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WORLD CINEMAS OF RESISTANCE: CINEMATIC WORLDS AS DECOLONIAL PRACTICES

EDITED BY DANIELE RUGO AND MARCO BENOÎT CARBONE

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WORLD CINEMAS OF RESISTANCE

Mapping Decolonial Cinema

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The articles that animate this special issue aim to map and investigate decolonial practices in cinematic worlds from the Global South. Whilst the scope is for obvious reasons limited to only few practices and context, this approach emphasises the potential of these cinemas to resist hegemonic filmic (and more generally cultural) forms and to move beyond thematic concerns, formal strategies and industrial frameworks generated and sanctioned in the Global North.

The Global South is understood here as a broad category that denotes contexts and sites that have been historically subjected to financial, political, and cultural othering and dominance, including therefore diasporic and indigenous cinemas practiced in the Global North. As a critique of ideologies, institutions, and power, the contributions in this issue draw on the paradigms of decolonisation and should therefore also be read as attempts to strengthen and expand the use of these paradigms in relation to film scholarship, an area where their use is to this day marginal. As a political category aligning with that of a "cinema of the margins", a south-driven approach challenges the othering of a "world cinema" label. In Traverso and William's definition (2017), a "south-to-south" approach entails hearing voices and seeing through the eyes of majority world nations to decentre the positionality of the subject, offering new perspectives, whether contextually or comparatively. This idea of a Global South cannot thus refrain from intersecting with the critical paradigms of Black cinema, indigenous cinemas, queer and feminist cinema, third cinema, imperfect cinema, poor cinema, migrant, diasporic, and accented cinema.

Inevitably, world cinemas produced away from the canons and infrastructures of Hollywood and/or Europe are also potential sites of resistance. Instances of world cinemas of this kind have the potential to decenter Western gazes and enact practices of decoloniality that are both mindful of and surpass the decolonial third cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s (which this issue touches upon).

The term resistance is employed here both in terms of the themes and issues developed, as well as the formal strategies deployed and the production and

distribution frameworks adopted and/or created. In this sense, the articles of this special issue aim to interrogate resistant world cinemas as they emerge through a range of approaches that may include traditional fiction, political documentary, first-person cinema, as well as avant-garde and collective filmmaking. Resistant world cinemas ideally reconfigure planetary gazes on the present, produce deconstructions of the past, and imagine possible futures. Ultimately, the idea of world cinema as a decolonial practice may offer a chance to rethink formal and aesthetic theorization around cinema's representational forms and objects and their power relations, while challenging the very idea of what cinema is and what discourse presides over definitions, without excluding its relations with cognate media forms.

DECOLONIALITY AND FILM

Decolonial approaches have become extremely popular in the last decades in a variety of academic and non-academic disciplines. The decolonial framework builds on experiences of liberation from colonial rule in the 1960s across Africa, Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and Latin America and on knowledge developed by authors as different as Frantz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, María Lugones, Mahdi Amel, Sylvia Wynter and Walter Mignolo.

Decolonial theory seeks to expose and dismantle the enduring patterns of power, knowledge, and being that emerged from the colonial project. Whilst rooted in readings and analyses of specific historical experiences, this framework is not simply a historical analysis, but an active practice of thinking that challenges the colonial foundations of the modern world. Its central argument is that colonialism is not merely an event of political conquest and economic extraction, but a profound and ongoing rewiring of material and epistemic realities. It established an enduring global hierarchy of humanity, dividing the world into the modern and traditional, civilized and savage and it embedded this hierarchy into our institutions, our cultural practices, and our sense of self. This hierarchy - which is closely connected to modernity - endures through what Quijano called the 'coloniality of power' (2000: 536). Coloniality is what survives once formal political administrations or military occupation (what we normally call colonialism) ends. As Achille Mbembe underlines the division between two types of humanity (the modern and the savage) is as much a product of modernity as modernity's accomplishments - democracy in the first place. As Mbembe writes: 'The colonial world, as an offspring of democracy, was not the antithesis of the democratic order. It has always been its double or, again, its nocturnal face. No democracy exists without its double, without its colony—little matter the name and the structure. The colony is not external to democracy and is not necessarily located outside its walls. Democracy bears the colony within it, just as colonialism bears democracy, often in the guise of a mask (2019: 26-27). Western modernity—with its promises of progress and its rationality — is built upon and is inextricable from the exploitation and epistemicides

of the colonized world. Modernity's bright side always casts the shadow of coloniality and it is impossible to read one without the other. A foundational act of decolonial thought is therefore 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo 2009). It challenges the universal claims of Western thought, which often presents itself as the sole, objective standard for all human knowledge. Decolonial theorists argue that this "zero-point" perspective—the view from nowhere that claims to be the view from everywhere—is a fiction that masks its own geographical and historical particularity. In response, decoloniality calls for a pluriversality of knowledge (Mignolo 2018). This is not a simple multicultural relativism, but a serious engagement with the vast and suppressed reservoirs of thought, language, and wisdom from colonized peoples—what Mignolo calls the 'colonial difference' (Mignolo 2000). It involves turning to indigenous philosophies and cosmologies, and other subaltern systems of knowing to articulate alternatives to the dominant Western paradigms. Central to this project is the concept of the 'locus of enunciation' (Mignolo 1999) —the acknowledgment that all knowledge is situated, emerging from a specific body in a specific geopolitical and historical context. The decolonial thinker deliberately speaks from the margins, from the "colonial difference," to expose the biases of the supposedly neutral center.

