

delivery of DVDs as a form of pirate infrastructure. Here, the comparison that Neves draws between pornography and fakes is most fascinating. Both, he argues, endow a sense of timeliness—in celebration of the here and now—that cuts through the temporal logic of the modernizing telos, which valorizes the promise of a future to come over the immediacy of pleasure that the fakes often provide.

Neves's (filmlike) treatise arguably has itself a pornographic effect. Some of his tantalizing conceptual musings could perhaps have been even more gratifying if accompanied by more-full-blown analyses of the political society in action. By calling the book a "sociography or technography" (28), Neves wishes to distinguish his project from others that are more explicitly committed to representing marginalized voices and narratives. The turn to the material and the infrastructural that his study promotes is a most welcome intervention in critical studies of media and globalization. But his provocative move also makes one wonder about the relevance of meaning-making practices in non-Western locales when the focal point of attention is shifted away from the textual realm. How, for example, might a political society look and sound if one were to return the enactments of piratical citizenship to the Chinese-linguistic milieu in which they unfold? Might the near exclusion of the non-English realm of meaning production—that is, how people in China talk about and make sense of what they see and experience, in the streets and on the internet—reinforce the epistemological hegemony that the book seeks to contest?

Neves is a daring theorist who offers a dazzling array of concepts that will prove inspirational for China studies, Asian studies, and media/cultural studies alike. The multilingual mediascapes of contemporary globalization and the related "vibrating forms of overlapping legitimacy" (165) in which a rising China is increasingly entangled can also benefit from an approach that methodologically liberates media from their messages. After all, how media manifest their presence and effects in different space-times can illuminate more about their social and political ramifications than the contents they deliver, verbal or visual. By demonstrating a bold defiance of globally circulated myths and a keen sensitivity toward site-specific transformations, Neves's book undoubtedly contributes to an ongoing effort to decolonize knowledge production. But its insights also serve as a good reminder for scholars of global/non-Western media to continue reflecting on the uneven power relations that render the locally sanctioned legitimacy of faking and other nonnormative practices illegible. To imagine globalization otherwise calls for more

sustained analyses of how and why global norms are capable of perpetuating themselves even as they fail to control the unruliness of those governed.

BOOK DATA. Joshua Neves, *Underglobalization: Beijing's Media Urbanism and the Chimera of Legitimacy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020. \$99.95 cloth; \$26.95 paper; \$25.60 e-book. 272 pages.

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## GIOVANNI VIMERCATI

### *Cinema of the Arab World: Contemporary Directions in Theory and Practice* edited by Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard

Over the last decade or so, films from the Arab world have enjoyed a renaissance of sorts, with many of them having received exposure and acclaim at international film festivals. Yet scholarship on the subject, as the editors of *Cinema of the Arab World: Contemporary Directions in Theory and Practice* argue, "remains relatively limited, both in substance and frequency" (vii). It is precisely this lacuna that those editors, Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard, set out to address.

One of the many merits of this volume is that it approaches cinema in its sociohistorical dimension, thus shedding as much light on the circumstances (social, historical, economic, etc.) under which films are produced and consumed as on the films themselves. While the term "Arab world" may erroneously suggest a homogenous space, both linguistic and cultural, the image of the "world" that emerges from the book is one of pluralistic difference, full of fertile contradictions. As the book's subtitle suggests, there is no overriding trend or stylistic current to be found in the region; rather, what emerges is a set of "directions," plural and often diverging.

The different contributions range from historical analysis of "documentary diplomacy" (Hadi Gharabaghi) to Moroccan documentary (Kevin Dwyer) and from the impact of foreign backing and funding in diverse contexts such as Lebanon (Wissam Mouawad) and Qatar (Suzi Mirgani). For the first half of the twentieth century, the arrivals of cinema and of colonial powers in the Arab world roughly coincided. Film distribution, determining what the colonized got to see, was perhaps the central concern for (post)colonial powers throughout the Arab world, as masterfully denounced in Tahar Cheriaa's seminal study *Écrans d'abondance, ou cinémas de libération*

*en Afrique?* (1968). For example, “the decline of cinemas providing spaces for the public exhibition of films is an especially acute dilemma in the Arab world,” while multiplex chains AMC and Vox are opening new theaters in Saudi Arabia after years of Wahhabi obscurantism and iconoclastic rejection of the medium (xi).

