

# 'A fabulous speck on the Earth's surface': Depictions of colonial Macao in 1950s' Hollywood

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European colonialism was in the background, and even forefront, of several North American fiction films, including classics such as *Gunga Din* (1939) and *Casablanca* (1942).<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese empire had its own share of screen time, particularly in the case of the Asian colony of Macao, which was featured in over a dozen Hollywood productions while under Portugal's domination. With a population of 250,000-300,000 Chinese (around 95% of its entire citizenry) and a continually expanding tourism industry, reaching over 1,250,000 tourists a year by the late 1960s, Macao was a peculiar colony in the context of the Portuguese empire, which gained a disproportional projection.<sup>2</sup>

While motion pictures can provide diverse insights into the ways in which the largest film industry in the Western world engaged with Macao, this analysis will focus on their implications in terms of presenting Portuguese colonial rule. The article will begin by contextualizing the general patterns of Macao's screen presence, particularly in the 1950s, when there was a significant spike in American productions set in this colony. Taking into account the different scales of distribution and mass appeal, special attention will be given to films that brought greater visibility to Macao. We will therefore zoom in on the three highest profile productions of that era to feature the Portuguese colony, both as a central stage and as a peripheral – and contrasting – location in Hong Kong-set political dramas. The article examines how the articulation between, on the one hand, Macao's historical and geographical characteristics, and, on the other, Hollywood's orientalist conventions and hyperbolic sense of spectacle ended up conjuring an overall image of 'subaltern colonialism'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gunga Din*, Dir. George Stevens, RKO Radio Pictures, 1942; *Casablanca*, Dir. Michael Curtiz, Warner Bros, 1942. For a brief look at film fiction's early engagement with colonialism, see James Burns, 'Cinema', in *Colonialism: an international, social, cultural, and political encyclopedia. A-M. Vol.1*, ed. by Melvin E. Page, Penny M. Sonnenburg (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), pp.119-21.

<sup>2</sup> 'Adventure Still Rules Macao; Gals Serve Your Opium at Hotel Bedside', *Variety*, 11.08.1954, p.2; '5 Casinos Lure Tourists to Macao, Portugal's Beachless, Orient 'Resort'', *Variety*, 19.11.1969, p.2. For a history of Portuguese rule in Macao from the 1930s to the 1970s (during which the films addressed in this article were released), see Geoffrey Gunn, *Encountering Macau: a Portuguese city-state on the periphery of China, 1557-1999* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), pp.95-170; Wu Zhiliang, *Segredos da Sobrevivência – História Política de Macau* (Macao: Associação de Educação de Adultos de Macau, 1999), pp.297-374.

Based on Portugal's 'intermediate economic development' and its mediating position between the center and the periphery of the modern capitalist system, sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has repeatedly described Portugal as a semi-peripheral country that, by implication, produced a form of semi-peripheral colonialism. According to Santos, since Portugal was itself highly dependent on the core powers of the global political economy, Portuguese society combined traces of both colonizer and colonized, its identity a hybrid between the Shakespearean symbols of the colonial master Prospero and the colonized savage Caliban. The Portuguese empire was then simultaneously shaped by 'a deficit of colonization' (due to Portugal's 'incapacity to colonize efficiently') and by 'an excess of colonization' (with the colonies submitted to a double colonization – by Portugal and, indirectly, by the countries on which Portugal was dependent). Conceptualizing this specificity in relation to the norm of British colonial rule (i.e. the prototype of 'hegemonic colonialism'), Santos recodifies the Portuguese case as subaltern colonialism.<sup>3</sup> In turn, critics have accused such an interpretation of perpetuating a narrative of exceptionality whose lineage includes not only a strand of anti-colonialist critique (Perry Anderson's concept of Portuguese 'ultracolonialism') but also the colonialist justifications employed by the Estado Novo dictatorship (the theory of 'luso-tropicalism', which assigned to the Portuguese empire a high degree of originality and racial harmony).<sup>4</sup> The aim of this article is not to assess the validity of Santos' theses on the ground, but to demonstrate their alignment with the discourse of American film fiction. It will thus contribute to the wider study of the international image of Portugal's empire and the evolving discourse about its colonialism.

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<sup>3</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-Identity', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39/2 (2002), 9-43. The quoted expressions are taken from pp.9-11.

<sup>4</sup> Perry Anderson justified the concept of ultracolonialism in a trio of articles titled 'Portugal and the End of Ultra-Colonialism', first published in 1962, in *New Left Review*, 1/15-17. Luso-tropicalism was initially developed by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre and it was gradually adopted by the Estado Novo dictatorship in the 1950s, as outlined in Cláudia Castelo, *"O modo português de estar no mundo": o luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1933-1961)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1998). For a critical assessment of Santos' ideas, see João Leal, *Etnografias Portuguesas (1870-1970). Cultura Popular e Identidade Nacional* (Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2000), pp.101-03, as well as Eric-Morier Genoud and Michel Cahen, 'Introduction: Portugal, Empire, and Migrations – Was There Ever An Autonomous Imperial Space?', in *Imperial Migrations: Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World*, ed. by Eric-Morier Genoud and Michel Cahen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.1-28 (2-7).