The thematic focus of this special issue is partly motivated by the acknowledgement that much of the potential of decolonial paradigms remains unexpressed in film scholarship. Aside from the work of Robert K. Beshara (an author in this special issue) and in particular his *Transmodern Cinema and Decolonial Film Theory*, there hasn't been a systematic engagement with the tenets of decolonial theory in attempting to reread film language, its production mechanisms and its narrative/thematic choices. However the potential of decolonial theory for cinema seems substantial and moves beyond the earlier responses of Third Cinema and the work of filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembène, or Santiago Alvarez, which remain crucial in many respects. The initial decolonial response emerging from Third Cinema movements of the 1960s and 70s in Latin America and Africa, used film as a weapon for anti-colonial resistance, foregrounding revolutionary narratives and giving voice to the oppressed. While vital, this phase often remained within a binary logic of counter-narrative. Other avenues might become available by examining more systematically the core decolonial concepts of pluriversality, embodied knowledge, and coloniality of knowledge and perception. The first step would be a deliberate formal and narrative *delinking* from Western cinematic conventions. Through this delinking scholars can emphasise and amplify cinematic forms rooted in indigenous and Afro-diasporic cosmologies. This can manifest as circular narratives, collective protagonism, or the integration of mythic time into contemporary settings (see on this in particular Apichatpong Weerasethakul's filmography).

Second, decolonial film scholarships should systematically engage in epistemic reconstruction. They can act not just to critically assess works, but to reactivate subjugated knowledges and cinematic experiences. Films become archives of otherwise-erased practices, languages, and ecological relationships. These are not necessarily just decolonial in a thematic sense; they become enactments

of decolonial practices, using filmmaking as a method to diagnose present-day settler colonialism and strengthen intergenerational kinship, immerse the viewer in a specific, non-universal sensorium—the textures, sounds, and oppressive heat of a particular landscape and history—forcing embodied, situated understandings that defy abstraction.

Third, the field should be marked by a critical interrogation of the medium's own materiality and history. This meta-cinematic strand questions the technology of film itself—the camera, the archive, the act of viewing—as a product of colonial modernity. Artists and filmmakers examine ethnographic archives to "rehear" the voices of captured subjects, or use speculative fiction to imagine technological futures divorced from colonial extraction.

The articles in this issue reflect in differing ways on the potential of decolonial theory for film (and more broadly media) scholarship by engaging with these different ways of reading cinematic works. The manifold historical, conceptual, and theoretical contributions are especially valuable for the diversity of their approaches, which nonetheless converge toward shared objectives. Overall, the sheer variety of voices gathered in this collection testifies to the plurality of perspectives animating the special issue. Across the contributions, Authors' approaches and objectives are deeply intertwined with their objects of analysis: whether engaging with the dominant logic of cultural industries, foregrounding voices that challenge it, withdraw from it, or inhabit cracks of resistance, these works proceed from the ground up rather than from an unreflexive alignment with a dominant canon or method. The issue opens with Robert K. Beshara's article *Divine Intervention: A Decolonial Psychoanalytic Reading*. Here Beshara examines Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2002) through the lens of decolonial psychoanalysis, offering a critical analysis of the film's engagement with themes of subjectivity, resistance, and the lingering effects of colonialism in contemporary Palestine. I will explore how Suleiman's portrayal of Palestinian life reflects the psychological impacts of colonial subjugation and displacement. The film's surreal and darkly comedic narrative serves as a medium to dissect the internalized colonial trauma and the fractured sense of subjectivity experienced by Palestinians under occupation. The analysis underscores how *Divine Intervention* not only critiques the colonial power dynamics but also addresses the psychological dimensions of liberation within a colonized context. By foregrounding these tensions, Beshara offers tangible examples of how "world cinema" may function as an imposed label in professional and academic practice. Thus, "misgivings about class and positionality" in academic practices are not external to the analysis but become integral to the methodological approach, inseparable from the need to deconstruct entrenched prejudice.

