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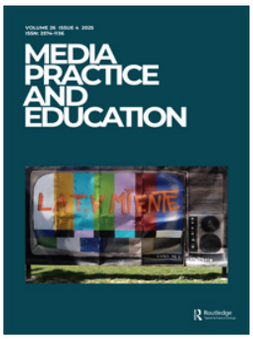

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Film journals and committed pedagogy today: learnings from the global long sixties

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the enduring relevance of mid-twentieth-century anti-imperial pedagogical practices, focusing on the goal of consciousness-raising as one of the key goals of historic decolonisation. Situating its analysis within the broader theoretical frameworks of Third Cinema, anti-colonial thought, and Freirean critical pedagogy, the article takes as a case study the Turkish film journal *Youth Cinema* (1968–1971), which functioned as a platform for consciousness-raising through film literacy and guerrilla documentarianism. Combining dialogic teaching methods with grassroots filmmaking and mobile screenings, *Youth Cinema* aimed to democratise film as a medium of political and social transformation. The discussion considers overlaps between Turkish Third Cinema and a Freirean 'problem-posing education'. Through archival research and pedagogical reflections, the article then highlights the relevance of these methodologies to contemporary challenges in film and media education. Theoretical insights from bell hooks and Lindiwe Dovey inform the exploration of 'two-way' approaches to teaching narrative and audiovisual media. By revisiting historic practices of liberational pedagogy, the article underscores the potential of film literacy to challenge systemic inequalities and inspire transformative learning. Ultimately, it calls for the prioritisation of consciousness-raising in educational praxis.

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Introduction

In the global cinema landscape, the 1960s and 1970s marked a period of radical transformation and resistance, as filmmakers and intellectuals from diverse geopolitical contexts sought to articulate modes of storytelling that could reflect and inspire their respective sociopolitical struggles. The wide-ranging social, political, and cultural transformations subsumed under the concept of 'the global sixties' resist clear definitions and neat compartmentalisation. However, as Martin Klimke and Mary Nolan argue (2018), the complex political developments, new social movements, cultural expressions,

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and diverse ideologies that emerged worldwide nevertheless reverberated well into the 1970s – hence their, and my, use of the term 'long sixties' throughout. Amidst this ferment, Third Cinema emerged in Latin America as a significant theory and practice that sought the democratisation of film production, distribution and screening, as well as the politically committed position of film as a dialogic, participatory experience singularly suited to mass consciousness-raising.

Film scholars Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen have recently insisted on a reconsideration of Third Cinema. They have articulated a sharp riposte to the post-political positioning of the category of 'World Cinema', which is now more commonly used than the term Third Cinema to refer to filmmaking from the global South. Conceived as a value-free category about plurality, they argue it can reflect, at worst, how 'trans- and pan-nationalism is often used as a cover to introduce neoliberal order' (2020, 11). At best, it does 'little to help the masses excluded from participation in politics and culture due to their poverty and colonial legacy … to [analyse] their condition' (12). I proceed from the assertion that the 'active character' (3) of a cinema with the latter goal – that of developing people's understanding of their own conditions – remains alive, so long as the unequal global conditions it first challenged persist in our time. The application of its principles in Turkey is almost entirely unstudied; however, even though the Turkish Third Cinema moment and movement make for a particularly helpful case study in its hybrid use of film journals as platforms of dialogic learning between working class audiences, filmmakers and activists.

Examining the practices used by one Turkish film journal in particular, *Genç Sinema: Devrimci Sinema Dergisi* (*Youth Cinema: A Revolutionary Film Journal*, which ran 1968–1971), this article will proceed in two interrelated sections. In its first, it will give a definition to the multi-faceted term it introduced above: 'consciousness-raising'. This section will draw especially from anti-colonial thought to discuss how film was understood as a means of consciousness-raising during the era of historic decolonisation (the time of nation-building that proceeded apace from Indian independence in 1945 through to the 1980s in the formerly colonised world). It will point especially to how and where journals and periodicals were recognised as sites of pedagogy vital for politically liberatory aims, flagging especially the findings of the *Revolutionary Papers* collective, of which I am a part.

The second half of the article will bring these theoretical inroads relating pedagogy, decolonisation and journals to bear on the case study of 1960s–1970s Turkish anti-imperialism, centring *Youth Cinema*, a radical filmmaking group that printed a monthly, cheap and easily circulated film journal in the Turkish language. This publication not only served to document the political and artistic aspirations of Turkish Third Cinema, but also, I will argue, functioned as a site of what the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire termed a 'problem-posing education' (1968). The section will then highlight two particular methods used by this journal that offer methodological inspiration relevant to meeting contemporary calls for decolonial pedagogy in the areas of film, television and media education. My appraisal of these methods will be informed by two lenses: the practical insights gleaned from my own teaching of African and South Asian films, which is inspired by Lindiwe Dovey's (2020) incorporation of lived experience into her pedagogy; and secondly, bell hooks' (1991) and Freire's (1968) advocacy for liberational and dialogical approaches in education.

In the spirit of Dovey's call for the acknowledgement of subjectivity in pedagogic method, I proceed throughout from a politically committed position that takes as foundational Freire's assertion at 'there is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and brings about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' ([1968] 2014, 13–14). I do not seek here to resolve the contradictions (which are broadly historical, social and political) of drawing a case study from an oppressed group that was nonetheless located within a country that was once an oppressive imperial power itself. My case study is determined by my personal closeness to its context; a consistently comparative scholarly practice thus far in my career; and my ongoing desire, as a mixed race person from two backgrounds shaped by the fallout from empires, to study the complex 'patterns of political affiliation' (Boehmer 2018, 15) in global twentieth-century anti-imperialisms.

