

EMBRACING THE FLICKERING SHADOWS OF MODERNITY

Fantômes sous les tropiques: Aller au cinéma en Afrique coloniale.

By Odile Goerg.

Paris: Vendemaire, 2015. Pp. xi + 287. €22.00, paperback (ISBN 9782363581709).

Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences.

By Glenn Reynolds.

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2015. Pp 240. \$45.00, paperback (ISBN 978-0-7864-7985-6).

doi:10.1017/S0021853716000736

Key Words: West Africa, southern Africa, African modernities, arts, culture, film, identity.

There has been no shortage of studies on African cinema lately. With Nollywood at its peak, penetrating ubiquitously in African living rooms, including in French and Portuguese-speaking regions, Africans have finally appropriated an instrument that came to their land in colonial times along with the Maxim gun and the Bible. Regional studies, too numerous to be listed here, have attempted to shed light on the reception of colonial cinema in their many areas of the continent, from Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and World Beyond* (Routledge, 1994), to James Burns's *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Ohio University Press, 2002), to my own, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa* (Indiana University Press, 2016). Each focuses on issues of viewership, agency, censorship, on- and off-screen cultures, and more generally the ways in which the screen morphed into a battleground where the European imperial project to control African minds and bodies retreated as African audiences unyieldingly rejected colonial schemes and created their own cinematic culture. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that scholarship on African cinema would take stock of this flurry of local and regional surveys and attempt to present a general and more continental picture of African cinema that would go beyond Manthia Diawara's outdated *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1992).

Indeed, Odile Goerg's *Fantômes sous les tropiques: Aller au cinéma en Afrique coloniale* and Glenn Reynolds's *Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences* could not have come at a more propitious time. Yet, readers looking for an all-encompassing study of colonial cinema in Africa might brace for some disappointment as both studies fall short of the continental claims of their titles. While Goerg's study focuses mostly on West Africa, with some forays into Belgian Congo, Reynolds deals squarely with southern Africa, with interesting, albeit short, incursions into other parts of Africa as well. It is a testament to the resilience of the colonial partition that, decades after African colonies have won their independence, it continues to shape the way Africa is being studied. To be sure, the lopsided geographical coverage in these two studies is directly related to language issues as well as to the availability of archival resources.

In Goerg's study references to other areas such as Belgian Congo appear in small vignettes and snapshots interspersed within a narrative that covers mostly French West Africa, owing to her access to and vast knowledge of French colonial archives. Both studies have another feature in common: they focus on the interwar period, a period where cinema, according to Goerg, found its public. The first half of her book is thus devoted to

recounting the slow transition from silent (mainly Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin's comic shows) to sound films and the creation of African cinematic culture. In the second half of her book, she pays closer attention to the postwar period when at least 60 per cent of African city-dwellers attended film projections in over 2,000 movie theaters and when movie theaters became beacons of urban life and modernity and contested spaces teeming with infrapolitics. Perceived as dangerous, subversive, and morally reprehensible, movie theaters were gendered; female moviegoers required male accompaniment. *Aller au cinéma* in West Africa was labeled *woullah* in Peul, meaning 'waste of time'. Indeed, in some parts of West Africa, cinema drew a sharp line between two polarized forces at the opposing ends of the spectrum: Islam versus the notion that film ushered in modernity, progress, and a new way of life in the city. Goerg is also particularly interested in the *politique du film* (film policies) with which colonial authorities became preoccupied as early as the interwar period and devised in earnest following the Second World War when such control had already become a rearguard (re)action. Yet, with the advent of the war, colonial authorities shifted their views on cinema, seeing the new media as a double-edge sword, an 'asset and peril', which in some way reflects the rivalry between imported films (mostly Hollywood-made), perceived as dangerous, and the colonial-grown film production. Cinema then could serve as an ally to the colonial mission only if it were controlled, censored, and used as a propaganda and educational tool.

Cinema in Africa is such a vast topic that one wonders whether each author might have done better to focus on a single colonial territory. Yet the francophone scope of Goerg's study does lend itself to some insightful comparisons with regard to censorship, segregation, viewership agency, and film origins and distribution. For that reason, one simply regrets that there is no index at the end of her book.

