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Evacuee Cinema: Bombay and Lahore in Partition Transit (1940–1960)

by Salma Siddique.
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While reading Salma Siddique’s Evacuee Cinema: Bombay and Lahore in Partition Transit (1940–1960), I was reminded of a comment by the Urdu short story writer Sa’adat Hasan Manto: “Even after trying, I cannot separate Hindustan from Pakistan, and Pakistan from Hindustan. Continuously this question arises in my mind. Will Pakistan’s literature be different? If yes, then how? All that was written in undivided Hindustan who will claim that literature, will it now also be divided?” Manto’s queries about a literature suddenly bifurcated by political and cultural borders could be extended to the cinematic domain as well: What happened to the vibrant Urdu-Hindi cinema of the Indian subcontinent (emerging from a productive triangulation between the filmmaking centers of Bombay, Lahore, and Calcutta in the 1920s to 1940s) after the partition of the Indian subcontinent into the nation-states of India and Pakistan in August 1947? How did films, filmmakers, film journalists, and film industries negotiate the turbulence of this

historical passage, the concomitant splitting of film personnel and publics, and the problematics of national difference? How did Lahore’s film culture respond to its post-partition predicament of having to forge a new national cinema in the shadow of the Bombay film industry, from the performative, narrative, material, and creative resources inherited from a colonial past it shared with Bombay and Calcutta? Siddique crosses geopolitical and historiographic boundaries created by partition in search of answers to these questions, delving into overlooked films and previously unexplored cinematic, archival, and private records to follow the trails of migrants, evacuees, ideas, images, and genres as they move across social, cultural, and political fault lines in late colonial India and across newly drawn borders after 1947. Her own border-crossing journeys, physical and conceptual, have resulted in a compelling book that highlights the entanglement of histories of filmmaking in Lahore and Bombay (which emerged as preeminent centers of film production in Pakistan and India, respectively, after partition) between 1940 and 1960 and succeeds in unsettling “the holds of national borders on film histories in South Asia.”

Evacuee Cinema is a notable addition to an emerging body of work on the film cultures of Pakistan and on the interlinked media histories of post-partition South Asia. Even as it responds to the increasingly urgent calls for film studies to break out of the analytic framework of territorialized nation-states, the book remains alert to what Ravi Vasudevan describes as “the continuing significance of the nation-state, and, indeed, of the nation in defining crucial parameters of historical possibility.” In a remarkable balancing act, Evacuee Cinema demonstrates how the complexity and the contradictions of the national, understood “as a field of differentiated cultural production,” can be productively grasped through methodological attentiveness to the transnational flows, frissons, and frictions that play a crucial role in shaping or reshaping national imaginaries, institutions, and practices. The book moves beyond unidirectional notions of influence or reception in its insistence on the shared past and the interconnected nature of the cinemas of Bombay and Lahore and in its analysis of the relational, interactive, and processual nature of their transformations between 1940 and 1960. Its histoire croisée approach and creative use of official and unofficial archives (including the private collections of Pakistani cinephiles) should be of interest not only to those studying the entanglement of cinemas across borders in South Asia

5. Vasudevan, 95.
or the intertwined histories of divided cinemas in other contexts but also to film scholars in general. This is especially the case for scholars invested in thinking about the transnational production and inherent instability of the national; in following the movement of cinematic traffic across territorial, linguistic, and cultural boundaries; and in exploring the historiographic challenges, methods, and payoffs of analyzing the entanglements—created by cross-border flows of films, funds, personnel, labor, genres, stories, and fantasies—that have always been at the heart of cinema.

Siddique’s immersive account of the interlinked film cultures of Lahore and Bombay in the 1940s to 1960 is also a valuable addition to partition studies. It builds on recent shifts in the historiographic, artistic, and curatorial imaginations of partition, especially on attempts to reenvision partition in a longer temporal frame and through the lens of specific local or regional histories, everyday experiences, and creative refractions. In *Evacuee Cinema*, partition emerges as a long process of transition rather than a singular geopolitical event, a process that starts years before and continues long after the decisive rupture of 1947; as a sociocultural experience generating a cacophony of voices and active negotiations rather than silence and collective amnesia; and, most importantly, as “a productive force” and not just as a destructive and debilitating cataclysm. The book’s emphasis on partition’s “discursive and performative power”—on how partition reconfigured film cultures, ideological stances, discursive shifts, industrial practices, and creative trajectories—marks a significant departure from Bhaskar Sarkar’s foundational study of partition’s impact on Indian cinema, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*. Sarkar focuses on cinematic representation, tracing partition primarily as a locus of unresolved trauma and through allegorical traces in Bengali and Hindi films from the 1950s and the 1960s. Siddique looks beyond the screen, as well as at cinematic representations, to examine how the traumatic dislocations and multiple losses (of material resources and filmmaking contexts, among others) brought about by partition also spurred the making or remaking of film genres, star personas, production strategies, and discourses about national identity and national cinemas along a preexisting film axis between Lahore and Bombay. This focus on what partition produced, rather than on what it destroyed, aligns *Evacuee Cinema* with *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, a significant 2012 exhibition (of videos, photographs, prints, paintings, sculptures, and installations) curated by Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar to explore how the upheavals of the 1947 partition created a space for the forging of “new nations, identities, languages, and relationships.”

