

Gaze in Film and Television from the Perspective of Post-colonialism: Taking the Film "Anatomy of a Fall" as an Example

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of the current rise of feminism around the world, films directed by women are increasingly attracting attention. However, discussions on gender imbalance and social scrutiny in gender relations are still insufficient. This study focuses on *Anatomy of a Fall* and uses Post-colonialism and "Gaze" theory to explore how ethnicity, gender, and identity in the film affect the expression of gender relations. Through socio-cultural perspective and literature analysis, the phenomenon of gaze and anti-gaze in films is interpreted, revealing the complexity of gender gaze and its special significance in post-colonialism. The study found that *Anatomy of a Fall* not only presents the diversity of gender gaze but also shows its intersection with ethnicity, gender, and identity in the context of post-colonialism. The director challenges the traditional gender gaze model through film language, which has a profound impact on gender relations. This study reveals the complexity of gender gaze in the context of post-colonialism, provides new ideas for the harmonious development of gender, and emphasizes the importance of Bourdieu's field theory in understanding the confrontation of gendered space, revealing the dynamic changes in the position, role and social structure of gender individuals in the marriage field. In addition, this study fills the gap in the research on this film in the Chinese academic community, opens up a new perspective for the study of the gender dimension of gender relations in films directed by women, and has important academic and practical significance.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, gaze theory, Homi Bhabha, Bourdieu, gendered space.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the dilemma and development possibilities of gender relations under the gaze in the context of post-colonialism. Taking the excellent work *Anatomy of a Fall* by female director Justine Triet as an example, from a postcolonial perspective and within the framework of "Gaze" theory, it explores how directors challenge and subvert traditional gender gaze patterns through their films, thereby having a profound impact on gender relations.

Based on the sociocultural perspective, this article delves into the context of *Anatomy of a Fall*, takes Post-colonialism as the starting point, and through the "Gaze" theory, analyzes the diversity of gaze based on gender. It also deeply shows how gaze is intertwined with issues such as ethnicity and identity in the context of Post-colonialism. Use the literature analysis method to search and read relevant materials and documents and analyze the research status and trends of post-colonialism as a theoretical criticism in discussing films about gender relations. The film won the Palme d'Or and the Golden Globe for Best Picture. The goal of the research is to explore more possibilities for the development and interpretation of future gender relations through this international benchmark award.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1. Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism examines multiple issues such as power, culture, identity, and recognition in globalization from its unique perspective. It is not only an in-depth analysis of the political, economic,

cultural, and other issues left over by the former colonial countries and regions after the end of the colonial era, but also a profound reflection on the relationships and power dynamics between multiple subjects of different cultures, races, genders, etc. in the context of globalization [1].

As some scholars have summarized, "the methods of postcolonial theory criticism itself can also be divided into deconstructionism, feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, cultural materialism, new historicism, etc." [2]. The main research theories of "hybridity" and "gaze" in this article are derived from Post-colonialism and are not limited to colonial relations in the sense of geographical space. Based on the theory of gendered space, this article explores the colonial theory contained in gender relations, focusing on the possibility of resistance by the colonized, which is also a way to further explore harmonious coexistence between the sexes.

2.2. Homi Bhabha "Hybridity"

In the theoretical system of Post-colonialism, Homi Bhabha contributed the core concept of cultural hybridity and how it plays a key role in the interaction between colonizer and colonized, and between local and foreign cultures. Hybridity theory mainly demonstrates the subversive power and dynamism of hybridity from the perspective of language and culture. Hybridity is both a subversion of the central consciousness of imperial discourse and a criticism of nationalism's pursuit of authenticity. This reveals the constructedness and falsity of colonial racial discourse and nationalist discourse [3].

Homi Bhabha believes that cultural hybridity is a process full of tension and contradiction. It not only includes cultural mixing but also involves the colonized's transformation of the colonizer's culture and the adaptation and deformation of the colonizer's culture. This hybridity forms a unique cultural landscape in postcolonial society, which is neither purely traditional nor completely Westernized, but a state of dynamic change. In addition, hybridity has a profound impact on identity, values, and political consciousness. In the postcolonial context, individuals or groups need to find their position in multiple cultural identities.