Cine clubs have almost disappeared in the Maghreb, yet the Fédération tunisienne des cinéastes amateurs (FTCA) and its platform, the Festival International du Film Amateur de Kélibia (FIFAK), founded in 1964, are still going strong. Significantly, their mandate exceeded the big screen and encompassed the “resistance to authoritarian regimes through a range of political activism and a small corpus of amateur films in Tunisia” (90). Yet even resistance, often assumed to be a quintessential feature of Arab filmmaking, is by no means assumed to be congenital to films from the region. *Cinema of the Arab World* explores the region in all its complexity. The binary view that opposes emancipatory cinema to (neo/post)colonialism is an oversimplification that the book problematizes, providing historical nuance and context.

A byproduct of leftist orientalism and its redundant celebration of “agency,” the tendency to look at the colonial subject as a natural-born rebel and, consequently, to look at the cinema from the Arab world as inherently revolutionary permeates a lot of writing on the subject. Reality is far less romantic. Emblematic in this respect is the state of independent Palestinian cinema, described by Sobhi al-Zobaidi (as quoted in the book’s essay by Viviane Saglier): “[I]ndependent filmmaking in Palestine is better understood as individual filmmaking... Palestinian filmmakers act competitively, most often incompatible with each other” (128). The collective dimension that anticolonial cinema evoked and at times incarnated throughout the 1960s and 1970s has been diluted, if not altogether drowned, by the rising tide of neoliberalism and the emergence of “an economically privatized Arab public sphere” (ix). It is precisely within this sphere that Arab cinema, if such a label is to serve any purpose, is produced and (poorly) distributed.

“While the commodification of difference in world cinema can hardly be denied,” Lippard contends, the cultural and economic circumstances under which images of the Arab world are conceived and marketed are complex and globally intertwined (163). If on the one hand, as Suzi Mirgani argues in her essay, neocolonialism continues to operate in a relatively straightforward fashion, on the other hand, Gulf states’ petrodollars have ushered in a new paradigm of film production in the region. The former tendency is best illustrated by Wissam Mouawad’s chapter

on Lebanese cinema and the French coproduction system. Do transnationally funded Lebanese films, the author asks, “really express and reflect local concerns, or do they comply with expectations predefined by European funders with respect to European audiences and festivals?” In answering this question, Mouawad explores the many, subtle ways in which coproduction agreements between former colonial powers and their ex-colonies are by no means equitable. Stereotypes and preconceptions are not so much consciously imposed by producers as structurally reproduced by a system economically geared toward Western audiences and their expectations.

While post- and neocolonial dynamics still revolve around nationhood and cultural sovereignty, as both Mouawad and Saglier illustrate and problematize in their two essays, film production in the Gulf countries is making these conceptual frameworks increasingly insufficient when understanding new cultural dynamics. Neoliberal colonialism no longer moves along the binary coordinates of “us versus them.”

National interests and foreign meddling can in fact go hand in hand, as Mirgani persuasively argues: “GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) governments have been able to establish a host of educational and cultural infrastructures tasked with working toward the fulfillment of specifically mandated developmental milestones and, ultimately, constructing national identity” (46). American universities and art institutions in the GCC countries serve a most ambiguous function: as “ambassadors of global neoliberalism and free market capitalism” (47). Agents of what can still be considered imperial interference, these institutions “retain strong ties with local governments” and, most crucially, play a pivotal role in the (re)writing of national mythologies (47). Their presence, which followed in the footsteps of US military bases, is thus not entirely ascribable to a traditional colonial function, let alone to an anticolonial one.

In the ecumenical name of profit, Western soft power lends its tools and expertise to business partners in the Gulf to forge a “cultural diplomacy” aimed at serving their respective interests. Mirgani links film to these same agendas, recognizing the scenario through which festivals like Dubai or Abu Dhabi and organs such as the Doha Film Institute have invested massively in the making of cinema in “nations with almost no film history and a population with little knowledge of film history” (50). Though the generous funding comes with its own set of requirements and limitations, both political and religious, “this new knowledge economy, while producing transnational and

neoliberal subjects, also brought a form of localized politicization” (49).