Reynolds's study builds on a greater number of regional studies. Reynolds locates Africans not at the receiving end of cinema, not as consumers of European-made images, not even as performing before European gaze, but behind the camera, as black filmmakers who took an agentive stance to reclaim the control over images, audiences, and markets. Their agency, Reynolds argues, did not simply lie in their ability to produce new viewership cultures. It also shaped the whole cinematic process from shooting to performing, from marketing to viewing movies. In addition, his study endeavors to uncover 'the hidden traces' of political consciousness embedded in the emerging cultural practice of film spectatorship (10). How cinema was introduced to Africa in the first place, and the ways in which black audiences harnessed and commandeered images from Hollywood's and others' film production, are central to Reynolds's richly textured narratives and theoretical framework. He examines the connection between empires and images through the *longue durée*, showing how images were interwoven into the fabric of European imperialism, from maps to postcards, from still photographs to silent films and 'talkies'. He excavates earlier films that extolled the virtues of European colonization to show how films served as powerful tools to tame the African body and mind and win over European public opinion. European and American filmmakers used films – sometimes in conjunction with Cairo-to-Cape 'endurance expeditions' such as *La croisière noire* (1926) and *Wheels Across Africa* (1936) – to satisfy European insatiable curiosity about 'untamed Africa', in much the way that National Geographic documentaries operate today by displaying not only wild animals, but also primordial tribes, pygmies, and Maasai. One is reminded

of photographer Casimir Zagoursky who romanticized such tropes as ‘vanishing Africa’, real and authentic Africa that only the camera could capture, preserve, and save.

After the First World War, Reynolds argues, the demand for labor and the subsequent migration and mobilization of workers in mining towns created a potential market/audience for the emergence of a film industry in southern Africa. Linking cinema to labor and migration is an astute way to frame colonization as a total phenomenon that aimed at controlling and shaping African labor, bodies, minds, and tastes. In fact, both studies show how cinema, ‘a poignant expression of the technological and cultural of the West’ (18) reserved for and enjoyed by white audiences in southern Africa, Egypt, and the Belgian Congo, became a totally different medium once it attracted and was made available to black audiences. For white residents, cinema was not just entertaining; it was a window to civilization that allowed them to vicariously partake in the progress that unfurled in Europe. For black audiences, however, cinema remained until they became more familiar with it the ‘machine that spits out shadows’ giving them glimpses of the promises of modernity (25). Cinema thus was no longer perceived as an exclusive pastime for the white community but also as a popular leisure activity among the black city dwellers, mine workers and disenfranchised juveniles in urban slums. The goal was at times to use cinema to ‘improve workplace efficiency’ by boosting workers’ morale as well as diffusing the ‘rising tide of discontent’ among the mine migrant proletariat.

Cowboy movies provided a ‘visual template’ for young migrants and miners to forge new masculine identities in colonial communities where they represented a social capital that buttressed traditional patriarchy. Cowboy movies represented a new frontier where young African viewers could deploy a sense of agency, usher in and reenact a new urban sociability. Reynolds relies on a dense theoretical scaffolding, such as Homi Bhabha’s dialectic between the production of hybrid identities and resistance, to buttress his arguments. So compelling and encompassing is Reynolds’s foray into cowboy movies that this reviewer wished that he had read Chapter Four of *Colonial Cinema in Africa* before submitting his own *Tropical Cowboys* manuscript.

CH. DIDIER GONDOLA

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)

BEYOND EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN SLAVERY AND INTO THE PRESENT

Historical Dictionary of Slavery and Abolition, 2nd edition.

Edited by Martin A. Klein.

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. Pp. xxv + 450. \$85.00, hardback (ISBN 978-0-8108-5966-1).

doi:10.1017/S0021853716000748

Key Words: Comparative, gender, identity, law, slavery, slave trade, smuggling.

Few historians other than Martin Klein, deeply familiar with the varied nature of slavery in Africa, would have been capable of compiling a historical dictionary of an institution this complex and diverse in its global manifestations. The challenge for the compiler is,