

## IMPERIAL PROJECTIONS

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**Imperial Projections: Screening the German Colonies**  
Wolfgang Fuhrmann

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## Screening the German Colonies

Wolfgang Fuhrmann



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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AMVL	Archiv des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig
AZSTL	Altenburger Zeitung für Stadt und Land
BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
BArch-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg
BUFA	Bild und Filmamt (Photography and Film Office)
DAMUKA	Deutsche Armee-Marine und Kolonialausstellung (German Army, Marine and Colonial Exhibition)
DEUKO	Deutsche Kolonial-Filmgesellschaft (German Colonial Film Company)
DEULIG	Deutsche Lichtbild-Gesellschaft (German Cinematographic Company)
DFV	Deutscher Flottenverein (German Navy League)
DJFG	Deutsche Jagd-Film-Gesellschaft (German Hunting Film Company)
DKG	Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (German Colonial Society)
DKZ	Deutsche Kolonialzeitung (German Colonial Newspaper)
DOA	Deutsch-Ostafrika (German East Africa)
DOAL	Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linie (German East Africa Shipping Line)
DOAZ	Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung
DSWA	Deutsch-Südwestafrika (German South-West Africa)
FDKG	Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft (Women's League of the German Colonial Society)
KA	Kolonialabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes (Colonial Department of the Foreign Office)
RKA	Reichskolonialamt (Imperial Colonial Office)



## INTRODUCTION

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In April 1905 a selected circle of colonial authorities, members of Berlin high society and journalists was invited to a premiere screening of films from the German colonies at the Deutsche Kolonialmuseum (German Colonial Museum). The following day reviews in local and national newspapers reported on the premiere and praised the 'surprisingly vivid image' of the colonies on film, which in this 'simple, faithful form' would considerably contribute to the understanding of the colonial territories.<sup>1</sup> The press coverage of the Berlin screening underlines Benedict Anderson's notion of print media's significance for the formation of a national identity: reading the daily newspaper, the German public was informed about the prosperity of 'their' colonial territories.<sup>2</sup> The coverage, however, also mentions another medium that had its share in the formation of an 'imagined community': cinematography was beginning to communicate the experience of the German colonial empire.<sup>3</sup>

Cinematography started in the era of late imperial colonialism, and its history probably would have taken a different path had the first film operators not had colonial infrastructure to enable them to travel the world and shoot their films. Colonial territories were perfect locations to feed cinema's voracious appetite for ever new topics, actualities, attractions and 'views' from all corners of the world. However, how are we to understand a film that does not offer a clear-cut narrative? What about a film in which shots of African prisoners are followed by a panorama shot of the colonial territory and a scene in which tourists are

embarking on an ocean steamer? Such a film suggests a colonial reading, but it cannot exclusively be subsumed under the notion of propaganda, influencing the public's opinion, attitude and behaviour in their support of German colonization.<sup>4</sup> It also stands for a specific film form, aesthetic and viewing experience in early cinema that goes beyond a simplistic interpretation of its images.<sup>5</sup>

*Imperial Projections* examines the history of German colonial cinematography, roughly between 1904 and the end of the First World War. Written from a filmhistorical perspective, the book is situated at the intersection of both film and colonial history. It investigates the interrelationship between colonialism and early German cinema in terms of production, distribution, exhibition and reception. Colonialism can be described in terms of rational political calculation, economics and scholarly interest, but also in terms of popular entertainment, modernity and adventure.<sup>6</sup> By watching films from the colonies, viewers participated in colonial rule, conquest, racism and salvage ethnography, as well as in virtual travelling, urbanism, moral uplift, visual spectacle and wildlife protection: no contradiction in terms but two sides of the same coin. The study of the history of colonial cinematography, therefore, requires a double focus: firstly, on the history of German colonialism and the way colonialism was represented, shown and understood by the contemporary film audience, with the second focus requiring a sound understanding of the aesthetics of early nonfiction films, as well as of existing film exhibition practices. Hence, the book discusses colonial films in the context of very different exhibition venues and shows how their specific analyses can produce important information about the films and their meaning where traditional film analysis has its limits. *Imperial Projections* shows that the history of German colonial cinematography is more than just putting the colonies on film; it is a cultural and aesthetic experience framed by the conditions of early cinema.

## German Colonialism and Visual Culture

German colonialism was greatly influenced by the nation's transformation from an agrarian into an industrial nation in the last third of the nineteenth century and a rising new national self-confidence after the unification of the German Reich in 1871.<sup>7</sup> The risk of playing only a marginal role in future world politics eventually made Germany shift towards active colonial politics and join in the 'Scramble for Africa' at the Berlin Congo conference 1884/85. The purpose of expanding power

through colonization was, as the later chancellor Bernhard von Bülow put it simply in 1897, to demand Germany's 'place in the sun'. Colonial advocates supplied German colonialism with the necessary ideology. The need for colonial expansion was mainly explained by Germany's increase in population, in that colonies could be used to channel emigration to national territories rather than to foreign continents such as the United States, a loss that would weaken Germany's 'national energies'.

