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War marked, in many ways, the apotheosis of empire for Britain. The global conflict of 1939–45 was sustained by the material and economic resources gathered through extractive empire; by a mass imperial fighting force that automatically assumed belligerent status when Britain declared war; and by the control of territory and naval bases and consequently, the global circulation of materials and peoples.¹ All of this was accompanied by a newly urgent rhetoric of unity in a proliferation of official and popular stories that portrayed the wartime empire pulling together across differences of race and ethnicity in a transnational and global anti-fascist conflict.² Yet at the same time the flawed logic of this conception of the conflict and of empire ‘unity’ was apparent to many, not least to those colonised populations fighting fascism for the liberal rights of democracy, self-determination and freedom that were for them merely fictions. The biopolitical atrocities of fascism directed attention toward racism.³ And the disconnect between the rhetoric of unity and freedom and the reality of colonial governance grew ever more visible, as violence – and its threat – sustained imperial dominance (in, for example, the suppression of the 1942 Indian uprising, and the mass imprisonment of members of the Indian National Congress (INC); the occupations of Iraq, Syria and Iran; and the shooting by police and military of strikers in the economically essential region of the Northern Rhodesian Copper Belt in 1940). In August 1941 the widely publicised ‘Atlantic Charter’ affirmed the ‘rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live’, prompting the American Under-Secretary of State to declare that ‘the age of imperialism is dead’.⁴ Not quite. Liberalism had, after all, long lived with the contradictions between declarations of human rights and democratic rule and the realities of slavery and colonial expansion and exploitation.⁵ Even so, military losses in Asia in 1942 – including the loss of the crucial naval base at Singapore – undercut the fiction of racial supremacy upon which colonial governance relied.⁶ The certainty, and longevity, of colonial rule and the global colonial order was put into doubt, amid uncomfortable questions about the connections between liberalism, colonialism and fascism.

Alternative fictions were pressed into service to prop up the seemingly ailing age of imperialism and its distinctive formation of racialised governance and ordering of space and power. The rhetoric of unity was urgently supplemented with ideas of ‘development’ and ‘Commonwealth’, as the British colonial state accelerated trends visible in the interwar period to emphasise its benevolent trusteeship and its role in establishing economic self-sufficiency. In 1940 the Colonial Development and Welfare...
Act set in place structures of welfarism that were designed to forestall radical social and political action, preceding the establishment of the welfare state in the metropole in the post-war period. Education policies were developed to better integrate colonial subjects into a market economy. Alongside economic ‘development’, the colonial state began preparation for divesting governmental control, albeit haltingly and with no immediate end in sight. India, for example, was ‘offered’ Dominion status in 1942 (it is when leading members of the INC refused, and formed the Quit India movement, that they were imprisoned). In July 1943 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Stanley, told Parliament that the British government was ‘pledged to guide Colonial people along the road to self-government within the framework of the British Empire’. Any such road would, it was imagined, be connected back to Britain, sustaining economic ties in the aptly named ‘Commonwealth’ and the objectives of geopolitical ‘security’.

At stake was the transition of colonial dominance to economic imperialism, guided in part by the model provided by the United States and indeed provoked also partly by the opposition of that country to colonial rule. This opposition was motivated in part by the British state’s earlier erection of a structure of economic protectionism that attempted to place the materials and markets of colonial states beyond the reach of American capital. US policy, particularly in the post-war settlement, would require that these barriers be removed (that this was fundamentally an economic question, and not a question of liberal ethics, was apparent in the US policy to help prop up the British empire when it served US Cold War agendas). At the end of the war, deeply in debt to the US and unable to re-establish the old balance of power, Britain was clearly a fading geopolitical force. The revelation of Britain’s financial and military weakness in the 1956 Suez Crisis made this clearer. At the same time, the rise of colonial nationalism – demanding the logical freedoms of liberalism – led to wars of decolonisation in Africa and Southeast Asia, and to what Paul Gilroy describes in his essay in this volume as the ‘slow, fractious, blood-soaked decomposition of the British empire’. Under pressure from subaltern populations, nationalist movements and newly established American global hegemony, Britain’s empire began to crumble: India became independent in 1947, followed later by rapid bursts of decolonisation in West Africa and Southeast Asia in 1956–7, and Western and Eastern Africa between 1960–5. The number of people living under British rule in the two decades after 1945 was cut from 700 million to 5 million; the largest and probably the most ambitious imperial venture in human history was reduced, as Francis Gooding reminds us in his contribution here, ‘to a mere rump, a far-flung global archipelago’.

