

'Makwerekwerisation' and the Quest for African Renaissance: South African Film and Perceptions on 'Foreigners' Before May 2008

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Introduction

This chapter analyses the discursive ways in which film are implicated in the framing of 'foreignness' in identity-based violence. Specifically, it looks at the ways in which South African film, in the context of 'xenophobic' violence in South Africa framed certain individuals and groups as 'foreigners.' It examines the ways in which *Mama Jack* (Hofmeyr 2005), a pre-2008 South African film, constructed, and framed, specific images about black non-South Africans through a process identified as makwerekwerisation. The chapter develops from the understanding that all texts, film included, are inherently cultural productions that communicate specific ways of seeing the world, also referred to alternatively as frames of references or media frames, and therefore actively participates in the construction and circulation of normalised and misrecognised forms of violence. Film's semiotic potential need not be understated. By focusing on the various ways in which makwerekwere is deployed in *Mama Jack*, it is noted that the category 'foreigner' does not subscribe to a monolithic and/or stable representation. It emerges that not all non-native South Africans are ascribed the discursive label foreigner or mukwerekwere. Types of foreigners were constructed in films and such classifications fed from, and into, acts of violence against individuals. It is a continuation of the Pan-African drive over centuries, for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. It conceptualises makwerekwerisation as distinct form of xenophobic violence, locates it within the African Union's Agenda 2063 that adopts a grassroots approach towards the achievement of an African Renaissance by 2063. Agenda 2063 is the African Union's blueprint and master plan that serves as a roadmap for the continent's transformation into a global powerhouse. It is a continuation of the 346 centuries-long Pan-Africanism whose overarching goal is the realisation and delivering on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance (African Union Commission April 2020). It is apparent that peace and security are major pillars in the African Union's quest for a truly united Africa to realise its goal of being a global powerhouse. Violence by Africans targeted at fellow Africans therefore threatens the realisation of this important goal. In May 2008 a wave of violence broke out in South Africa beginning in Alexandra Park, Johannesburg, and spreading to the other parts of South Africa. An estimated 60 people were brutally murdered while thousands were displaced and left homeless. The violence of this period has been documented in various scholarly and non-scholarly articles with focus being placed on the part played by the media before, during and after the May 2008 violence (Hadland 2010), the characterisation of the violence (Matsinhe 2011) and the possible causes of the violence. While efforts have been made to examine the role print media played in the violence, little has been done in trying to understand how the electronic media, film in particular, could be implicated in the shaping of perceptions of everyday violence. This is despite the acknowledgement that 'there seems to be a link between fictionalised violence (on television or in film) and aggressive behaviour,' albeit a

contested view (Hadland 2010: 124). However, the present chapter does not wish to participate in the debate on media power. Instead, it poses the question of how, through the construction of specific frames of references, film is implicated in violence against Black foreigners in South Africa by examining the ways in which one film, *Mama Jack* (Hofmeyr 2005), constructs specific ways of perceiving Black non-South Africans. Thus, focus is placed on how socio-cultural identities are socially constructed through media representations without necessarily insinuating any possible direct effects that may be implicated from those representations. In fact, the media effects from these representations might need to be explored through audience analyses and/or statistics for screenings and rentals for the film. Galtung (1990) provides a way of understanding some aspects of film as participating in cultural violence. Cultural violence is a constituent of a three-part syndrome of violence which also includes direct and structural violence. Cultural violence refers to ‘those 347 aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art...