

Chapter 5

Reclaiming the Frame Through Cinematic Decolonisation of the African Female Body Beyond the Western Gaze: A Study of Selected Films

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines cinematic decolonisation in African cinema as a structural intervention into visual power, spectatorship, and archival authority rather than a corrective politics of representation. Situating African film within postcolonialism, it argues that cinema operates as a form of theory-making that dismantles Eurocentric regimes of visibility governing African female and queer bodies. Drawing on Bell Hooks's oppositional gaze and biopolitical, necropolitical, and archival theory, the chapter traces a continuum of cinematic decolonisation across four films: *Black Girl* (1966) as a critique of colonial domestic servitude; *The Woman King* (2022) as speculative historical repair and counter-archival reconstruction; *I Am Not a Witch* (2017) as an exposure of institutionalised biopolitical capture; and *Rafiki**

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(2018) as a reclamation of queer visibility, pleasure, and futurity. Collectively, these films show how African cinema reconfigures not only representation but also the conditions of seeing, remembering, and political appearance.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the African female body has been placed within a totalising Western gaze that has stigmatised or pathologised it as a site of “deviant” sexuality and “primitive” imagery. Such colonial imagination – represented by figures like Sara Baartman – contrived narratives of atavism, hypersexuality, and grotesquerie to justify the subjugation and control of African women as “animals” to be domesticated and made civilised (Majavu, 2021). In these visual cultures, the Black female body was categorised as a commodified object, usually depicted within a “mammy/whore” dichotomy that denied women real autonomous subjectivity (Marshall, 1996). Cinematic decolonisation, therefore, needs to deconstruct these colonial epistemologies by creating an authentic voice and an oppositional gaze. This chapter explores how African filmmakers have reclaimed the frame, transforming the female body from an object of scientific scrutiny and moral panic into a potent historical agent. This section first outlines the historical problem before turning to contemporary cinematic interventions.

More specifically, this chapter examines African cinema as a critical site of cultural theory, archival intervention, and postcolonial knowledge production. Moving beyond Eurocentric literary paradigms, it treats film as a Global South text that actively contests colonial visual regimes, patriarchal power, and inherited modes of spectatorship. The chapter contributes to existing scholarship by reframing cinematic decolonisation not merely as representational correction but as a reconfiguration of visual archives and spectatorial relations. This chapter aims to theorise cinematic decolonisation in African cinema as a structural intervention into visual power, spectatorship, and archival authority, rather than as a corrective politics of representation. It examines how African filmmakers dismantle Eurocentric scopoc regimes that historically rendered African female and queer bodies governable, pathological, or disposable. Drawing on Bell Hooks’s (2014) oppositional gaze alongside biopolitical, necropolitical, and archival theory, the chapter analyses *Black Girl*, *The Woman King*, *I Am Not a Witch*, and *Rafiki* as counter-archival interventions. This offers a novel framework for analysing African women’s and queer bodies as historical and political subjects. In doing so, it positions African cinema as a critical site of theory-making within Narratives of the African Female Body.

To clarify the structure of the analysis, the chapter proceeds chronologically and conceptually, moving from colonial domestic servitude (*Black Girl*), through

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