What roles did film play across the period 1939–65, in the face of these rapidly changing geopolitical strategies and realities? What were the varied ways in which film registered, and projected, colonial discourse? What do these films now reveal about the fantasies and realities of colonial rule? The essays in this collection offer varied answers to these questions, in dialogue with the materials assembled by the ‘Colonial Film’ project. At their broadest, the essays address the enmeshing of cultural representation and political and economic control. They examine the ways in which state and non-state actors harnessed film to instructional and pedagogical functions, putting media to work to shape the attitudes and conduct of populations to sustain colonial governmental order. The considerable investment in ‘colonial film’ by the
British – the most sustained and extensive use of film for governmental purposes by a liberal state – was predicated on ideas both about film as a symbol of technological modernity that embodied and projected colonial authority and, relatedly, about its persuasive power over ‘unsophisticated’ populations. The specific work of film to supplement colonial governance in this period began, contributors here teach us, with efforts to generate loyalty to the colonial power and its geopolitical strategies; moved through the attempted elaboration of an ‘imagined community’ that transcended the nation-state and was properly transnational; and was cathected to the efforts to establish new economic relationships, to ‘develop’ the colonies in ways that supplemented the British economy and to educate colonial subjects about, principally, the market and its demands in the coming era of self-governance. These essays suggest new ways of conceptualising British cinema as a cinema of imperialism; and in turn propose new models for mapping the circulation of what we might call the visual regimes of geopolitics. Together, they urge us to resist the marginality of colonial history, and to more fully engage with the colonial ordering of the world and its articulation through the medium of cinema.

Various forms of film facilitated and visualised colonial rule and its mutation into ‘Commonwealth partnership’. Governments, educationalists, entrepreneurs, missionaries and the film industry all made films, and so inscribed in varying ways colonial discourse onto, and as, film. The essays here address the newsreels that were produced in different languages; state-produced ‘documentaries’; corporate-financed non-fiction films about economic relationships; and narrative fiction films telling stories about the history and present moment of imperialism and its ostensible dissolution (encompassing long-established fantasies of conquest and domination but also new rhetorics of ‘progress’ and development). Across these differing filmic forms, there emerged a set of related formal practices and tropes, belying any simple separation of the real and the imaginary. Time and time again in these films we see white characters central to the frame educating and guiding the marginal colonial subjects in learning about and using modern technology. Frequently the sound of an English upper-class voice embodies authority and directs our attention. Cruelty, hierarchy, domination are displayed, naturalised and justified. A common format shows the right and wrong way to accomplish various tasks, a ‘Mr Wise and Mr Foolish’ format that embodies a pedagogical and paternalistic logic. Trusteeship, benevolence even, is central to the colonial relationship, these films often propose. Yet other films offer a more unfiltered record of what Laura Mulvey calls ‘the gaze of the regime’. Amateur films made by military personnel and other colonial officials occasionally reveal truths about colonial attitudes and events suppressed in official films. Violence, rarely seen in the official record of empire, is glimpsed in the margins of these films, as, for example, in the films made by Major William Rhodes James discussed by Vron Ware, which show the British military clearing Chinese villagers away from their homes and into new camps during the Malayan Emergency.

Along the way, specific institutions were formed to foster colonial film, most notably the Colonial Film Unit (CFU), set up in 1939 under the auspices of the Ministry of Information (MOI) initially to mobilise colonial support for the war but remade in the post-war period to better reflect new projects of education and economic development. Local units were established in the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Central Africa,
Jamaica and Malaya. The advent of filmic independence mirrored, and crossed over with, that of political independence – both fraught with similar complexities for the British state, and new independent states, in charting change and continuity.