This article intends to analyze the colonial phenomenon in gender relations through the film *Anatomy of a Fall*, and to explore the factors that cause inequality in gender relations through Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" theory and explore the way out for vulnerable groups. At the same time, combined with the commonality in the anti-gaze theory, it emphasizes the feasibility of "discourse power" as a key method to solve the problem.

2.3. Gaze Theory

Gaze refers to a way of viewing that carries with it the operation of power, the entanglement of desire, and identity consciousness. The viewer is mostly the subject of "viewing", the subject of power, and the subject of desire. The viewed is mostly the object of "being viewed", the object of power, the object of desire, and what is desired. The act of looking and being looked at constructs subject and object, self and other, but in the interweaving of multiple gazes, the status of subject and object faces the possibility of transformation [4]. The so-called "the self and the other" refers to the subject defining its own identity and existence through its relationship with others. In Hegel's theory, this is a dialectical process of self-consciousness and self-identification, involving a relationship of mutual recognition.

At the same time, gaze theory has been widely used in many fields such as film, literature, art, media studies, sociology, and cultural studies. The text combines the film *Anatomy of a Fall* to analyze the impact of the dialectical relationship between "the self and the other" on gender relations, and through the director's shaping of the characters, it seeks a way out of the dilemma of being stared at.

2.4. Gregory's Gendered Space

Gregory's work on the gendering of spatial representations shows that nature is coded as feminine in Western intellectual traditions, and by inference, socially produced space—spatiality—is similarly

gendered. He emphasizes that the distinction between “private” and “public”, “inside” and “outside” is achieved through patriarchal norms, the spatiality of which reflects the occupation of space by men and the exclusion of space by women [5]. Ye Jiachun pointed out that Gregory’s theory reveals the close connection between space and gender. This connection is essentially a division of power based on geography, which affects the social activities and degree of freedom of men and women [6].

Drawing on Gregory’s theory of gendered space, this study analyzes how space is gendered in *Anatomy of a Fall* and how this gendered space affects the characters’ behaviors, roles, and social identities in the film. This not only deepens the understanding of gender gaze in film but also reveals how gendered space interacts with power relations in the context of post-colonialism to jointly shape gender images in film.

2.5. Bourdieu's Field Theory

Bourdieu’s field theory emphasizes the importance of the field as an arena for competing for space and resources, where individuals compete for advantageous positions and resources through the connection between “habitus” and “capital” [7]. In the field of marriage, this struggle is particularly evident, as the emotional exchanges, power distribution, and role positioning between husband and wife all unfold within this specific social structure. Bourdieu’s theory reveals the complex relationship between individual behavior and social structure in the field, especially how the position and role of gender individuals in the marriage field are constrained by external factors such as social norms and cultural traditions and change with time and context [8].

This study applies Bourdieu's field theory to analyze the confrontation phenomenon of gendered space in *Anatomy of a Fall*, especially the dynamic changes of gender individual positions, roles, and their social structural relations in the marriage field. This not only helps to understand the complexity of gender gaze in films, but also reveals how gender gaze interacts with power relations, social structures, etc. in the context of post-colonialism, and jointly affects the gender identity and social status of characters in films.

3. Discussion

3.1. The Impact of the Gaze of "The Self and Other" on Characters in Post-Colonialism

Since the release of *Anatomy of a Fall* in 2023, the topic of gender relations has become a hot topic for analysis and discussion among many film critics. From a macro perspective, the causes of the tragedy in this movie are by no means limited to gender issues.

"The self and the other" refers to the subject defining its own identity and existence through its relationship with others. As one of the core theories of Post-colonialism, it is based on Said's Orientalism theory and emphasizes the subjectivity and construction of "other". At the same time, "other" is also a concept of process. However, due to historical reasons and political, economic, and social realities, the self and the other in the racial and cultural dimensions always have distinct superiority and inferiority and hierarchical order, and the opposition between subject and object, and the opposition between self and the other are constantly magnified [4].