Overall, my article hopes to provoke questions on how film journals, something still central to our pedagogy and assessment methods today as practitioners within Film and/or Media Studies, could be democratised in terms of not only the pluriversality of their perspectives, which scholars like Judith Aston (2024) have recently discussed, but also in their psycho-political ambitions. With the help of Turkish Third Cinema as a case study (while also acknowledging the limitations of the example *Youth Cinema* offers), my article seeks to highlight the convergence of the political goals of historic decolonisation, community-oriented media practice, and dialogic pedagogy, ultimately calling for the reprioritisation of 'consciousness-raising' in our praxis.

Part I: revisiting

Consciousness raising and decolonisation

When we speak of decolonisation in the context of the classroom, too rarely do we refer back to a mid-century historic decolonisation: the social, political and economic project that sought full independence and sovereignty from both European imperialism and a then-emergent American imperialism. And yet part and parcel of the visions of anti-colonial thinkers such as Amílcar Cabral, Steve Biko and Thomas Sankara was the idea that people can only be empowered to inform the trajectory and priorities of decolonisation as a political, social and economic process from a greater degree of consciousness than that which colonialism had (deliberately) left its subjects with. While the notions of consciousness-raising and critical pedagogy have occasionally been raised within Political Theory (Agathangelou 2016; Bose 2009) and African Philosophy (Mungwini 2022), they are less often centred within Film Studies. Nevertheless, as the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe once wrote, 'art is important, but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive' (1975). A critical pedagogy that harnessed the powers of textual and audiovisual media was an avowed concern to cultural creators in the era of decolonisation.

That era saw decades that Frantz Fanon once called 'a programme of complete disorder' (1963, 36), that is, 'a time when things are decomposing or dissolving, or when

the inherited metaphysical distinctions between ethics and politics, say, or sovereignty and subjectivity, are being put under erasure' (Marriott 2011, 34). It is important to recall this notion of decolonisation as disorder (which is not synonymous with chaos or aimlessness); it reminds us, in the context of the valid criticisms of this term's usage in the contemporary Western academy (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2012), that colonised peoples who once envisaged and sought to execute decolonisation were not only faced with the task of defeating the violent social, political and economic structures of empire. They also had to dismantle what Aimé Césaire called the 'skilfully injected' mix of 'fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement' (1950) through which colonialism had ensured the 'stunted consciousness' (Fanon 1963, 144) of its subjects. To pull apart a powerful order has a pedagogical component to it as vital as armed struggle and organised resistance; it involves the discomfort of collective expansion in terms of social and political imagination.

Decolonisation posed the disorder of doing away with your identity as a colonial subject – determined by various hierarchies of race, class gender, caste, and more – and asking anew 'who and what we are' (Césaire 1939) (my translation) as so-called post-colonial identities (in a world which nevertheless retains neocolonial characteristics). Decolonisation therefore emerges in a wide range of midcentury anti-colonial thought as a multi-faceted process that is unfinished – a verb – rather than an adjective that imbues a thing (a syllabus, an exhibition, a pamphlet) with a particular quality.[1] As part of its processes, decolonisation must somehow also challenge and transform epistemic and ontological conditions, as much as the colonisation of resources, labour power and territory. That is why the question of consciousness-raising must remain of vital interest to any one of us committed to pedagogies of decolonisation in the present.

Mazierska and Kristensen point out that the characteristics of Third Cinema are precisely in service of this goal: that of developing people's understanding of their own conditions. As such, this means it 'does not address the "human subject" and "human condition" as such, but a person entangled in specific historical circumstances and affected by many factors' (2020, 3). Articulated in Latin America and taken up by radical filmmakers whose national contexts ranged from Turkey to Vietnam, Mozambique to Cuba, Third Cinema set out a vision of a guerrilla cinema that foregrounded collaborative production, democratic screenings, and the concerns of societies struggling with the effects of imperialism.[2] Audiovisual cultural production was embraced as one means of exploring what Liberation Psychologist Daniel Jose Gaztambide has called 'how oppressed communities and subjectivities overcome fatalism and develop a capacity for critical consciousness' (2019, xxi). The idea of consciousness-raising as the main purpose of a pedagogy oriented towards the process of decolonisation is not prescriptive, but rather about the opening up of avenues: of imagining how societies, knowledge production, intersubjective relations and our global economic system may be permanently transformed out of structures still profoundly unequal along lines reminiscent of, because directly in continuity with, imperialism.

On that basis, consciousness-raising remains one of the most consequential pedagogical questions of our moment. People who do not know that their individual conditions are shared, who erroneously attribute their own hardships to those even more powerless than they, and who think the inequalities in our world are a natural rather than a social order are ill-equipped to act upon their own conditions in a manner that fosters solidarity

and social justice. How can we, in our roles as educators, help our students overcome the former and build the latter? It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the role of audiovisual literacy in such transformations in consciousness. Recent years have seen a fiercely reactionary turn in the media available for mass and free consumption, from the often misogynistic 'men's self-help' genre of online video (Regehr 2022) to the quantifiable bias of mainstream Western news outlets in their coverage of the 2023–2024 genocide of Gazans (Irfan, Aqeel, and Hussain 2024). But surging also, albeit underfunded and besieged, has been media that seeks to 'perceive clearly the "order" which serves the interests of the oppressors' (Freire [1968] 2017, 36). These have relied heavily on social media, grassroots publications, low- or no-budget documentary-making, iPhone filmmaking, handmade zines and similar forms of narrative not easily co-opted by hostile governments or corporate power. These mediums have featured in the liberational and anti-imperialist demands being made by people on the streets of Brazil, Turkey, Nigeria, South Africa, India and others, especially since 2019. Within the limitations of the Western academy (I say this to acknowledge the task extends beyond the classroom, touching on actions like fully divesting universities from their shares in arms and fossil fuels), we as practitioners may seek to translate these global energies into pedagogies that harness the power of film literacy to inform our students' ways of understanding their everyday experiences as situated within shared material conditions.