During Portuguese rule, Macao consistently remained by far the most visible area of Portugal's empire in North American cinematic fiction. This colony was a primary setting in the thrillers *Smuggler's Island* (1951), *Macao* (1952), *Forbidden* (1953), *Flight to Hong Kong* (1956), and *Hong Kong Confidential* (1958).<sup>5</sup> It served as the location for key scenes in the crime and adventure films *Hong Kong Nights* (1935), *Dragon's Gold* (1953), *Soldier of Fortune* (1955), *The Scavengers* (1959), and *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold* (1975), while also playing a smaller role in the plots of *Windjammer* (1937), *Kill a Dragon* (1967), and *That Man Bolt* (1973).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Macao was featured in films of other genres, namely the romantic melodrama *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955) and the social drama *Out of the Tiger's Mouth* (1962).<sup>7</sup> By contrast, other Portuguese colonies were virtually absent from Hollywood's output at the time, with the small exception of the African-based adventure stories *Rope of Sand* (1949), which was mostly set in South Africa yet featured a sequence in a bar in Angola, and *Elephant Stampede* (1951), an entry into the 'Bomba the Jungle Boy' series which featured two ivory poachers in Africa on their way to unspecified Portuguese territory.<sup>8</sup>

To a great degree, Macao's relative prominence drew on the colony's aura of mystery and adventure, which had already been popularized over the centuries through countless tales of piracy, gambling, espionage, addiction, murder, and contraband.<sup>9</sup> Anglophone literature had combined these motifs with descriptions of the colony as a

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<sup>5</sup> *Smuggler's Island*, Dir. Edward Ludwig, Universal Pictures, 1951; *Macao*, Dir. Josef von Sternberg and Nicholas Ray, RKO Pictures, 1952; *Forbidden*, Dir. Rudolph Maté, Universal Pictures, 1953; *Flight to Hong Kong*, Dir. Joseph M. Newman, United Artists, 1956; *Hong Kong Confidential*, Dir. Edward L. Cahn, United Artists, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> *Hong Kong Nights*, Dir. E. Mason Hopper, distributed by state rights system, 1935; *Dragon's Gold*, Dir. Aubrey Wisbeg, United Artists, 1953; *Soldier of Fortune*, Dir. Edward Dmytryk, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1955; *The Scavengers*, Dir. John Cromwell, Hal Roach Distributing Corp. and Valiant Films, 1959; *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, Dir. Charles Bail, Warner Bros., 1975; *Windjammer*, Dir. Ewing Scott, RKO Radio Pictures, 1937; *Kill a Dragon*, Dir. Michael D. Moore, United Artists, 1967; *That Man Bolt*, Dir. David Lowell Rich and Henry Levin, Universal Pictures, 1973. I was unable to locate *Dragon's Gold*, so the analysis is based on the dialogue continuity script available at the British Film Institute (SCR-7134) and on this movie's entry in the American Film Institute [AFI] Catalog of Feature Films – <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=51188> [accessed on 28.09.2014].

<sup>7</sup> *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Dir. Henry King, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1955; *Out of the Tiger's Mouth*, Dir. Tim Whelan Jr, Path-America Distributing Co. and Astor Pictures, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> *Rope of Sand*, Dir. William Dieterle, Paramount Pictures, 1949; *Elephant Stampede*, Dir. Ford Beebe, Monogram Pictures, 1951. I was unable to locate *Elephant Stampede*, so data is based on the shooting script, available at Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Walter Mirisch Papers, Box 10, Folder 3.

<sup>9</sup> For a collection of stories, chronicles, and poems harkening back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see *Macao: mysterious decay and romance: an anthology*, ed. by Donald Pittis and Susan J. Henders (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

languid, romantic intersection of Western and Eastern cultures, marked by miscegenation and picturesque yet decadent architecture.<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s, the vivid impression of a place of extremes had been notably reinforced by Hendrik de Leeuw's *Cities of Sin*, a mix of travel narrative and investigative report on prostitution and white slavery in Asia, which included the oft-quoted passage:

There is no question that [Macao] harbors in its hidden places the riffraff of the world, the drunken ship masters, the flotsam of the sea, the derelicts, and more shameless, beautiful, savage women than any port in the world. It is a hell. But to those who whirl in its unending play, it is one haven where there is never a hand raised or a word said against the play of the beastliest emotions that ever blacken the human heart.<sup>11</sup>

The spike of Macao's popularity in 1950s' cinema can be explained by geographical as well as historical reasons. For Hollywood executives, the economic recovery of Southeast Asia generated interest in that region's expanding market since the early 1950s,<sup>12</sup> in contrast to less economically developed sub-Saharan Africa, where most other Portuguese colonies were situated.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as soon as the Korean War (1950-53) broke out – pitting South Korean forces and a US-led United Nations mission against the Soviet-backed North Korea, later joined by China – major studios rushed to capitalize on the public's newfound interest in Asian affairs.<sup>14</sup> Macao benefitted from its location on the 'Bamboo Curtain', directly bordering communist China and just a four-hour ferry ride from the British colony of Hong Kong, which made it an ideal setting for plots of Cold War espionage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rogério Miguel Puga, *A World of Euphemism. Representações de Macau na Obra de Austin Coates: City of Broken Promises Enquanto Romance Histórico e Bildungsroman Feminino* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, 2009), pp.144-64.

<sup>11</sup> Hendrik de Leeuw, *Cities of Sin* (New York: Garland Pub, 1979 [1933]), pp.146-47.

<sup>12</sup> 'Mono Foreign Prexy Sees Better Biz in Asia Than in Europe', *Variety*, 06.03.1950, pp.1,10; 'Asia Is Hardly Scratched - Ugast', *Variety*, 24.02.1954, pp.3,24.

<sup>13</sup> Pointing out several obstacles and limitations of the African market in the mid-1960s, film critic Robert J. Landry argued that 'As regards motion pictures, and so much else, Africa is "new territory," its story one of development to come rather than development to date.' – 'Africa: Future Film Frontier', *Variety*, 04.05.1966, p.160

<sup>14</sup> 'H'wood Scurries To Capitalize On Korean Shooting', *Variety*, 05.07.1950, pp.3,22. For an overview of the Korean War, see William Stueck, 'The Korean War', in *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1: Origins*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.266-87.