In his *Acousmatic Voices and Visual Glitches: Colonial Hauntings in the Experimental Cinema of Bacigalupo and Orsini*, Edoard Pelligra offers a Derridean reading of how colonialism haunts Italian cinema as an uncanny absence. Focusing on a number of films from 1960s Italian cinema, and specifically juxtaposing Bacigalupo, Orsini and Antonioni, the article examines

the unique modalities through which 1960s Italian filmmakers blended European avant-garde sensibility, Fanon's thinking and the radical aesthetics and politics of Third World Cinema. Working on a similar period, in his *Cinema in Uruguay (1960–1974): Resistance, Guerrilla and Third World*, Alvaro Lema Mosca reviews the ways in which documentary and animated films produced in Uruguay during the 1960s and 1970s engendered powerful critiques of colonialism and established strong links with Third Cinema. Keeping a focus on cinematic resistance, but moving from Latin America to Africa, Alasambom Nyingchuo's *Cinema, Politics and Resistance in Cameroon* charts a history of cinematic production in Cameroon, during and after colonial rule (first by Germany and then France and the UK). Despite a restrictive legal regime during and after the colonial period, cinema in Cameroon has been a site of resistance especially with filmmakers like Jean Marie Teno, Basseck Ba Khobio, Jean Pierre Bekolo and Alphonse Beni; who employ hidden transcripts to lend their voices to an oppressed Cameroonian and African society. The article analyzes how these filmmakers denounce neo-colonialism, dictatorship and cultural alienation on one hand and government's incompetence and insensitivity to the plight of the masses on the other. Nyingchuo employs advocacy to describe how "committed filmmakers denounce neo-colonialism," deconstructing the material and socioeconomic disadvantages faced by peripheral cinemas, as well as the omissions made necessary by restrictions on freedom of speech or limited material affordances.

Nadica Denić's "*Can We Allow Ourselves to Make Films?": Rethinking Production Norms through the Lens of Migration* examines first-person films about migration in Europe with the aim to understand the alternative production practices that they engage in. While first-person films about diverse experiences of migration in Europe have proliferated in recent years, what we know about the positionality of their directors in the European audio-visual sector, and about the films' production process, is however limited. On the basis of a series of interviews with a selection of filmmakers, the article unpacks the challenges migrant filmmakers' encounter during the production process and strategies developed to overcome production barriers and forge alternative practices. Denić thereby extends the polyvocal approach to consider the concrete effects of coloniality and the affordances granted or denied to colonized subjects operating within the colonizer's territory.

In her *Deconstructing Paperlessness: Documentary, Mise-en-scene and Participation in Feminist and Decolonial Film Practices: the Case Study of LALA*, Ludovica Fales reconstructs the making of her own documentary hybrid film "Lala". Starting with an exploration of Boal's theatre of the oppress "Forum" and the construction of Brechtian mechanism of dismantling of the "third wall", this article investigates how the making of LALA played out, what participants retained and whether the film's was able to jostle people's consciousness. Fales's contribution works through "personal storying and cultural critique," placing subjectivity and autoethnography at the core. By employing participatory training workshops, the filmmaker-author, alongside all participants, becomes "not a

passive witness but an active participant in meaning-making." This enables a sustained reflection on the power dynamics embedded in representation itself, enacted through an ongoing struggle toward "inclusive, relational authorship."

The issue is closed by Júlia Vilhena's article *Affective Landscapes of Deterritorialization in Contemporary Cinema*. Here Vilhena delves into the movements of deterritorialization in cinema to understand the affective landscapes that reverberate within the diegetic space of narratives centered on exile, migration, and diaspora. Through an in-depth analysis of films by Cuban filmmakers Heidi Hassan and Patricia Pérez, and by Franco-Senegalese filmmaker Alice Diop, the article examines the subjective, intimate, historical, and political dimensions arising from the filmmakers' experiences of displacement. In this journey, the article weaves together theoretical articulations around identity and otherness in cinematic practices, in dialogue with diasporic thinkers from Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, and with the aesthetic-political manifestos of Third Cinema movement, which emerged in the 1960s and 70s in Latin America.

The outcomes of this special issue are generative precisely because they exceed any objective or normative conception of research results. Instead, the contributions foreground reflexive questions that are central to both the potential and the problematics of decolonial approaches to cinema. Fales frames filmmaking explicitly as an act of reparation. Beshara's aim is to confront the gatekeeping mechanisms that shape the publication and circulation of scholarship on Palestinian cinema within Eurocentric film studies. Pelligra targets the amnesia surrounding coloniality's impermanent yet diffuse haunting of public discourse. Nyingchuo aims to cultivate a practice of reading between the lines, contextualizing the cinemas of the periphery within interstitial spaces of resistance shaped by pervasive ideologies and their material effects on conditions of production. Likewise, Lema Mosca works to acknowledge the invisibility concealed within these cracks—an invisibility that demands historical and conceptual recognition. Denić broadens this scope by illuminating not only the contextualized workings of film texts, but also the visibility of subjects themselves within these structures.

With keywords such as reparation, gatekeeping, amnesia, and visibility emerging across the issue, the collection offers a series of generative critical prompts through which to engage with, expand, and contest the very concept of the canon.

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