Film has long been recognised for its social potential, and theorised within Film Studies as a visual vocabulary that, among other things, enables a social mission. Soviet pioneers like Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov arguably even pared down this goal of enabling audiences to make social observations into pure form through the development of dialectical montage (Eisenstein [1949] 1977). However, we cannot assume the social function of film has already been fully realised because it has already been theorised by, and is practiced within, some traditions of filmmaking, such as British social realism.

The task yet ahead is what the Jewish Palestinian filmmaker and scholar Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues – that 'unlearning the right to rule others and destroy worlds, registered in endless images from this time, is unlearning the imperial mode of bearing witness' (2019, 1034). In our twenty-first century context of blockbuster franchises that feed what Anna Kornbluh (2024) has called an aesthetics that negates mediation in its demand for immediacy (precisely at a time when political turmoil and social challenges require *more* mediation) – as well as a time of filmmaking in direct collusion with state and corporate powers (Jenkins 2013) – Film Studies as a discipline must adjust its social mission to one as ambitious as 'unlearn[ing] the imperial mode' (Azoulay 2019) of seeing.

Film journals and committed pedagogy

Periodicals – including newspapers, magazines, cultural journals, and newsletters – have historically played a pivotal role in liberational politics, particularly within anticolonial and anti-imperial movements across the Global South. Their low costs of production and ease of (sometimes clandestine) circulation acted counter-institutionally and counter-culturally in contexts of marginalisation, exploitation and assimilatory propaganda, providing alternatives to colonial and neo-colonial structures. Their flexible nature allowed for the dissemination of new ideas, nurturing local and regional cultures by publishing emerging

thinkers and fostering critical discussions. For example, *Al-Jadid*, launched by Palestinians post-Nakba, became a platform for Arab Marxist and Palestinian literature throughout the 1950s and '60s, providing a voice amidst cultural and political erasure (Nassar 2010).

Through international debates and exchanges, journals could translate and redefine concepts like socialism, liberation, imperialism, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, secularism, and democracy across various languages and contexts. Koni Benson, a co-founder of the *Revolutionary Papers* collective, captures some of their positively differentiating factors through the following personal recollection:

> Self-publication within movements, as a means of self-organisation, was so different to the academic journals that I had, in a way, run away from. It was much easier to write; it felt like you were in conversation with people for a shared political project. It opened up a world of what solidarity writing could look like today. (Shamshiri 2024, 104)

As Benson suggests, these publications often proved more democratic and accessible platforms for readers and writers alike. And – importantly for this discussion – such journals also brought vocabularies that connected local struggles to global revolutionary movements to bear on the discussion of aesthetic material, demonstrating that activities like literary fiction and film criticism could be sites of committed pedagogy.

How could they enact moves from 'solidarity writing' to 'solidarity teaching'? Culturally, periodicals fostered anticolonial aesthetics and art practices by circulating works through local, regional, and international channels. They contributed to literacy and political awareness, challenging dominant nationalist, colonial, and neo-colonial definitions of literary, visual and audiovisual culture. This was especially full of potential in the context of teaching film literacy, given the political energies available in the socio-spatial experience of cinema-going. By this, I mean an example like the origins of cinema in West and Central Africa, where imperial anxieties around the socially transformative potential of cinema were rife. At first, the British, French and Portuguese used films for didactic and exhortative purposes in their African colonies (Ukadike 1994, 29–35). Cinemas were spaces where segregation, exclusion, as well as dissent were produced and lived.[3] As Odile Georg documents, 'cinema in pre-independence Africa was the site of tensions between audiences, the authorities, and the rising elites' (2021, 130). But then Indian and Arab films (at first profitably distributed in the French colonies with larger Muslim populations such as Senegal) became a cause for concern for colonial authorities after Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt and Egyptian film production took on Pan-African political inflections. Decrees such as Le Décret Laval sought to 'control the content of films that were shot in Africa and to minimise the creative roles played by Africans in the making of films' (Diawara 1992, 23) precisely because of the psycho-political powers of audiovisual experience. Film, and audiences capable of critically viewing film, had colonial authorities fearful of gatherings, meetings, emotive displays, and other embodied political energies on the part of the 'natives' occurring in and around cinemas.

