



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

RED ISLAND (12A)

Director: Robin Campillo

Starring: Nadia Tereszkiewicz, Quim Gutiérrez, Charlie Vauselle

France/Belgium/Madagascar, 2023, 1 hour 56 minutes, French with English subtitles

The Red Island is Madagascar, a French colony since the 1890s which formally gained independence in 1960. Robin Campillo's film is set in the early 1970s, when there is still a French presence on the island. Eight-year-old Thomas is living with his parents on a French military base.

Drawing from Campillo's own childhood experience and memories, one dimension of the film is the child's point of view, observing, puzzling, and making sense of the island and the people around him. There is a dream-like quality to the cinematography (the cinematographer is Jeanne Lapoirie), and for Peter Bradshaw it is "a visually exquisite piece of work". Campillo has noted in one interview that he wished to achieve a 'precious feeling' about the images, to register both the reality of his own cherished memories and the fairy tale that (in more than one sense) it was.

The film is threaded through with interludes of fantasy, in which Thomas's favourite comic-book superhero, the French girl Fantomette, appears. While Thomas watches the confusing and confused adult world revelling in the last throes of colonial power, the film equates the child's developing perception not only with an emergent understanding but also with more unsettling glimpses of what lies beneath or beyond. "For me, Fantomette was always about ambiguity – she watches adults by day, she un.masks their real faces by night" (Campillo). In many ways, *Red Island* brings the personal and the political together, suggesting that imbalances of power permeate any number of relationships: Thomas with his parents, the partying among the adults in the expatriate community, and interactions between the Malagasy and the French.

For another critic, the film is 'unshackled by burdens of narrative . . . a loose patchwork of lived-in memories' (Alistair Ryder). The viewer is presented with a range of cinematic techniques, the coexistence of dream, memory and fantasy, and sudden changes in direction. While the beginning brings us a superhero, the ending shifts to a different perspective of some of the people who have hitherto been out of sight in the film. Some early reviewers have criticised Campillo's approach as lacking consistency, specifically in terms of the use of the child's point of view, but the film offers a critique of post-colonialism and invites the viewer to contemplate the realisation of powerlessness and domination, experiences that continue to resonate.

Preview courtesy of Signature Entertainment.

Notes compiled by Catherine Neale

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À MA GLORIA (15) - Complexities rise to the surface when six-year-old Cléo visits her adored nanny Gloria on her home territory.

THE NEW BOY (15) - Newcomer Aswan Reid, Cate Blanchett as an unorthodox nun and a haunting score from Nick Cave and Warren Ellis make for an intriguing follow-up to Warwick Thornton's *Sweet Country* (2017).