A second economic argument emphasized Germany's need for new markets and the protection of these markets by the German government. For German industries, colonies were the chance to gain cheap and safe access to resources that, in the long run, could make them independent from world price politics. Plantation, farming or trading were three economic models that characterized colonial economic policy. Finally, colonial advocates were convinced that only overseas possessions could make Germany into a real world power. Within the ambivalence of trying to demonstrate political power on the one hand, and, on the other, the feeling of having played only a secondary role in world politics in the past, German colonial ideology was characterized by variations of social Darwinism. Colonialism was considered a *Kulturmission* (cultural mission) in which the 'superior' race educated and civilized the 'inferior' Other, who was still steps behind on the evolutionary ladder. Being German was never associated with anything other than being white.<sup>8</sup>

Compared to the French or British colonial empires, Germany was a colonial latecomer that acquired most of its colonial territories between 1884 and 1885. In Africa: Deutsch-Südwestafrika (DSWA, German South-West Africa), present-day Namibia; Kamerun (Cameroon), Togo; and Deutsch-Ostafrika (DOA, German East Africa), present-day Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. In the Pacific: Deutsch-Neuguinea (German New Guinea), present-day Papua Guinea, Melanesia and Micronesia. Between 1897 and 1899 the empire additionally acquired more islands of Micronesia and the Polynesian Deutsch-Samoa (German Samoa), present-day Samoa, as well as Kiautschou (Kiaochow), today the Jiaozhou Bay area and Qingdao in China. The German colonies measured nearly 900,000 square miles, more than four times the area of the German Reich in Europe. However huge in extent, the German colonial empire was economically unprofitable, militarily insignificant and attracted few Germans to start a new life in the territories: 'The *Kolonialreich* in the end proved the most short-lived of European colonial empires – apparently a venture in futility'.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the popular belief that German colonialism was merely a footnote in German history, the 'venture in futility' has left its traces in German public life and designates important historical decades of today's independent nations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Two recent centenaries have reminded the German public of its colonial past and its historical responsibility for an era of oppression, enslavement and exploitation: that of the colonial genocide directed at the Herero and Nama peoples during and after the Herero War, 1904–07, in DSWA, which was marked in 2004, and that of the 1905–07 Maji-Maji Rebellion that caused the death of more than a hundred thousand Africans in DOA, which was marked in 2005.

A critical coming to terms with Germany's colonial past would not have been possible without the theoretical and methodological approaches of cultural and postcolonial studies in the German humanities.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the influence of the iconic turn in the humanities has shifted the focus towards colonialism's visuality and medial representation. Images are no longer considered simple illustrations of history but active agents in the making of history due to their specific aesthetics and their social and cultural practices.<sup>11</sup> Following Edward Said's approach in his seminal work *Orientalism*,<sup>12</sup> we see how images and visual media have contributed to the Western imagination of what colonialism and the colonial Other was supposed to be. Research on colonial photography, monuments, architecture, advertisement, *Völkerschauen* (human zoos), trademarks and postcards and trading cards underlines colonialism's presence and meaning, showing its influence on people's everyday life in Imperial Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Colonial cinematography has only marginally been discussed in the context of colonial visual culture. Assenka Oksiloff's *Picturing the Primitive* is one of the very few publications on early German cinema that covers Germany's active colonial period.<sup>14</sup> Oksiloff investigates the relationship between early German cinema and German anthropology's fascination with primitive cultures. The focus on the notion of the primitive as a kind of 'nodal point' that connects ethnographic observation and the earliest discourses on cinema, however, leaves no room for a careful discussion of the emergence of film as an ethnographic research tool during the colonial era, or the history of colonial cinematography in general. *Imperial Projections* touches only to a limited extent on German ethnographic filmmaking, which still is a blind spot in German film history. With a provisional first case study on early ethnographic filmmaking in German East Africa, however, the book focuses on the ethnographers' experience with the new medium and German ethnology's