<sup>15</sup> 'Adventure Still Rules Macao; Gals Serve Your Opium at Hotel Bedside', *Variety*, 11.08.1954, p.2. For the significance of Macao in the Cold War during this period, see Michael Share, *Where Empires*

Macao also appealed to screenwriters due to particular side effects of Portuguese rule. Because Portugal did not ratify the Bretton Woods monetary agreement until 1961, it was not bound by the same exchange rate for gold as most countries.<sup>16</sup> According to a famous report in *Life* magazine in 1949, this gave rise to a booming gold trade in Macao, capitalizing on China's craving for gold through smuggling networks between the two territories, which in turn encouraged local piracy.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, since the communist victory in China until the early 1960s, the Portuguese colony was the only place in the region where open gambling was permitted.<sup>18</sup> All these elements allowed for distinctive story possibilities, ranging from the pulpy spy twists of *Hong Kong Confidential* to the serious exposé approach of the Golden Berlin Bear-nominated *Out of the Tiger's Mouth*, and even an aborted project for a Macao-based *Casablanca* remake.<sup>19</sup> Repeated exposure then turned this colony into an instantly recognizable backdrop of foreign intrigue.<sup>20</sup>

If its casinos and frontier status made Macao cinematographically attractive, they also meant that films set there tended to emphasize elements of crime and vice. With the exception of the mainstream drama *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, every film contained references to racketeering and most featured gambling and sordid nightclubs. Although Portuguese rule at the time was indeed marked by a mutually beneficial relationship between corrupt colonial bureaucrats and the casino capitalists, including a degree of organized crime,<sup>21</sup> Hollywood helped give Macao's already lurid connotation larger-than-life proportions. A brief dialogue exchange in the otherwise

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*Collided: Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), pp.242-46.

<sup>16</sup> Michael D. Bordo and Fernando Teixeira dos Santos, 'Portugal and the Bretton Woods International Monetary System', in *International Monetary Systems in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Jaime Reis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp.181-90.

<sup>17</sup> 'Smuggling junks sail with golden cargoes from Macao's cellars', *Life*, 08.08.1949, pp.22-23. Ten years later, popular British author Ian Fleming explored in greater depth the triads associated with the Macao gold trade in his travelogue *Thrilling Cities* (London: Vintage Books, 2013 [1963]), pp.25-49. (An excerpt of this text was collected in Pittis and Henders, pp.61-66.)

<sup>18</sup> 'Korea Paying Satch 30G Weekly To Lift Lid Off Orient Version Of Las Vegas', *Variety*, 17.01.1963, p.14. For the evolution of Macao's gambling culture and casino franchise in the colonial era, see António Pinho, 'Gambling in Macau', in *Macau: City of Commerce and Culture*, ed. by Rolf Dieter Cremer (Hong Kong: UEA Press, 1987), pp.155-64 (pp.155-58); Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *Political Change in Macao* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.84-86; Zhidong Hao, *Macau: History and Society* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), pp.73-74; Victor Zheng and Po-san-Wan, *Gambling Dynamism: The Macao Miracle* (Heidelberg/New York/Dordrecht/London: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2014), pp.32-46.

<sup>19</sup> 'Palm Springs Ripples', *Variety*, 09.03.1961, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> This may explain, for example, the choice to open *That Man Bolt* in a Macao prison, a detail that is irrelevant to the plot yet allows for some atmospheric establishing shots before the credits.

<sup>21</sup> Lo Shiu Hing, *Political development in Macao* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), pp.176-79.

unrelated *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) had famously identified Macao as the ‘wickedest city’ in the world.<sup>22</sup> A character explicitly calls back to this line in *Flight to Hong Kong*, before asking the protagonist, Tony Dumont, if Macao really is wicked. Tony replies: ‘Well, let’s put it this way, in Hong Kong you could get your hair cut, and in Macao you could get your throat cut. The only difference is that in Macao there’s no charge.’<sup>23</sup> The tendency to exaggerate was acknowledged by some film critics. Kay Proctor, at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, commented that although ‘Macao long has been glamourized in fiction as “the wickedest place on earth”’, in fact ‘a tourist is perfectly safe trying to win a couple of bucks in the Central Casino playing fan-tan’.<sup>24</sup> Howard McClay, at the *L.A. Daily News*, noted that, aside from illegal traffic and an admittedly thriving gambling industry, the colony’s economy also consisted of prosaic trade in rice, fish, firecrackers, vegetable oil, and metal products, but it was not the legitimate end of Macao’s business that interested filmmakers.<sup>25</sup>

In American cinema, the colony became particularly associated with smuggling. In the 1930s, the implicit background of the Chinese Civil War had favored stories about arms contraband to China: in *Hong Kong Nights*, US secret agent Tom Keene tails a gunrunner to Macao; in *Windjammer*, the passengers of a shipwrecked yacht are rescued by Captain Morgan, who is carrying out an illegal shipment of guns and ammunitions to the colony. Following *Life* magazine’s exposé, in the 1950s the focus shifted to the contraband of gold and jewelry. *Smuggler’s Island* concerns the Macao-based, ex-Navy diver Steve Kent, who is persuaded by his love interest to retrieve gold bars from a crashed airplane and smuggle them into Hong Kong. In *Dragon’s Gold*, investigator Mack Rossiter tracks down the employee of a New York bonding company who apparently absconded with seven million dollars in gold bullions entrusted to him by a Chinese warlord living in the Portuguese colony. *Flight to Hong Kong* follows Macao-based mob operative Tony Dumont, who goes rogue during a diamond smuggling job. In *Hong Kong Confidential*, American intelligence agent Casey Reed worms his way into Macao’s underworld by proposing an elaborate scheme to smuggle gold into China. Furthermore, *The Scavengers* contains subplots about the circulation of bonds and narcotics (as implied by the protagonist’s cocaine-addicted wife).

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<sup>22</sup> *The Lady from Shanghai*, Dir. Orson Welles, Columbia Pictures, 1947, 04:02-10.

<sup>23</sup> *Flight to Hong Kong*, 06:27-54.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), General Collection, Forbidden, ‘Action Fast in ‘Forbidden’’, *Los Angeles Examiner*, 07.01.1954.

<sup>25</sup> AMPAS, General Collection, Macao, ‘Film Review’, *L.A. Daily News*, 03.05.1952.