The film journal, though not as widespread as the political periodical and news bulletin in this broader context of a global anti-imperialist culture, had its place. As Sembène identified, 'the publication of a book written in French reaches only a minority, whereas via film one can do as Dziga Vertov did with his "Kino Pravda"' (Sembène in Levieux 2004) (my translation). As such, into the 1960s and onwards, critical film literacy was arguably a relatively achievable and politically desirable goal (especially given the

chance to make and watch films in local majority languages – Wolof, Bambara, Bengali, Xhosa, and so on). As a medium for intellectual exchange, political mobilisation, and cultural expression, the film journal supported the broader objectives of decolonisation and social transformation; however, it was also interested in the above-mentioned psycho-affective capacities of film. This is encapsulated in the manifesto published by a group of radical Turkish filmmakers and activists in the first issue of their journal *Youth Cinema* in 1968, which begins: 'We reject the commercial and commodified form of cinema, just as we reject the societal order that produces such a cinema. Neither this form, nor this order, enables humanity to realise itself'. Reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's words in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), where he finds the struggle for liberation contiguous with self-actualisation (to 'move toward an ideal which is the transformation of the subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth' [Fanon 1967, 193]), this manifesto's stated goal is to pursue a cinema that contributes to the broader task of enabling 'humanity to realise itself'. When film can enable what is systemic to be made visible through the vantage point of subjectivity, they suggest, it is humanity-affirming. This, as the following section will examine, is necessarily pedagogical, and holds contemporary relevance.

Turkey's 'long sixties'

The ambivalence of Turkey's position – both in a geographic sense, straddling as it does Europe and Asia, but also a historical sense, transforming as it did from an imperial power to a contested republic – provides a unique context for its radical cinematic movements. The so-called 'long sixties' (1960–1980) in Turkey were a time of unprecedented radicalisation, artistic experimentation, internationalism, and youthful disaffection. The period was also marked by military coups, rising social polarisation, anti-communist witch hunts, foreign interventions, and street violence. Located in the Eastern Mediterranean on the edge of Europe and West Asia, and therefore not easily categorisable in the 1960s as part of the so-called 'First', 'Second', or 'Third Worlds', Turkey has often slipped through the disciplinary cracks, as Kenan Behzat Sharpe (2018) says. Though it was capitalist, Turkey was not an advanced capitalist nation at the time like Britain or the United States. Though it was never a colony, in a parallel to anti-colonial independence struggles in Africa and Asia, the nation was nevertheless founded by an independence war (1919–1923) that involved fighting the might of the British and French Empires (who had partitioned then invaded the Ottoman heartlands among themselves according to the Treaty of Sèvres). What further makes Turkey's 'long sixties' difficult to analyse alongside global trends is that it is punctuated by military coups of very different kinds in 1960, 1971, and 1980.

But one constant throughout this twenty-year period was the various economic, political and social pressures exerted by, on the one hand, US attempts to bring Turkey decisively into its sphere of influence (through, for example, NATO membership and Marshall Plan aid), and on the other, its left-leaning intelligensia, an army constitutionally charged with 'protecting national sovereignty', and its heavily unionised labour force. Internal tensions within burgeoning workers' movements, a military with sweeping powers, its (then) overwhelmingly agrarian population, and pressures exerted by the US to neoliberalise the Turkish economy echoed some of the conditions that new postcolonial states, caught in

the cross-pressures of the Cold War, were also grappling with. Left vanguardism on the part of a military sounds counter-intuitive to many of us who know the post-independence histories of the Global South. But unlike the reactionary, right-wing line of the Turkish military from the 1970's onward, the 1960 military government saw army generals and President Cemal Gürsel openly declare that socialism might be beneficial to Turkey. Police controls over labour movements were lifted. A new constitution that increased freedom of speech and labour rights was ratified on May 27, 1960, fuelling the energetic political activity that continued throughout the decade, reaching a climax in 1968 when students began occupying universities, agitating for Turkey's immediate withdrawal from NATO, and even kidnapping American soldiers.[4] A lively cultural scene of magazines, newspapers, literature, music, theatre, and cinema developed in parallel.

The methodologies and visions emerging from Turkish Third Cinema shared profound affinities with the broader currents of postcolonial and anti-imperialist cinema in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Third Cinema, as briefly described above, aimed to democratise film as a medium for consciousness-raising and community engagement, as part of a wider global anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist sentiments that often sought non-alignment with either the US or the Soviet Union. The Turkish Cinematheque Foundation, co-founded in Istanbul by socialist writer and filmmaker Onat Kutlar, played a foundational role in fostering an alternative film culture in Istanbul. The Foundation introduced alternative screening practices, curated international film retrospectives, and challenged the narrative hegemony of Yeşilçam (Green Pine), Turkey's Hollywood. Yet Kutlar's somewhat classed arthouse vision was critiqued by younger members who sought a more practical and pedagogically committed approach to filmmaking and local audience engagement. This critique reached expression with the founding of their group and journal *Youth Cinema* in 1968 – almost contemporaneously with the Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's seminal manifesto 'Towards a Third Cinema' (1970). *Youth Cinema*'s vision aligned more fully than the Cinematheque Foundation with the praxis of Third Cinema in its rejection of both the ideological content of commercial cinema (First Cinema) that Yeşilçam embodied, but also the individualism of auteur-driven art cinema (Second Cinema) that Kutlar's retrospectives emphasised.

