

Book Award Citation

Title: South Africa's Renegade Reels: The Making and Public Lives of Black-Centered Films
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Author: Litheko Modisane

What is the relation between 'film' and 'publicness', particularly in repressive and post-repressive societies? What might this relation imply for the role of film in the public sphere- the compromised English translation of Jürgen Habermas's 1962 habilitation thesis contribution - *Öffentlichkeit*? And how can film conjure up a public under conditions of repression- that are clearly inimical to the efflorescence of public reflection? These questions are at the centre of Litheko Modisane's book *South Africa's Renegade Reels: The Making and Public Lives of Black-Centered Films*.

South Africa's Renegade Reels is concerned with the role of film in public critical engagements. The book foregrounds the publicness of a selection of what Modisane calls 'black-centred' films, Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa* (1959), Simon Sabela's *u'Deliwe* (1975), Oliver Schmitz's *Mapantsula* (1987), and Ramadan Suleman's *Fools* (1998) and comparatively- the television series *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2003). Through the films, the book shows the role of film in the conjuring up of a sphere of public critical engagements that is, public critical reflections, direct or indirect, that come into being in the wake of films or in their anticipated release. The core of the book's argument is that under certain evolving conditions and circumstances of their circulation, black-centered films stimulate public critical engagements on blackness. Censorship, orchestration, context of circulation, and importantly, contextual affiliation to contemporary social and political preoccupations and relations, constitute the evolving conditions in the making and public lives of black-centered films. The convergence of these conditions with the generic and material attributes of film underwrites the precarious but potent status of film in the public life of ideas. The book provides an opening into a new way of thinking about film and its publicness, which is as a text whose role in the public sphere, resides in its circulation and subjection to many uses over-time. Through this approach, *South*

Africa's Renegade Reels surfaces the critical role of black-centred films in the ongoing and contemporary public engagements on blackness. The book illuminates the complex nature of cinema in modern public life, enriching established methodologies by expanding the cultural and conceptual boundaries of film as a phenomenon of textual circulation. It is a welcome contribution and challenge to current scholarship on film in general and South African film scholarship in particular.