Later films would go on to address various kinds of contraband. *Out of the Tiger's Mouth* addresses human traffic in the story of two Chinese orphans who escape from mainland China and seek to reach Hong Kong: the 5-year-old girl and the 9-year-old boy are smuggled into Macao and sold to a brothel where they are forced to work as helpers and thieves. In *Kill a Dragon*, the villain is a Portuguese gangster from 'the Mafia of Macao'<sup>26</sup> seeking to retrieve a cargo of nitroglycerine in order to sell it in the black market. The traffic of currency informs the plot *That Man Bolt*. Finally, in *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, the titular special agent faces a casino owner who controls most of the local heroin trade.

The depiction of Macao as a pit of forbidden pleasures and rampant moral corruption fell in line with Hollywood's traditionally Eurocentric portrayal of colonized areas. The rise of cinema had coincided with the height of imperialism and, from early on, the film industry had reflected the interests and prejudices of hegemonic nations, idealizing the West's role in pushing back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny.<sup>27</sup> As part of this process, American films had incorporated orientalist narrative and visual tropes inherited from the works of European explorers, novelists, and painters, which had proven popular with the public. Classic cinema presented a clear dichotomy between East and West, displaying little interest in intercultural understanding. It typically rendered non-Western cultures and regions as strange, perverse, mysterious, romantic, dangerous (if ultimately submissive), and on the whole opposed to the values of modernity and rationality personified by Western protagonists. This representation implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, supported the rhetoric of American and European imperial powers who justified colonialism as a philanthropic effort to control and civilize so-called primitive lands and peoples.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the Portuguese regime did not find in American movies a clear endorsement of its presence in Macao.<sup>29</sup> For one thing, while genre conventions led to

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<sup>26</sup> *Kill a Dragon*, 30:35-45.

<sup>27</sup> As argued by Robert Stam in *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), pp.19-20.

<sup>28</sup> The key text on the origins and fundamentals of orientalist discourse remains Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). For an extended discussion of Hollywood's ethnocentrism, including towards Asia, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the yellow peril – race, sex, and discursive strategies in Hollywood fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994); *Visions of the East – Orientalism in Film*, ed. by Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (London: Rutgers, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> During the Estado Novo dictatorship, the censorship office only allowed *Kill a Dragon* to air in Portugal if references to the Portuguese gangster and the Mafia of Macao were cut out (IAN/TT/SNI, IGAC (2ªinc), cx342, Nº464, Dispatch from 13/07/1968). It did not allow *Smuggler's Island* to air at all (IAN/TT/SNI,

the perpetuation of earlier stereotypes, after the end of the Second World War mainstream cinema had begun to evolve into more politically complex directions, gradually and often ambivalently mixing colonialist images with anti-colonialist sensibilities.<sup>30</sup> More significantly for the corpus of films analyzed in this article, Hollywood's gaze was not concerned with Portugal's perspective. Evoking their semi-peripheral status in the cartography of the world's powers, the Portuguese settlers were either fully disregarded or relegated to act as mere intermediaries in the orientalist adventures of American characters (and one Eurasian protagonist, in the case of *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*).<sup>31</sup> As a result, the ways in which Portuguese rule was represented were not always favorable, as indicated by a closer analysis of the major American film productions of the 1950s to feature Macao.

Hollywood's highest profile work to extensively engage with the Portuguese colony, the classic film noir *Macao*,<sup>32</sup> came about as the result of multiple creative voices. Howard Hughes, head of the production company RKO Pictures, bought the story rights from screenwriter Bob Williams in August 1949.<sup>33</sup> Josef von Sternberg unenthusiastically signed up to direct the film and his work was well underway by the time he was fired, due to disputes with the cast. Hughes, who had a reputation for interfering with the content of RKO's films, then hired uncredited director Nicholas Ray to shoot retakes and additional scenes. Script credit went to Stanley Rubin and Bernard Schoenfeld, although there were six other writers involved in the script's various drafts,

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IGAC (1<sup>st</sup> inc), cx342, N<sup>o</sup>22145, Dispatch from 28/02/1952). The remaining films are not listed in the censorship archive, which means either that they were not purchased by Portuguese distributors or that their files, like many official documents from the time, have been lost.

<sup>30</sup> Jon Cowans, *Empire Films and the Crisis of Colonialism, 1946-1959* (Baltimore, Ma: John Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> The other exception, already in the 1960s, are the two Chinese children at the forefront of *Out of the Tiger's Mouth*. In fact, this was a particularly original production, not only because it was an independent film shot entirely on location in Macao and Hong Kong, but because for once the indictment of living conditions in the colony comes across as purposefully critical rather than incidental to the plot. For details on the film's production, see the promotional pamphlet by Blank-Rand Associates, Public Relations, at the New York Museum of Modern Art, Film Study Center, *Out of the Tiger's Mouth, News from BR*.

<sup>32</sup> Academic debate over the exact parameters of the film noir genre remains inconclusive. Although not a perfectly archetypal example of the genre, *Macao* has nevertheless been included in canonical lists such as *Film Noir: An Encyclopaedic Reference to the American Style*, ed. by Alain Silver and Elizabeth M. Ward (New York: Overlook Press, 1979), pp.179-80, and Spencer Selby, *Dark City: The Film Noir* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1984), p.160.

<sup>33</sup> 'STORY BUYS', *Variety*, 15.08.1949.



including last minute rewrites by leading actor Robert Mitchum.<sup>34</sup> As explained below, Hollywood's trade organization, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), also had significant input in the final product. Among the transformations brought about by this turbulent production history, the film's tone seems to have shifted dramatically. At the outbreak of the Korean War, *Variety* reported that RKO was eager to exploit this military conflict by working it into *Macao's* screenplay.<sup>35</sup> The project's expected topicality got the film rushed into production in the summer of 1950.<sup>36</sup> However, no signs of either Korea or the war made it to the shooting script, much less to the final cut of the film, released in April 1952.<sup>37</sup>

If anything, on the surface the end product seemed decisively apolitical. It told an escapist story of intrigue and romance close to China's border without any reference to the fact that US troops were at the time fighting against the Chinese. The byzantine plot follows three Americans who arrive in Macao simultaneously: wandering veteran Nick Cochran (Robert Mitchum); gambling salesman Lawrence C. Trumble (William Bendix), who is actually an undercover New York police officer; and worldly singer Julie Benton (Jane Russell), who gets hired at a casino owned by American racketeer Vincent Halloran (Brad Dexter). Trumble sets in motion a convoluted plan involving a smuggled diamond necklace in order to lure Halloran into international waters, where the International Police can arrest him. A love triangle between Halloran, Julie, and Nick, combined with a wrongful suspicion regarding the identity of the undercover agent, leads Halloran to kidnap Nick. The web of double-crosses and misunderstandings is further complicated by Halloran's jealous girlfriend Margie (Gloria Grahame) and the improbably named Felizardo José Espírito Sebastian (Thomas Gomez), a crooked Portuguese police lieutenant working for Halloran on the side. In the end, Nick escapes, delivers Halloran to the International Police, and gets together with Julie.