In the film, Sandra and Samuel are not only a couple but also a suspect and a victim. In both sets of relationships, the gaze of others on Sandra is based on the premise that Samuel is the subject, defining Sandra as the other. For example, because Sandra is Samuel's wife, she must treat her husband's relatives and friends with a gentle and amiable image, otherwise she will be criticized; as the suspect in Samuel's death by falling from a building, Sandra was asked by her lawyer not to talk too much about herself during the rehearsal of her self-defense in court, and the topic must revolve around Samuel, because in the absence of sufficient evidence, the jury does not value the truth, but the answer that satisfies themselves.

Samuel becomes the "reference" for judging Sandra. He is both the "self" that is opposed to Sandra's "other" and the "other" that is being gazed at whether it is the psychiatrist or the defense lawyer, their cognition of Samuel is limited to the one-sided cognition of "patient" and "dead"; Judges

and inquisitors could only learn about Samuel from fragments of what others had to say; even journalists who followed the case publicly stated that a successful female writer who killed her husband was more interesting than a frustrated stay-at-home husband who committed suicide. Samuel's self and the truth were marginalized, and his life story became a tool to accuse Sandra of murder.

Throughout the entire film, Samuel and Sandra, as a community of heterosexual relations, are being gazed upon together on the edge of othering. This means that the two of them are mirrors of each other in a subversive gender relationship, and the subject staring at them is the patriarchal society that has disciplined them for thousands of years. The demands that a patriarchal society places on men are reflected in many aspects, including economic responsibilities, personality and behavioral traits, social roles and expectations, and cultural identity and values. These demands not only affect men's personal growth and development trajectory but also have a profound impact on gender relations and power structures in society as a whole.

The imbalance in their relationship does not lie in superficial issues such as "strength and weakness", but in Samuel's focus on sacrificing himself for his family. At the same time, he is emotional and fragile, which runs counter to the requirements of a patriarchal society for men. Sandra is the wife and the only source of income for the family. She is successful in her career and is strong and rational. She has many romantic relationships due to her humorous personality and beautiful appearance. These characteristics are not understood by the patriarchal society in a woman.

When the patriarchal gaze otherizes one of them, the gender contradiction between the two becomes more obvious. But obviously, such contradictions will not be solved by Samuel returning to the workplace or Sandra giving up work to focus on family. Compromising with hegemony will undoubtedly not change any problems. So the fragile Samuel's death became a fact, and it was this fact that made his resistance to the gaze possible. Unlike Samuel, Sandra's success in resistance lies in her tenacious character and her courage to express herself, which enables her to turn from passive to active, decompose the voice of patriarchal judgment, and establish her own subject status.

The "other" is a trap shared by both the self and the other. The self-consolidates its central position by setting and caring for the other, but this process destroys the holistic "other" and makes the other a powerless subject. At the same time, the mirror formed by the fragmented others makes the self blurred and decomposed. While smashing the others, the self also loses the goal of further development. Social life cannot completely block the existence of others. When facing the problem of "others", accepting others and facing others is the way to solve the problem of gender relations.

3.2. Homi Bhabha's "Hybridity" and Gaze

The movie *Anatomy of a Fall* explores the relationship between the sexes under the subversion of gender roles and tries to find a way to live in harmony. However, it is not enough to analyze it only from the perspective of gender, because the role environment is complicated. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity helps to gain a deeper understanding of the complex environment in which Sandra and Samuel find themselves, and the reasons for the deterioration of gender relations. Furthermore, the film shows how Sandra breaks the vulnerable image of being "gaze-ed at" and copes with cross-cultural marginalization.

First, Homi Bhabha's hybridity refers to the process of mixing different races, populations, ideologies, cultures, and languages as a strategy for the colonized to question and subvert the hegemonic status of the colonial culture [9]. This is different from the analysis of heterosexual relationships, which is based on economics, responsibility for children's education, and openness of the relationship, which defines Sandra as the "dominant" party in a marriage. From the perspective of postcolonial hybridity, as a German, Sandra not only left London, where she had lived for many years, for France, the hometown of her husband Samuel but also had to face the criticism of her character from her husband's acquaintances. In family life, Samuel has an independent personal space at his request, while Sandra's daily work environment is in her bed or the living room. Even Sandra's work will be interrupted because of Samuel's dissatisfaction. At the same time, the couple established

a common language in life - English, but Samuel was also unhappy with his wife Sandra's poor French and accused her of not communicating with their son in French during arguments.