Youth Cinema believed that Turkey's national moment corresponded to what the Argentine group *Cine Liberación* referred to as 'a new historical situation' that needed a new cinema of ideological transformation (Solanas and Getino 1969). They prioritised guerrilla documentary and archiving work, using their journal as a dissemination platform. Their manifesto in the first issue of the journal stated, amongst other things, that culture stems from and lives within societies; the arts therefore cannot be conceived of as separate from the society that produces them; and that a cinema with an authentic national consciousness will by its very qualities open out into an international(ist) consciousness. This final point parallels with Frantz Fanon's writings in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), where he foresees the potentials and pitfalls of 'national consciousness' in post-independence contexts (its susceptibility to instrumentalisation at the hands of elites, versus its psycho-politically transformative potential as a precursor to pan-African and pan-Asian alliances).[5] This grassroots approach to filmmaking as a tool for liberation was most tangibly realised in the practices of *Youth Cinema* the group, before it was recorded and analysed within the pages of *Youth Cinema* the journal. The group recorded, via hand-held camera, strikes, demos and marches now immortalised in modern Turkish history,

including the Gerze Tobacco Workers' strike (1969) and the events known as Bloody Sunday (1969), which refers to the counter-revolutionary violence unleashed on February 16, 1969 on peacefully protesting groups in Istanbul's Beyazıt Square.[6]

This commitment to 'bringing the streets on-screen' was not easy. They filmed with whatever equipment they could buy, borrow and find, inevitably encountering multiple obstacles. The costs of post-processing were high. They had to build their own facilities for washing the film, and put together their own small printing press to reproduce the journal. The financial difficulties were compounded by the threat of heavy police presence and intervention at the demonstrations that *Youth Cinema* were trying to record; the authorities kept tabs on those they saw filming, and knew their backgrounds and headquarters. As a result, the guerrilla documentarians could never keep their films in their personal homes or printing premises: they would usually deliver them to Kutlar, who would hide them amongst reels of Chaplin or Godard at the Cinematheque Foundation. Their footage is now either lost, destroyed or inaccessible in state archives, as their headquarters were ambushed by police in late 1970. But we can already see from the all too brief life of the group and journal that they were blazing a trail that was complimentary and parallel-running to Solanas and Getino's *Cine Liberación*. Whilst their members were doing work on the ground that amounts to no less than 'guerrilla archiving', the group had also started to attempt to weave cinema – particularly in the form of public screenings followed by discussion – into the fabric of everyday life. The following section will consider examples of content in *Youth Cinema* that emphasise consciousness-raising – articles, mobile screenings, and community letters. With particular reference to frameworks from Paolo Freire and bell hooks, it will contextualise these practices within wider, and still relevant, pedagogical aims.

Part II: reimagining

Liberational methodologies

'That small acceptance of critical interrogation was a crucial challenge inviting us as students to think seriously about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom', reflects bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1991, 6), referring to the transformative effects of her own experience of a classroom that allowed her even a modicum of room to pose critical questions of pedagogical processes. Her words echo the power of what Freire termed a 'problem-posing education' (Freire 2017, 52), which, in centring the activity of critical questioning, eschews top-down, didactic methods in favour of dialogical and participatory approaches. To question is the beginning of changes in consciousness: the identification of a gap between what is and what could be. Freire and hooks (even in their fruitful tensions, especially with regard to Freire's blind spots around gender) understand this disjointedness as crucial to liberatory pedagogies, because while they are committed to the empowerment of marginalised voices, they also warn against the easy inclusion of the disadvantaged into the very structures that disadvantaged them in the first place. Their eventual horizon is the rehumanisation of all through conscientisation (*conscientização*) – the remaking of social relations that arise from dehumanisation in turn creates individuals able to remake those structures that keep the majority of the world beholden to the hegemony of a few. Freire describes this as the integration of

reflection and action for the purposes of transforming our collective conditions, coming full circle to his assertion that there is no such thing as a neutral education. In that vein, as *Youth Cinema* identified, there is no neutral cinema.

This insight, radical in its clarity, calls attention not only to the political stakes of filmmaking, but also to the pedagogical lacuna within Film Studies itself. *Youth Cinema*'s praxis, fusing production, criticism, exhibition, and popular education – although with mixed results – underscores an attempt to harness film as a tool of ideological interrogation and social empowerment. Such potential remains under-integrated in mainstream film pedagogy. The latter can often pits aesthetic analysis against ideological critique – in much the same vein as Anglophone literary studies privileges self-reflexive and anti-realist texts over the so-called 'mimetic naïveté' of realism (Sorensen 2014, 241). Re-engaging with the ethos of *Youth Cinema* invites us not only to reimagine our goals within Film Studies as a discipline, but also to question the taken-for-granted notion that film as aesthetic achievement and individual vision is somehow the more sophisticated area of scholarly inquiry than film as a politically committed means to teach with, through, and for social transformation.

Though short-lived due to the crackdowns that followed the 1971 Turkish Military Memorandum (which effectively functioned as a coup), their attempt to intertwine pedagogy with archival and documentarian practice was 'integrating reflection and action'. In its articles, *Youth Cinema* the journal focused on cinematic storytelling as a mode of understanding systemic inequities – in its context, particularly those faced by Turkey's large population of agricultural and industrial workers – while also helping explain how power is exercised over people through this visual medium at once widely accessible and powerfully affective. But it combined these somewhat theoretical essays with practical guides on low-budget filmmaking, interviews with workers and activists, and reports on the material conditions of filmmaking in Turkey. This juxtaposition sought to dismantle the hierarchies that often characterise cultural production and dissemination. An opinion piece in their March 1969 issue titled 'Popular versus People's Cinema' tackles a typical argument that often serves to shut down 'problem-posing' approaches to the relationship between audiovisual media, the market, and audiences: that a cinema truly accessible and relevant should be 'a lowest common denominator' cinema – anything else is elitist and it doesn't give the people what they want. 'A popular cinema is not necessarily a cinema on the side of the people', the journal identifies. 'What, then, is a people's cinema? A cinema that does not drug us, that does not capitulate to censorious pressures, that weaves the director's vision into our existing social contradictions in order to arrive at truths' (Gönenç 1969, 24) (my translation). Despite the ambiguities of the political vocabulary of its time ('the people'), the active character of a consciousness-raising film literacy versus the passivity of film as a consumer product ('drug') is highlighted here without being unduly prescriptive. There is a rejection of censorship (of any ideological persuasion) without capitulating to relativism, and a rootedness in social conditions without uncritically assuming that audiences are immune to the libidinal energies of cinema and its potentially reactionary manifestations at the level of the psyche and politics. The general horizon remains that of a pluriversality that recognises the individuality of aesthetic expression ('the director's vision') without pretending that vision does not arise from a human immersed in context, and without losing sight of the fact