Script-wise, while the plot and dialogue retained an unkind image of Portuguese rule, this was deliberately toned down due to the interference of the MPAA's Production Code Administration (PCA). The PCA, headed by Joseph Breen, was in

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<sup>34</sup> John Baxter, *Von Sternberg* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), pp.244-249; *Macao's* entry on the AFI Catalog of Feature Films – <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=50564> [accessed on 27.09.2014].

<sup>35</sup> 'H'wood Scurries', *Variety*, 05.07.1950, p.22

<sup>36</sup> 'RKO Speeds "Macao" As Topical, Timely Fare', *Variety*, 17.07.1950.

<sup>37</sup> American Film Scripts Online [AFSO], 'Macao Shooting Script' - <http://solomon.afso.alexanderstreet.com/cgi-bin/asp/philof/afso/overview.pl?FS001033> [accessed on 27.09.2014].

charge of enforcing the film industry's morally-minded, self-regulated censorship under the Motion Picture Production Code.<sup>38</sup> Having read *Macao's* proposed screenplay, in July 1950 Breen ruled the basic story unacceptable. Besides the 'low tone of criminality' and several lurid details, PCA reviewers argued that the project violated a section of the Production Code which stated that the 'history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly'. Specifically, they unanimously objected to the treatment of the Chinese characters ('The whole flavour of the story tends to indicate that these "coolies" are little more than animals, and the element of "white supremacy" is, we feel, quite offensive.') as well as of the Portuguese administration:

The picturization of the District of Macao is, we think, an unfair and unjust characterization of the Portuguese. All, or nearly all, of the officials of the District portrayed in this picture are shown to be criminally dishonest. This has reference, specifically, to the Police Lieutenant, Sebastian, and, by implication at least, all the other law-enforcing bodies on the Island.<sup>39</sup>

The PCA's input was detailed and insistent. Breen suggested that RKO consult with Addison Durland – the PCA's Latin American advisor, considered the most suited in the office staff to advise on Portugal<sup>40</sup> – over the 'improper characterization' of the Portuguese and Chinese.<sup>41</sup> In point of fact, some of the PCA's demands seemed more concerned with avoiding controversy and accusations of bigotry than with actual fairness and accuracy – after all, the image of widespread corruption among Macao's police and civil servants was not far-fetched, according to the internal account of Portugal's own intelligence services.<sup>42</sup> Regardless, among other requests, the PCA asked the producers to omit the police's dismissive and, in one scene, brutal behavior towards the Chinese population, as well as to avoid indications of corruption by not

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed analysis of Joseph Breen's role as director of the PCA, see Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Letter from Joseph Breen to Harold Melniker, 11.07.1950.

<sup>40</sup> For Durland's background, see Brian O'Neil, 'The Demands of Authenticity: Addison Durland and Hollywood's Latin Images during World War II', in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. by Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp.359-61. At the time, Durland also consulted on the Portugal-set production *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima*. – AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Miracle of Fatima*, Letter from Joseph Breen to Kenneth Clark, 13.11.1952.

<sup>41</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Breen to Melniker, 11.07.1950.

<sup>42</sup> Zhiliang, p.326.

showing Lt Sebastian in a Rolls-Royce or a bank note on a customs official's hands.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the introductory narration establishing Macao was to be rewritten, 'having in mind a fair-minded approach in dealing with the description of this colony'.<sup>44</sup>

The PCA's impact, however, was limited by the producers' awareness that the territory's seedy connotation was one of the project's key selling points to the thrill-seeking public.<sup>45</sup> Although the scripted scenes most explicitly disrespectful of the Portuguese rulers were left out of the film,<sup>46</sup> other concessions to the Production Code remained quite superficial. For example, the brief inclusion of a low-ranking Portuguese officer of the International Police, on screen for 22 seconds,<sup>47</sup> with his back turned to the camera, uttering one inconsequential line of dialogue, was enough to counterbalance Lt Sebastian's substantial role in the story, thus satisfying the PCA that the Portuguese in the film were fairly portrayed as both sympathetic and unsympathetic.<sup>48</sup>

Orientalist themes and imagery were not novel in the film noir genre,<sup>49</sup> or even in Josef von Sternberg's own body of work,<sup>50</sup> but *Macao* set out to establish a distinctive identity for its location from the start. The film opens with shots of boats and sampans along the Macao coast during daytime, while a documentary-style voice-over delivers the PCA-approved initial narration.<sup>51</sup> At first, this almost sounds like a Portuguese propaganda broadcast, even down to the luso-tropicalist emphasis on the colony's peculiarity and racial mixture, in line with what was becoming Lisbon's official discourse about its empire:

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<sup>43</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Breen to Melniker, 11.07.1950 and 28.07.1950.

<sup>44</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Breen to Melniker, 13.07.1951.

<sup>45</sup> This aspect is repeatedly highlighted in the Exhibitor's Campaign Book provided by RKO to UK distributors to help promote the movie. One section states: 'The angles which lend themselves to pay-off exploitation are self-evident: triple star power, volcanic romance, music, thrills and the fascinating atmosphere of the East.' – British Film Institute, Reuben Library, *Macao* Pressbook.