In this relationship, although Samuel is more emotional and vulnerable, he is undoubtedly the colonizer in the two-person space, and Sandra is the colonized. This relationship even extended to the court - the trial required Sandra to speak French, and did not care about Sandra's self-expression, but only cared about Samuel's condition before his death. But Sandra was determined at heart. She insisted on speaking English with Samuel in daily life. In court, she changed from speaking halting French to communicating in fluent English and expressing herself clearly, forcing the jury to wear a translator to listen to her words. This behavior showed that Sandra had become the dominant party in the trial. This is consistent with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a resistance to hegemony. The consequences of colonial power have produced hybridity, which has undermined colonial authority and resulted in insecurity and ambivalence among the colonizers. In these confrontations, Sandra is the winner.

Secondly, because of the trial in this film, Sandra is in a position of being stared at, whether in terms of camera language or the plot itself. This gaze is not only about men's gaze on women but also includes the racial gaze on Sandra, a foreigner. Even in the later part of the film, Sandra gradually gains the upper hand in the rebuttal. She changes from being the one being gazed at to the gazer. This change is in line with Hegel's dialectics in the "Other Problem" in Western philosophy. The other is the way to perfect oneself, and these two identities are fluid, not fixed [4].

Gaze runs through the entire film, so anti-gaze becomes particularly important in it. Through feminist scholar Irigaray's advocacy of anti-"gaze"—the right to master language is a way to correct distorted visual relationships [4]. Director Justine Triet expressed Sandra's individuality by having her insist on speaking in English throughout the film. According to the explanation of the word order of subjects in psycholinguistics, the subject is at the beginning of the sentence and is perceived and extracted first, and other information is activated shortly thereafter. In the three court scenes, with a total of approximately 58 minutes of dialogue (including the audio recordings played during the trial), Sandra often uses the first person as the subject in her answers, accounting for approximately 44% of the total prescribed situations, the third person subject (referring to Samuel) accounts for approximately 35%, and other person subjects including impersonal subjects account for approximately 21%. This is also a way of emphasizing autonomy. She uses "language" to break through the colonized relationship of "being gazed at." The entire film, the outcome of this victory was foreseeable to the audience.

It can be seen that Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" has certain similarities with the purpose and process of resistance of gaze theory. Combining the two may further discover the gender issues in transnational marriages and provide a new perspective for solving the problems. At the same time, the exploration of Post-colonialism on gendered space and cultural space provides new inspiration for this article.

3.3. The Battle of Gaze: Field Competition in Gendered Space

In the film, gendered space is completely reversed. As a successful writer, Sandra occupies a wide range of "public" and "external" spaces in society and enjoys freedom of action, while Samuel is confined to "private" and "internal" spaces and cannot compare with his wife's success.

To balance this imbalance, Samuel tried to expand his space, such as filling the house with music and having a loft and a study. However, these efforts had no effect on Sandra, who could still "work anywhere". After Samuel realized that he could not reclaim his own male space, he decided to move his family back to France from London, hoping that the familiar environment of his hometown would inspire his creativity. In France, Sandra was in a foreign country with limited social interaction, but Samuel was like a duck to water and was familiar with the local social norms and cultural traditions. However, even in such a favorable environment, Samuel still lacked creative inspiration, and his works were not taken seriously by publishers. They spent all their savings and took out a loan to move, but Samuel had no output. Fearing failure, he began to blame Sandra and blamed her for everything.

But Sandra calmly retorted, leaving Samuel powerless to fight back. Samuel could no longer bear the feeling of lack of space and imbalance. In the film, the cause of Samuel's death is unknown, but from the perspective of the imbalance between the sexes, he could not accept his failure and his wife's success, and even in a favorable environment, it was difficult to break the imbalance, so it is reasonable to speculate that he died [8].

