiseer die figuur van die Suid-Afrikaanse rugbylegende Francois Pienaar as 'n "goeie witte" in Clint Eastwood se film *Invictus* (2010). Dat Pienaar 'n "goeie witte" is, word nie betwyfel nie aangesien hy "die nuwe bedeling aanvaar, simpatie toon vir die lyding van Mandela in die verlede en pogings aanwend om die rasse-animositeit van sy wit spanmaats te onderdruk" (56-7). Soos Jesse Arsenaault uitwys, vergestalt "figure soos Mandela 'n soort politieke-aseptiese en uiters welwillende vorm van manlikheid deels vanweë hul heteronormatiewiteit" (40). (Hierdie gesuiwerde uitbeelding van Mandela gaan in die film gepaard met goedvoel klankgrepe oor 'n 'nuwe' Suid-Afrika en gedeelde medemenslikheid.) Selfs in hierdie Amerikaanse-vervaardigde film tref kykers die Afrikaanse witman in heldhaftige vorm aan; dit is waarskynlik net soveel toe te skryf aan die Amerikaanse geneigdheid tot emosioneel-opheffende sportfilms oor helde wat teëspoed trotseer as wat dit te make het met 'n breër uitbeelding van wit heroïsme in kontekste van diepgaande rasse-ongelykheid soos dié in Suid-Afrika.

Dit is hierdie spesifieke representatiewe strategie wat Danielle Britz en Chris Broodryk in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* ontleed aan die hand van die konseptuele raamwerk van post-heroïsme wat deur Thomas Elsaesser ontwikkel is. Die skrywers demonstreer dat hierdie film in teenstelling staan met baie ander Suid-Afrikaanse films wat sentreer om 'n edel heldefiguur wat dikwels gesien word dat hulle nasionale (nasionalistiese) belange dien, deur eerder 'n post-held, waarvan die persoonlike en openbare mislukkings dien as 'n toegangspunt vir groter politieke verkenning uit te beeld. Hierdie soort verkenning is ook sentraal tot die tematiese dinamika van die film *Verraaiers*, wat tydens die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog afspeel. Ook hier verskyn sleutelkarakters as post-herotiese figure wat verskeie perspektiewe oor belangrike nasionale gebeure en temas soos die oorlog en die idee van hoogverraad beliggaam en uitnooi.

Die queersentriese *Die stropers* het 'n somber estetika wat dikwels kloustrofobie ontlok, soortgelyk aan Jason Xenopoulou se *Promised land* (2002). Net soos *Promised land* (2002) speel gebeure in *Die stropers* ook af op 'n plaas in Suid-Afrika. Adriaan Steyn merk op dat die plaas vir 'n aantal Afrikaners "die bastion van 'n unieke lewenswyse bly" (68). In sekere Afrikaanstalige speelfilms soos die riller *Die laaste tango* (2013) en die romantiese komedies *Semi-soet* (2012) en *Vrou soek boer* (2014), is die plaas 'n ruimte gekenmerk deur heteronormatiewe romantiese aktiwiteit of nostalgie (68-70). Steyn bevind dat hierdie (en baie ander) rolprente die plaas en platteland as "outentiek en heilsaam" (70) uitbeeld, in teenstelling met die vergelykbare ontaarding van stedelike ruimtes (sien ook die

bespreking van Keyan Tomaselli oor die landelike Eden-film, sy nostalgiese glans en die karaktertipies daarvan in *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* 143–4).

Hierdie digotomie in Afrikaanstalige films is 'n gevestigde representatiewe strategie wat op verkwikkende wyse aanklank gevind het by sommige hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse gehore. Die films wat op die volgende bladsye bespreek word, bevraagteken op eksplisiete of implisiete wyse egter die idee dat die plaas, platteland of landelike ruimte om die een of ander rede as meer “outentiek en heilsaam” as die stad beskou word. In *Skoonheid*, kan die alledaagsheid van Bloemfontein en omgewing nie heeltemal die queerheid bedwing nie (later in die film word Kaapstad vlugtig uitgebeeld as 'n stad waar queeridentiteite wel aanvaar word). In *Kanarie* navigeer Johan Niemand kleindorpse konservatisme en militêre hipermanlikheid onderweg na queer selfaktualisering. In *Die stropers* laat die kulturele suiwerheid en gedissiplineerde arbeid 'n ruimte vir owerste en koverste subversie, deurdat queermanlikheid dreig om tradisioneel dominante vorme van manlikheid te destabiliseer.

Met die klem op die ruimte van die plaas en die sosio-kulturele konserwatisme van landelike Afrikanergemeenskappe, bespreek Danel Boshoff en Annemi Conradie die maniere waarop agente in sulke konserwatiewe kontekste produktiewe (doglatente) weerstand kan bied teen die geïdealiseerde heteronormatiewe manlikheid wat tradisioneel met die Afrikaner geassosieer word. In *Die stropers* vergestalt die aangenome broers Janno en Pieter verskillende reaksies op Afrikanerkonserwatisme se aandrang op heteronormatiewe. Soos Boshoff en Conradie dit in hul artikel stel, “[Janno en Pieter se] navigasie van hegemonie in hierdie wit, Afrikanergemeenskap deur weerstand en akkoord, kan dui op 'n aandrang op ruimte vir queeridentiteite en die voortgesette transmutasie van hegemoniese manlikheid”.

Slot

Die argumente wat in hierdie temanommer voorgehou word, maak verskeie navorsingsmoontlikede oop oor identiteitsuitdrukking, -representasie en -onderhandeling in kontemporêre Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigtings. Benewens die kritiese tekstuele omgang met hierdie nuwe rolprenttrigtings, kan die politieke ekonomie van Afrikaanse filmvervaardiging baat by hernude navorsingsbelangstelling. Verder is al die films wat in hierdie temanommer bespreek word teaterverystellings; daar is egter op televisie en in digitale media nuwe vergestaltungs van Afrikaanstalige rolprenttrigtings wat saam met nuwe tegnologieë ontwikkel het en selfs gepaardgegaan het met grootskaalse gebeurtenisse soos die inperkingsperiodes gedurende die nasionale reaksie op die COVID-19 globale pandemie (hier is kykNet se *storiefilms* 'n goeie voorbeeld).

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Ten slotte bedank ek ook die kollegas wat met mag en mening tot hierdie temanommer wou bydra, maar wie se ontluikende denke en kennis te erg belemmer was om dit te doen weens post-COVID gesondheids- en welstandsprobleme, asook deur die neoliberale aard van die tersiêre hoëronderwyssektor.

Eindnote

1. Alle vertalings uit Engels is my eie.

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