<sup>46</sup> AFSO, 'Macao Shooting Script' – In an early sequence, Nick would have rescued a drowning Chinese worker, only to be yelled at by a Portuguese boat captain for having delayed his ferry (pp.3-6). Another cut scene included a Portuguese aristocrat, Senhor Garcia, who helped out Trumble and said of Sebastian and Halloran, 'Someday our city will be free of men like that.' (pp.105-08). The script ended with Sebastian, fired and disgraced, leaving Macao with a sardonic call-back to an earlier line: 'And so I bid farewell to beautiful Macao – always friendly and hospitable.' (p.123).

<sup>47</sup> *Macao*, 51:14-36.

<sup>48</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Analysis Chart, 25.01.1952.

<sup>49</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp.225-27.

<sup>50</sup> Von Sternberg had directed the China-set dramas *Shanghai Express* (1932) and *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941). For a detailed analysis of those works, see Baxter, pp.142-51 and 230-36.

<sup>51</sup> AMPAS, MPAA, PCA records, *Macao*, Breen to Melniker, 27.12.1951.

This is Macao: a fabulous speck on the Earth's surface, just off the south coast of China, a 35-mile boat trip from Hong Kong. It is an ancient Portuguese colony, quaint and bizarre. The crossroads of the Far East, its population a mixture of all races and nationalities, mostly Chinese. Macao, often called the 'Monte Carlo of the Orient' ...<sup>52</sup>

It quickly becomes clear that the difference between Macao and Monte Carlo – typically depicted by Hollywood as the luxurious site of elitist casinos and hotels<sup>53</sup> – is more than merely geographical. As the footage changes to night time, the camera travels along dark, crowded streets, ill-lit by neon signs and shabby stands, leading to a foot chase that will culminate in the murder of an American agent, knifed in the back by a Chinese thug. The voice-over informs the viewer:

[Macao] has two faces: one calm and open, the other veiled and secret. Here millions in gold and diamonds change hands, some across the gambling tables, some mysteriously in the night. Macao is a fugitives' haven, for at the three mile limit the authority of the International Police comes to an end.<sup>54</sup>

The 'two faces' of Macao are reinforced aesthetically throughout the film. Some scenes are worthy of a travelogue, presenting the colony as a picaresque, dream-like – if inhospitably hot – setting. Examples include the lingering and brightly lit shots of the boats and harbor upon the characters' arrival in Macao,<sup>55</sup> as well as the background footage of the city and docks during Julie and Nick's romantic interlude halfway through the story.<sup>56</sup> Conversely, in the film's final act, which takes place wholly at night, the chiaroscuro black and white cinematography – characteristic of film noir and of von Sternberg's earlier forays into German expressionism<sup>57</sup> – creates a sinister atmosphere of violence and occult forces hiding in the stark shadows. This is particularly the case during a climatic chase – echoing the opening sequence – where

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<sup>52</sup> *Macao*, 01:24-52.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, *The Young in Heart*, Dir. Richard Wallace, United Artists, 1938, or *Rebecca*, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, United Artists, 1940.

<sup>54</sup> *Macao*, 01:52-02:17.

<sup>55</sup> *Macao*, 10:15-11:13.

<sup>56</sup> *Macao*, 37:37-41:55.

<sup>57</sup> Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (California: University of California Press [2<sup>nd</sup> edition], 2008), p.314.

Nick desperately runs among sampans and fishnets, and Trumble ends up fatally stabbed.<sup>58</sup>

Besides the initial voice-over and the duality motif, the film uses multiple strategies to convey Macao's distinctiveness. The poster's tagline speaks of 'exotic, exciting MACAO, port of sin and shady dealings!'<sup>59</sup> Gambling is presented as not merely a leisure activity but an all-consuming lifestyle: the customs officer declares that 'In Macao everything is a gamble'; the clerk at 'Hotel Portugueza' informs Trumble that gambling halls have no opening hours because they never close; Julie feels frustrated when her seductive singing act fails to shift the casino customers' attention away from the games.<sup>60</sup> The crowd at the gambling tables is also not the same as in Monte Carlo: the wealthy sit on an upper gallery, above the masses, looking down on the tables and lowering their bids in baskets (a visual von Sternberg had used before in the Chinese casino of *The Shanghai Gesture*). Moreover, most scenes were filmed in studio, with the only actual footage of the colony being either projected onto the background or used for wider establishing shots.<sup>61</sup> The set design highlights Macao's particular colonizing history: the decor of Halloran's casino combines Chinese dragons and Portuguese guitars; the docks where Nick is kidnapped appear to be a prototypical Hollywood Eastern-looking backlot,<sup>62</sup> but the mise-en-scène and Mitchum's acting make a point of drawing attention to the Portuguese street name sign that reads 'Largo Do Pagode Da Barra'.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, overall the orientalist iconography far outweighs the Portuguese, from the soundtrack to the title's font during the opening credits, as well as the wardrobe, with a clear contrast between the light colored suits of the Westerners and the black-clad Asian characters and extras.

Ultimately, despite the PCA's efforts, the truly distinguishing feature of Macao, as presented in the film, is its feeble law enforcement. The dialogue keeps reminding the viewer of the colony's nefarious reputation.<sup>64</sup> The plot rests on the central premise

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<sup>58</sup> *Macao*, 1:07:34-.11:56.

<sup>59</sup> Ad in *Variety*, 02.05.1952, p.5.

<sup>60</sup> *Macao*, 13:51-52, 23:20-22, and 32:53-33:02.

<sup>61</sup> A second unit on location lensed more than 20,000 feet of original footage in the summer of 1950. – 'RKO Speeds "Macao" ...', *Variety*, 17.07.1950.

<sup>62</sup> A memo by the film's executive producer states that it 'appears to be the backlot at Cost Plus Imports' – AMPAS, General Collection, Macao, Memo from Samuel Bischoff [no date].

<sup>63</sup> *Macao*, 51:37-47.