The core of Sandra's struggle with Samuel is the struggle for gendered space and discourse power. This struggle ends with Samuel's death and accidentally brings the private dispute into the public space. After entering the public space, they are like the characters in Sartre's works, touched by the gaze of the outside world and falling into confusion of identity [10]. Although Sandra had a successful career, she was caught in a dilemma in the foreign trial. She was out of tune with the language and customs, and she did not even expect to be prosecuted for her husband's death. In court, she had to defend herself in her broken French, while the plaintiff's lawyer attacked her using her stories, extramarital affairs, home recordings, and other private information. Under the public gaze, her private life was infinitely magnified, misunderstood, and modified. Everyone accused her of neglecting her family and not conforming to traditional female roles, while Samuel was seen as a poor man oppressed by his strong wife. As a woman who transcends traditional gender norms, Sandra's very existence is a challenge to established gender roles, and she has therefore become a target of public criticism.

Samuel is powerless to resist the gaze and ultimately dies, but his tragedy is simplified into a story of a gender power struggle, ignoring its complexities and other underlying factors. This gaze phenomenon reveals society's fear and misunderstanding of women's success and power. Sandra's success challenges traditional gender concepts and triggers a sense of threat among those who adhere to old ideas. They maintain their own identity and social status through gaze and judgment. Samuel's death is not only a personal tragedy but also a symbol of society's anxiety and conflict in the face of gender role changes.

Sandra and Samuel's dilemma is not only that they are defined and judged by the gazer, but also that they gradually lose themselves in the gaze and become victims. Although Sandra tried hard to defend herself in court, she could not get rid of the prejudice of the gazers. Samuel was always searching for his identity and position and finally fell into despair and confusion. They are unable to break free from the constraints of social gaze and power discourse and find it difficult to understand themselves and find the true path.

In the film, the only time Sandra breaks down and cries is when her son pushes her away, which enriches her image and shows her softness as a mother and the tenacity of her logical thinking. Gregory pointed out that women are often written about in the subjectivity and space being discussed, and they need to break the passive situation and strive for the right to speak. Women's writing is an effective way to enter the public space [6].

As a writer, Sandra has a say and influence in the marriage, and her clear logic and calm thinking benefit from her education and writing ability. At the end of the film, although it seemed that Daniel's experimental evidence turned the tide of the trial, Sandra's calm rationality was equally crucial, ensuring that the testimony worked. Director Justine focuses not only on gender issues throughout the film but also shows Sandra's discipline, space squeeze, and strong survival ability in society. The film provides inspiration for women to find a viable path for themselves. As Sandra walks out of the court, it also symbolizes the rise of female power and self-affirmation.

4. Conclusion

This study, through an in-depth analysis of Justine Triet's film *Anatomy of a Fall*, combines postcolonial theory with the "Gaze" theory to reveal the complex relationship between gender imbalance and gender gaze in film works. The study found that the film not only reflects the diversity of gender gaze but also deeply shows how this gaze is intertwined with ethnicity, gender, and identity issues in the context of post-colonialism. Through the exploration of "hybrid" cultural identity, this

study further understands how directors challenge and subvert traditional gender gaze patterns through film language, thus having a profound impact on gender relations.

During the research process, this study takes postcolonial theory and gaze theory as the main theoretical framework, and uses Homi Bhabha's "Hybridity" theory, Gregory's gendered space research, and Bourdieu's field theory to carefully interpret *Anatomy of a Fall*. These theories together constitute a comprehensive analytical framework for the phenomenon of gaze in film, which can provide an in-depth understanding of how directors portray gender relations and the two genders in society through film language and explore the gendered gaze and anti-gaze phenomena contained therein.

The core contribution of this study is that it provides a new perspective for understanding the gender dimension of gender relations in films directed by women. By revealing the complexity of the gendered gaze and its intertwined relationship with the context of post-colonialism, the film clarifies the director's profound thinking on the possibility of communication between the sexes and promotes in-depth thinking on gender equality and harmonious society. In addition, the study also emphasizes the importance of Bourdieu's field theory in understanding gendered spatial confrontations, revealing the dynamic changes in the positions and roles of gender individuals and their social structural relations in the marriage field.

Although this study has made important progress in revealing the complexity of gender gaze in films directed by women, there are still some limitations of the study. For example, the social dilemma of gender in the context of Post-colonialism, how genders are anti-gaze, and how directors promote the construction of gender relations through film language still need further in-depth exploration. Future research can continue to expand research perspectives and methods on this basis, and provide more references and inspiration for the development and practice of gender relations.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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