10. See the curators’ note at https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/109647/lines-of-control-partition-as-a-productive-space/. For more on the exhibition, see
Siddique traces the productive power of partition through a meticulously researched, multilayered analysis of films, reminiscences, networks, star personas, publicity mechanisms, production processes, ancillary practices such as journalism and theater, and the migrations of film personnel between Bombay and Lahore. Appropriating the bureaucratic category of “evacuee property,” which was used by both India and Pakistan to manage land and property ownership after partition and refers to “a concrete edifice emptied of its original occupants and replaced by evacuees from another context,” she traces the emergence of an evacuee cinema in transit between Bombay and Lahore. She uses evacuee cinema not merely as a descriptive term but also as a conceptual frame for grasping “the discordant, chaotic, and transformative force of partition” through an examination of “the evacuation, rehabilitation, and voiding that went into the making of nationally separate cinemas” during the long process of partition. While it would have been helpful to have a more detailed elaboration of the term in the introduction rather than in the conclusion, the concept captures the central role of the newly minted nation-state in orchestrating forms of population displacement, as well as the existence of a preexisting mode and infrastructure of film production, the escape of film personnel from endangerment to safety, and the blurring of the contours of enforced and active migration. The use of the term is also in keeping with the materialist slant of an analysis that connects shifts in cinematic form to socio-political developments and to contestations over, and transfer of, material and creative resources.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first section explores the space of Bombay’s film culture in the 1940s to 1950s and scrutinizes its supposedly secular orientation, while the second, longer section traces the emergence of evacuee cinema through genre innovations, the two-way movement of film personnel, and multiple transits between Bombay and Lahore. Chapter 1, which precedes these two sections, initiates the book’s revisionist project by approaching the category of the “all-India film” of the pre-nation-state era through an account of filmmaking in pre-partition Lahore and films produced in Lahore such as Khandaan (Lineage, Shaukat Hussain Rizvi, 1942), tracing an alternative genealogy of a transregional cinematic aspiration that is usually attributed to the Bombay film industry. Excavating the entrepreneurial and experimental spirit and all-India ambitions of two family-run studios based in Lahore, Pancholi and Shorey, Siddique connects the representational claims made embedded in an “all-India film” such as Khandaan to the contest between the Muslim League and the Congress in the domain of political representation, one that would eventually contribute to the division of the subcontinent.

The two chapters in part 1, “The Secular Stance of Bombay,” map the film culture of 1940s Bombay as a terrain of competing interests and conflicts, challenging an earlier scholarly consensus about a silence around the partition
in the Bombay film community. These chapters draw attention to a cacophony of voices ancillary to films and trace the emergence of Bombay’s so-called secular stance out of a process of partition “already in progress,” its relationship to contemporary film migrations, and its entanglement with a certain variety of communalism.14 Chapter 2 juxtaposes the explicitly anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim vituperations in the pages of the influential English-language periodical *Filmindia* (established in 1935), which became increasingly successful in the late 1940s as it started covering film news through a religious lens, with the memoirs of Shaukat Hussain Rizvi and M. Luqman, two Muslim directors who left Bombay for Pakistan. This juxtaposition provides glimpses of prejudices as well as cooperative transactions and networks in the Bombay film industry and draws attention to a film-industrial logic of partition as ensuring Muslim film personnel of greater access to above-the-line work.

Chapter 3 examines the partition repertory of the fabled Prithvi Theatre, established in 1944 by Prithviraj Kapoor, one of the most prominent actors in Hindu-Urdu cinema at the time and widely regarded as a beacon of progressive theater in the 1940s and 1950s. Under his direction, Prithvi Theatre, associated with the left cultural movement that unfolded in the 1940s under the banners of the Indian People’s Theatre Association, the cultural wing of the Indian Communist Party, developed a series of plays that attempted to make sense of and counter the process of partition as it unfolded and performed these plays on the proscenium stage not only in Bombay but also in various Indian cities from the 1940s to the mid-1950s. These performances have often been praised for explicitly tackling the subject of partition, in a striking departure from Bombay cinema’s oblique references to the trauma of partition, and for their impeccable secularism. Siddique also reads these performances as a central site for articulating a certain version of Indian secular nationalism, but her analysis reveals this secularism to be less benign and much more ambivalent than it has been made out to be. Drawing on play scripts, memoirs by Kapoor’s co-travelers and close associates, and film periodicals, she shows how the secular stance articulated through these performances was undermined by its exclusionary biases, its hostility to the idea of Pakistan, its anchoring in an essentially Hindu worldview, and a tendency to address its spectators as “spiritual Hindus.”15 Her analysis of the ambiguities in Kapoor’s theatrical practice is illuminating and makes one wonder about its impact on Bombay cinema of the 1950s and about its affinity with—or distance from—other strands of the secular imagination of India in the 1940s, which fall outside the book’s ambit.

Part 2, “Between Bombay and Pakistan,” traces an active negotiation—rather than disavowal (as in the case of popular Indian cinemas)—of the partition, as a crucial part of a process of crafting a Pakistani cinema, in changing genre iconographies, personas, and industrial strategies from the 1940s to 1960. The first chapter in this section (chapter 4) focuses on the Muslim social film, a genre representing contemporary urban Muslim lives in India, and especially on the 1940s film cycle of the Fazli brothers. Through a historically situated analysis of film texts as well as production contexts and

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15. Siddique, 90.
publicity material, Siddique shows how the pre-independence Muslim social film was predicated on the community’s minority status, shaped by the narrative tension between multiple modernities and engaged in visualizing an all-Muslim ethnoscene. She reads the genre not just as a space for mapping debates over Muslim identity but also as an articulation of a desire for Muslim independence and an act of “picturing Pakistan.”

Chapter 5 foregrounds the cosmopolitanism of the national and religious border crossings in the cinematic and personal alliance between the Muslim actress Meena Shorey (born and raised a Muslim in pre-partition Punjab but supposedly converted to Hinduism at the peak of her stardom in Bombay in the 1940s and reconverted to Islam upon immigrating to Pakistan), known for her flair for comedy, and a Hindu refugee producer from Lahore, Roop K. Shorey, in post-partition Bombay. Reading filmed interviews, journalistic discourse, archival media, and Meena Shorey’s memoir through the lens of feminist revision, Siddique highlights the intersections of Meena Shorey’s stardom with the geopolitics of partition; her negotiation of dislocation and historical trauma through the screwball comedies (a reinvention of the Hollywood screwball genre) that she made in collaboration with Roop Shorey; and the humorous treatment of transitional, transnational, and transitory spaces in these films. Chapter 6 examines the films and evolving star image of Ratan Kumar (the screen name of Syed Nazir Ali), a child star who came to embody the image of “the national orphan” in post-independence Bombay films and moved from India to Pakistan in 1956. Again, Siddique uses a dual focus on films made in Bombay and Lahore, on film and star texts, and on production strategies and discursive contexts of production and reception to unearth a fascinating politics and poetics of doubling in films starring Kumar, who remade Bombay films through a Pakistani lens that were often referred to as charbas or duplicates.

Together, the chapters make a persuasive case for the claim that the cinematic rendition of Pakistan and aspirations for a Pakistani national cinema both preceded the territorialization of the nation-state and continued to be in flux long after it. Evacuee Cinema ends with a brief reflection on what the book offers, in terms of a theoretical and methodological lens, to South Asian film history and partition studies and on the suitability of the concept of evacuee cinema for thinking about the cinemas of Lahore and Bombay, as well as some modes of what Hamid Naficy describes as exilic cinemas. Given the methodological relevance of Siddique’s work for research on entangled film and media histories beyond South Asia, I found myself wishing that she had spent a little more time in exploring these implications for the wide readership that it deserves and will no doubt attract.

