
“Heck,” said one man from Dar es Salaam, “even on buses and ferries people talked about films. You could always get a conversation going, even between complete strangers” (p. 120). In her latest study, Laura Fair takes readers to the movies. Straddling nostalgic recollections of romance and wistful memories of childhood joy on the one hand, and discussions of civic citizenship and youth activism on the other, Fair’s chronicling of cinema-going cultures in Tanzania is an apt follow up to her acclaimed Pastimes and Politics. Fair’s Reel Pleasures offers an intimately local and necessarily global look at how Tanzanians screened, viewed, and thought about movies in the twentieth century.

Fair begins with the South Asian businessmen who established Tanzania’s first movie theaters at the beginning of the twentieth century. These colonial-era entrepreneurs paint an image of cooperation and community-oriented business, where audience happiness took precedence over profit margins. According to Fair’s interviewees, any capitalist ambition was tempered by cultural and religiously informed notions of wealth-sharing and philanthropy. Chapter 2 discusses “the men who made the movies run”: projectionists, concession stand operators, and ticket-sellers from this same South Asian community. While Fair describes her interviewees as engaging, generous, and joyful, frequent mentions of these men developing ulcers or stress-induced collapses reminds us that this industry was not always as enjoyable as sentimental memories might have us believe.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to Tanzanian audiences of the 1950s and 1960s. Raj Kapoor’s Awara (1951) struck a particular chord due to its critique of capitalism, moral codes, and intergenerational family pressures. Fair’s interviews with elderly Tanzanians highlight how theaters inspired many to live their lives differently: women-only screenings offered Muslim women a place to socialize and experience the city; afternoon shows were popular with kids eager for something to do; and late-night screenings gave young people an excuse to stay out late and an affordable place to meet dates. Early preferences for melodramas and musicals shifted to Elvis Presley, blaxploitation, spaghetti westerns, and kung-fu, but classics like Awara continued to sell out theaters for decades.

Chapter 5 offers a critical analysis of the racial and economic make up of audiences. Differences in audience composition were primarily predicated by geography—coastal theaters were less regulated, less expensive and thus more diverse than those in the mainland. Often, mainland colonial restrictions in terms of censorship and urban mobility meant that Africans were denied entry to the cinema—an annoying and embarrassing experience. The intense nostalgia for a seemingly golden age of cinema felt by some was clearly not shared by all. Fair continues by breaking down theaters’ internal divisions, where seating sections and ticket prices divided patrons by class. Despite this internal segregation, Fair concludes that cinemas were one of few public spaces where people from all over the city came together under one roof.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the 1960s–1980s, where Fair explores how morality, urbanity and a growing social consciousness played out among Tanzania’s youth. Linked to national debates about modernity and development, the drive-in was an example of African
socialism at work, and a space for Tanzania’s interracial, multiethnic, cross-class public sphere. Bruce Lee’s message of cultural nationalism and antiracism sparked a martial arts phenomenon among Tanzanians linking self-defense to personal (and often gendered) empowerment. While this trend concerned elders and socialist politicians, young Tanzanians linked kung-fu to the principles and objectives of Ujamaa.

In her final chapter, Fair outlines the decade of nationalization of cinema (1961–1971), which she credits with sparking the slow decline of the industry. Government taxation policies and attempts to regulate film distribution made it too expensive for local businessmen to screen new material, and the nationalization of land led many theatre owners to not invest in necessary repairs and technological upgrades. While Fair’s epilogue points to a resurgence of cinema since 2002, her inclusion of recent photos of old cinema houses throughout the text makes clear that these former jewels of the community were never restored to their original majesty.

*Reel Pleasures* offers a comprehensive look at how many Tanzanians utilized and navigated the space of the cinema. A tension exists throughout *Reel Pleasures* between the cinema as a space of segregation and as a place for encounters and exchange among Tanzania’s diverse population. Particularly given areas like Zanzibar’s well-documented history of racial friction during the time period in question, discussion of how race, class, and gender figured into cinema as a space for community could have been developed further. Fair directly addresses potential critics of her use of oral interviews, particularly in regard to their nostalgic nature. However, attention to the vast literature on nostalgia would have nuanced her analysis even further while still allowing for her productive focus on affect and the livedness of the past. As Fair states: “Cinema halls were not lifeless chunks of brick and mortar; they resonated with soul and spirit” (p. 10). In recent years, there has been a reinvigoration of critical scholarship on popular cultures and print cultures in Africa; Fair convincingly demonstrates the necessity of also taking seriously cinema-going cultures in African history.

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*Modern Egypt: What Everyone Needs to Know*, by Bruce K. Rutherford and Jeannie L. Sowers is a comprehensive but concise synthesis of current literature on contemporary Egypt. Each chapter ends with a short “Suggested Readings” section. The book has maps and photos, a few pages of notes, an index, but no bibliography. It begins with a preface entitled “Why Study Egypt.” Chapter 1 is a comprehensive survey of the much lamented 2011 Uprising, the events leading up to it, and the military takeover. Chapter 2 shifts to a standard discussion of how geography shaped Egypt and the empires that ruled it from the pharaonic era through the Muhammad Ali era that began in 1805, the British occupation, the post-World War I years, the Islamic movements of the 1920s and 1930s, and a very