

Alexandra M Parker

Architecture and Planning, University of the Witwatersrand

alexandramaryparker@gmail.com



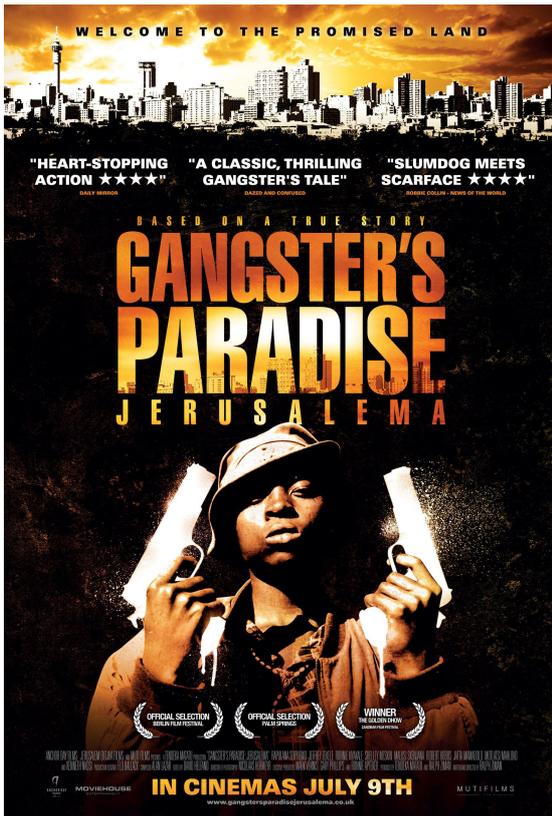
Alexandra Parker is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, researching the role of film in shaping urban representation and practice. She is currently working on a book project, *Urban Film and Everyday Practice*, based on her PhD thesis, which will be published in early 2015 with Palgrave Macmillan. She teaches first year courses in architecture and planning. She serves on the Architects' Collective board, organizing the Architect Africa Film Festival and on the board of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation.

Research Interests: Architectural Heritage, Urban Planning, Urban Geography, Ancient Urbanism, Ancient Urban Planning, Cinema and Urban Spaces, Cinematic Space, Architecture, Cinema Studies, Gated Communities, Suburban Studies, and Suburbia

Publications: - *Gangsters' Paradise: The Representation of Johannesburg in Film and Television*

The Masculine City: Johannesburg and mobility represented in film

Alexandra Parker



abstract

In exploring the representation of mobility in Johannesburg as portrayed in films of recent decades, the city is depicted as an overwhelmingly masculine space and remains inaccessible to women. This paper will focus on the two modes of movement of walking and driving as depicted in three of Oliver Schmidt's films: 'Mapantsula'; 'Hijack Stories'; and 'Life, Above All'. These films reflect some of the reality women have experienced in Johannesburg.

Johannesburg's origins were firmly entrenched within the masculine realm when men from all over the country and further abroad settled in the small town to seek their fortunes in gold. Although women gradually made their homes in the burgeoning city as the settlement stabilised, the majority of these women were white. Because black women were not needed as labour on the mines, they suffered greater exclusion and were relegated to reside permanently in the townships or in the backyard accommodation in the white suburbs or to remain in the 'homelands'. These spaces were overwhelming defined as domestic in nature. For black women, Johannesburg has remained inaccessible, indifferent and masculine.

The confinement of women to these spaces is reflected in the representation of mobility in films set in and outside of Johannesburg. Mobility depicted in film represents agency in the city and this agency is portrayed through urban and masculine characters and masculine modes of transport. Most of this mobility is demonstrated through the urban trope of the tsotsi so that even the mobility of walking takes on the signifiers of the masculine. Aside from the lack of urban female protagonists in filmic Johannesburg, women on the screen are generally static characters restricted to the domestic realm and as a result, are unable to exert agency in the city of the screen.