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17. Siddique, 178.
In an ethnographic vignette that appears late in *Making Film in Egypt: How Labor, Technology, and Mediation Shape the Industry*, anthropologist Chihab El Khachab finds himself out of place at the glitzy premiere of a film that he spent months observing while it was being made. The crowds at the Cairo Opera House and the star-studded afterparty were a far cry from the mundane editing suites and chaotic soundstages and location shoots El Khachab had spent many months meticulously observing. It was amid the bustle of the everyday work of filmmaking, conversing and sharing tea with workers of all sorts, that he was most evidently at ease. But at the film’s premiere, the ethnographer appeared suddenly directionless, the forward propulsion of the production process now halted, and with it the motion of his ethnographic tracking. The thrust of the work of filmmaking had not only propelled him forward; this inescapable forward push had been the central analytical focus of his project. Now that the production journey was complete, the film a fact, his propulsion faltered.

The central puzzle animating Chihab El Khachab’s detailed ethnographic description of filmmaking in Cairo is how complex production processes made up of thousands of small decisions and acts, all with good odds of failure and infelicity, come to fruition with some regularity in the...
Egyptian film industry. It is a question borne from time spent with the many workers who populate the labor force of any film production process. Grips and gaffers, welders and makeup artists, assistant producers and script supervisors—all of these workers in the large-scale project of filmmaking can often only guess at the final form of their product while they labor toward its completion. El Khachab’s time spent with these workers persuaded him of the fact that the “actualisation [of a film] is not the preordained realization of a singular artistic ‘vision’ . . . but the result of contingent decisions made within a certain configuration of labor, anticipation, and technological use.”

This is what the book describes in great ethnographic detail. Once the fantasy of a singular artistic vision that is centrally dispersed from a single point is dispelled, understanding the nature of the filmmaking process must shift toward the many small actions and practices that make up the production process. Each of these small actions is inscrutable and cannot be predicted in advance, but together they add up to a future outcome that is roughly understood by all those involved in its realization. El Khachab terms this condition “imponderability.”

Imponderables are those small, nearly imperceptible aspects of daily life that are enigmatic and inscrutable but nonetheless familiar and predictably present. They provide the texture of everyday life in inconspicuous ways. Anthropologists traditionally pay attention to these imponderable aspects of life when trying to understand the quotidian shape of social contexts and cultural practices. For El Khachab, “an imponderable future is expected even though all the courses of action leading to it cannot be weighed in the present.” This isn’t a future that is fundamentally opaque; El Khachab is “not sold on the idea that the future could be described as an unknowable and unpredictable fog into which one sails inevitably.” The idea of an imponderable future becomes especially productive in the context of filmmaking, as a “film’s future is not uncertain, because its outcome is known and expected, but it is imponderable given the varying ways in which filmmakers can arrive at their destination.”

The question, then, of how an imponderable future is realized focuses the ethnographer’s attention on quotidian actions and decisions taken within the historical, sociological, and technological infrastructure that mediate and delimit these phenomena. Individuals “attempt to overcome imponderable outcomes in their everyday activity. This attempt transforms unpredictable yet expected futures into smaller, contingent tasks by relying on existing labor hierarchies, operational sequences, and technological devices.” These contingent tasks set within familiar structures propel the project into the future. Making Film in Egypt tracks this forward velocity through close ethnographic description of the historical, sociological, financial, and political

2. El Khachab, 17.
5. El Khachab, 53 (emphasis in original).
contexts that structure the field of film work (chapters 1 and 2) as well as the objects and ideas that organize and direct the concrete everyday activity and labor that make up film production (chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6). By reconceptualizing film production as a contingent response to an imponderable future outcome, El Khachab forces our attention toward everyday labor practices within the film industry. In this way, his book contributes directly to the field of production studies and the anthropology of film and media by reframing the question of how a film is made into the larger questions of how an imponderable future is realized and how we are able to labor at all in contexts of complexity and partial knowledge.

El Khachab’s analytical focus also means that this book is not about Egypt or even the Egyptian film industry, although the latter is the research site for the book. This book is an anthropological monograph, and, despite frequent misconception, anthropological studies are rarely only about a particular place or practice. The ethnographic descriptions that are at the heart of such monographs are always located in a specific context and written by an ethnographer with a profound familiarity with that context, someone at ease with its imponderables. But the anthropological questions that animate such descriptions, while emergent from that context and shaped by it, speak to concerns that are more broadly shared. That is to say, it is within the context of the everyday lives of film workers in the Egyptian film industry that El Khachab comes to ask and understand how people manage to get on with forms of work and practices of making when outcomes and futures are capricious and imponderable. The particularity of the Egyptian context is central to the book, but it is not its focus. Similarly, El Khachab approaches filmmakers as he would makers of other things: as oriented toward “the futures of their everyday sociotechnical activity.”

The chapters that follow the introduction delve deeply into the industry’s everyday working. This section of the book provides the reader with insight into how labor is organized and articulated to break up the unforeseeable process of filmmaking work in the Egyptian film industry. The first two chapters give a historical and sociological account of the film industry. Chapter 1, a primer on Egyptian film history, describes the “overall shape, its historical evolution, as well as its central organization around interpersonal relations” of the industry. El Khachab chronicles the development of filmmaking in Egypt through colonial and postcolonial transitions around financing, ideological use of film, and key individuals and initiatives. Ethnographically, chapter 1 also addresses how film directors perceive that history and how this perception allows them to position themselves as commercial or independent filmmakers.

Chapter 1 draws attention to the role of personal relationships within the historical development of the industry—relationships that weave a wide net of individual connections across film and media practice in Cairo. These personal relationships provide the sociological counterpart to the historical and political formations that have shaped the contemporary nature of the indus-

8. El Khachab, 45.
try and become the focus of chapter 2. In particular, these personal relationships are organized hierarchically, in terms of class and gender (which transcend the industry) as well as labor (which are native to the industry). Such hierarchical social norms fundamentally shape how work is “patterned” in the industry, informing “the way in which different social agents engage with what I have described as a singular ‘process’ of film production.”