(*Völkerkunde*) strategies of reaching the public. Racial representation in Weimar cinema has been carefully analysed by Tobias Nagl.<sup>15</sup> Based on the most impressive range of primary sources and a combination of postcolonial criticism and sound filmhistorical understanding, Nagl shows how cinema provided a visual matrix for concepts of race and racism in the cinema that immediately followed Germany's active colonial era. *Imperial Projections* shares with Nagl's book a scholarly interest in studying film in a filmhistorical context that goes beyond aesthetic film analyses. However, it puts a much stronger emphasis on the exhibition context of colonial films and its implications for the conditions of the films' reception. Belgian film historian Guido Convents was likely the first film historian to investigate German colonial filmmaking in a comparative analysis of German, French, British and Belgian filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa. In his work, which very much inspired the research for this book, Convents points out that it is almost impossible to find any entries in cinema histories on filmmaking in Africa before 1918.<sup>16</sup> The situation has not changed very much since Convents wrote in the late 1980s. The recent anthologies of the British research project 'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire' give a very detailed overview on the complex relation between British colonialism and the medium film but, unfortunately, provide little information on the practice of early colonial filmmaking in the British colonies.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, studies in colonial Maghreb cinema have attracted more attention than those dealing with French sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The historiographical marginalization of Africa is all the more surprising since German colonialism shares two thirds of its history with early cinema, usually defined as the period from 1895 to the First World War, a time in which nearly 85 per cent of the earth's surface was controlled by colonial powers.<sup>19</sup> In other words, watching films from unknown regions in early cinema meant watching films from colonial territories. A very pragmatic explanation for the negligence of German colonial films in the discourse of visual colonial culture could be the fact that films from the colonies are archived in different national film archives and are difficult to access. German films have no platform similar to the digitized image collection of the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG, German Colonial Society) or the *Kolonialbibliothek* (colonial library) at the university library in Frankfurt.<sup>20</sup> In addition, surviving colonial films are very often in a precarious condition due to decomposition and decades of unprofessional handling. Carefully restored DVD compilations of colonial films do not exist and are unlikely to be produced because of the costly copyrights to the films.

A more methodological explanation for the neglect of colonial films could be the scope and heterogeneity of the corpus and the lack of film-historical understanding for films that appear so different in style to today's films. Exact figures on the number of films dealing with the German colonies do not exist and can only be provisional.<sup>21</sup> An examination of early film journals suggests that the number of commercial productions was between fifty and sixty films from 1905 to 1918. With the exception of colonial propaganda fiction films produced during the First World War, which will be discussed in length in the final chapters of the book, the majority of colonial films were nonfiction. More films were shot in the African colonies, 'the fantasy topoi of German colonial desire',<sup>22</sup> than in the Pacific colonies. Early cinema was an international cinema mainly dominated by French productions such as those of Pathé Frères or Gaumont, so that films about the German colonies were not shot exclusively by German production companies. Today, the 1911 Pathé Frères film *Die Fortschritte der Zivilisation in Deutsch-Ostafrika* (The Progress of Civilization in German East Africa) is one of very few surviving films that give an idea of the schooling and training practices in the East African colony. While the Pathé film addressed a German audience because of its German colonial context, it is not known to what extent lecturers or intertitles contextualized foreign productions in such a way as to produce a national German colonial patriotic interest. An example for such contextualization is the 1907 Raleigh & Robert film *Die Viktoriafälle* (The Victoria Falls), which was obviously not shot in one of the German colonies but in Rhodesia, today's Zambia and Zimbabwe. What made the film interesting for the German audience was not only the film's aesthetic that showed 'wonderful changing scenes, the cataracts at sunrise, sunset and by moonlight, the beautiful colourings when the enormous mass of water crashes down the abyss', but, as the release advert remarks, that it was an example of how German industry was planning 'very soon to use the enormous power of water for bringing electricity into the interior of Africa'.<sup>23</sup>

Checking film titles for German colonial content and context can be misleading as well. The majority of early films are known only by their title but rarely indicate exactly where a film was shot. One might expect that a film called *Der Kongo* (The Congo) (Messter [Film] Projektion Berlin, 1913) would concern the Belgian Congo. In 1911, however, the territory of the German colony Cameroon was assigned a part of French Equatorial Africa, known as Neukamerun (New Cameroon). It is difficult to say whether all viewers would have been familiar with the new territory that had been acquired two years before, but the film seemed

to suggest that the Congo was a new German colony and thus depicts the life of the 'black compatriots of our new colony', as the review put it.<sup>24</sup> Studying titles shows that sometimes even film companies were unfamiliar with the geography of the colonial territories. In October 1914 the Deutsche Bioscop GmbH re-released a film called *Sigifälle in Kamerun* (Sigi Falls in Cameroon), though the Sigi Falls was one of the tourist attractions of the East African colony. The error can be explained by the company's hectic efforts to release old material to supply German cinemas with films in the first months of the First World War, but it also might be an indication that film sellers did not pay too much attention to geographic accuracy; who would be able to tell the difference between a giraffe hunt on the British East African or on the German East African plains anyway?

The corpus of German colonial films also includes those films that were not shot in the colonies but had a colonial *sujet*, as well as films that draw the public's attention to their colonial acquisitions in one way or the other. Films like *Der Verräter* (The Traitor) (Georg Alexander, 1917) or *Farmer Borchardt* (Carl Boese, 1917) of the Deutsche Kolonial-Filmgesellschaft (DEUKO, German Colonial Film Company) were successful colonial propaganda films during the First World War, but were entirely shot in and around Berlin. The film *Wie Fritzchen sich die Reichstags-Kämpfe und Neu-Wahlen denkt* (How Fritzchen Imagined the Reichstag's Quarrels and the New Elections) (Internationale Kinematographen- und Licht-Effekt- Gesellschaft mbH, 1907) refers to the election of the German Reichstag in January 1907. Nothing more is known about this film apart from the release advertisement. The cartoon in which different people line up in front of the polling booth suggests that the film was a satirical comment on recent political happenings.<sup>25</sup>