The establishment of institutions to foster the production of didactic film was supplemented also by the elaboration and intensification of novel methods of distribution and theatrical and non-theatrical exhibition. Legislation at times ensured short didactic films would be shown in cinemas before fictional features. Elsewhere, mobile cinema vans were constructed, and equipped with projection equipment, and these circulated widely in remote areas, presenting films and so ‘projecting the State’, as Charles Ambler shows here, to largely illiterate audiences who probably confronted colonial propaganda for the first time lit up on screens in the night sky. Film itself as ‘shock and awe’, perhaps. The development of such a system was pioneered in the interwar years, but reached a wider audience in the post-war period when these new pathways of film distribution and exhibition facilitated the mobile economic relations that were so central to post-war colonial strategies. Across this period there developed infrastructures to deploy film as a medium of information and communication, accompanied by considerable discussion of the best ways to manage and orchestrate this.

All these efforts were predicated on ideas about the utility of cinema for engineering consent and managing the conduct of diverse populations. Often these proto-film theoretical arguments proposed that structures of ‘identification’ in film texts functioned to draw audiences into sharing the beliefs embodied in the films. The ideas about audiences and the effects of film embodied colonial logic, for it was based on the belief that colonial subjects would be more easily and profoundly influenced by media than Western subjects. Likewise, the efforts to harness film to the project of colonialism were predicated also on beliefs about the necessity and efficacy of ‘fictions’ to sustain colonial rule (even better when those fictions claim truth status, as, for example, documentaries and newsreels do). Film could supplement colonial rule carried out a distance. At the core of the elaboration of colonial film, and its infrastructures, were ideas about the efficacy of film and fiction for (colonial) government.

Film and the End of Empire begins with Paul Gilroy’s essay ‘Great Games: Film, History and Working-through Britain’s Colonial Legacy’. Gilroy’s widely, and justly, influential work has argued that the British empire is the crucial repression within contemporary national memory, and that the failure to think through the process by which Britain dominated one-quarter of the globe for the better part of two centuries significantly contributes to current traumas around race and religion. The film material assembled for the ‘Colonial Film’ project offers, Gilroy argues here, the possibility of re-engaging with that past, confronting the realities of the divisions and differences that have been so central to the British state. Working-through the ways cinema was deployed to elaborate an imperial mythography – as the cultural mandate, Gilroy argues, of white supremacy – is a crucial and urgent project to consolidate a liveable, convivial, multiculture. Gilroy argues that the social, political and economic upheavals that attended the end of European empires are epochal developments, heralding our
post- and neocolonial world. The urge to understand those, and their refraction through the prism of cinema, is central to Gilroy’s project – and indeed to the essays gathered together here.

Gilroy reminds us also that colonialism is always war, and so requires, constantly, propaganda; that information, culture, power and government were, from the early twentieth century onwards, complexly intertwined. War frequently makes propaganda imperative, though this was, for a colonial power ostensibly fighting for democracy, certainly a complex process. The essays in the first section of this book address this period and this complexity. In ‘The Last Roll of the Dice: Morning, Noon and Night, Empire and the Historiography of the Crown Film Unit’, Martin Stollery traces out the production history of a film that was ultimately never completed and suggests that this failure reveals something of the instability in colonial order towards the end of the war. The film was started in 1942 by the Crown Film Unit, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Information. Crown produced such canonical wartime documentaries as Target for Tonight (1941), Listen to Britain (1942) and Fires Were Started (1943). It was intended though that Morning, Noon and Night, as it was provisionally called, would focus not on Britain or on frontline fighting by colonial troops, as other wartime propaganda had, but on the infrastructure which supported the British empire’s war effort: food production; the manufacture of military equipment; medical and welfare services; training, and so on. The story of the empire pulling together in this fashion would, it was thought, help enact the unity the film imagined and also contribute to the ongoing effort to persuade the US of the benign nature of British imperialism. To tell its story of a united empire, the producers planned to edit together film from across the empire, literally uniting materials and images and presenting them as a coherent whole – as film, uniting pieces of celluloid, and in turn sound with vision, and so mimicking the ‘unity’ of the empire itself. It was, though, never finished. Unity was hard to fabricate. The difficulty and ultimately the impossibility of mixing footage from across the empire and embodying a global vision makes apparent, because it is caused by, the broader political divergences of the moment.