However, “[l]abor hierarchies and modes of apprenticeship . . . are insufficient to describe the future-orientation implicit in much of the filmmaking process. This orientation . . . is one where the film is apprehended as a clear outcome whose actualization remains unpredictable.” The concept of the “operational sequence,” taken from studies in the anthropology of technology, lays out “conventional horizons of expectation” that guides practice and “informs the social agent’s understanding of operations yet to come.” With this, El Khachab brings into focus the conjunction of hierarchical relationships and forms of apprenticeship with objects and technology that result in “sociotechnical outcomes,” a term he borrows from Bruno Latour. Where “media anthropologists and production studies scholars . . . have had little to say about media production as a sociotechnical activity,” El Khachab focuses on objects and technology without sacrificing human actions and meaning-making in the flattening of relations sometimes seen in actor-network theory.

The subsequent four chapters provide comprehensive ethnographic descriptions of this sociotechnical activity. Chapter 3 describes technological devices used in the industry, illustrating how “technical actions hold, in their very execution, an orientation to the unpredictable yet expected future of a sociotechnical process, which gives meaning to individual working practices.” The devices that mediate such actions are understood as reserves, that is, any “object that makes . . . demands on the worker’s attention to engage in a situated, future-oriented task.” Reserves thus help structure “the way in which we experience our day-to-day work.” Chapter 4 outlines how shooting is prepared and undertaken, with an emphasis on budgeting, scheduling, transportation, and execution. El Khachab describes the stresses of the set very vividly. His ethnographic storytelling makes the many tensions and irritations palpable and reveals how film workers labor in an “unpredictable environment” that is structured through sociotechnical forms such as the shooting schedule. These sociotechnical forms mediate between imminent and distant futures and help workers keep a complex project on a path to completion. Chapter 5 explains how a shared vision of the imponderable outcome that is the actual film is realized through “visual and sonic mediators summoning filmmakers to visualize the unfinished film.”

11. El Khachab, 70, 69.
12. El Khachab, 12.
15. El Khachab, 84.
17. El Khachab, 115.
18. El Khachab, 22.
describes practices of scouting locations, image composition, and sound work to show how the “cinematic imagination was not immediately poured onto paper or the screen.” Instead, he demonstrates that this imagination “is constantly adjusted in dialogic unfolding with reserves” that “summon artistic workers to converse, here and now, about what should be done in the film to come.” Finally, chapter 6 shows how an imagination of a future audience’s reaction is anticipated in the making of a film. El Khachab’s proximity to a variety of film workers in the industry allows him to parse how these workers imagine their audience and its responses. “Passive enchanted viewing is a strong normative model of spectatorship among filmmakers in Egypt,” and this model “has practical effects on the process of film production.” The inscribed spectator has distinct characteristics that directly influence the ways in which film workers at all levels of the industry take decisions about the execution of their craft. Again, filmmaking emerges as a practice equally shaped by sociological and technological factors.

Making Film in Egypt reveals how filmmaking consists of a series of contingent decisions that are taken based on the historical and sociological structure of the industry and shaped by its mediating objects and practices that form the quotidian, imponderable, everyday life of the film industry. The rich ethnographic detail provided in the book is marshaled to engage with key conceptual questions about enchantment, imponderability, and futurity, offering important insight for anthropologists everywhere. For scholars of film and media, whether ethnographically inclined or not, this book urges us to marvel once again at the fact that such incredibly intricate and complex processes as those involved in the making of a film come to fruition with any regularity at all. To read about the many contingent decisions that make a single film in a single place should urge us to pause and consider what notions of the future, of labor, and of technology can truly account for the realization of such an imponderable future.

Lotte Hoek is a media ethnographer whose research sits between anthropology and film studies. She is the author of Cut-Pieces: Celluloid Obscenity and Popular Cinema in Bangladesh (Columbia University Press, 2014), co-editor of Bio-Scope: South Asian Screen Studies, and professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Edinburgh.

Matthew Brown’s *Indirect Subjects: Nollywood’s Local Address* is probably the kind of book that Nollywood studies needs at this point in its history, approximately twenty-five years after the publication of Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome’s first essays on Nigerian home videos. Brown’s study cogently builds upon existing scholarship on Nollywood history, on its film genres and political historicities in particular, in order to formulate a set of new theoretical propositions that open up a fertile ground for future research and debate. The book carefully analyzes the political dimension of Nigerian popular cultural production, providing readers with several original conceptual tools to unpack how Nollywood blockbusters and Nigerian television series have both mirrored and shaped Nigerian political imagination in the past few decades.

The book is well researched, well written, detailed, and comprehensive in both theoretical and empirical terms. One of its main contributions is undoubtedly the historical perspective that it adopts. As Brown puts it in the conclusion, Nollywood screen media history can be described through a Yoruba proverb: “if the snail moves, the shell will follow it (*Bi ighin ba fa*,
If Nollywood is the snail, its shell is the history of Nigerian state television, and Brown, with depth and precision not seen in Nollywood studies to date, provides an engaging, cross-media account of early Nigerian television history, dominated by the role of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the national broadcaster. His detailed analyses of Nigerian television’s most popular productions of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (such as the series *Village Headmaster* [1964], *Checkmate* [1991–1994], *Things Fall Apart* [1987], and *Basi and Company* [1986–1990]), for instance, subsequently inform his understanding of early Nollywood’s main narrative and aesthetic features.

This approach has an important consequence: it gives the Nigerian state the position it deserves in the history of Nollywood. If the Nigerian video film industry has generally been seen as an industry that emerged *despite*, rather than *because of*, the intervention of the state, Brown’s emphasis on the role that the NTA played in Nollywood’s history at several levels inevitably produces a much more complex and nuanced description of the impact that state institutions have played on the emergence and consolidation of the Nigerian video film enterprise. This impact, indeed, has been widespread; the NTA has shaped aesthetic and narrative formats and infused them with ideological orientations; it has produced specific professional itineraries; and it has brought to the limelight actors who later became the first Nollywood stars. As Brown puts it, the recentering of the NTA leads to a provocative question that might well generate new lines of research and debate in the future around “why and how Nollywood, which emerged during a period of structural adjustment in Nigeria and thus without direct state oversight, would imagine and address its spectators in ways similar to the state’s modes of address: as indirect subjects queuing at the gates of modernity.”