We should not regard the manageable number of commercial film productions about the colonies as insignificant. The number of productions has to be viewed against the background of countless international productions distributed in Germany depicting other colonial territories. An example of a paneuropean colonial film is *Wie ein Brief von den grossen Seen Zentral-Afrikas zu uns gelangt* (How a Letter Travels from the Great Lakes of Central Africa) (Alfred Machin/Pathé Frères, 1911). The film shows the different stages of the delivery of a letter from Africa to Europe. The film was a French production, shot in one of the British colonial territories, the Sudan, and distributed all over the world. One may doubt whether any viewer was interested in the film's national origin but rather in how a letter from colonial Africa reached the receiver at home – whether in France, England or Germany. Ger-

man colonial films were part of an international colonial film repertoire, and together these films formed the sediment of the viewer's colonial world view, which made the world available for consumption and appropriation.<sup>26</sup>

*Imperial Projections* mainly focuses on films that refer to the German colonies in title or in content, and includes paneuropean colonial films that were shown in the German cinemas only to support a specific aspect or argument. A historiography of German colonial cinematography, however, would be incomplete if it concentrated merely on surviving film prints and neglected the so-called 'nonfilmic evidence'.<sup>27</sup> Most colonial films that will be discussed in this book have not survived. In many cases the only proof of the films' existence are references to them in primary sources such as reviews, official and business records and private documents; this applies in particular to amateur footage. There is good reason to believe that a great number of colonial films, perhaps even the majority of colonial films, were shot by amateur filmmakers such as the Altenburg merchant Julius Friedrich Carl Müller (1868–1935) or the forestry assistant Robert Schumann (1878–1914). Both were popular figures in the colonial movement and supplied the German public with some of the very first films from the colonies. The amount of film material supplied by amateurs cannot even be roughly estimated, but their significant contribution to colonial cinematography indicates not only the scope of early cinema but also asks for a reconsideration of nonprofessional filmmaking and informal distribution and exhibition circuits.

## Early Cinema's Rediscovery

The study of early cinema would not have been possible without its academic rediscovery at the now legendary FIAF conference, the annual assembly of the national film archives, in Brighton in 1978.<sup>28</sup> At this event archivists and scholars gathered to analyse and discuss early fiction films from the period 1900–06. The conference became a catalyst for a New Film History, which expressed its dissatisfaction with traditional film historiography that told 'the tales of pioneers and adventurers that for too long passed as film histories'.<sup>29</sup> The conference proved that early cinema significantly differs from today's understanding of what cinema is like. Early cinema was a cinema in its own right, and its films often appear incomprehensible to the untrained eye and are considered primitive in form and naïve in content. To understand

early cinema means to understand its paradigmatic otherness, as Miriam Hansen put it: 'In contrast to today's films, [e]arly films, although they lacked the mechanisms to create a spectator in the classical sense, did solicit their viewer through a variety of appeals and attractions and through particular strategies of exhibition'.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the aesthetic re-evaluation of early films, filmhistorical research became interested in nonfilmic evidence, such as company papers and the private and public records of filmmakers, organizations and public authorities. The enormous stimulus of the Brighton conference promoted early cinema as 'a complex historical sociological, legal and economic phenomenon' in which films were 'merely one manifestation of the working of the system as a whole'.<sup>31</sup>

Colonial cinematography cannot be discussed without considering the repertoire of visual media and illustrations that already were in practice when the first films from the colonies reached the screens. The colonial experience was not exclusively dealt with in parliamentary committees or other decision-making bodies but was visible through a range of early media. New printing techniques and a fast shutter speed accelerated the availability of photographic images, which turned readers into eyewitnesses and journals into 'visual telegrams'.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the most popular German magazine, *Die Gartenlaube*, Kirsten Belgum has shown that even if the editors 'did not consider colonial involvement a key national cause', the magazine had to increase its coverage on this issue in keeping with Germany's becoming a colonial power.<sup>33</sup> Following the expeditions of German explorers in their discoveries on foreign continents, the illustrated press documented Germany's becoming of one of the last colonial powers and established a visual repertoire that appealed to the public's national patriotic feeling for the Vaterland and supported the image of 'German Glory and German Greatness'.<sup>34</sup> *Kolonialschauen* (colonial expositions) and *Völkerschauen* represent another media context that familiarized the German public with the colonies. Both were part of the Berliner Gewerbeausstellung (Berlin Trade Fair), a 'local world exposition', operating between May and October 1896.<sup>35</sup> The fair included a colonial exposition that familiarized the visitor with a range of products from the colonies like cacao, coffee and tobacco. Statistics, numbers and data from the colonial economy demonstrated to the public Germany's political, military, economic and scientific achievements. In a colonial reading hall, where the public was offered new colonial literature, visitors could enjoy lectures and lantern slideshows with pictures from the colonies. Visitors who wanted to experience the colonies 'alive' could attend a *Völkerschau*

