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Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, eds.,  
*Postcolonial Cinema Studies*  
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Reviewed by **Michaela Quadraro**

The legacy of colonialism is evident in contemporary societies, where questions of belonging and citizenship are displaced by migratory and transcultural movements. Colonial experience is therefore not an abstract entity, but a complex and continuous process that produces intervals, passages, and interstices. In a postcolonial perspective all these questions are investigated in the attempt to reveal the violence that is at the core of Western hegemony. Thus, the postcolonial question does not become a temporal succession, but a critical and historical interruption in the grand narratives transmitted within European parameters.

The essays included in this volume should be read bearing such contextual frame in mind. This volume constitutes a rich and heterogeneous source of references and critical elaborations that give a significant contribution to the field of postcolonial studies. In particular, through the close analysis of films, this book tries to map possible encounters between cinema and postcolonial studies. Cinema confirms itself as a powerful example of the deep interrelation between the experience of colonialism and the complexity of the contemporary world. What matters in particular is how cinema engages with history, subjectivity, and the political and material developments. As its two editors declare, this volume does not aim at proposing a postcolonial cinema as a fixed genre or a taxonomy. The films explored in the chapters come from different contexts; however, they are here read together through a “postcolonial lens”, “allowing us to unpack their visual codes and narrative discourses of supremacy and to discover their tensions and aporias” (11-12). Following the interdisciplinary nature of the postcolonial paradigm, the extremely rich introduction to the volume weaves the threads of philosophical thinking, feminist theory, and cultural studies approach, together with the recent visual imaginaries developed in the context of exile, displacement, and diaspora. Therefore, cinematic practices come to extend the conceptual space of postcolonial critique.

The book is organised into four parts. The first one, called *Cinemas of Empire*, discusses the so-called ‘empire films’ that contribute to postcolonial studies through the reflection on nineteenth-century ideological construction of empire. Ruth Ben-Ghiat outlines the tragic history of Italian expansionism in Lybia in her discussion of the silent movie *Kif Tebbi*, an empire film made in 1928 and set in this region. In her essay Julie Codell discusses the use of blackface in 1930s British and American colonial films, combining her analysis of several empire films with Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘faciality’. As an ambivalent and complex colonial representation, blackface parodies differences of race and class,

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but also performs colony nostalgia, “a desire to return to a time when empire was considered unquestionably heroic” (41). Finally, the postcolonial framework allows author Anikó Imre to resist the pleasures of the socialist national epic and underscores a map of hybridities and contradictions.

The second part, entitled *Postcolonial Cinemas: Unframing Histories*, not only undoes “established historical accounts and fixed geographies” but also rediscovers the multilayered histories and frames of local spaces through cinema (62). Hamish Ford analyses three films that mark important moments in France’s colonial and postcolonial history. Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Ousmane Sembene’s *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), and Michael Haneke’s *Cache/Hidden* reveal, in Ford’s essay, the ambivalence of the self/other dichotomy and its complicated psychic mechanisms. In Jude G. Akudinobi’s essay the repressed memories of the colonial oppression come back to haunt the present, as highlighted in his discussion of the film *Fatima, L’Algérienne de Dakar* (Med Hondo, 2004). A reflection on the consequences and the multiple histories of colonialism in the contemporary world is again very important for Mireille Rosello’s analysis of the work made by Morocco-born filmmaker Philippe Faucon and for Mariam B. Lam’s investigation of postcolonial Indochinese cinema.

In the third part *Postcolonial Cinemas: Postcolonial Aesthetics* the focus is on the innovative strategies proposed in the filmmaking practices that subvert representation. In doing this, postcolonial cinema has always engaged deeply with the traditional cinematic paradigms. Paulo de Medeiros, in particular, discusses the strategies and the formal construction of some Lusophone films that express on a formal level the complexity of memory and the “spectral postcoloniality” of the present time. The question of the strategies employed by cinema is central also to Sabine Doran’s essay on postcolonial aesthetics. In this chapter the author links the recent turn of critical theory to a more sensorial analysis of cinema with the groundbreaking techniques proposed by Surrealist artists in the 1930s. Concluding this section, on the one hand, Marguerite Waller’s chapter evokes the haunting presence of the Italian fascist era through the analysis of the film *Luna e l’altra* (Maurizio Nichetti, 1996); on the other hand, Sandra Ponzanesi investigates two films made by diasporic female artists that give a huge contribution both to the field of adaptation studies and the postcolonial perspective: *Bride and Prejudice* by Gurinder Chadha and *Women Without Men* by Shirin Neshat. In the latter film, in particular, Ponzanesi finds a very interesting example of a postcolonial feminist strategy that intervenes critically and proposes alternative theoretical tools.

The fourth and final part of the book is entitled *Postcolonial Cinemas and Globalisation*. In this section the focus is on the forms of production and distribution of cinema and particularly on “resistance and alternative forms of agency” (189). Through the analysis of the science-fiction dystopian film *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), Shohini Chaudhuri investigates the legacy of old stereotypical discourses of Orientalism in today’s wars on terrors and measures of detention. A postcolonial reading of this film reveals the violence of contemporary neo-colonial

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forms of imperialism. Subsequently, Kanika Batra's and Rich Rice's chapter on Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) attempts to trace a postcolonial theory of new media from the concept of "transcoding", "a convergence of layers of media, technology, and culture that generates new layers of meaning" (205). In this analysis Bollywood cinema constructs a technological postcolonial space and displaces binary oppositions of local and global, Indian and diasporic, innovative and traditional. Concluding this section on globalisation, Claudia Hoffmann highlights the crucial role of self-sustained and hand-held digital technologies for the production and the dissemination of Nigerian films. By doing so, Nollywood cinema is an example of a creative practice that proposes an alternative to the Western dynamics of funding and exhibition. Furthermore, it traverses the borders of a Nigerian audience and spreads over across diasporic African communities in the world.

The heterogeneous and stimulating issues developed in this volume are further expanded in a conversation between editor Marguerite Waller and postcolonial cinema studies theorist Priya Jaikumar. Far from providing a conclusion, this interview is considered as a "postface" that opens outward and poses methodological and pedagogical questions. Jaikumar stresses the impossibility to give a definition for postcolonial theory and cinema. She invites us to build our own optics and to keep it open-ended, "making connections between theory, concept, and image or narrative" (237). Her words, which conclude this book, emphasise the powerful affective potential of film and encourage readers to engage with the productive and interdisciplinary challenge offered by postcolonial studies.