

Prof. Joshua Cole
Office Hours: Thursday 2:30-4:00
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Fall 2009
HIST 196

First Year Seminar

Debating the French Colonial Past in Film

Recent debates in France about citizenship, racism, the integration of religious minorities, and the legacy of the colonial past are often presented as a relatively new phenomenon, as if globalization's impact has only recently been felt in France. In fact, such debates have been a part of French culture since the beginning of the modern period, and the traces of these discussions are easily found in all aspects of French culture.

This course explores the way in which twentieth-century cinema treated the question of the French empire, both as a contemporary phenomenon, in the case of films made during the colonial period, and as a historical legacy, in the case of films made after most French colonies gained their independence. We will view a selection of films made by French filmmakers as well as several films made by directors from former French colonies. Selected films will include works of fiction as well as documentaries, and will be supplemented with readings about the history of French colonialism, colonial cinema, and 20th-century French popular culture.

Requirements

Films. There will be one film per week. Occasionally we will screen all or part of a film in class, otherwise it is the student's responsibility to go to the Askwith Media Library on the second floor of the Shapiro Undergraduate Library to arrange for a screening on the monitors that are available there. The films are on reserve for this class during the week prior to our discussion.

Readings. The required readings are available in .pdf form on a C-Tools website that I have set up for members of the class. No book purchases are necessary for this class.

Papers. Every student will be required to write a short paper each week, prior to our Monday meeting. The paper should be your critical response to the film and the reading. I will not be expecting a particular point of view, though I do expect you to have one.

The requirements for the paper are as follows: one page, single-spaced. No margins, no title, no page number, no footnotes, no name on the printed side of the paper. Just your words, organized coherently into several paragraphs that contain an argument. Write your name lightly in pencil on the back, so that I will not be able to identify you until after I have read the essay.

As a way of getting started, I might suggest a few questions that you could ask as you approach these films:

- What is this film trying to do?
- How is it trying to do it?
- Is the film motivated by a question? Or is it motivated by a specific message?
- Who is/are the audience(s) for this film? What response(s) does it seek to incite in this/these audience(s)?
- Who does it ask us to sympathize with (if anybody)? Who does it ask us to judge? How do you know this?
- What situation does it want to explain? What does it seem willing to leave out?
- What assumptions does the film make about its characters, the situations that they find themselves in, and the spaces that they occupy?
- Does the film open itself up to more than one interpretation? Or does it insist on a relatively straightforward reading? Is it ambiguous? Why? Why not?

Obviously you will not be able to answer all of these questions in every case. I just throw them out to help you begin.

A portion of our discussion each week will be devoted to discussions of student papers. Each week I will select several of the papers, photocopy the FRONT side only (the side without your names) and we will read through them and talk about ways to improve the clarity and organization of the argument.

Attendance and Participation. I expect all enrolled students to attend all class meetings and participate actively in discussion. If you are shy or uncertain about speaking in public, please come speak to me in my office hours about ways to overcome this reluctance. Remember, too, that one of the best ways you can contribute to a seminar is to ask a good question. Try and think of one or two questions to ask each day we have discussion, and don't worry if you can't answer them yourself.

All unexcused absences to section or lecture will negatively affect your grade. Medical excuses will only be accepted with a certified doctor's note. Three or more unexcused absences will result automatically in a zero participation grade **If you have an illness that necessitates more than three excused absences, it is your responsibility to contact me early on in order to find some solution.**

Grades. The papers will be graded on a 9 point scale. 9 = excellent, 8=very good, 7= shows real promise, 6=on the right track but needs work, 5= elements of a good argument but lacking in coherence, 4 and lower = come see me in my office hours to work on your writing. Please see also the "Writing Hints" I have included in the Resources section of the C-Tools site.

75 percent of your final grade will be based on your written work for the class. 25 percent will be based on your attendance and participation in discussion. There is no final exam.

Schedule of Classes, Films, and Readings

Week 1 (Sept 14) Introduction: The French Empire and Colonial Culture in France

Dina Sherzer, "Introduction: Cinema, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism" in Dina Sherzer, ed., *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds* (Austin: University of Texas, 1996), pp. 2-19.

Week 2 (Sept 21) The Colonial Film in the Silent Era

L'Atlantide (1921), Jacques Feyder

David Slavin, "Heart of Darkness, Heart of Light: *La Mission Civilizatrice* and *Le Cafard* in *L'Atlantide*," *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 35-57.

Week 3 (Sept 28) The Colonial Film in the 1930s

Pépé Le Moko (1937), Julien Duvivier

David Slavin, "Poetic Realism's *Cinéma Colonial*: Native Sons of the Popular Front?," *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 172-198.

Week 4 (Oct 5) Decolonization

The Battle of Algiers (1966), Gillo Pontecorvo

Joshua Cole, "Intimate Acts and Unspeakable Relations," in Alec G. Hargreaves, ed., *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 125-141.

Week 5 (Oct 12) African Film in the 1960s

La noire de... (*Black Girl*, 1965) / *Borom Sarret* (*The Wagonner*, 1963), Ousmane Sembène.

Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Tribal Scars (Sembène's *Black Girl*)" in *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 284-288.

Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" in Anthony King, ed., *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1957), pp. 19-39.

Week 6 (Oct 19) NO CLASS – FALL STUDY BREAK

Week 7 (Oct 26) African Film in the 1970s*Touki-Bouki* (1973), Djibril Diop Mambèty

Patrick Williams, "Entering and leaving modernity': utopia and dystopia in Mambety's *Touki bouki* and Hyènes," in Wendy Everett, ed., *The Seeing Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.

Week 8 (Nov 2) The Resurgence of Colonial Memories in France 1*Chocolat* (1983), Claire Denis

Catherine Portuges, "Women Directors Interrogate French Cinema," in Dina Sherzer, ed., *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds* (Austin: University of Texas, 1996), pp. 80-102.

Week 9 (Nov 9) The Resurgence of Colonial Memories in France 2*Fort Saganne* (1984), Alain Corneau

Carrie Tarr, "French Cinema and French Postcolonial Minorities," in Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 59-83.

Week 10 (Nov 16) Colonial History Retold in African Film*Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), Ousmane Sembène

Gregory Mann, "Veterans and the Political Wars of 1940-60," in Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 108-145.

Week 11 (Nov 23) The Documentary Film and Colonial Memory*Drowning by Bullets* (1992), Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling

Joshua Cole, "Remembering the Battle of Paris: 17 October 1961 in French and Algerian Memory," *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 21-50.

Week 12 (Nov 30) Postcolonial Romantic Comedy*Métisse* (1993), Mathieu Kassovitz

Alain Gabon, "The Transformation of French Identity in Mathieu Kassovitz's Films *Métisse* (1993) and *La Haine* (1995)," in Hafid Gafaïti, Patricia E. Lorcin, David G. Troyansky, *Transnational Spaces and Identities in the Francophone World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

Week 13 (Dec 7) Postcolonial Realism*Hate* (1995), Mathieu Kassovitz

Joshua Cole, "Understanding the French Riots of 2005: What historical context for the 'crise des banlieues'?" *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* 5:2 (Autumn/Winter 2007), pp. 69-100.

Week 14 (Dec 14) Postcolonial Fairy Tales

Salut, Cousin (1996), Merzak Allouache

David Blatt, "Immigrant Politics in a Republican Nation," in Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 40-55.