Representation failed to hold together difference, to imagine a global community or stitch together rhetoric with reality. The complex jarring of image and reality, and film and geopolitics, is also central to Richard Osborne’s account of film made in India between 1939, the outset of the war, and 1947, the moment of Independence. Osborne traces out the production of film by the MOI, by the Government of India and by the American newsreel company March of Time. The films enact differing visions of India, caught up in the throes of radical transformation, and fractured across the differing political imperatives of the British, Indian and (to some extent) American state. The British films are mostly silent about the political situation, and the Quit India movement, and this is characteristic of the evasions, lacunae, of the official filmed record. Yet the political situation was described in more detail in the American newsreels, which were initially supported by the MOI again in the hope that they would portray enlightened British governance. At the end of the war, immediately prior to the granting of Independence, the Central Office of Information (COI, the peacetime successor to the MOI) made the film Indian Background (1946), telling the wearily familiar colonial story about ‘primitive’ cultures necessarily confronting
industrial modernity. Osborne shows how the film was a composite print, shot silently with sound added later because this enabled the commentary to be dubbed into various languages and so transformed according to the political valences of its audiences. It was composite also in that it was made up of previously used footage, a kind of compilation film holding together, in its very form, the past and present as it imagined the future. These formal practices strove to offer a comforting fiction of coherence, of unity – the suturing of sound and vision, of past and present – that bore little relation to the radical transition and indeed Partition that was becoming visible outside the frame and the cinema theatre.

Towards the end of his essay on government and amateur film-making in India, Ravi Vasudevan also ponders the way film functions as both a medium of disaggregation and recombination. Addressing amateur films made by colonial officials in India, Vasudevan shows how they combine forms and functions, stretching from domestic scenes, to scenes of ‘Orientalist curiosity’, to public events and to the celebration of what he calls ‘developmental vistas’. The amateur film-maker in this colonial context stitches together diverse events, often by the simple expedient of editing in the camera: scenes and events tumble together, allowing a glimpse into the varied movement of colonial officials, as the camera captures the physicality of people and objects and material life in the colonial world. Vasudevan is interested in how the disaggregative logics of film enable recombination for informational and rhetorical purposes. It is these purposes that sustained the elaboration of state policies in India, particularly in the 1940s, for the production, circulation and exhibition of films. Vasudevan maps out the establishment of state production practices and media infrastructures in the first part of his essay, showing how these emerged to better facilitate the dissemination of information to diverse Indian populations and so supplement the complex and unstable governmental rationality of the late colonial moment.

Vron Ware also examines film across the official/amateur divide to address the intersection of film and the establishment of a multiethnic fighting force that was deployed widely in the war and in later wars of decolonisation. Amateur and official films show us now how widely this colonial force was deployed across Europe, North Africa, Burma, Malaya and elsewhere to sustain the colonial order. The films supplement, and at times reorientate, the standard historical accounts of the empire at war and the policing of the crumbling empire in the post-war period. Ware demonstrates also how film was used to construct a racialised military imaginary, drawing on colonial constructions of ethnic difference that derived from the history of military Orientalism. Gurkhas, for example, were portrayed as a martial race, capable of great feats of military prowess, in a way that was entirely consistent with colonial discourse. The visual trope of the kukri, the knife used by Gurkha forces, appears across a number of films, emphasising and making material this conception of a colonial primitivism that was harnessed now to the sustenance of colonial order. The nature of that order is glimpsed outside the official film record. Ware shows us how amateur film shot by a Gurkha soldier during the Malayan Emergency, moving Chinese villagers to a British detention camp, makes visible, uncomfortably so, the realities of a multiethnic military order enforcing imperial rule.

