



## OUTLAWED BLACK PUBLIC SPHERES: SNAPSHOTS OF CINEMA'S ARCHIVE

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The cinema would be capable of recording permanently a fleeting moment, the duration of an ephemeral smile or glance. It would preserve the lifelike movements of loved ones after their deaths and constitute itself as a grand archive of time.

Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*

Any reference to archive and film is apt to conjure up images of rolls of celluloid tucked away in hardly visited archives. Muted, forgotten and consigned to damp dark rooms, the films become important only for the student, specialist and occasional cinephile. Safe from the elements, films are retained on one level as tangible archive material, and on another level for the value that their depictions may provide in the making of memories and construction of histories. This understanding concurs with the conventional concept of archive as an institutional practice of the collection and systematic ordering of objects for later recovery and the writing of history (Merewether 2006, 10). Indeed, the archive is important for the historical enterprise. However, the image of archived films stored away in a specialised institution is a total negation of film's nature as a sum of pleasurable, emotionally appealing and intellectually stimulating moving images.

There is, thankfully, another view with regards to film archives, and the relations between archive and film as distinct phenomena, which I intend to develop. This view acknowledges the healthy rapport between the two, which finds its expression through the public lives of film (Modisane 2010). By the public life of film, I mean the totality of the events and engagements in the circulation of films across time and space. This is based on a methodology

*Opposite: Miriam Makeba in a scene from Come Back, Africa. (©Rogosin Heritage Collection, with kind permission)*

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