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Clive Nwonka and Anamik Saha (eds.), *Black Film British Cinema II*. London: Goldsmiths Press, 2021, 248 pp. £21.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781912685639

Thirty-three years after the publication of proceedings from the inaugural Black Film British Cinema conferenceⁱ, Clive Nwonka and Anamik Saha's collection, *Black Film British Cinema II*, could not be more necessary or urgent. Drawing on the prescience of Stuart Hall's foundational work, the unifying intellectual labour that makes up this collection recognises, speaks to and expands the historical definition of Black film 'while permitting the expansion and fissuring of ethnic difference within it' (p.5). Providing generative and deliberative insights from a range of contributors both inside and outside of the academy, the aim of the collection to 'demonstrate [and] permit Black film to exist as a unifying cinema of *resistance*' (p.5), is fully and compellingly realised. Combining conceptual, terrain mapping work, discussions of relational forms of responsibility and deconstructions of cultural governance, and contextualised accounts of the making and circulation of Black cinema, the collection offers vital new frameworks for understanding Black British film.

The varied shape and content of the collection, containing essays, critical dialogues and think pieces, reflects the ways in which Nwonka and Saha bring into dialogue the work of academics, activists, filmmakers, programmers, cultural executives and curators. This structural mode demonstrates the 'mutual belonging' (p.xv) that the collection promotes, providing incisive, intersectional and interconnected conversations about contemporary Black British film culture. Proposing an important shift in the question 'from *if* to *how*, and to what degree the film industry includes, appreciates, and values both black film and blackness within film', the editors underline the urgent necessity for a 'consideration of the concept of cinema (in all its totality) with the reality of Black circumstances; in terms of race and ethnicity, aesthetics, politics, culture, technology, and following the connections between these contexts (p.5-6).

Part one of the collection, 'The new politics of representation in black film', showcases work from Sarita Malik, Kara Keeling and Maryam Jameela, offering up national and transatlantic perspectives. Malik's skilful chapter opens the collection, identifying and plotting what she refers to as the 'three interrelated acts' (p.38) of Black film British cinema. She combines

personal reflection with cultural historical review to discuss the relations between shifting structures of governance and power that have helped shape an aspect of British culture that has sought to reshape our national story, even as its formations have mutated (p. 22)

In this way, Malik moves deftly through the story of three decades, beginning in 1987 and ending in 2017. Moving from the radical hope and creative and critical openness of the first act (1987–1997), to the fragmentation of the 'Black' in British cinema - aligned to the cultural imperatives of neoliberalism via a 'turn from anti-racist to post-multiculturalist sensibilities' (p. 29) (1997–2007) - to the final act, the political, economic and technological changes that secured the dominance of creative diversity policy (2007–2017), this terrain-mapping work points to 'a dual story of resistance and governance' (p. 36).

Keeling's chapter brings the work of British filmmaker, John Akomfrah, into dialogue with that of Black American filmmaker, Arthur Jafa. In so doing, Keeling provides a transatlantic study of both the technological and political tenets of cinema, attentive to the industrial arrangements of production and distribution of Black film and media. This logic of connection provides not only a space for critical reflection and analysis but also a working through of what Keeling notes to be Alice Maurice's (2013) understanding of the ways in which film technologies have been imbricated with racial

epistemologies, countered through drawing attention back to materialist praxes to contest racist logics.

Maryam Jameela's chapter also concerns representation and racial categorisation, evidencing the contemporary flattening of difference via the on-screen dominance of the British Muslim as synonymous with being South Asian. Speaking of 'political Blackness' and drawing on David Tyrer's (2013) scholarship on the violent practice of colour coding, Jameela argues that the terms BME, BAME and POC are connected by a 'thread of minoritisation that [...] has at its centre, whiteness' (p. 57).

Part II, 'Black Film Aesthetics', explores a range of apparatus deployed in Black British filmmaking, delineating both formal characteristics and potential effects on Black audiences. Richard T. Rodríguez's chapter considers transnational desires and queer of colour politics in the work of Isaac Julien. Assessing how the work of Julien operates 'at the crossroads of national, cultural, and aesthetic influence' (p.73), Rodríguez explores the temporal and spatial contours of Julien's stylistic motifs, arguing that they operate as a complex view of race and sex, repurposing 'African American cultural history for a distinctly Black British film practice (p.77).

