

Postcolonial Cinema Studies

Eds. Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller

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Postcolonial theory and cinema studies have overlapped in recent critical debates. For example, Josefa Loshitzky's *Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (2010) has shown that cinema about migration provokes debates about national belonging, as it frequently brings back the memory of the colonial past. However, these fields of research have not yet benefited from a cohesive and programmatic dialogue. *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* bridges this gap by offering a transnational perspective on the relation between cinema and postcolonial studies. It is no surprise that the back cover of the book presents a comment by Loshitzky herself, who praises "its rigorous investigation of specific case studies of national, transnational and global cinemas."

According to Editors Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, "postcolonial cinema studies" denotes a hybrid field of research, which attempts to create a dialogue between film analysis of movies that deal closely with the representation of colonialism, and critical approaches that examine movies through the lenses of postcolonial theory. The articles of this volume examine both imperial cinema and movies that have challenged colonial narratives, such as the "Transnational Third Cinema" that is produced outside Western distribution and production industries (5). "Postcolonial cinema studies" can be defined in relation to its objective, namely to challenge a "colonial hangover," which is "far from over," "as neo-colonial configurations of power emerge in the contemporary world" (9).

The book is organised in four thematic sections. The first section focuses on colonial cinema and analyses the imperialist agenda in its filmic production (17). The three sections that follow are dedicated to postcolonial cinema, and aim to explore respectively the relation between cinema and the decolonization of national histories, postcolonial aesthetics, and the challenges for cinema in a globalized world. Each section is introduced by a short presentation, which provides the volume with greater clarity and consistency. The postface of the volume, an interview by Marguerite Waller with Priyanka Jaikumar, offers an insightful glimpse of the possibilities and challenges offered by postcolonial cinema for teaching, for example in addressing the issue of how to access rare material, to create a course on postcolonial cinema, and to use new media in class. This last section emphasises the importance of the connection between post-colonial theory and practice, and indicates that cinema could be a possible vehicle for linking the two.

As the volume includes analysis of a heterogeneous range of movies, I can only highlight some of the key themes and methodologies that readers will find in this book. The theoretical approach of *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* is unavowedly interdisciplinary, incorporating reflections on the deconstruction of historiography, intersemiotic translation, and visual semiotics. Postcolonial theory occupies an important role in most film analysis. “The Holy Trinity” of postcolonial criticism (Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak), to use Robert Young’s definition, looms large, as does the figure of Frantz Fanon in the articles by Hamish Ford and Jude G. Akudinobi, focusing on the movies about the French colonisation of Algeria. Contributors to the volume employ a wide variety of methodologies to examine different genres of movies, including Gilles Deleuze’s writings on cinema, Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, Arjun Appadurai’s socio-cultural theories about globalization, and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s postmarxist analysis. For instance, Shohini Chaudari draws on Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the state of exception in order to scrutinize Alfonso Cuarón’s dystopic future described in *Children of Men*. Sandra Ponzanese focuses on postcolonial adaptation, and analyses two movies: Shirin Neshat’s *Women Without Man* (2009), which is based on Shahrnush Parsipur’s novel of the same name (1990), and Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), a Bollywood movie that corrects and complements Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The critical relevance of the volume is also connected to its gender sensitive perspective, especially in relation to the intersection of race and gender discrimination, and in the construction of a “gendered sense of orientalism” (3), which is present in most essays of the volume. For example, Ruth Ben Ghiat’s analysis of Mario Camerini’s 1928 movie *Kif Tebbi* or Mireille Rosello’s discussion of Philippe Faucon’s 2007 film *Dans la vie* address respectively the representation of masculinity in an Italian movie that was made to support the Italian conquest of Libya, and the relationship between two women and their communities.

The volume is programmatically transnational in its approach and it aims to challenge both the colonisation of the monopolistic distribution by Hollywood and the claims of some film theories in the United States, which contributed to “recapitulate the colonial binary ‘the West and the rest’” (3). Apart from Julie Codell’s critical analysis on the use of blackface to represent African characters in 1930s Hollywood movies, articles go beyond the Anglophone boundaries, and scrutinise movies produced in emerging contexts, such as Nollywood (Claudia Hoffman) and Bollywood (Kanika Batra and Rich Rice), the aesthetic of postcolonial cinema in a 1983 surrealist movie by the Chilean filmmaker Raul Ruiz, *Three Crowns of the Sailor* (Sabine Doran), or the post Cold-war film industry in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos (Mariam Lam). Three articles also reflect upon postcolonial issues that critical discourse has long neglected or disregarded in Europe, such as the resurgence of the memory of Italian colonialism between the end of colonisation and the beginning of

African immigration to Italy (Marguerite Waller), Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique (Paulo de Medeiros), or Soviet Imperialism in Eastern Europe (Anikó Imre).

The choice of analysing the postcolonial legacy in a global perspective goes hand in hand with the goal of reconsidering the historical development of cinema up to the present day from a postcolonial perspective. As Ponzanesi and Waller put it: “Unframing histories is not only about undoing established historical accounts and fixed geographies but also about rediscovering the regional, the minor histories and local spaces, made available through anachronisms and deterritorialisations” (62). In other words, the reconceptualisation of imperial geographies and the creation of “multiple temporalities and spatialities of the postcolonial imaginary” (127) are aimed at challenging historiographic stability, “to undo official and dominant accounts that exclude or marginalize subjects, creating gender, racial, ethnic, and linguistic alterities” (12).

One last observation of this volume is its well-placed use of stills from movies, which facilitate the understanding of close film analysis by a readership of non-specialists that might not have watched all of the movies. Thanks to this illustrative material, and the clarity of its structure, *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* is accessible to a wide audience, and is adaptable for use in course syllabi at various universities. At the same time, this is also an eloquent and provocative study, which scholars working in the examination of cross-cultural dialogue will want to keep well in mind in their future research.

Works Cited

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