<sup>64</sup> Trumble asks Julie if this is her first trip to Macao, she answers 'From what I hear once is once too often.' and he acknowledges 'So I've heard...' (07:50-54). Later, asked by Nick if she is smuggling anything into the country, Julie replies 'The way I hear it, you smuggle things out of here, not in.' (12:21-28) When they first meet, Lt. Sebastian tells Nick that 'It is our fond hope that all visitors to Macao

that Macao is – as the voice-over puts it – ‘a fugitives’ haven’, where police detectives are killed with impunity and the only way to arrest a racketeer is to make him leave the local jurisdiction. Portuguese authorities come across as eagerly corruptible. Following the PCA’s request, a customs officer is no longer explicitly bribed with money, but he nevertheless accepts a pack of cigars from Trumble while checking his luggage.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Halloran glibly orders Lt Sebastian around.<sup>66</sup> Although the script describes the short and chubby Sebastian as ‘a handsome middle-aged Portuguese, debonair and corruptible, but withal a shrewd official’,<sup>67</sup> Gomez plays him as pompous, cowardly, and generally buffoonish. By contrast, the brief scenes set outside of Macao’s three mile limit take place in contexts of stern authority: first the Hong Kong headquarters of the International Criminal Police Commission, headed by British Commander Stewart, and then an International Police ship in which Stewart is accompanied by two subordinate officers – the Chinese Mr. Chang and the Portuguese Mr. Alvaris.<sup>68</sup> This disparity suggests a Portuguese inability to rule the colony alone and the need for outside assistance to impose order. Thus, while the film’s most orientalist tropes are reserved for Asian characters, the Portuguese themselves appear as a version of the ‘barbaric other’, at once semi-colonizers and semi-colonized, a view which was reinforced in Hollywood’s subsequent output

Three years after the release of *Macao*, two other big productions featured the Portuguese colony, albeit with much shorter screen time. Nominated for eight Oscars, including Best Picture, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* is a melodrama directed by Henry King and adapted by John Patrick from a 1952 autobiographical novel by Han Suyin. The film is set in 1949 and 1950 Hong Kong, against the background of the refugee crisis that followed the Chinese Revolution. It tells the story of Eurasian Doctor Han Suyin’s (Jennifer Jones) love affair with married American correspondent Mark Elliott (William Holden), who dies in the Korean War. Also capitalizing on McCarthy-era anti-Chinese sentiment, *Soldier of Fortune* is an adventure drama directed by Edward Dmytryk and scripted by Ernest K. Gann from his own 1954 novel. The plot

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should feel as untroubled here as Adam in the Garden of Eden’, to which Nick remarks ‘Untroubled? It ain’t the way I heard it.’ (15:42-53).

<sup>65</sup> *Macao*, 13:40-46.

<sup>66</sup> *Macao*, 56:38-57:55.

<sup>67</sup> AFSO, ‘Macao Shooting Script’, p.15.

<sup>68</sup> *Macao*, 03:22-04:08 and 50:27-51:36.

concerns Jane Hoyt's (Susan Hayward) efforts to find her husband Louis (Gene Barry), a photojournalist imprisoned in China as a suspected spy. In Hong Kong, Jane falls in love with shipping magnate and alleged smuggler Hank Lee (Clark Gable). Hank undertakes a dangerous rescue operation into Chinese territory, in order to allow Jane to resolve her marital relationship before committing to staying with him.<sup>69</sup>

These films are mostly set in Hong Kong and portray it as strikingly different from the Macao at the center of Josef von Sternberg's film noir. Shot in bright yet realistic colors, the British colony seems crowded but orderly, a metropolis that smoothly combines skyscrapers and sampan communities.<sup>70</sup> In *Soldier of Fortune*, a representative of the American consulate informs Jane from the onset that the local authorities are competent and cooperative.<sup>71</sup> The well-disciplined Maritime Police, which peacefully patrols the sampans, is personified by British Inspector Merryweather (Michael Rennie), shown to be honest, perceptive, and brave. The film even makes a point of justifying how a smuggler like Hank can operate out of a British colony by having Merryweather explain that Hong Kong is 'a few miles of land, yes, but just outside the waters are Chinese. There they do as they please and so does Hank Lee. Inside the colony, he is very careful.'<sup>72</sup> In *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Han Suyin works in an efficient British-run hospital with spacious facilities, modern resources, and a helpful staff. Despite depicting Hong Kong as a stable, functioning society, the film contrasts the settlers' conservative attitudes with the idealistic liberalism of the American Mark Elliot, thus implicitly legitimizing the US presence in Asia as an 'enlightened' alternative to British rule.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, in both movies the central contrast is ultimately between Western freedom in Hong Kong and communist tyranny in China, privileging an anti-communist message over an anti-colonialist one.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> For production notes on the films, see the entries at the AFI Catalog of Feature Films – <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=51570> and <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=51663> [accessed on 28.09.2014].

<sup>70</sup> Hollywood depictions of Hong Kong were more varied than the ones in the films under discussion. However, since these were productions that also depicted Macao, they did invite a direct comparison and serve as the most patent form of contextualization of the Portuguese colony in American film fiction.

<sup>71</sup> *Soldier of Fortune*, 04:25-05:03.

<sup>72</sup> *Soldier of Fortune*, 11:08-40. In fact, although Merryweather accuses Hank of being a gangster, Hank acts more like an archetypal hero than the anti-hero suggested by the film's title: he has adopted three orphans, helps the local community, and comes across as suave, noble, and lucid.

<sup>73</sup> For an extended discussion of this dimension of the film, see Marchetti, pp.109-24.

<sup>74</sup> For a closer look at this aspect, see Cowans, pp.212-13, 215-16.