that we must criticise any pluriversality that seeks to pass off voices that serve populism as a desirable kind of diversity.

The latter grows especially important today in light of the institutional co-optation of decolonisation as a project of enacting a more comfortable fit between itself and those historically excluded from institutional life, without requiring the institution to overhaul its mission, economic structure, or value system. Pluriversality cannot mean allowing what Amba Azaad evocatively terms 'the malignant melancholy of the erstwhile master' (2021, n.p.) – power that cries victimhood in the face of equity – to be on par with the justice call of the historically excluded.

Two-way learning

The group's approach extended to its screening practices, complementing its journal content. These included mobile cinemas that reached diverse audiences – from university students to rural farmers. A one-page report in issue 7, May 1969, summarises that since September 1968 *Youth Cinema* has held film screenings in settings quite diverse in demographic. The list includes the Black Sea Technical University Cinema Club; the first anniversary of the founding of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions; al-fresco village cinemas in Eastern Anatolia; and screenings at the Rubber Workers Union. They screened works by Ahmet Soner, a then up-and-coming, social realist Turkish director and screenwriter (who was later head of the Cinema Workers' Union from 1998 to 2000), followed by their own short documentaries and guerrilla archiving efforts. The latter were relevant to fostering a sense of shared struggle and interests between urban and rural audiences, and formed an example of translating the pedagogical articles in their journal into practice. This ethos resonates with Judith Aston's emphasis on the importance of dialogical teaching and multi-perspectival approaches in addressing global challenges, which is fundamentally about enabling our students 'to create transformative approaches to narrative and story that can help reframe the way we think about and experience our lives' (2024, 124). Free, mobile screenings in underserved communities fostered discussion spaces free of jargon, and brought cinema out of its escapism-oriented and dazzlingly star-studded Yeşilçam circle (which had not only cultivated a certain mystique around big personalities but also, in many cases, just produced low-budget copies of whatever Hollywood made, reinforcing the notion that cinema consisted of Western narratives entirely removed from Turkish conditions and contexts).[7]

Other content that sought to 'reframe our experiences' (Aston 124) included a 'letters from the press' section, wherein the editors of *Youth Cinema* would print correspondence from local newspapers, universities and unions related to filmmaking or film audiences. Given the dominance of the urban metropoles of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir to film culture, this singled out the journal's interest in the medium's consciousness-raising potential, and suggested a two-way pedagogy rather than a dissemination of criticality from the urban to the rural setting. One letter in issue 7, from the local press of a coastal Mediterranean village near Çeşme, writes: 'This is Çeşme, that town filled with the rich at play every summer and 4000 underpaid, exploited tobacco farmers every winter. Our local audiences say: 'cinema has come down to the people, but only in terms of ticket price'. People are not buying into the farce that is our domestic cinema

anymore: they go only because there's no other entertainment to be had. But we're awake. We're an audience with eyes wide open' (1969, 11–12) (my translation).

As can be gleaned through these examples of the journal's contents, *Youth Cinema*'s primary aim was to challenge and provide an alternative to the mainstream-capitalist entertainment behemoth. It is undeniable that *Youth Cinema*'s limitations reflected its scant resources, its besieged conditions of production, and the political vocabulary of its time, particularly in its lack of attention to how visual storytelling could also address divisions other than class (gender and ethnicity being the most glaring ones in its Turkish context). Nonetheless, its emphasis on collective authorship, political consciousness, and accessibility provides a counterpoint to the increasingly commercialised and siloed nature of contemporary academic publishing and film pedagogy. In the meantime, its aporias and failures speak to the needs and the conditions of our own moment in Higher Education – both with its promisingly greater diversity of students in comparison to the past, as well as its troubling new modes of technologised surveillance and discipline like the Prevent Duty. So, how can some of these learnings from both *Youth Sinema* as a radical kind of film journal, and more broadly the teachings around consciousness-raising in the era of historic decolonisation, hold relevance today in the Media and/or Film Studies classroom?

In practice

'To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage "audiences", to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning', writes hooks (1991, 11). Interestingly, resorting here to metaphors that bring to mind cinema – a 'performing' to 'audiences' – hooks differentiates this kind of performance from spectacle by highlighting its purpose ('catalysing engagement'). In my teaching practice, I have found dialogical and participatory pedagogies to be transformative, particularly in fostering critical engagement and inclusivity. Drawing from Freire's concept of 'problem-posing education' and hooks' vision of education as the 'practice of freedom', I have, with varying success, aimed to create classrooms as spaces of mutual inquiry and shared discovery. These strategies have yielded some measurable outcomes, as evidenced by student feedback and progression, and have reinforced my belief in the pedagogical value of dialogic learning and multimodal approaches.