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The fifth chapter in the collection, 'Understanding Steve McQueen' is a transcript based on a panel discussion with Clive Nwonka, Ozlem Koksak, and Ashley Clark, chaired by Richard Martin, from the ICA conference in May 2017. Exploring McQueen's career, the conversation draws out the spatial, political and cultural contexts in which McQueen operates, debating his place within the mainstream of Black British film, and discussing the permissibility of his art cinema aesthetics. The panel's debates around the brutality in McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013) are picked up thematically in Rabz Lansiquot's chapter, exploring the paradox of violence against Black people and bodies as shot by filmmakers and artists on mobile technologies. Thinking through 'their perceived intention [. . .] as calls to action or expressions of solidarity; in relation to their psychic, corporeal, and socio-political effects' (p. 91), Lansiquot reflects on both their own work, and that of artist-filmmaker, Kat Anderson.

Part III, 'Curatorship, Exhibition, and Arts Practice', features contributions from So Mayer, James Harvey and Alessandra Raengo. Exploring how exhibition and curation connect Black film and British Cinema, Mayer's energetic essay argues that while the exhibition of Black British film may not 'share a single map of circulation' (Givanni, 1988), the 'activism of curators and programmers operates as the comma between Black Film and British Cinema [...], opening out the multiple, dynamic, situated, and shifting relations between the terms as a mediated process' (p. 109). Mayer's understanding of such practice thus works to suggest ways to resist curator/programmer dissonance through the curation of 'spatial scenarios' (p. 119).

James Harvey's chapter also focuses on space, returning to the work of Akomfrah to explore his use of montage and the archive, 'analysing how, since the 1980s, Akomfrah repurposes artistic techniques from film history to construct a *space of intervention* against racist discourse' (p. 125). Drawing out Akomfrah's persistent return to the archival and his use of montage as '*a way of thinking*' (p. 133), Harvey evidences Akomfrah's aesthetic interventions, arguing that these pertain not only to a questioning of the mode of representation, but also at the level of exhibition, equating to '*an aesthetic politics*' (p. 135). Akomfrah's work is picked up again by Alessandra Raengo, focusing on the 'the centrality of the ontopolitics of movement in Akomfrah's practice' (p. 144) as he works to interrogate the themes of migration and movement as central to the form as well as the themes of Akomfrah's gallery work.

The final and fourth part of the collection shines a critical light on the 'Politics of diversity' and through the contributions of Shelley Cobb and Natalie Wreyford, Tess S. Skadegård Torsen, Melanie Hoyes and Bidisha, offers national and international comparisons of the mechanics, cultures, production and measurements deployed through and by diversity policies. Cobb and Wreyford draw on data from their 'Calling the Shots: Women and Contemporary Film Culture in the UK, 2000–2015' project to 'highlight the intersectional identities and experiences of these [Black and minority ethnic] women in an industry that favours whiteness and masculinity' (p. 166), assessing employment patterns, tokenism and segregation. In contrast, Skadegård Torsen's chapter considers Danish representational politics through the lens of the Danish Film Institute (DFI), to 'better understand the (infra)structures of the Danish film industry's work with diversity and representation' (p. 185). Interrogating political and cultural discursive frames, Skadegård Torsen situates the DFI as a 'central actor in the structuring of the industry and in the financing of film', and yet points towards the ways in which they negate accountability, relying on 'the continued erasures of those most affected by oppression, meanwhile overlooking the powered hierarchies the[y] participate in upholding through practices of funding, support, and exposure' (p. 198).

Melanie Hoyes' work turns back to the use of data interrogating the difficulties involved in both the collation and monitoring of diversity data in relation to the BFI survey of Black participation in the UK film industry, arguing that current data shows that the 'UK film industry is failing [...] to augment visibility for underrepresented groups or portray them in a nuanced, positive way' (p. 209). In the final chapter of the collection, Bidisha reflects on both the cultural landscape of the United Kingdom in relation to the overwhelming dominance of on and off-screen whiteness, and her own positionality as 'a woman artist of colour working in photography and film, [...] creating in total isolation' (p. 222); she asserts the urgent need to talk about race and racism, rather than equality and diversity.

This final call to action by Bidisha is exemplified in this collection, which, as Nwonka and Saha had intended, offers up new and salient frameworks for understanding and studying Black British film. This collection, though somewhat gender-siloed in its sectioning, represents a crucial intervention in the field, and its interdisciplinary lens, coalition of contributors, and political and critical dialogues nuance the cultural dimensions of Black British cinema, providing readers with invitations to pick up the potent questions, practices and actions that it provokes.

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ⁱ <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/black-film-british-cinema-conference-2017-representation-radicalism>