To begin to answer this question, Brown develops a number of interesting and thought-provoking theoretical propositions, which are explored throughout the six chapters that make up the book. As the title suggests, Brown’s main thesis is that Nollywood’s specific forms and styles shape Nigerian spectators into a unique kind of public, one he calls “indirect subjects.” To define this concept, Brown draws inspiration from both political history and film studies, connecting scholarship on colonial modes of administration (i.e., indirect rule) to works on the mode of cinematic address known as “free indirect subjectivity,” understood as “a situation where otherwise consistent third-person narration momentarily slips into a different narrative voice, often belonging to one of the story’s characters.” Brown’s argument is complex and articulate, and the best way to summarize it is probably by quoting from Brown himself. Nollywood spectators “see with third-person eyes and hear with first-person ears,” like subjects who, because of the specific colonial modes of administration applied to them, saw modernity from a distance (with third-person eyes) but felt the consequences of this distance directly

(with first-person ears). Through an analysis of Nigerian screen media, especially television series of the 1970s and 1980s and Nollywood classics of the 1990s and early 2000s, Brown presents a theory of modernity and liberalism that underlines the centrality of colonial territories to the liberal project. But he also suggests that the marginality of colonial territories is the result of the formulation of a specific system of colonial governmentality (indirect rule), designed to keep colonies (and later, independent postcolonial states) at arm's length from the (social, political, economic) benefits of belonging to the liberal world, in a position that Brown defines as “periliberal.” This position is characterized by a complex, contradictory dynamic of participation and marginalization: “Periliberalism is not simply about being peripheral to the liberal world order; it is about being fundamentally and indispensably constitutive of the liberal world order precisely by being held at arm’s length from it.”

If, as Brown shows in the introduction (“Indirect Subjectivities and Periliberalism”) and the first chapter of the book (“Subjects of Indirect Rule: Nigeria, Cinema, and Liberal Empire”), periliberalism finds its origins in colonial modes of governmentality, it reaches well beyond the end of colonialism. In chapters 3 (“‘No Romance without Finance’: Feminine Melodrama, Soap Opera, and the Male Breadwinner Ideal”) and 4 (“Breadlosers: Masculine Melodrama, Money Magic, and the Moral Occult Economy”) in particular, Brown proposes that periliberalism perpetuated itself during the years of the Structural Adjustment crisis (the 1980s and early 1990s), by entering the intimate sphere of the family and by manifesting itself through a “gender crisis” around the role of men and women in the modern Nigerian family. The Nollywood melodramatic forms that Brown describes developed within this socio-historical conjuncture, partly mirroring, partly reinterpreting it, and certainly confirming how, to quote Brown again, “modernity seems to have made melodrama more useful than ever . . . a fully modern project of the new, meant to help us cope with the present.” Through an analysis of several examples, Brown identifies two key configurations of melodrama in Nigeria, the feminine and the masculine melodrama, which structure most Nollywood genres, such as those studied in Haynes’s classic book on the topic. These two forms of melodrama are somehow complementary, and their analysis helps us better understand how periliberalism plays out in peoples’ lives during times of economic turmoil, shaping the way audiences are convened and how specific kinds of publics are formed.

As Brown argues, feminine melodramas such as Violated (Amaka Igwe, 1996) and Games Women Play (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2005) present us with women who appear to reinforce a controversial male breadwinner ideal. Grounding his analysis in Lisa Lindsay’s work on the history of gender roles

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in southwestern Nigeria, Brown highlights this particularly complex social construct, whose Nigerian formulation is the result of both local and foreign influences. Women do not reinforce this ideal “to submit to men’s productivity, but because if the ideal were achievable, then Nigeria would actually be part of the liberal world order.” However, wage labor of the kind that provides men with stable and reliable income is not available to the vast majority of Nigerian men living in the 1980s and 1990s, and this makes the aspiration to marry a trustworthy breadwinner (and thus claim a liberal, rather than the periliberal, condition) the source of unimaginable conflicts, jealousies, and intrigues.

Conversely, masculine melodramas such as Living in Bondage (Chris Obi Rapu, 1992–1993) and Ashes to Ashes (Andy Amenechi, 2001) show us men who sacrifice their wives and children to achieve wealth through occult rituals. This kind of plot, in Brown’s eyes, is less about the occult dimensions of contemporary “millennial capitalism,” which have greatly preoccupied Nollywood scholars, than about the breadwinner ideal itself, which is seen as based on a paradox: “the bread itself matters more than for whom it is won.” Masculine melodramas thus implicitly critique the inner contradictions of modern conceptions of gender. Brown explains, “Masculinity may have always been an unsatisfactory construct for men, and an unjust construct generally, but liberal masculinity, from the point of view of Nigerian screen media, seems to be so clearly ideological, so obviously materialist, while being cast as immaterial, that it must be exploded.”

These distinct articulations of the Nigerian melodramatic imagination allow Brown to bring to light the potential for social criticism that lies beyond these otherwise conservative media products. I underline this point because in drawing attention to this potential for social criticism, Brown somehow mitigates his rather pessimistic view about the political content of Nigerian screen media productions and the agency of their audiences in relation to their position as “indirect subjects” of a periliberalist world order. Indeed, the concept of “indirect subjectivity” lends itself to misunderstanding about Nigerian screen media producers’ and audiences’ capacities to have an impact on their predicaments. Brown is aware of it and makes several attempts to clarify his position by underlining, on the one hand, the dangers of the “agency-as-argument” tendency in contemporary African studies and, on the other, the obvious empirical evidence “not only of spectator agency but also of the agency practiced by people in the Nigerian film industry, the people who make the sounds and images I attend to in this book and who thus make the world I observe.” However, a certain pessimism remains. As Brown explains, “there is also a sense in which agency does not really matter at all.”