In my MA teaching, dialogical pedagogy helped address diverse learning needs while fostering deep engagement with cinematic and literary texts that dealt with challenging topics like trauma, racism, misogyny, slavery and mental illness. My postgraduate module titled 'Constituting Identities', which explored cinematic and literary representations of race and gender through especial attention to Psychoanalytic perspectives, incorporated varied modalities to accommodate the diverse academic and cultural backgrounds of students. This included international students new to UK academic contexts and students without a first degree in English. Adjusting the reading load through student feedback mid-module to focus on fewer texts helped them engage more deeply while retaining critical rigour, as I attempted to apply throughout the idea that 'the problem-posing

educator constantly re-forms [her] reflections in the reflection of the students' (Freire 2017, 80–81). Appreciation of lecturer responsiveness to this issue was high, helping de-hierarchise the classroom and translate into deeds my spoken commitment at the start of term to be 'co-learners' over teacher/student. One student from this module noted in module evaluations that they 'came into the class with no background in post-colonial studies, and left feeling like [they] could look critically at the world around me through the lens of what we'd studied'. Another remarked that 'the structure of discussions encouraged me to draw connections between [narratives] and the broader sociopolitical context of my own experiences'. Comments consistently suggested how dialogic teaching allowed students to 'challenge their own assumptions and rethink their perspectives' without feelings of 'shame' with regard to making mistakes.

The integration of multi-modal materials – such as films, visual art, and podcasts – further demonstrated the impact of prioritising consciousness-raising over cultivating identical skill sets across the classroom. In an example of a vastly different level classroom, in my first-year undergraduate, introductory module to postcolonial studies, I included sessions where students analysed visual representations of colonial power, from twenty-first century Hollywood representations of Muslims to Instagram travel influencers' representations of the Caribbean, alongside literary texts. This approach not only facilitated richer intertextual analysis but also made students more critically aware of how cultural narratives shape their everyday perceptions of history, place, inequality and identity. As one student put it, 'Examining the films alongside the novels opened my eyes to how stories are constructed in different ways to either uphold or challenge power structures'.

An explicit commitment to decolonial pedagogy has also shaped my teaching. Having African and Asian texts dominate case studies was particularly impactful in supporting students from Global Majority backgrounds, who noted that they felt more 'seen' when their backgrounds did not feature as mere add-ons but as exemplary of the aesthetic expression of the majority of the world. As Lindiwe Dovey (2020) argues, making space for emotion in the classroom is a key part of decolonising, and this includes the facilitator, too, taking the risk of 'being seen'. There were missed opportunities for a 'two-way' learning process in some of *Youth Cinema*'s screening practices: for example, they did not always succeed in understanding their audience's rural contexts when they went to small Anatolian towns. This speaks to a lack of reflection around positionality on the part of the urban (though variously gendered and raced) university students who comprised the ranks of *Youth Cinema*. Given teaching *does* often require providing some prerequisite or contextual information, how can we prevent such moments from becoming instances of talking *at* students (as *Youth Cinema,* though well-meaning, sometimes did)? In this regard, foremost in our minds as educators may be the fear that moments requiring some degree of what Freire calls 'an act of depositing' (1968/2017, 45) can make us complicit in 'coding classrooms – and universities as a whole – so that they address and include certain people, and exclude others' (Dovey 2020, 11).

Reciprocity of subjectivity and emotion has helped me avoid this as much as possible in instances where the classroom must temporarily turn more uni-directional (lecturer to student) because of the delivery of necessary contextual information. Our own positionalities ultimately cannot always be intersectional along lines that help all students relate to the facilitator. My gender, country of origin, religious background and mixed ethnicity

have given me, in the eyes of diverse students at my current institution, greater authority in a postcolonial studies classroom. For other students, notably those I taught previously in an elite institution, the same markers at times burdened me with having to prove my credentials for facilitating their learning. However, the occasional use of my own lived experiences, including honesty as to where aporias in one's own experiences lie, fosters moments of connection and inserts subjectivity into teaching moments where knowledge transmission may temporarily need to turn uni-directional. The information provided could then be presented not so much as a prerequisite that is coded as indisputably canonical or normative (thereby reaffirming the exclusions of the institution) but material chosen via the educator in a mediation between their expertise and interpretation, open to discussion.

The point of these is not to prioritise subjective impressions overdue study and analysis, but to foremost aid students in developing a deeper understanding of their own contexts and the systemic forces that shape them. An environment in which their peers, and the facilitator, incorporate lived experience in a manner that does not exempt that experience from critical analysis is key. One MA student shared how fruitful this mode of critical subjectivity proved for them: 'Engaging with texts that reflect my own cultural heritage made me realise how narratives about identity and power intersect with my lived reality. I now look at both literature and the world with a much more critical lens'. These aid the creation of co-learning moments, as another student emphasised: 'Leading a seminar helped me see the material through my peers' eyes and understand how different perspectives can deepen our understanding of complex issues. It's changed how I engage with ideas, not just in class but in my everyday life'. By centreing the students' voices and experiences, without exempting them from the work of analysis, a pedagogical practice that foregrounds the cultivation of consciousness is necessarily global-minded and critically engaged. Relatedly, while *Youth Cinema*'s efforts to break free of institutional settings by taking film to rural contexts is a consciousness-raising endeavour, the return to 'my everyday life' that comes to the forefront in my students' feedback reveals where this film collective could have truly made the most of the cross-class political energies of Turkey's Long Sixties. We do not know what the Anatolian tobacco farmer thought of hearing and seeing on screen that the plight of the urban construction worker in Istanbul looked remarkably like their own. As such, we do not know what politics *Youth Cinema* could have achieved with a somewhat more multidirectional approach that acknowledged the experiential gaps in the collective's own position.