The failure of film to stitch together difference in coherent visions of colonial unity, and transact the shift from colonial rule to post-war partnership and
development in the shadow of the Atlantic Charter, is addressed by historian Philip Zachernuk in his essay on the production and reception of the fiction film *Men of Two Worlds* (1946). The Colonial Office began production of the film in 1942, with the aim of visualising new ideas about partnership developed during the war and accelerated in the post-war period, when the film was released. At vast expense – costing more than the budget of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act – the film told the story of an educated African, Kisenga (Robert Adams), returning to Africa with a white District Commissioner to help persuade Africans to move away from areas infested by the tsetse fly. Kisenga is a celebrated musician in England; but on his return to Africa, is cursed by a witch doctor and falls ill, lost between two worlds – Europe and Africa, the civilised and the savage – and unable, momentarily, to overcome what he describes as ‘ten thousand years of Africa in my blood’. At his lowest, Kisenga is saved by the District Commissioner, who plays him his own musical composition – European-influenced, and distinct from threatening African drums. Zachernuk traces out the complex production history of the film, using various archival resources, and shows how the film sought to balance longstanding conceptions of primitivism, as embodied in the figure of the witch doctor, with new imperatives to imagine educated African elites as partners in the post-war future. The difficulties of this were apparent during the arduous production process, and again upon the film’s release. African intellectuals in England, particularly the West African Students’ Union (WASU), argued that the figure of the witch doctor was not only unrealistic but also a pernicious and racist conception of African backwardness and difference. WASU writers argued also that this was compounded by Kisenga’s breakdown, with its intimation of essentialist ideas about race. These resistant reading practices eloquently discerned the colonialist logic underpinning the film’s narrative of ‘development’, and made apparent the broader and more fundamental problematic of visualising and enacting a new post-war and, perhaps, postcolonial order.

What changed in the immediate post-war period? What were the ways that films were used to negotiate and manage these changes? The essays in the section ‘Film/Government/Development’ address these questions, probing the establishment of new filmic policies and practices in light of emergent post-war conceptions of partnership and development and showing how film was complexly implicated in the effort to preserve and protect colonial order. The transformation in the functioning of the Colonial Film Unit is emblematic of this. It was set up during the war years to foster the loyalty of colonial subjects. As war ended though, as Tom Rice shows us in his essay ‘From the Inside: The Colonial Film Unit and the Beginning of the End’, the CFU made a number of films about colonial subjects in England, seeking to make visual an ostensibly new paradigm of interconnection and partnership. Later the so-called Home Unit was disbanded, and local training schools and film units were established initially in the Gold Coast and Nigeria and shortly thereafter in Jamaica (Franklyn St. Juste considers some aspects of the history of the Jamaican Film Unit in his contribution here). The establishment of local film units seemed to mark a shift in both film and colonial policy. Rice probes this shift, showing us how the local film units operated, and how centralised and metropolitan authority continued behind the fictions of decentralised partnership. The films produced by the local units themselves frequently registered this uncertainty and ambiguity, Rice shows us, for though they
engaged with a local specificity, the key production roles and decisions were taken by British film-makers and officials. This was frequently embodied in the familiar English voice of authority that accompanies the images and directs attention. As Rice demonstrates, the halting and partial move toward a decentralised film policy and practice mirrors the broader complex and stuttering shift toward decolonisation that gathered pace in the post-war years.

The transformation of the CFU into local units was accompanied by a newly urgent rhetoric of ‘development’ that sought to reorientate conceptions of colonial rule toward a more benign sense of trusteeship and partnership. Film played a central part in this transaction as Rosaleen Smyth conveys in her essay ‘Images of Empires on Shifting Sands: The Colonial Film Unit in West Africa in the Post-war Period’. It did so both as an effort to legitimise and prolong colonial rule, and as part of a global public-relations exercise by a British state still seeking to differentiate its authority from that of fascist states and to appease American resistance to imperialism. Along the way, film came to be integrated with new educational practices around public health and agriculture in particular, as a central part of the colonial state’s efforts to generate and ‘develop’ the economic utility of subaltern populations and colonial states. Later still, when political decolonisation became inevitable, film was used, Smyth argues, to try to maintain close economic and political ties between Britain and newly independent states in the transnational ‘Commonwealth’.

Wars of decolonisation punctured the fiction of partnership and development. In Malaya, for example, the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), the military wing of the Malayan Communist Party, began a guerrilla war against British forces in 1948. The British response to what they called the ‘Emergency’ centred on the massive relocation of Malayan and Chinese populations to new villages. As the Emergency intensified, the government increasingly utilised propaganda to portray these villages as idyllic spaces, the MNLA as a barbarous force, and the British and Malayan populations as working together to develop Malaya and, from the mid-1950s, to establish the parameters of a new independent state that would be closely connected to Britain. Hassan Abdul Muthalib accounts for this history in his essay ‘The End of Empire: The Films of the Malayan Film Unit in 1950s British Malaya’. As Muthalib shows, the propaganda policies of the British state were predicated on the establishment of a mobile cinema network in Malaya to position the films of the Malayan Film Unit (MFU) in front of what was still then a largely illiterate audience. As such, film texts, and media infrastructures, dovetailed with brutal state policies, collectively designed to maintain, in particular, the economically crucial resources of Malayan tin and rubber.