as part of the colonial exposition.<sup>36</sup> Völkerschauen started to become popular in Germany in 1874 when Hamburg entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck showed the apparently authentic daily life of the Laplanders in his shop's backyard.<sup>37</sup> Hagenbeck's success inspired many others to imitate this lucrative business idea, and within a decade Völkerschauen became a new form of mass entertainment that regularly toured German and European cities. The shows were often performed in real zoos, a setting that was supposed to underline the shows' exotic appeal. The exhibitions were designed to satisfy the public's curiosity to see previously unheard of 'savage tribes'. Though the organizers of the Berlin trade fair were sceptical at first about displaying colonized people, the exhibition was promoted as an invitation to the public to compare the often propagated cultural and racial differences between Western civilization and the 'primitive' colonized cultures, and to vote for the benevolent act of colonization. The colonial exhibition was visited by more than two million people who had the chance to study the various aspects of colonial life and to walk through its colonies, which were represented by the reconstruction of villages and made alive by more than a hundred 'tribal' people from the African and overseas colonies.<sup>38</sup> Until 1901 colonial advocates favoured the organization of such live exhibitions as being more productive for 'the fanciful lower circles' than museums, lectures or cinematographic recordings, but the prohibition against exhibiting people from the colonies for commercial purposes removed much of a colonial exhibition's attraction.<sup>39</sup> Whatever may have caused the end of the Völkerschau, in the following decades film recordings became a much cheaper and more efficient medium to present 'authentic' images from the German colonies to the public.

Analysing how film communicated the experience of colonialism shifts the focus to the relationship between film and the audience. *Imperial Projections* argues for a consideration of the exhibition context and the specific programming practices in early cinema. Between 1904 and the First World War the exhibition of colonial films was not limited to one particular venue. In his recent publication on early film exhibition in Germany between 1896 and 1914, film historian Joseph Garncarz identifies seven exhibition practices: film screenings in the international variety theatre and the local variety theatre, travelling film shows in the form of fairground cinema (*Jahrmarktkino*) or town hall cinema (*Saalkino*), screenings in a shop cinema (*Ladenkino*), which was similar to a U.S. nickelodeon, in the common cinema theatre (*Kinotheater*), and in the cinema palace (*Kinopalast*).<sup>40</sup> The different exhibition practices did not replace each other but often existed side by side, sometimes in competi-

tion, sometimes complementing one another. In his analysis Garncarz shows how the different exhibition venues addressed rather different audiences. In contrast to the international variety theatres with their urbane, worldly programme that targeted an upper-class audience, the local variety theatre or the shop cinema aimed at the petty bourgeois and lower-class audience. While the shop cinema was a major feature of the big city, town hall exhibitors were more successful in small towns and rural regions where a cinema culture was not yet established.

Closely related to the exhibition context is the study of the historical reception of early films. Though it is empirically impossible to explore how films were understood by the historical viewer, one can study the conditions of their reception in a way that allows the drawing of conclusions regarding the intended meaning of the films. Frank Kessler's approach of 'historical pragmatics' links the study of the conditions of the historical reception of early films to the exhibition context.<sup>41</sup> Historical pragmatics is based on French theorician Roger Odin's concept of 'semio-pragmatics', whose goal is to show the 'mechanisms of producing meaning, to understand how a film is understood'.<sup>42</sup> According to Odin, a fiction film is not inherently different from a documentary; a film does not produce 'meaning by itself, but all it can do is to *block* a number of possible investments of meaning'.<sup>43</sup> In other words, for a film to be understood by the spectator as fiction and not as documentary requires external processes like the applying of a specific 'reading mode', in this case a fictionalizing reading mode to the film. Within this perspective, however, it is also possible to read a film in an opposite mode. A film class that analyses a specific stylistic feature in a fiction film does not follow the film as fiction – it resists the film's fictionalization – but applies a documentarizing mode to study the specific aesthetic quality of the film. Kessler is interested in the transhistorical validity of Odin's concept.<sup>44</sup> He considers the variety of exhibition contexts as institutional determinants that conditioned a specific reception. Every exhibition context, therefore, addresses the audience in a particular way and intends a meaning that can be different from the intended meaning on the production side of a film.<sup>45</sup> This also means that the same film can be understood differently depending on the exhibition context: the screening of a colonial film in the context of promoting tourism intends a different meaning than a screening at an event of the colonial lobby.

Garncarz's and Kessler's studies are crucial for the understanding of colonial cinematography's history, as suggested in this book. The exhibition context of the town hall has turned out to be the richest in terms of conceptualizing the exhibition and reception of colonial films.

The most important organizer of colonial film screenings in the very first years of colonial cinematography was a voluntary association, the DKG, which was clearly interested in using film for popularizing colonial issues among the German public. At the time public cinemas became established in Germany, around 1906/07, the branches of the DKG were offering non-theatrical film experiences that document the popularity of film outside the commercial market. Even if screenings at the DKG could not compete with public cinemas in the long run, the record shows that the DKG had its own 'film scene' whose filmmakers did not necessarily enter the public film market in the following years.

