



The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia

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music in television with the way it is used in film, highlighting crucial differences. She also notes the impact of technology, especially synthesizers and samplers. The use of synthesizers in particular seems to be less common today than it was in the 1980s. She hypothesizes that this could be related to vastly improved television sound quality compared to previous decades, and also to the 'dated' quality of the sounds produced by synthesizers manufactured in that era.

In a later chapter of the book, Halfyard makes a distinction between cult TV, which encompasses science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and 'quality TV', which aims to create a sense of realism. She notes that quality TV programmes such as *The West Wing* tend to use much less music overall than cult TV.

The author is a musicologist and relates a classroom experience to demonstrate the power of music to evoke emotions. She showed her class the same film clip three times, using different background music each time. When she asked the students what they thought was happening in the scene, they tended to give radically different answers depending on what music was used. Even more interestingly, the different interpretations provided by her students tended to remain remarkably consistent across different class sections. The book features a handful of black and white photographs and an extensive selection of figures and tables, many of which utilize musical notation. There are also several pages of notes, an extensive Works Cited list, a list of television programmes and films discussed in the book, and an index. This work is part of the Investigating Cult TV series edited by Stacey Abbott.

Though the book is written in an approachable style, some of the musicological information is highly technical. Students and faculty at colleges and universities with well-developed film, television, animation or musicology programmes will find this book of great interest, as will independent scholars of television.

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The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia

IAN AITKEN and CAMILLE DEPREZ (eds), 2017

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

pp. ix + 246, illus., £75.00 (paper)

The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia, edited by Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez, is a powerful book that addresses the relationship between documentary films and postcolonialism in South-East Asia. The book contains 11 essays that are divided into 3 main sections on 'Issues of Colonialism, Late Colonialism, and Independence', 'Missionary Films and Christian Evangelism', 'Documentary Representations: Projections, Idealised and Imaginary Images' respectively. The editors' introduction situates the book within the growing field of colonial film studies and

provides a sound theoretical framework that pinpoints the controversial cinematographic results of decolonization: since histories, geographies and cultural dynamics of decolonization are particular to each country, the ways in which non-fiction films address the passage from colonial order to postcolonial nations require a broad perspective that deals with multifaceted issues. The editors tackle such heterogeneity by expanding the category of 'colonial documentary film' to include 'newsreels, amateur films; missionary, philanthropic, nature, educational, informational and promotional films; official, public relations, sponsored and propaganda films; and also travelogues; and this range of material that also points to the eclectic practices, discourses, and styles involved here' (p. 4). Accordingly, the whole book uncovers a vast array of case-studies and perspectives, by focusing not only on official production, but also on under-researched and marginal documentaries that reveal regularities as well as incongruities within the relationship among colonial powers, decolonization and films.

The triangulation between cinema, decolonization and national identities is critically focused in part one, in particular in the essay of Ian Aitken, who adopts a bifocal perspective, encompassing both historical context and visual-content analysis (p. 29) to analyse a series of Singaporean newsreels backed by the government (1963–1969). This perspective is also implemented by Joe Capino ('Figures of Empire: American Documentaries in the Philippines') and Tom Rice (*Merdeka for Malaya: Imagining Independence across the British Empire*): both contributions highlight the ambiguity of postcolonial documentaries, which try to 'reconcile the contradictory goals of empire' (Capino, p. 80) by emphasizing several continuities between colonial and postcolonial cinema histories (Rice, p. 46).

Part two, entitled 'Missionary Film and Christian Evangelism', proposes interesting insights to reconsider the borders of postcolonial documentary film. By looking at unorthodox examples ascribed to the category of missionary-ethnographic film, the contributions by Sandeep Ray, Annamaria Montrescu-Mayes, and Emma Sandon look at the relationship between the colonial imaginary and the rhetoric of the civilizing mission. Particularly resounding is the stylistic negotiation between the colonial and postcolonial documentary presented by Annamaria Montrescu-Mayes ('Paradoxical Legacies: Colonial Missionary Films, Corporate Philanthropy in South Asia and the Griersonian Documentary Tradition'): in taking into account the first principles of Griersonian documentary style, Montrescu-Mayes explores how colonial imaginaries have resisted formal decolonization and are still able to shape visual products recalling exoticism and racial hierarchies (e.g. the HSBC advertisement *Lemon Grove*, 2013). Vice versa, some documentaries produced during formal colonization (e.g. those made by the Saint Joseph's Missionary Society in India during the 1930s) can hardly be pigeonholed in the category of colonial-propaganda film, since they emphasized more interaction rather than separation between colonizers and colonized.

The hybridization between fiction and non-fiction cinematographic styles is examined in depth in part three ('Documentary Representations: Projections, Idealised and Imaginary Images'), which deals with the construction of imaginaries in the blurred boundaries that should separate both colonialism/decolonization, and documentary/featured film. Camille Deprez's essay stresses that the producers' subjectivity, along with their political aims, contributed to creating largely staged and partial representations of Indian society. Similarly, Timothy Barnard explores how some naturalistic

documentaries produced in 1920s mixed non-fiction and narrative film styles, in order to produce an imaginary space in which Western desires could be projected. The use of documentary as a means to re-envision postcolonial belongings returns in the chapters by Thong Win and Dean Wilson, which both explore how images about Vietnamese decolonization constructed ambivalent meanings that assimilate and at the same time repel the hegemonic imaginaries created by former colonizers.

The last section, and in general the book as a whole, consistently takes into account the broad category of documentary as a privileged tool to envision how legacies of colonial power were negotiated and restructured in the postcolonial non-fiction production. Such visual legacies established themselves not only in State-controlled products, but also among a vast array of unconventional cinematic representations. Accordingly, even if the broad definition of colonial documentary that the editors presented (p. 4) could engender controversial outcomes in terms of methodological coherence, it seems a viable way to tackle the complex issues that emerge in the chapters. By focusing how postcolonial countries visually translated imaginaries created by the former rulers, the volume pinpoints the correlation among cultural means of colonial power (such as the colonial cinema), the ways in which those means have been adapted during decolonization, and the ways in which postcolonial nations used non-fiction films to strengthen their collective imaginations and belongings (p. 15). Of course, by encompassing a wide range of case-studies, *The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia* focuses more on the relationship between histories and representations, than on a thoroughly developed film analysis. However, the book's attempt to push the reflection on the relationship between visibility and colonial legacies beyond pre-determined styles and discourses is noteworthy. For these reasons, the volume stands as a significant and refreshing contribution for future, and more systematic, analysis of colonial documentary film well beyond the geographical and historical coordinates proposed in the volume.

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Activist Film Festivals: Towards a Political Subject

SONIA TASCÓN and TYSON WILS (eds), 2017

Briston and Chicago, Intellect

pp. 250, \$64.00 (paper)

In their volume, *Activist Film Festivals: Towards a Political Subject*, Sonia Tascón and Tyson Wils bring together a range of academics and practitioners to explore the sociopolitical potential of activist film festivals. They state that their book was 'born of the hypothesis that different platforms for political activism may produce different audiences and that film festivals (...) having an activist orientation need to be considered more closely as