

# *Post-Apartheid Same-Sex Sexualities: Restless Identities in Literary and Visual Culture*, by Andy Carolin

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Andy Carolin's *Post-Apartheid Same-Sex Sexualities: Restless Identities in Literary and Visual Culture* is an important addition to the growing scholarship on understanding same-sex sexualities from a point of view that veers from the norm. Some would call such a veering "queer," but this term has been so misused and abused in the South African academy that authors such as Carolin avoid using it to frame their writing. Nevertheless, *Restless Identities* is a "queer" text in the best possible way. And by this, I mean "queer" in the way that it was originally conceived of, full of promise, potential and radicalness—a "queer" that was always aware that its usefulness might end, or be replaced, because "queer" was theorised as an open signifier without fixed meaning and with no attachable political agenda. Without so much as using the word "queer," Carolin has constructed a text that indexes the most radical of thinkers in the area of race, gender and sexuality, thinkers who have refused to be co-opted by the academy or the disciplining field of Queer Theory (for example Kobena Mercer, Gayatri Gopinath, Michael Warner). However, this is not mere name-dropping—Carolin carves out from these (and other) radical theories the most incisive tools to dissect the representation in literary and visual culture of same-sex sexualities in South Africa since 1994.

He casts his net wide, as examples from books, movies, photographs, and magazines are used as evidence to construct a set of arguments that destabilise the privileged white gay male gaze and bring to the fore the abjected queer voices of Black and Indian female and Black male same-sex desires not attached to essential identities but rather to restless

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identities. He shows how various writers, photographers and directors represent these restless identities that are embedded in specific times and places in post-apartheid South Africa. He further connects these representations to the lingering effects of apartheid and colonialism and to transnational ideologies brought ashore by globalisation.

His search for restless identities begins with the representation of same-sex identities that interface with transnational cultural flows to produce a “distinctly localised negotiation of sexual rights” (18) (Gerald Kraak, Robert Coleman, Bev Ditsie and Nicky Newman). In Chapter 2, Carolin interrogates how Africa is evoked as a signifier and mobilised to produce and challenge “essentialist notions of static African identities” (18) (John Trengrove, Masande Ntshanga, Zukiswa Wanner). Chapter 3 investigates white gay identities and assimilationist political and aesthetic positionings (Richard De Nooy, Christiaan Olwagen, Mark Behr, Oliver Hermanus, Michiel Heyns). The last two chapters of the book focus on Black and Indian same-sex sexualities and desires and their link to colonialism, slavery, apartheid, and the fictions of cultural authenticity (Zanele Muholi, Siphumeze Khundayi, Shamim Sarif, Zinaid Meeran).

Carolin’s book was published two years ago, and the take-up of the book seems slow (2 citations on Google scholar at the time of writing this review). This could be because the book is not the standard narrative produced by scholars working in the LGBTQI+ field. In a way, this book produces an unsettling type of knowledge as the arguments forwarded disrupt ways of thinking about issues of otherness. Established ways of thinking in the field take on the form of a framework that acknowledges South Africa’s progressive Constitution, but simultaneously admits to homophobia and violence towards the other persisting. The frame of this approach is based on the idea of human rights as protecting those categories of people who are defined within this ideology and rarely contemplates the possibility of ways of being that resist being defined by a rights-based discourse. Carolin’s book is situated in this uncomfortable space and wrestles with the very frame that theorists within the field take as *a priori*. However, his arguments are not unhooked from the complexities of “real” life—they show the real and symbolic violence of being positioned as other.

*Restless Identities* is not without fault. For example, his inclusion of the *Gay Pages* magazine seems out of place among his literary texts (both visual and written) and lacks a systematic analysis technique which the genre requires. In summary, Carolin’s book uses as data visual and literary representations; however, he has inadvertently synthesised an alternative set of lenses that can be used and developed to analyse any data about “queerness” in South Africa.