This is a significant and productive concession, as it draws our attention to the complexity of the “fantasies of integration” and “fantasies of sovereignty” that inhabit not only the Nigerian media discussed in the book but also the very political economy of Nigerian screen media production, historically and in the present age of global streaming platforms.\textsuperscript{18}

In her important study of popular culture’s modes of address, Karin Barber observed that “though new kinds of public undoubtedly emerged across Africa from the nineteenth century onwards, this was not a ‘before-and-after’ type transition where one mode displaced the other. Rather, there was a multiplication of modes constituting textual meaning and imagining community. And the introduction of these new modes was always experimental, piecemeal, partial, hybrid, and subject to complications.”\textsuperscript{19} This suggests that, if Brown’s notion that indirect subjectivity characterizes early Nollywood’s main mode of address is certainly thought provoking, we should not overlook the fact that it is but a partial description of an otherwise intricate process in which different forms of subjectivity have inevitably co-existed, simultaneously called upon by the specific aesthetic and narrative features of various Nigerian screen media and popular culture products. As the introduction clearly states, \textit{Indirect Subjects} focuses on the analysis of “members of a theoretical public addressed and positioned by certain examples of screen media in certain ways.”\textsuperscript{20} Yet as Brown himself wrote (with Nyasha Mboti) a few years ago, we still know very little of what Nigerian audiences really do with the films and series they consume, in the concrete, everyday settings in which media consumption takes place.\textsuperscript{21} During the few research experiences that I have had with Nigerian audiences,\textsuperscript{22} I realized that screen media consumption processes in Nigeria are, as elsewhere, very complex, conditioned by specific material and infrastructural contingencies. In many cases Nigerian viewers do not reach the end of the films they watch. Screenings can be interrupted by power cuts, for instance. Likewise, unpredictable factors may oblige viewers to switch their attention away from the television set before the end of a program. This means that, while films might have specific modes of address and strong “pedagogical imperatives” (as Brown rightly points out in the second chapter of the book, “Emergency of the State: Television, Pedagogical Imperatives, and \textit{The Village Headmaster}”), people watch them in a variety of different situations that can lead, for various reasons, to fragmentary viewing experiences, thus leaving the film’s narrative (and its pedagogical intentions) entirely open ended. What does this mean for a theory of address like the one Brown formulates in this book?

This and other questions remain after reading this wonderful book. And this is, in my view, precisely \textit{Indirect Subjects}’ most valuable contribution: it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Brown, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Karin Barber, \textit{The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Brown, \textit{Indirect Subjects}, 1.
\end{itemize}
provides the reader with new conceptual tools and theoretical models that question current understanding about Nigerian films and their relationships with audiences. The book thus invites further investigation into how people make sense of what they watch on-screen in postcolonial contexts such as the Nigerian one.

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To my left, as I write this, a TV is displaying *The Last of Us Remastered* (Sony, 2014), a game running on my PlayStation 4. The system is idling while I tap away at my keyboard, yet I glance up to notice my character ambiently performing a series of animations that make him seem lively even as my hands are not on the controller. The provocation that Sonia Fizek’s book *Playing at a Distance: Borderlands of Video Game Aesthetic* leaves me with is that, at bottom, my present experience of distracted, spectatorial passivity is not so different from the event of active play, where my hands are on the controller and I am providing a string of inputs to which my character seems to immediately respond. Even when I am active, my play undergoes a series of intervals and delegations—two ideas crucial to the book.

The book’s foundational idea is that my various states of activity and passivity can be understood through the concept of “mediated distance.” Mediated distance names a contradictory simultaneity of distance and proximity that characterizes many media forms, among them video games (and the experience of video game play). With this concept, Fizek brings to game

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studies an analytic approach that highlights the exchange between the player
and game, providing the field with much-needed language for theorizing not
just the medium, but the experience of mediation itself.

Fizek’s preface clarifies the meaning of mediated distance at two key
moments. First is her discussion of the German words *Spannend* and *Span-
nung*. *Spannend* is “used to describe the fun property of games,” and *Span-
nung*, a noun etymologically linked to *Spannend*, describes the concepts of
tension and suspense as well as the difference between “plus” and “minus”
states in voltage.² *Spannung*, therefore, “is that which spans the gap between
two states; in the case of video games, the active state and the inactive state.”³

The second clarifying moment comes in a brief summary of the French phi-
losopher Jacques Henriot’s theory of play. Henriot’s theory, as Fizek summa-
rizes it, is derived from a mechanical understanding of the term *play*, which
refers to the space or gap that is necessary in mechanical machinery for a
mechanism to function: “Distance, then, is a symbolic interval that makes
it possible for a game to take place at all.”⁴ Mediated distance captures the
interval between activity and passivity, between human and nonhuman, that
is being crossed and/or occupied in the act of video game play.

The concept of mediated distance allows Fizek to take “a medium-
and matter-centric perspective that sheds light on a diversity of delegated,
automated, and otherwise distant experiences of play, all of which tend to
be pushed to the edges of gameness.”⁵ Mediated distance identifies how
processes of distantiation and passivity—associated with genres that have
become marginalized as so-called not-games—are based on processes of
automation that undergird moments of agential interactivity, which in turn
function to set players at a distance from their own experience of agency.
Delegation of action into the apparatus is always happening in gameplay; we
are always being set at a distance from our experience of ourselves.

Much of the book is committed to developing this analytical paradigm.
First, however, Fizek offers a brief critique of interactivity, a concept central
in game studies that has been associated with both the medium itself and
the player’s agential power. In chapter 1, “Beyond Interactivity,” Fizek takes a
relatively novel approach, placing canonical works of new media theory (such
as those of Lev Manovich and Wendy Chun) in conversation with critiques of
interactivity in game studies as well as critiques of ideologies of mastery that
the rhetoric of interactivity seems to engender. Fizek also relies on media
archaeology to situate discussions of computational media’s interactivity in a
longer history of media reception, a strategy that serves to problematize theo-
ries of the interactive nature of digital media by demonstrating how other
media, such as cinema, were once viewed as fostering more active audiences
than earlier narrative forms.

Chapters 2 through 4—titled “Interpassive Play,” “Ambient Play,” and
“Automated Play”—explore the various aspects of mediated distance as

². Fizek, xi–xii.
³. Fizek, xii.
⁴. Fizek, xiv.
⁵. Fizek, xiv.
they appear in video game play. Building on the work of Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek, Fizek defines interpassive play as delegated play, in which a player transfers their activity to an automatic system. (Supposedly) Idle games, games whose play involves extended periods of waiting while the game autonomously performs operations that are usually the responsibility of the player, epitomize interpassive play. Moreover, idle games, while often dismissed as being not-games due to the passivity of their players, model an agential dance between player and video game that is always at work in computational media, subverting traditional notions of interactivity. In an idle game, Fizek argues, a player must act in order to delegate away their agency; the click of a mouse, normally taken to be a moment of interactive agency, becomes an act of allocating agency to the game system. This agential dance is not marginal, Fizek argues, but reflective of the way in which playing a video game entails repeatedly interfacing with a machine that is ambiantly running processes that translate button presses into complex technical operations.