Africa too became economically crucial for the British state in the post-war period, particularly in light of the loss of large parts of its empire in South Asia (India, centrally, but also Burma and Ceylon). The essays in the following section, ‘Projecting Africa’, address different aspects of that importance in the period leading up to the decolonisation of Western and Eastern African states in the mid-1960s. The innovation of new media infrastructures as a part of the information policies of the colonial power is addressed further by Charles Ambler in his essay ‘Projecting the Modern Colonial State: The Mobile Cinema in Kenya’. Ambler focuses on the mobile exhibition of films in Kenya in the 1940s and 1950s, and the establishment of an
exhibition circuit that connected with broader policies of mass education and that sought to compete with the increasingly aggressive anti-colonialism that erupted in particular in 1952 with the Mau Mau rebellion. Exhibition functioned, he proposes, as a performance of modern colonial power, a kind of ritual of state power that started with film itself as the embodiment of the technological modernity that colonial power claimed for itself and included other patriotic activities – addresses about the royal family, for example, or the raising of the Union Jack – and also the enactment of forms of order and rule in terms of the marshalling of audience behaviour, responses and in the organisation of seating hierarchies. Rituals and fantasies of colonial order and its continuation ignored, of course, the anti-colonial violence that erupted in the country. Colonial cinema is most frequently a cinema of evasion. Yet the policing of colonial rule at the cinema was not without its difficulties: at one screening in 1947, for example, the political leader Paul Ngei seized the microphone to advertise his cause; at others, audiences talked among themselves, ignoring the film’s and the screening’s attempted embodiment of colonial power.

In his essay on films made in the Gold Coast (later Ghana), historian Gareth Austin traces out a shift from interwar certainty about the longevity of colonial order to a new rhetoric of partnership that emerged during the war – he notices, for example, that the word ‘native’ shifts to ‘African’ – and that became more fully elaborated in the post-war period. These later films tell stories about the function of government, in, for example, films about taxation, seeking to model new practices of ‘good citizenship’ for the soon-to-be-independent African subjects/citizens. At the same time, the films show the centrality of capital-intensive technology for ‘development’, so ensuring the longevity of British industry and finance capital in neocolonial orders (a subject that Francis Gooding tackles in his contribution). Austin addresses the filmed record as a historian, tracing out what these films confirm for historians about this period and how they also propose some revisions to the historical record. Toward the end of his essay, he observes that the films give evidence about the extent of malnutrition and poverty in parts of Ghana: the indexicality of the image registering the materiality of the suffering body, and so acknowledging, if without comment, the failures of colonial rule.

Fiction films in this period also anxiously reflect on failure and loss as the colonial project careers towards its end. Wendy Webster considers aspects of this in her essay ‘Mumbo-jumbo, Magic and Modernity: Africa in British Cinema, 1946–65’. Africa, she shows, was frequently associated with primitivism, its diversity homogenised and represented through repetitive tropes (notably of sound – chanting and drumming – and through the spectacle of rural and jungle spaces). Webster looks closely at a series of mostly fiction films from the mid-1940s through to the mid-1960s, tracing out how the films reflect and refract the complex shifts in the British imagination of Africa. The realities of colonial war in Kenya are largely avoided in fiction, aside from indirect references to a frightening atavism; later, in the early 1960s, new conceptions of an almost-modern Africa emerge, but only haltingly, always intertwined with ingrained colonial ways of thinking. Travelogues and newsreels showed ceremonies of independence, attended by members of the royal family and so celebrated the continued relevance of Britain even beyond the colonial moment. Yet at the end of this period, the fiction film *Guns at Batasi* (1964) can only imagine British impotence: in
response to an African coup, British soldiers stay in their barracks, confined and mostly powerless.

