



Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema (New Directions in National Cinemas)

By Ruth Ben-Ghiat

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Ruth Ben-Ghiat provides the first in-depth study of feature and documentary films produced under the auspices of Mussolini's government that took as their subjects or settings Italy's African and Balkan colonies. These "empire films" were Italy's entry into an international market for the exotic. The films engaged its most experienced and cosmopolitan directors (Augusto Genina, Mario Camerini) as well as new filmmakers (Roberto Rossellini) who would make their marks in the postwar years. Ben-Ghiat sees these films as part of the aesthetic development that would lead to neo-realism. Shot in Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, these movies reinforced Fascist racial and labor policies and were largely forgotten after the war. Ben-Ghiat restores them to Italian and international film history in this gripping account of empire, war, and the cinema of dictatorship.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema is the most subtle and detailed examination we have of a crucial element of the cultural practice of 'totalitarian' dictatorship, Italian-style." ?Times Higher Education Supplement

"This new book splendidly confirms Ruth Ben-Ghiat's standing as the preeminent cultural historian of Italian Fascism in the English-speaking world today. She illuminates not only the drive for empire, along with the place of violence and history in the associated Fascist imaginary, but also key facets of cinematic modernity, the merging of documentary and fiction in the "empire film" aesthetic, and the antecedents of neo-realism. No one brings greater theoretical acumen, interpretive care, and contextual erudition to writing about film historically." ?Geoff Eley, University of Michigan

"A pathbreaking study of Fascist-era films set in Italian colonies in North and East Africa, Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema represents a major contribution to multiple fields, from the history of Italian Fascism and interwar European cultural politics to the history of colonialism and film history." ?Journal of Modern History

"The first comprehensive scholarly study of films made in or about the African and Balkan colonies of Mussolini's fascist empire, this book is genuinely groundbreaking and exceptionally insightful. ... A balanced, judicious historian, [Ben-Ghiat] displays her wealth of archival knowledge and interpretive skills in a clear, straightforward narrative that proves utterly enthralling.... Essential." ?Choice

"If film is a portal to empire as Ruth Ben-Ghiat claims and so beautifully demonstrates, then her book is that and much more: from a carefully chosen set of vantage points on documentary and feature film genres, screen masculinity, and cinema's mobile technologies, she burrows through the thicket that joins fascist film culture and empire cinema to show their entangled production of the weapons of empire, fascism, and war. Shifting between a close-up and wide-angle lens, Ben-Ghiat unsettles what we think we know about Italian cinema and its racial inscriptions, and not least about the fantasies of mobility and force of restriction that shaped fascist violence and visions of empire." ?Ann Laura Stoler, author of *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*

"Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema contributes to an important rethinking of an understudied aspect of Italian history.... One hopes that this provocative work is only the beginning of an overdue conversation, and that future contributions will move beyond the doors of Italian archives to consult voices/sources/documents from the colonies themselves." ?H-Italy

About the Author

Ruth Ben-Ghiat is Professor of Italian Studies and History at New York University.

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