Film screenings in associations are still rarely considered in early film studies, but they played an important role in colonial cinematography's nationwide success and contribute to a more refined understanding of early nonfiction cinema.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the audience structures of public cinemas that are empirically hard to pin down, associations often give detailed information about their membership structure. Especially in places where film screenings in associations were the only venue to watch films, the screenings provide us with valuable demographic information about the early film audience. Sociologically, an association is a group of individuals who voluntarily agree to act as a collective or organization to accomplish a specific purpose. For this an association requires a meeting place, a clubhouse or an assembly room, where members can meet at an agreed time. To inform, entertain and attract new members, associations made use of media of all kinds: speeches, lantern slides, publications, photographs and film. Associations can be considered public spheres in their own right, whose internal structure can be studied with regard to class or gender composition and their common interest. Gender was the category most restrictive to public access and often relegated to the realm of the private.<sup>47</sup> Nancy Fraser notes 'that despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere ... was importantly constituted by ... a number of significant exclusions'.<sup>48</sup> Michael Warner has transformed Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere into a theory of 'counterpublics',<sup>49</sup> and Geoff Eley acknowledges the existence of competing publics 'not just later in the nineteenth century when Habermas sees a fragmentation of the classical liberal model of *Öffentlichkeit*, but at every stage in the history of the public sphere'.<sup>50</sup> According to Eley, it makes more sense to understand the public sphere 'as the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest and negotiation among a variety of publics takes place'.<sup>51</sup> The heterogeneity of the public sphere as an



arena of continuous conflict and contest shifts the focus on the role and significance of voluntary associations:

It [the public sphere] was linked to the growth of urban culture – metropolitan and provincial – as the novel arena of a locally organized public life (meeting houses, concert halls, theatres, opera houses, lecture halls, museums), to a new infrastructure of social communication (the press, publishing companies and other literary media; the rise of a reading public via reading and language societies; subscription publishing and lending libraries, improved transportation; and adapted centres of sociability like coffee houses, taverns and clubs), and to a new universe of voluntary associations.<sup>52</sup>

Associations were considered a ‘secondary system of power’,<sup>53</sup> and their importance has been emphasized by historians such as Eley, Thomas Nipperdey and Roger Chickering, who see the proliferation of voluntary associations as ‘one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of the Wilhelmine epoch’.<sup>54</sup> Associations represented a network of private and nonprofessional activities and had a significant influence on the formation of the public opinion.

In his study of the *Deutscher Flottenverein* (DFV, German Navy League) Eley has shown that film screenings constituted an important part of the DFV’s propaganda work.<sup>55</sup> The success of the DFV’s screenings clearly influenced the introduction of film screenings at the DKG.<sup>56</sup> The Colonial Society, most of whose members were drawn from the upper-middle class, was the most important colonial pressure group in Germany and the ‘spokesmen for and the chief agency of the colonial lobby’.<sup>57</sup> Despite statements in the DKG’s official histories that suggest the marginal significance of film in the society’s propaganda work, the DKG was more than once in its history convinced that film was the most powerful medium to teach the German public about the colonies. From 1905 to 1907 film was a major point of discussion in the DKG’s decision-making bodies, and watching films from the German colonies was a leading activity in the DKG’s local branches that represented the society throughout Germany.<sup>58</sup> Film screenings at the DKG’s branches play a crucial role in the history of colonial cinematography, which underlines not only the significance of voluntary associations as alternative film venues but also the significance of nonfiction films in early cinema.<sup>59</sup> The general importance of voluntary associations with regard to the exhibition of colonial films will return at various stages in the book, either in the form of ethnographic, geographic circles or the wildlife protection movement in the 1910s.

Diversity also characterizes the production context of colonial films. There is no evidence that the German government or the colonial lobby ever produced or ordered the production of colonial films. Rather on the contrary, colonial authorities in the *Kolonialabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes* (KA, Colonial Department of the Foreign Office) and, after 1907, the *Reichskolonialamt* (RKA, Imperial Colonial Office) seemed to be rather cautious about supporting or producing colonial propaganda films on their own. This does not mean that producers of colonial films, professional or amateur, shot their films out of patriotic duty. Filmmakers most likely were colonial enthusiasts and supporters of colonial politics, but they also were entrepreneurs. Significant colonial historical events like the Herero War, 1904–07, the election of the German Reichstag in January 1907, the outbreak of the First World War and the loss of the colonies were events that stimulated amateur filmmakers and production companies to supply the screens with colonial films. However, in contrast to the colonial lobby's clearly patriotic interest in colonial films, the biographies of individual filmmakers show that colonial filmmaking was often closely linked to very personal interests. Carl Müller, Robert Schumann, Paul Graetz (1875–1968) or Hans Schomburgk (1880–1967), filmmakers that will be discussed in the various chapters, were also filming in the colonies for promoting and consolidating their own social status. Carl Müller combined his cinematographic activities with a business trip through the African colonies. While he became a prominent figure in the colonial movement through his film lectures for the DKG, he also used his films for improving the reputation of his business in his hometown, Altenburg – a popular restaurant. Robert Schumann, a passionate hunter, originally planned to film an expedition, and only the outbreak of the war in the German South-West African colony made him change his plans. Later, Schumann became famous for his films on hunting big game in the East African colony, but he never made an appearance as an expert on colonial issues. Like Paul Graetz, who realized that film recordings would promote his large-scale adventure expeditions, Hans Schomburgk was fully aware that shooting fictional films in Africa was still a novelty that would sell at the box office. Last but not least, Leipzig ethnographer Karl Weule (1864–1926) probably was the first to use a film camera in ethnographic fieldwork in the German colonies. Weule must be considered a key figure in early ethnographic filmmaking who knew how to use the new medium to promote his academic career and to consolidate the reputation of the Leipzig museum for ethnography as a modern institution. Operating in a new, fast-growing segment of modern me-

