

End of Empire At BFI Southbank in November 2011



The British Empire was often portrayed on film as an exotic playground for tales of adventure and derring-do until the 1950s when political intrigue and social drama crept into the safari-suited swagger. **BFI Southbank** explores the way British Cinema marked the **End of Empire** with a season of screenings and special events.



Highlights of the season include well known feature classics like **Zulu** (USA 1963), rarer gems such **Windom's Way** (1957) and a new print from the **BFI National Archive** of **The Planter's Wife** (1952). Each screening will be accompanied by short films that illustrate the fraught political climate of the Empire during it's final moments.

The screening of **Man Of Africa** (1953) on **Fri 11 Nov** will be followed by a special Q&A with the film's director **Cyril Frankel**. And on **Wed 9 Nov** we'll be welcoming actor **Earl Cameron**, who starred with Dirk Bogarde and Virginia McKenna in **Simba** (1955), to give an extended introduction to the film.

The season coincides with the release in November of two books published by **BFI/Palgrave** entitled **Empire & Film** and **Film and the End of Empire**

From the earliest days of cinema, filmmakers were fascinated with the British Empire. A fertile source of mystery, pageantry and adventure, British Cinema revelled in showing domestic audiences exotic images from the Empire. But the films rarely strayed from an imperialist agenda. Often one-sided and fiercely patriotic, the documentaries, features and news films from this era contain repeated images of representation that are very problematic.

After World War II, with spirits high and cinemas full, British film resumed its love affair with the colonies, rediscovering the glamour of the British Empire in the glow of a new national optimism. With a heady blend of

colourful vistas, wild beasts, dangerous escapades and torrid romances, the Empire was a veritable Jewel in the Crown for post-war filmmaking exploits.

In the mid-1950s, however, it became increasingly apparent that the British Empire was changing. Crowd-pleasing imperial adventures such as **Where No Vultures Fly** (1951) and **The Planter's Wife** (1952) morphed into darker, more politically engaged thrillers. A new liberal perspective emerged in the screenplays, recounting the challenges facing colonies as they moved towards independence. Matinee idol Dirk Bogarde could suddenly be found confronting Mau Mau in **Simba** (1955) while Peter Finch negotiated between armed rebels and autocrats in **Windom's Way** (1957). Hollywood's Ava Gardner struggled with ethnic identity at **Bhowani Junction** (1956) and John Grierson presented the crisis of re-settlement from a Ugandan perspective in **Man of Africa** (1953).

After the Suez crisis in 1956, Britain's diminished colonial power was exposed. The films that followed reflected Britain's new international position with different approaches to Empire legacy. The first, epitomised by **Zulu**, eschewed the difficult problems that faced the dying Empire by focusing on historic military spectacle. Others couldn't shake the sense of colonial responsibility that first emerged in the 'End of Empire' period. Typified by **Guns At Batasi** (1964), these films carried the debate into the new Commonwealth era.

This season has emerged in collaboration with colonialfilm.org, a joint project by the BFI, UCL and Imperial War Museum to digitise the BFI and IWM collections of colonial film. We're very pleased to accompany each feature film with a short documentary selected from this collection.

- Ends -

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End of Empire takes place at BFI Southbank on Nov 3 – 30 in association with:

NewStatesman

BFI Publishing launches *Empire and Film* and *Film and the End of Empire*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe. Both at £18.99.

Zulu

UK-USA 1963. Dir Cy Endfield. With Stanley Baker, Michael Caine, Jack Hawkins, James Booth. 133min. Digital. **PG**

A gutsy tale of grace under pressure, *Zulu* celebrates true British grit in the hour of need. Stanley Baker and Michael Caine lead a depleted contingent of Welsh infantrymen in defending Rorke's Drift missionary station from the attack of 4000 Zulu warriors. Released in the final months of the British Empire, producer Baker and director Cy Endfield's film offered audiences a timely reminder of Empire history.

Plus

How a British Bull-Dog Saved the Union Jack

(UK 1906. Walturdaw Company. 6mins. Silent)

More Empire bugle-blowing with this true tale of canine bravery during the Zulu wars.

Thu 3 Nov 18:30 NFT1

Where No Vultures Fly

UK 1951. Dir Harry Watt. With Dinah Sheridan, Meredith Edwards, William Simons. 107min. **U**

Anthony Steel plays a game warden tasked with creating a secure national park to preserve African wildlife from poachers and disease. Filming in the savannah of East Africa, director Harry Watt shot the dramatic locations in vivid Technicolor to capture the exotic thrills of this Safari adventure. It was a big hit for Ealing Studios.

Plus **Spotlight on the Colonies**

(UK 1950. Dir Diana Pine. 11 min)

A survey of the progress made by British colonies towards independence.

Fri 4 Nov 14:00 NFT2

Tue 8 Nov 20:40 NFT2

The Planter's Wife

UK 1952. Dir Ken Annakin. With Claudette Colbert, Jack Hawkins, Anthony Steel, Peter Asher. 91min. **PG**

Claudette Colbert stars as a despondent wife isolated on her husband's rubber plantation during a wave of attacks launched by the independence movement. Armed to the teeth in their fortified bungalow, Colbert and family determine to defend their land in this British twist on the Western. The complex political realities of the Malaysian Emergency are turned, here, into a simple patriotic action movie.

