

*Imperial Projections: Screening the German Colonies.* By Wolfgang Fuhrmann. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2015. Xi + 309 pp. £75.00 (hardback).

Wolfgang Fuhrmann is one of the few scholars to grapple with the scattered and ephemeral sources of early colonial cinematography. In his long-awaited book he uses these sources to good effect, expanding our understanding of both colonial visual culture and the beginnings of film culture in Germany. Put briefly, he argues that we cannot fully understand the one without the other, that imperial networks and ideology shaped early film practices and that the aesthetics and conventions of early film shaped how Germans perceived the wider world. Fuhrmann paints a picture of a chaotic and creative environment, full of intriguing men who developed new filming techniques on the fly and invented new ways to frame Germany's colonial project for a patriotic public hungry for exoticism and adventure. These men, who made their films just as much out of their own commercial or scientific interest as political conviction, were intertwined in often ambivalent relationships with colonial authorities and enthusiasts. And these colonialists were themselves excited by the prospect of winning over the general public to their cause but wary of using the tools of mass culture to do so.

Understanding this requires looking beyond the commercial cinemas and fictional films that have garnered the lion's share of scholarly attention. By directing our attention in particular to nonfiction films screened in voluntary associations and museums, he is able to provide a tightly focused account of the building of a colonial film public whose significance has not been appreciated.

Fuhrmann has arranged his book into five parts and fourteen chapters. Because of the fragmentary nature of his evidence, most chapters are brief but also thought-provoking case studies of the sort that would fit well into an undergraduate syllabus on the history of film or

colonialism. First he examines how and why colonialists, and in particular the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG), took up film to appeal to the public. Longstanding concerns about colonial apathy and the 1907 'Hottentott election' spurred colonialists to develop a public awareness campaign. They partnered with amateur filmmakers like the businessman Carl Müller and the Southwest African war veteran Robert Schumann who understood the popularity of film. For two years the DKG sponsored and distributed films to local branches clamouring for engaging media. They drew large and ever more diverse crowds to watch educational films that emphasized the modernity and productivity of Germany's colonies. While they could not compete with local commercial competitors, nevertheless DKG film screenings continued to provide some Germans with a distinctive cinematographic engagement with the colonies.

From here Fuhrmann explores colonial film as a scientific tool and as a commercial product. The ethnographer Karl Weule, director of the Leipzig Museum für Völkerkunde, serves as a case study. Weule tried to convince colleagues that film was unique in its ability to capture traces of 'primitive' cultures for preservation and for objective analysis. He also saw in film a valuable tool for engaging the public, and his museum consequently provided another important institutional setting for filmic colonial encounters. Fuhrmann gives fascinating details of Weule's East African expedition, including his dependence on the infrastructure of colonialism and the resistance he faced from his research subjects. Many were skeptical about being filmed naked, and their concern about an erotic gaze proved entirely justified, especially when ethnographic films were screened in commercial venues.

As a commercial product, colonial films filled a niche as enriching and patriotic non-fiction within programmes increasingly dominated by entertaining fiction. Colonial filmmakers tended to present the colonies as exotic but also a familiar *Heimat*, as adventurous but also

tamed by the technological modernity brought by colonizers. The hunting features of Robert Schumann represented an innovative and consequential response to the pressure to entertain. In his work he moved away from the travelogue and toward a 'documentary' style that focused on adventure and tension, embedding details within a narrative structure that could be turned not merely toward colonial propaganda but also other causes like conservation.

Fuhrmann closes with the First World War, during which colonialists came together with commercial filmmakers to produce features set in the colonies but made in Germany. Most notably through the Deutsche Kolonial-Filmgesellschaft (DEUKO), colonialists showed their willingness to move from overtly educational films aimed at a narrow audience to thrilling melodramas aimed at a broad public. DEUKO invited audiences to identify with heroic or suffering white protagonists and had a few successes before a disastrous revenge fantasy made in the final months of the war bankrupted the company. Despite the ultimate failure of the venture, however, the films showed the potential appeal of colonies presented not as sites for building technological modernity but rather as pastoral sites where individual settlers' stories could unfold. DEUKO revealed the shortcoming of earlier non-fiction strategies and pointed the way to new fictionalizations of the colonial world that would be explored in the Weimar era and beyond.

Many themes run through Fuhrmann's book, but I will highlight two that reveal ambivalences within German colonial culture. First, Fuhrmann makes the case that colonialists were willing to take up modern media in their propaganda work but faced a fundamental dilemma: how to engage audiences seeking spectacle without compromising on their tendentious political and educational intentions? Colonialist leaders were essentially elitist and patronizing toward the very 'masses' they hoped to engage, and this limited their reach. Second, Fuhrmann does an excellent job of outlining the practical challenges that complicated

filmmaking in the colonies and could even serve to undermine intended messages: e.g. depictions of colonial subjects working on their own seemed to obviate the need for colonial tutelage, and commentary on current events like the Southwest African war threatened to undermine a presumed colonial benevolence. Fuhrmann convincingly shows how films such as these could not help but reveal the contradictions in colonial rule and left themselves open to a variety of readings. These sources are thus more than merely expressions of some general colonialist ideology; they point to the diverse ways that Germans could engage with the wider world during the age of empire.

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