The volume also explores the pedagogical potential of film in and from the Arab world. In its opening chapter, Hadi Gharabaghi looks at the intriguing story of US documentary diplomacy in the Middle East through American declassified archives. As part of the cultural Cold War effort, the American government launched a campaign of “media diplomacy [which] operated more diffusely under the façade of an apolitical campaign of modernization as a new propaganda strategy” (5). The blunt dialectics of political proselytism were replaced by a more insidious approach that, while still aimed at the “immunization of the masses against the potential impact of Communist propaganda,” was ostensibly devoid of any doctrinal message (12). Gharabaghi reveals that it was none other than famed German cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer who, in 1952, wrote a fifty-seven-page report, “Appeals to the Near and Middle East: Implications of the Communications Studies along the Soviet Periphery,” in which he “synthesized the findings into a workable manual of mass media diplomacy for the Department of State” (13).

Mass-mediated persuasion is by no means the only pedagogical use cinema served in the region. In his chapter, Jeremy Randall illustrates how film—the documentaries of Maroun Baghdadi, in this case—can be used to counter the official histories of Lebanon and its methodical reduction to a country characterized exclusively by sectarianism (and not, for instance, by class inequality). The historical function of cinema in a country like Lebanon, where there is no unified history (or textbook), is all the more cogent. Films can in fact debunk official versions as well as sectarian fabrications, rendering reality, however fictionally, in all its complexity.

Making this complexity visible is the role that *Cinema of the Arab World* also plays. The contributions in this collection present a series of possibilities and case studies in how to approach a field that remains both understudied and oversimplified, not least owing to the extreme difficulties caused by limited access to films from the region.

BOOK DATA Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard, eds., *Cinema of the Arab World: Contemporary Directions in Theory and Practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. \$119.99 cloth; \$89.00 e-book. 422 pages.

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**NOTE:** To accompany this issue's dossier on Brazilian cinema, this edition of the Book Review section includes Lívia Perez's review of three books on Brazilian women filmmakers that have not yet been translated into English. At this time of discussions and fresh thinking regarding commitments to diversity, equity, and true inclusion, it is important to remember how much language opens a door to other worlds (to paraphrase a dear friend). The commissioning of Perez's review responds to a critical need to decenter scholarship if US film studies is to take a serious approach to encompassing global perspectives. These three books give long-overdue recognition to filmmakers and film scholars whose work—abounding with artistry and insights—remains little known within Anglophone film studies. An ongoing commitment to translation will be necessary for the field of cinema and media studies to become one that genuinely encompasses a multiplicity of voice and perspectives.

—Carla Marcantonio, Editor, Book Reviews

## LÍVIA PEREZ

*Feminino e plural: Mulheres no cinema brasileiro*  
(Female and Plural: Women on Brazilian Cinema)  
edited by Karla Holanda and Marina Cavalcanti Tedesco

*Mulheres atrás das câmeras: As cineastas brasileiras de 1930 a 2018* (Women behind the Camera: Brazilian Filmmakers, 1930–2018) edited by Luiza Lusvarghi and Camila Vieira da Silva

*Mulheres de cinema* (Women of Cinema) edited by Karla Holanda

Until 2017, feminist approaches to cinema were almost entirely unexplored in academic literature in Brazil, and women directors received little recognition as well. Even when a professor, usually female herself, chose to show a film by a female director, the class discussion would be accompanied by texts that only tangentially touched upon the director or the film; scholarship published in Portuguese about Brazilian women's cinema was minimal relative to the real participation of women in the history of Brazilian cinema.

As in most of Latin America, the number of female film directors has been growing in Brazil since the 1970s—especially in the 1980s, when a survey reported that 195 women directors had been engaged in making films by the end of the decade. In the 1990s, this growing trend continued, in effect leading to a boom of women filmmakers. Since 2000, women directors have reached unprecedented prominence in Brazil. Yet, shockingly, there have been no books published on the subject since the end of the 1980s; the legion of scholars invested in the topic had to be