Plus, **Alien Orders**

(UK 1951. Crown Film Unit. 11min)

The danger and disruption of 'terrorist' attacks to life and industry in Malaysia

Fri 4 Nov 20:40 NFT2*

Sun 6 Nov 16:00 NFT2

***Introduced by Dylan Cave**

Seniors' Free Talk: End of Empire

Dylan Cave, curator of this month's End of Empire season, presents an illustrated talk about the feature films made during the final years of the British Empire. From the optimistic dramas of the immediate post-war years, through the swaggering adventures of the early-1950s, to the later, more sober political thrillers, British cinema's final tour through the former colonies was one of exotic highs and problematic lows.

This event is free for the over-60s: otherwise tickets are available at normal matinee price.

Followed by a screening of *Where No Vultures Fly* on Fri 4 Nov 14:00 (see pX)

Fri 4 Nov 11:00 NFT2

Simba

UK 1955. Dir Brian Desmond Hurst. With Donald Sinden, Orlando Martins. 99min. **12A**

Dirk Bogarde and Virginia McKenna fall in love amid the terrors of the Mau Mau attacks on colonial farmers in Kenya. Earl Cameron gives a dignified performance as Dr Karanja teaching Bogarde lessons in humanity, but trapped between familial and moral allegiances. Amid some dubious social politics, *Simba* nevertheless acknowledges the difficult journey of colonies moving towards independence.

Plus, **Mau Mau**

(South Africa 1954. Dir Donald Swanson. 19min)

A drama-documentary about the Mau Mau threat in Kenya.

Sat 5 Nov 18:20 NFT2

Wed 9 Nov 18:10 NFT2*

***Introduction by Earl Cameron**

Man of Africa

UK 1953. Dir: Cyril Frankel With Frederick Bijurenda, Violet Mukabureza Narrated by Gordon Heath 74 min

A drama-documentary about a Ugandan tribe forced to move and live alongside a rival tribe. Filmed in gorgeous Ferraniacolor, with one of the first entirely black casts in a British feature, *Man of Africa* is a fascinating document of the lives, dreams and problems of tribal Ugandans leading to independence. Producer John Grierson complemented director Cyril Frankel that it was their finest moment.

Introduced by Dylan Cave. Following the screening we are pleased to welcome director Cyril Frankel who celebrates his 90th birthday in December.

Fri 11 Nov 18:10 NFT3

Bhowani Junction

USA 1956. Dir George Cukor. With Bill Travers, Freda Jackson, Francis Matthews, Lionel Jeffries. 109min. **12A**

Set in the months before India gained independence, *Bhowani Junction* stars Ava Gardner as Victoria Jones, an Anglo-Indian girl trying to discover her true self while caught between the advances of an English colonel (Stewart Granger), a young Sikh (Francis Matthews) and a fellow Anglo-Indian (Travers). Cukor adds plenty of American studio glitz to the Empire melodrama, seamlessly blending Victoria's turbulent love life into a story packed with political treachery.

Plus, **Indian Background**

(UK 1946. Crown Film Unit 9min) Social life and politics in India on the eve of independence.

Thu 17 Nov 18:20 NFT1

Sat 19 Nov 20:40 NFT3

Windom's Way

UK 1957. Dir Ronald Neame. With Natasha Parry, Robert Flemying, Michael Hordern. 108min. **PG**

Peter Finch gives an electrifying performance as Alec Windom, a doctor who becomes embroiled in menacing clashes between a ruthless rubber planter, unscrupulous government leaders and outraged rebels in Malaysia. As well as juggling the locals and the secret police, Windom has to deal with the arrival of his estranged wife (beautifully played by Mary Ure) and her attempt to to repair their marriage. Hugely underrated, *Windom's Way* crystallises the problems that faced many countries attempting independence.

Plus, **The Knife**

(Malaysia 1952. Dir Ow Kheng Law. 9min)

Two home guards are captured by rebels during the Malaysian 'Emergency'.

Mon 21 Nov 20:40 NFT2

Wed 30 Nov 18:10 NFT2*

*** Introduced by Dylan Cave**

Guns at Batasi

UK-USA 1964. Dir John Guillermin. With Flora Robson, John Leyton, Mia Farrow. 105min. **PG**

Richard Attenborough at his best as Regimental Sergeant Major Lauderdale, in charge of a British outpost in an unnamed African country. On the eve of independence, Lauderdale witnesses the military coup that takes over the peaceful transition of a former British colony to a newly independent African state. Trained to go down with the Empire before accepting defeat, Lauderdale refuses to let violent revolution get in the way of military decorum.

Plus, **Giant in the Sun**

(Nigeria 1959. Dir Sidney W. Samuelson. 21min)

A documentary about Northern Nigeria's move towards self government

Thu 24 Nov 20:30 NFT3

Tue 29 Nov 18:00 NFT3

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.50, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Filmstore

The BFI Filmstore is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank /