Identity and Difference. Postcoloniality and Transnationality in Lusophone Films is a compilation of previously published peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters by Carolin Overhoff Ferreira.

The end of the 48-year-long Portuguese totalitarian regime, the Estado Novo, with the Carnation Revolution in 1974 set the stage for a change of paradigm in the Portuguese film industry. A growing transnational trend was facilitated by film partnerships with Brazil and the Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa/African Countries with Portuguese as Official Language (PALOP), originating a number of Lusophone co-productions.

Ferreira focuses on fiction feature films that deal with the “post-colonial and trans-national condition of Portugal and its ex-colonies” (16), particularly in what concerns colonial history, postcolonial identity, globalization, and migration. The author sees transnationality as a critical concept, whose ambivalence can hide both “ideological traps” and “opportunities to develop” transnational dialogues (17). Those traps are related to the perpetuation of Luso-tropicalism and Lusophone discourses. The first is a term coined by Gilberto Freyre to refer to the supposedly natural Portuguese tendency for miscegenation. The latter points toward a supranational cultural and Portuguese-speaking community formed by Portugal and its former colonies, which would outlive the colonial rule. These topoi try to “camouflage difference by acknowledging that they were designed to maintain the imaginary of Portugal as a great nation” (19). Their notion of Portugal’s exceptionality is
widespread in canonical literature (Fernando Pessoa, Luís de Camões and António Vieira) and has been discussed by scholars such as Eduardo Lourenço, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and José Gil, from whom Ferreira borrows in her films’ analyses. Ferreira finds the concept of transnationality ineffective when put at use to even out identity within a “world of difference” (20) but very productive when related to the “net of identity and difference that results from the multi-faceted encounters during colonialism and post-coloniality” (21). She examines thus a corpus of films where identity and difference are simultaneously—though in different ways, depending on the case studies—at play.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, “Facing Authoritarianism and the End of the Empire: In Search for an Alternative Identity,” is dedicated to in-depth comparative analyses of Portuguese national films. Here, the author explores the strategies used by filmmakers to challenge the legacy of the Portuguese dictatorship’s authoritarian structures and hegemonic identity. She argues that there is an underlying imperial discourse in some of the studied films (Manoel de Oliveira’s No or the Vain Glory of Command, for instance) where the former colonized is still pictured as the Other, and the cornerstones of Portuguese national identity as a “chosen nation” (107) continue at play. Portugal’s problematic position within Europe is also explored through films whose characters (often adolescents) seek to solve their identity crises, metonym of the country’s own troubled identity as a European nation in the aftermath of its colonial history.

The second section of the book, “Facing Past and Present from a Trans-National Perspective: Between Identity and Difference,” presents a comprehensive overview of co-productions based on protocols between Portugal and the PALOP and Brazil. The author is interested in the extent to which material relations between the involved countries affect the identity construction in the films. Her analyses demonstrate that in some cases co-productions have the potential to renegotiate the legacies of colonialism while in other cases there is a clear monolithic identity discourse fueled by the myths associated with Luso-tropicalism and Lusophony (particularly in features directed by European filmmakers). In either case, these ideas do not appear to be triggered by financial constraints but rather by obsolete notions on identity inherited from the colonial and imperial past.

This compilation will appeal to academics, students, and the general public interested in national and transnational film studies that deal with the
renegotiations of power, identity, and difference in the multilateral Lusophone postcolonial contexts. Ferreira makes an important contribution to the mapping out of Lusophone national, regional, and transnational cinemas, while establishing a productive dialogue with the preexisting Anglophone and Francophone models. She does so by testing the value and the limitations of the concept of transnationality when contrasted with the notions of Lusophony and Luso-tropicalism. This book opens up a prolific research path related to the entangled cultural and artistic relationships among Lusophone countries in the plural and polyphonic postcolonial era. Furthermore, it includes Lusophone film studies in the geography of global academic circles.

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