Interpassive play blends into ambient play, the subject of chapter 3. Ambient play, defined as an aesthetic experience of “dispersion, distribution, and distraction,” contrasts with traditional aesthetic experience, in which an aesthetic object solicits an audience’s undivided attention. To make sense of how game systems give rise to different kinds of distracted aesthetic experience, Fizek distinguishes between operational and affective ambience. Operational ambience names the background processes of digital media that operate without our direct engagement—a form of aesthetic encounter associated with self-playing games such as dreeps (Hisanori Hiraoka and Diasuke Watanabe, 2015), Everything (Double Fine Productions, 2017), and Mountain (Double Fine Productions, 2014). But as Fizek reminds us, every video game relies on ambient processes running behind the scenes. Affective ambience, for its part, involves an aesthetic of slowness, an enveloping ambience that produces a calmness that provides an interval of escape from the instability of life under neoliberal capitalism. Crucially, Fizek’s two versions of ambience further legitimize non-hegemonic practices of play while also providing an ambivalent vision of how video games fit into the attention economy: the concept of ambience simultaneously invokes forms of slowness that provide moments of relief from the overstimulating rapidity that is endemic to neoliberal subjectivity while nonetheless also invoking the background operations of social media websites and other such services that compose the experience of distracted, compulsive consumption in contemporary surveillance capitalism. That is to say that Fizek brings us to the complexity of ambience, in which background technical processes transform everyday life into a distracted media experience that may work against normative forms of capitalist consumption while also being constitutive of such norms.

Chapters 2 and 3 coalesce, to a certain extent, in chapter 4’s sustained engagement with the concept of automation, where Fizek articulates one of her most fundamental insights: that the examples of games that seem to

6. Fizek, 36.
set their player at a distance by emphasizing the delegation, automation, or ambience of action and agency “may seem surreal, exceptional, or removed from the typical interactive video gaming experience” when in fact “in all their remoteness . . . they point to the very core of computer-mediated play.”7 Throughout these three chapters, Fizek stresses how the mediated distance of seemingly marginal, non-hegemonic play is always operative within the dominant, hegemonic interactive paradigm. This allows Fizek to both identify and validate alternative forms of play as play (that is, to argue against the trend of marginalizing idle games, cozy games, and autonomous games as not-games) while nonetheless problematizing these very alternative forms by gesturing toward their continued entanglement with the technical instantiations of capitalism.

And so, while most of the chapter titles (chapters 5 and 6 are titled “Intra-active Play” and “Spectated Play”) suggest that Fizek is primarily constructing a typology of non-hegemonic forms of play, the book is best viewed as a sustained argument about video game mediation as a whole, one that unfolds across the seemingly distinct subjects addressed in each chapter. Present here is a useful typology of distanced-play as categorically distinct play phenomena, but there is a cross-pollination of these play-forms across the entire text. For example, idle games—games that increasingly delegate tasks to algorithms over time, leaving the player in a so-called idle state—are featured in chapters on interpassive play and automated play. Thus, the boundaries between these play categories are not hard and fast. Instead, Fizek brings to our attention distinct-yet-similar phenomena that demonstrate the algorithmic operationality that is always-already mediating our experience of video games, displacing and distributing the agency that we might mistakenly assume to be the sole property of the playing human subject.

Fizek’s exploration of mediated distance reaches its climax in chapter 5, “Intra-active Play,” which argues for the value of using the new materialist philosophy of Karen Barad as a method for understanding the fluctuating, relational ontology of video games. Barad’s philosophy of agential realism is derived from the work of physicist Niels Bohr, who noted that the ontology of electrons changed—they would behave either like particles or waves—depending on the apparatus of measurement and observation being applied to them. From this, Barad develops a new materialist philosophy in which objects with determinate properties do not exist prior to measurement; instead of living in a world of objects, we live in a world of matter caught up in an agential flux, which is organized into reality by apparatuses. Following the double-movement of the previous three chapters, in which non-hegemonic play practices are both validated and problematized, Fizek, rather astutely, does not treat Barad’s agential realist approach to apparatuses as unlocking an inherently liberatory ontology of democratized agency (which is characteristic of new materialism). Instead, Barad’s quantum philosophy is brought to bear on data analytics and academic disciplinary structures within game studies, noting how particular

7. Fizek, 64.
apparatuses of measurement produce certain configurations of play and knowledge, at the possible expense of alternative modes of playing and knowing. This use of Barad’s philosophy maintains fidelity to the former’s investment in deconstructing the subject-object divide but grounds the ontological flux of agential realism in a concrete discussion of mediation and disciplinary knowledge production. In other words, Fizek’s examples demonstrate the extent to which subjects are acted upon by apparatuses of measurement and knowledge production while also refusing to engage in the rhetorical practice that views so-called animating matter as the be-all and end-all of ethical engagement with the nonhuman world. Fizek wants to draw our attention to how we, as players, are caught up in a “complex web of relations among different agents of ludic entanglements,” a web we must view as open ended.\(^{8}\) The moment we try to capture a single essence of games or play, we merely elide other ontologies that would emerge if our apparatus was arranged differently.

The book’s final chapter, “Spectated Play,” applies Vilém Flusser’s and Harun Farocki’s respective theories of the technical and operational image to argue that the visual and algorithmic elements of images in video games are inseparable. In this final analysis, however, Fizek does privilege the non-representational components of algorithmic images, extending her argument about the significance of apparatuses to argue that aesthetic analysis of video games ought to entail an engagement with the material mechanism that produces the representational image. This is not to say that Fizek argues that video game images are fundamentally non-representational; rather, she is drawing our attention to the fact that our function as spectators sets us at a distance from the apparatus that produces the image.