dia industry, all five amateur filmmakers aimed at finding and binding their audience in their own particular way.

## Nonfiction and Colonial Cinema

Early cinema almost is synonymous with nonfiction films like 'views', actualities, scenics and travelogues, but nonfiction films were excluded from the Brighton conference and have only recently shifted to the top of the Early Film Studies' agenda.<sup>60</sup> The exclusion had partly very pragmatic reasons. As pointed out by film historian Tom Gunning, they 'were difficult to date, trace or identify'.<sup>61</sup> Nonfiction films never reached the same popularity as fiction dramas or early slapsticks. There is no canon of nonfiction masterpieces or famous nonfiction directors. In addition, in contrast to early fiction films with their distinctive narrative style, nonfiction films put narrative in perspective: they are less argumentative but rather descriptive. Curator Nicola Mazzanti has compared looking at early nonfiction films to 'looking at hieroglyphics before the Rosetta stone was deciphered';<sup>62</sup> the films often give little indication of the reason for their production and do not immediately reveal their meaning to the contemporary viewer.<sup>63</sup> Historiographic approaches that focus on a film's intrinsic excellence, influence or typicality in order to constitute a history of film become troubling concepts when applied to a conceptualization of the history of early nonfiction film. The methodological challenge of analysing early nonfiction films' role in film history is therefore to work, as Paolo Cherchi Usai remarks, towards the intelligibility of the visible.<sup>64</sup>

Nonfiction film histories have usually skipped early nonfiction cinema in favour of a safe historical starting point of nonfiction filmmaking, usually somewhere in the 1920s with an established canon of well-known directors and films.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile several sound studies on early nonfiction have been published in recent years, for example Alison Griffiths's work on the origin of the ethnographic films in the United States, Uli Jung's and Martin Loiperdinger's history of the nonfiction film in Wilhelmine Germany and Jennifer Peterson's study on the film travelogue.<sup>66</sup> They all show the significance and the complex meaning of nonfiction films' form and aesthetic in early cinema. To label colonial films as 'colonialist', however, is 'as redundant as every tautology', as film historian Klaus Kreimeier remarks; he suggests rather that we analyse how the films organized their visual regimes with regard to colonialism.<sup>67</sup> In this sense Peterson's analysis of the most popular non-

fiction film form, the travelogue, has a particular significance for the investigation of colonial cinematography. Travelogues are nonfiction films that represent 'place as their primary subject',<sup>68</sup> and they stand for the majority of colonial films that were produced until the First World War. Travelogues, however, depict places in a particular way. They construct their own geography, geographies that exist only on the screen and therefore present, as Peterson states, an 'idealized cinematographic geography'.<sup>69</sup> Following that definition, colonial travelogues then present idealized cinematographic colonial territories that have very little to do with the real colonies. The notion of an 'idealized cinematographic geography' that exists only on the screen recalls Susanne Zantop's study of colonial fantasies in pre-colonial Germany.<sup>70</sup> Zantop shows how different sources such as popular novels, philosophical essays or academic reports produced fantasies of conquest, appropriation and control over territories and men; such fantasies acquired the status of factual 'reality' when Germany became a colonial power. While these fantasies created a 'colonialist imagination and mentality that beg to translate thought into action',<sup>71</sup> colonial cinematography translated these fantasies into a new aesthetic experience: the moving image. Film was considered a substitute for real travelling as well as an extension of the human vision that made it possible to gaze over the earth's surface.<sup>72</sup> The colonial territories were considered national properties of a greater Germany, and film offered the unique chance of sightseeing the colonies without leaving home. The colonial travelogue also added a new visual dimension to the colonial imaginary. Films and film reviews indicate that the depiction of the colonies as 'modern colonies' was one characteristic of colonial films that contrasts with the colonies' representation in colonial literature. The films were more interested in the urban colony rather than in a pastoral untouched territory. The fascination with technology and urban life is not only documented in numerous early nonfiction and fiction films but in the colonies as well. If 'modern life seemed urban by definition',<sup>73</sup> colonial films too were a witness of modern urban life and organized the way of looking at it in a very particular fashion. Almost as a consequence, films from colonial territories are ambivalent by nature – patriotic instruction and virtual adventurous travel, national patriotic navel-gazing of the bourgeoisie and exotic escapism for the masses, the colonies as the extension of the modern metropolis and as the peripheral *Heimat*.