Conclusion

This article sought to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to bring historical learnings to bear on contemporary pedagogical practices. First defining consciousness-raising within the specificities and limitations of the mid-century era of decolonisation in Africa and Asia, it summarised how the thought emerging in this period singled out the political and affective powers of audiovisual media, especially film, as singularly suited to the ontological and epistemic transformations called for under decolonisation. It then explored the liberation pedagogy attempted by left, anti-imperial and anti-colonial journals of the twentieth century and sought to affirm the ongoing relevance

of the journal form, traditional and digital, to teaching film and media in ways that look to meaningfully contribute towards the process of decolonisation.

By situating *Youth Cinema* within the broader context of methodologies conducive to this task, I underscored the potential of radical film history to inform and inspire innovative approaches to teaching narrative and story in university film departments. Highlighting more broadly Turkish Third Cinema's and particularly this journal's strategies for democratising film-going as a medium of resistance and education, I reflected on the implications of these methodologies for contemporary media education, drawing connections to bell hooks advocacy for inclusive, experimental storytelling practices. With the aid of Freire's thought, my discussion proposed that the kind of film literacy borne of *Youth Cinema*'s pedagogical methods is to the detriment of storytelling that seeks to 'make people conform' (Freire 2017, 13–14) to inequality, and to the benefit of 'pluriversal' (Aston 2024) storytelling that nevertheless also fosters people's analytical and creative capacities for transforming unjust conditions.

Concurring with Lindiwe Dovey's assertion that the subjectivity of the facilitator cannot be exempt from critical consideration, I have explored moments in my own teaching where the liberational pedagogical goals found in the global long sixties have inspired by this method. These have yielded outcomes that affirmed the principles articulated by Freire, hooks, and the practitioners of Third Cinema: that is, education, when participatory and inclusive, can empower students to critically engage with their realities and imagine transformative futures. By fostering environments that prioritise dialogic learning and consciousness-raising, educators can equip students with the analytical tools needed to understand how film literacy and audiovisual media studies are fruitful means of understanding broad systemic inequities.

Undoubtedly, such practices can, emotionally and cognitively, take more out of an educator because of their active character. Emotional distance; the false sophistication of intellectual both-sidesism; and the 'banking approach to adult education' (Freire 2017, 47) – all are tacitly, if not actively, preferred in the neoliberal academy. But, in hooks' words, 'to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn' (1991, 13). All attempts are imperfect contributions – hence the objectively 'failed' yet still relevant examples of the past – to imagining our collective conditions otherwise. Through these explorations, the article has overall attempted to contribute to the ongoing dialogue between film history and contemporary pedagogy. It seeks to encourage educators, scholars, and practitioners not to shy away from harnessing the possibilities of film and media education as precursors for political consciousness.

Notes

1. I am thinking here with key texts such as Fanon's *Toward the African Revolution* (1963) and *A Dying Colonialism* (1959); Amílcar Cabral's writings and speeches about the anti-colonial praxis of PAIGC; Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his essay collections *Homecoming* (1972) and *Decolonising the Mind* (1986); Kwame Nkrumah's analyses in *Neocolonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism* (1965); and Thomas Sankara's various speeches like his 'Déclaration du 4 aout 1983', among others.
2. See also Solanas and Getino (1969), Martin Stollery (2001), Frank Ukadike (1994), Mariano Mestman (2011) and Matthew Croombs (2019) for some histories, contexts and debates on Third Cinema.

3. Before the Colonial Cinema was built in Luanda, Angola, expressly for 'the indigenous', those so defined could only attend films at the National Cinema if they sat behind the screen (Moorman 2001, 104).
4. It should be noted that this political activity was by no means ethnically homogenous. Kurds were attracted to the broader Turkish left, particularly to the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP), and were the third most represented demographic in the upper echelons of the organisation – even though many Kurds inclined towards the left were also unhappy with the TİP's refusal to support an independent Kurdish state (Boggs 2025). Kadir Akın (2021) traces the long history of socialists movements led by Armenian intellectuals and deputies, from the late Ottoman period to the midcentury republic.
5. 'Nationalism is not a political doctrine, nor a programme. If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness' (Fanon 1963, 203).
6. Left wing radical activity continued unabated throughout the seventies until a decisive and traumatic 1980 military coup crippled the left. Martial law imposed by the junta resulted in: 1.7 million people blacklisted; 650,000 arrested; 230,000 tried in court; 517 sentenced to death; 300 suspicious deaths; 171 killed under torture; 50 executed; 16 shot fleeing military authorities; 30,000 who lost their jobs including 3,854 teachers, 95 university lecturers and 47 judges; and 30,000 who left the country as political refugees (Bekaroğlu and Barnes 2021). The coup changed the Turkish constitution to implement the kinds of market reforms that were also seen in the UK under Thatcherism.
7. These were known as Yeşilçam exploitation films of the '70s, which referred to low-budget Turkish films that are part of the global phenomenon known as 'remakesploitation' – Hollywood remakes that change the settings, symbols and character motivations to better reflect local culture (Savk and Doğu 2012).

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