In a brief conclusion, Fizek acknowledges what she perceives to be a gap in the book’s argument, namely a lack of political engagement. While it is true that the book offers relatively few strong ethical claims or moments of outright critique, \textit{Playing at a Distance} nonetheless provides an excellent materialist foundation on which an overtly political game studies can easily be built. Fizek’s argumentative structure, wherein marginal practices of play that prioritize slowness, delegation, idleness, and spectatorship are in fact revealing something always-already present in normative video game play, provides the reader with a medium-centric language to approach the video game’s representational and computational elements all at once. This approach, despite its emphasis on hybridity, distraction, and duality, paradoxically furnishes game studies with a refreshing clarity of vision of its object, a vision achieved via a complex theoretical apparatus that puts game studies into conversation with German media theory and media archaeology in a manner not normally seen in the field (at least not in English). At the same time, Fizek provides game studies with a generatively open-ended approach to the medium, which will allow scholars to bypass thorny issues related to ontological categorization to get directly at the question of mediation, of what is happening in the intra-action of the player and the technical apparatus. If you want to stop asking \textit{What is a game?} and begin to

\(^{8}\) Fizek, 82.
explore a different question—*How does this game operate on me?*—this is the book for you.

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I have contemplated what it would be like to teach the survey of international film history, one of my regular courses, from the perspective of the margins. How would film history unfold if we began not in France or New York but in Mexico City or Tokyo? I suspect that this approach would foreground not production but distribution and exhibition and would highlight not invention but adoption and adaptation. I have never actually undertaken this project, deterred by the enormous work it would take to rethink the course’s current organization but also by the general orientation of the field that privileges production and takes the film title as a basic unit of analysis.

Denise Khor’s book *Transpacific Convergences: Race, Migration, and Japanese American Film Culture before World War II* makes a significant contribution toward alternative film histories and might usefully help both scholars and students alike not only decenter the West but also imagine new historical trajectories for the moving picture that place minoritized groups at the center rather than the margins of the story. In the history of creation, exchange, and circulation that *Transpacific Convergences* relates, Japanese immigrants
and their Japanese American children make, exhibit, and consume motion pictures long before the emergence of Asian American media in the latter part of the twentieth century. The book, in Khor’s words, “tracer[s] an alternative public sphere of film practice and possibility for Japanese in the United States before World War II.” The alternate public sphere that Khor shows her readers is one whose politics might not be familiar but which is part of a compelling history that deepens our understanding of the role of media, including non-theatrical media in the formation of Asian American communities in the United States.

From the book’s opening vignette that focuses on the history of the Fuji Kan Theatre in Los Angeles, Khor draws her readers’ attention to alternative circuits of distribution and exhibition. Central to this history is her analysis of the circulation of films from Japan in the United States. Decentering white audiences as the test for when international films arrived in the United States, she focuses on the circulation of films and film that do not originate in the West. In four concise chapters, Khor explores Japanese film production in the United States; the circulation of both theatrical and non-theatrical films from Japan in venues that emerged in tandem with Japanese migrant communities; the effects of the introduction of sound technology on the film industries in the United States and Japan; independent Japanese American film production; and, finally, the role of Japanese-owned and operated theaters in exhibiting Tagalog language films for Filipino migrants in the 1930s and 1940s. Khor’s account takes us from the early teens, the tail end of the peak of Japanese immigration to the United States, to just before the outbreak of World War II, when Japanese film culture in the United States became “part of the wartime Pacific theater.”

Transpacific Convergences does not merely document Japanese American film culture in the first half of the twentieth century, which in and of itself would be a major contribution to our historical knowledge, but demonstrates how in the United States intertwined processes of migration and racialization led to the formation of a community that used film for its own purposes. That community not only made its own films, oftentimes in hopes of countering racist beliefs about the Japanese, but also incorporated elements of Japanese film culture into exhibition practices. Khor documents the circulation of Japanese films and the long-standing presence and popularity of extra-filmic elements of film exhibition such as the Benshi. Khor’s account of the Benshi, partly a product of the long arc of silent film production in Japan, provides a compelling way to connect Japanese film culture during the silent and early sound periods with practices in the United States, demonstrating the geographic reach of international film cultures and the uneven spread of sound technology.

Importantly, Khor does not claim the activities of Japanese migrant filmmakers and exhibitors for a radical politics. While we might see media today as a space for resistance to mainstream depictions of minoritized groups

or a site for the articulation of resistance, Khor shows how early Japanese migrant filmmakers mobilized a politics of respectability that “advanced concepts of self-help and entrepreneurialism” and promoted “a vision of Japan’s ascendency as [an] imperial nation-state.” Noting parallels between Japanese migrant film production and the race film industry in the United States, Khor probes the social meanings of film production, including the production of the melodrama The Oath of the Sword (Frank Shaw, 1914) by the Japanese American Film Company, in the face of de jure and de facto discrimination and exclusion. In this story of production, the silent film star, producer, and director Sessue Hayakawa is presented as part of a broader movement to use theatrical and non-theatrical film to improve the public image of Japanese migrants.

Most striking to this reader is Khor’s modeling of how to think across and within racial and ethnic groups to draw a richer, more complex picture of the role of media in histories of immigration and settlement. This strength is exemplified in her analysis of Japanese migrant filmmaking and its use as a tool for uplift and in the book’s final chapter on Japanese-owned theaters and their Filipino audiences. In that chapter she demonstrates the overlapping histories of distinct Asian groups that could create tension. Khor reminds us that racial and ethnic groups, while creating communities and barrios, interacted with other groups, and indeed their racial status was negotiated in relationship to other groups.

Khor’s book is the product of wide-ranging, multi-archival research. The tenacity with which she pursued her sources adds to the book’s methodological contributions. Khor illustrates the rich rewards that assembling traces and fragments can yield even when the archive seems resistant to telling alternate stories of film’s circulation across national borders or the formation of regionally specific ethnic film cultures. Transpacific Convergences will be a welcome addition in the film and media studies classroom at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and in ethnic studies courses. Its compactness means that it could be assigned in its entirety, usefully paired with, for example, a film by Sessue Hayakawa’s production company, such as The Dragon Painter (William Worthington, 1919). Khor’s book will push students to think about Asian Americans as audience members and producers of media as well as subjects of representation.

What is more, Khor’s work is a welcome addition to scholarly inquiries into the circulation of films and film culture in racialized communities in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. Part of a more capacious understanding of US film history that disrupts the equation of American film history with Hollywood and white audiences, this body of scholar-

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ship examines not just film production but also film exhibition and reception in communities relegated to the margins of Hollywood. Rather than merely including marginalized communities, *Transpacific Convergences* asks us to reframe a film history that has been shaped by industry and archival practice, public discourse, academic theory, and historiography. Khor’s work exemplifies this reframing that has allowed scholars of film history to foreground regional dynamics and opened new ways of studying national cinemas as the product of local practices rather than as predetermined categories.

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