Laura Mulvey addresses the dissolution of imperial certainties in the final essay in this section. Looking closely at two colonial compilation films, Vincent Monnikendam’s *Mother Dao*, *The Turtle-like* (1995) and Filipa César’s *Black Balance* (2010), Mulvey unpacks the complicated temporality of these films, which reuse archival film but interrogate the intertwined aesthetic and political logics encoded therein. The initial films celebrated colonial power, and its enactment of processes of modernity: they carry the impression of empire, Mulvey remarks, like a stamp. Yet when reassembled now the certainty of imperial power and oppression dissolves, and what remains are visible signs and traces of the unequal relation between the coloniser and colonised. While the original films celebrate one story, they unwittingly record another, of domination and exploitation. For Mulvey, these images, these celluloid footprints and ghosts, carry from the past something of a promise that may, perhaps, be redeemed in the future. In this way, we return to the beginning – back to the future as it were – to Paul Gilroy’s injunction that we use these films and the histories and fictions embedded in them to transform the present and future.

The complicated imbrication of temporalties, of the necessity of thinking together past, present and future, also animates our final section, ‘Afterthoughts on Colonial Film’. Film-makers Filipa César, Isaac Julien and Franklyn St. Juste reflect on the film record of colonialism – its aesthetic and political powers, the possibility of resistance and the place of these films in continuing efforts to preserve and honour the struggles of the past. Anthony Bogues starts by noting the conjuncture of cinema and colonial technologies of rule to account for the way these films contain spectres, or traces, that continue to haunt the present and shape contemporary discourse. Arjuna Parakrama likewise probes the place of film in establishing complicity between late colonialist discourse and practice and ostensibly postcolonial nationalist practices in Sri Lanka. Francis Gooding similarly ponders the continuation of colonial orders. *Giant in the Sun* (1959), a film from Nigeria, speaks of the coming era of independence but contains within it, Gooding shows us, a brief sequence that reveals the continuation of the presence of British technology and finance capital. The switch to neocolonial order is almost invisible, accomplished in the blink of an eye.

At the end, it is perhaps this question of the ‘end’ in our title that comes to the fore. Certainly, as the dream of empire died, the British state still reflexively held on to imperial ambitions: the Suez Crisis of 1956 was caused by Britain seeking to hold on to the territorial, and so also economic, advantage of the canal. Its unilateral actions brought a rift with the US, which had tolerated the British empire in part because it frequently provided a bulwark against Communism. It had limited utility in the Cold War; but it was, ultimately, a break on the circulation of goods and capital – a walled-off zone, that must be broken down to facilitate the global circulation of capital guarded and guided now by the US, and no longer by London. The dissolution of the British Empire would facilitate the hegemonic ambitions of the US, which modelled an economic imperialism divorced from geographical rule. Its neocolonial ordering of the world would be supported by a shamefully acquiescent British state, beholden to what its leaders – from Churchill onwards – imagine, absurdly, as a ‘special relationship’. As one empire subsided into shadows, glimpsed now in the scratched
and grainy images from the archive, another emerged for its day in the sun – helped in part by the bright lights of Hollywood.

NOTES


5. The constitutive connections between liberalism and imperialism are explored in Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Uday Singh Metha, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).


12. The Suez Canal had long been important to the British state because it provided a shorter sea route to its empire and to the oilfields of the Persian Gulf. When the canal was nationalised by Egypt in 1956, an Israeli–Anglo–French force attacked Egypt but was halted by the United Nations, acting under particular pressure from the United States. Anglo–American relations were strained; and the crisis starkly illuminated Britain’s declining influence. W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).


16. The ‘Colonial Film’ project was an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project to examine British colonial cinema. The genesis and organisation of this project is discussed in Colin MacCabe, ‘“To take ship to India to see a naked man spearing fish in blue water”: Watching Films to Mourn the End of Empire’, in Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (eds), *Empire and Film* (London: BFI, 2011). The project’s website at <www.colonialfilm.org.uk> houses digitised films, a combined catalogue and writing about films and production units.


20. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1987); and *After Empire*.

21. The Emergency was the term used by the colonial government; the MNLA described it as an Anti-British National Liberation War.

22. Filipa César’s *Black Balance* was produced as part of our project on colonial film. It is available online at <www.colonialfilm.org.uk/workinprogress>.


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