Regarding the neighboring colony, each film suggests a different facet of semi-peripheral colonization. When Macao shows up in *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, its story function is exceptionally benign compared to other Hollywood narratives. Han Suyin elopes to Macao to spend a romantic week alone with Mark, only to find a welcoming and touristic city. The two lovers stay in a comfortable hotel, eat in a restaurant with moody saxophone music, and have their future read by a professional fortune teller. They are served by friendly Portuguese staff, illustrating Portugal's role as tolerant facilitator of its allies' desires.<sup>75</sup> Conversely, in *Soldier of Fortune* Jane goes to Macao following a lead on her missing husband that takes her to the Portuguese Fernand Rocha<sup>76</sup> (Mel Welles), who runs a language school in Rua da Felicidade. Fernand tricks Jane into writing him a \$500 traveler's check, holds her captive, and spends the money on gambling and women, brashly slapping his female Chinese partner when she complains. Jane is rescued by Hank, who barges in and violently beats up the feeble Fernand, now representing the Portuguese as decadent rulers in need of outside discipline.<sup>77</sup> The overall impression is summed up in a dialogue exchange as the two protagonists reunite: Hank asks 'Why did you come to a place like this without me? Are you alright?' and Jane meekly pleads 'Take me away from here.'<sup>78</sup>

Visually, the approaches of the two productions are also distinct. *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* seeks to create a romantic atmosphere through orientalist fetishization, lingering on scenic shots of the Macao harbor, a traditional funeral procession, and the mystic rituals of the Asian fortune teller.<sup>79</sup> *Soldier of Fortune's* engagement with the location is more superficial: its Macao sequence does not include any actual footage of the colony, relying entirely on a modest studio version with obvious props (a fado guitar, Portuguese street signs).<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the humble decor of dim-lit alleys displayed during an extended shot of Jane and Hank walking down the empty ersatz-Rua da Felicidade, at dawn, underlines Macao's gloomy connotation in the story.<sup>81</sup> Thus each film draws on one of the 'two faces' described in *Macao's* opening

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<sup>75</sup> *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, 1:09:35-20:07.

<sup>76</sup> Although probably meant to be the Portuguese name 'Fernando', the sign on the door identifies him as 'Fernand'.

<sup>77</sup> *Soldier of Fortune*, 55:51-59:11 and 1:09:14-12:46.

<sup>78</sup> *Soldier of Fortune*, 1:11:53-12:01.

<sup>79</sup> *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, 1:09:35-55; 1:12:59-13:55; 1:16:26-18:30.

<sup>80</sup> Susan Hayward was unable to leave the US because her ex-husband refused to let her take their sons with her, so Dmytryk had to shoot all her scenes in Los Angeles. – Christopher J. Spicer, *Clark Gable: Biography, Filmography, Bibliography* (Jefferson, McFarland & Company, 2002), p.266.

<sup>81</sup> *Soldier of Fortune*, 1:12:46-13:55.



voice-over – one highlights the ‘calm and open’ face, the other focuses on its ‘veiled and secret’ face.

Although elements of this duality can be found across smaller productions as well, 1950s’ B movies always put greater emphasis on Macao’s seamier side. Indeed, the remaining films can be considered ‘exploitation movies’, i.e. relatively low-budget projects that, lacking star power or high production values, sought audience appeal through the choice of sensationalist subject matter. Even when presenting a murkier depiction of Hong Kong, those films associate the British island with a superior exercise of power compared to its Portuguese neighbor. In *Hong Kong Confidential*, an intelligence division in Hong Kong sends an American and a British agent on an undercover mission to Macao, where an abducted Middle Eastern prince is being secretly held by a gangster working for the Soviet Union. Both *Flight to Hong Kong* and *The Scavengers* feature earnest police inspectors concerned with smuggling in the Crown colony. In the former film, the inspector addresses viewers directly, before the opening credits, breaking the fourth wall to explain that the Hong Kong Police Constabulary is part of an international effort to stop a worldwide smuggling syndicate.<sup>82</sup> The plot focuses on a cell of this syndicate comfortably operating out of Macao – the Portuguese authorities are nowhere to be seen, but the criminals are apprehended by the police when they meet in Hong Kong, at the end of the movie. By contrasting Portugal’s ineffective rule with the British hegemonic model, these films further cast Portuguese colonialism in a subaltern light.

In conclusion, the image of the Portuguese empire in North American film fiction was overwhelmingly restricted to the Asian colony of Macao, which garnered particular attention in the 1950s. In line with Hollywood’s orientalist tradition, the stories focused on Anglo-American leads engaging, on the one hand, with the setting’s seductiveness and, on the other, with its perils and loose morals. The Portuguese presence, if acknowledged at all, may seem almost incidental to the stories, yet these films inevitably produced a discourse about Portugal’s empire, at the very least by virtue of being set in it. Implied in the two faces of Macao conveyed by Hollywood, especially by the major productions, was a semi-peripheral condition of the Portuguese colonial project, midway between the hegemonic center and the subaltern periphery.

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<sup>82</sup> *Flight to Hong Kong*, 01:26-02:15.

The analyzed films presented Portuguese colonialism as at its best when welcoming visitors and providing an attractive landscape for their romance (Nick and Julie in *Macao*; Suyin and Mark in *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*), and at its worst when failing to restrain local crime and thus to protect western outsiders (Jane in *Soldier of Fortune*; Nick, Trumble, and the murdered American policeman in *Macao*). The latter trait is particularly striking when compared to the image of order and safety linked to the British colony of Hong Kong in the same films.

While this subtext of the Portuguese as model hosts but comparatively unfit rulers ascribes, on a purely representational level, a subaltern status to Portugal's empire, it also demands a multifaceted reading of western orientalism. By portraying Macao as the 'wickedest city' in the world, these movies were not only building on stereotypes associated with an orientalist view of the East, but also conjuring an indirect indictment of its colonizers, who were, by implication, unable to fulfill their self-styled mission of promoting western civilization. Yet Portugal's inefficacy was not merely implied by the compromised state of the colony. The most prominent Portuguese characters (Felizardo Sebastian, Fernand Rocha) were actually shown to be highly corrupt and duplicitous, if ultimately submissive. In other words, Hollywood's exoticist impulses were not restricted to the Asian dimension of Macao – they also reflected a form of orientalizing of its southern European rulers. Thus, in its considerably limited exposure through the lenses of classic American cinema, Portuguese colonialism came across as inadequate and problematic, although it was more ostensibly maligned for being Portuguese than for being colonialism.