Considering the filmmaker's individual intention in shooting films, the range of venues where the films could be watched and the specific

aesthetic of the colonial travelogue, we see how the complex nature of nonfiction films in early cinema suggests that not every viewer became interested in the colonies for the same reason. The travelogue's formulaic composition of combining apparently disparate shots into a single film was a complex visual invitation to the audience to explore colonialism at its intersection with modern culture. The specific case of the colonial travelogue also invites us to think about the film form's wider implication for early cinema. The decrease of film screenings at the DKG around 1908/09 due to the increase of public cinemas and their manifestation in cultural life was not tantamount to a disappearance of colonial propaganda from the screens. The entries in film journals show that early film production had a small but stable output of films from the German colonies, a finding that suggests that public cinemas were taking over important tasks, which informal exhibition circuits, such as associations, could logistically no longer perform. Further research in early nonfiction filmmaking is needed to show to what extent the travelogue provided a visual holding centre for a range of different public interests and preferences.

## Sources, Omissions and Book Structure

*Imperial Projections* draws upon extensive research in various archives and in-depth study of primary sources. However, compared to records on cinematography's role in the DKG's propaganda work and reviews in local newspapers that give information on film screenings in the DKG's local branches, very little is known about how professional film companies organized a shooting in a colony and solved logistical problems of filming in the tropics or about their individual marketing strategies. The analysis of commercial colonial films and their historical reception is based on very disparate sources such as film prints, censorship cards, reviews, release advertisements, articles and discourses in German colonialism. The small body of surviving prints has limited the analysis of differences and variations in the aesthetics of the individual films. This handicap to analysing commercial filmmaking in the colonies could partly be compensated for by bringing in an important field in early nonfiction film practice – amateur filmmaking. Though one can generally agree with Convents that German sources are far more limited than British or French ones, the available sources about Carl Müller or Robert Schumann offer valuable information about the emergence of a national colonial film culture in the Wilhelmine era.

Amateur filmmaking in the colonies also applies to ethnographic filmmaking. The discussion of Karl Weule's films, as well as the existing records on his film expedition and his academic work, give an important first insight into the ambivalent role of the ethnographic filmmaker and his films in colonial Germany. Missing from the group of amateur filmmakers that will be discussed in this book is the African explorer, zoologist and wildlife protectionist Carl Georg Schillings (1865–1921). Schillings was probably the first German who successfully shot films in a German colony. He did this on his last expedition to East Africa in 1903. Though there exists proof of screenings of his films in 1905 and 1906, it is impossible to say why Schillings never mentioned the use of a film camera in any of his publications or surviving private records.<sup>74</sup> Photographic journals reported on Schillings' films, but they were never mentioned in film journals and were entirely ignored by the colonial movement.

The initial attempt to include the role of film in colonial missionary work was stopped at a very early research stage. For many people colonialism still is a loaded word that does not necessarily opens doors for a film scholar. Hence, missionary filmmaking remains to be explored by future film historians. The accessibility of visual sources was also limited due to German colonialism's popularity among collectors of colonial memorabilia. Long before the visual turn entered history studies, private collectors assembled huge archives of colonial postcards and other visual material. Filmmakers often were multi-media entrepreneurs using both the film and the photo camera, or publishing their film adventures afterwards in articles and books. For example, Carl Müller's passion for not only filming but taking photographs as well on his journeys gives us today the chance to have samples from his film travels. In contrast to his films that could not be located in an official film archive, his photographs have become collectibles at specialized picture-postcard fairs. Some of them are reprinted in this book; the majority remain behind closed doors. Last but not least, *Imperial Projections* covers a broad range of aspects in colonial cinematography, but it excludes cinema culture in the individual colonies. A study of colonial records in Tanzania, Namibia, Cameroon, Togo or the Pacific remains a project for the future.

The book is divided into five chronological parts that focus on different exhibition contexts. Part One and Part Two discuss colonial cinematography in the context of the German variety theatre and the DKG as a voluntary association. German cinema's rooting in the variety business suggests that the first films from the colonies initially appeared

in the programmes of high-class, international variety theatres around 1904, the year of the Herero Uprising. While colonial topicals quickly disappeared from the variety programmes, the DKG's lecture halls offered a more stable venue for colonial films in the following years. For the colonial lobby films from the colonies were the major attraction at every screening at the DKG's branches, where they were considered as an important complement of the association's propaganda activities. The films were supposed to demonstrate the colonies' political stability and economic power. The phasing out of DKG film screenings around 1908/09 was due not to a decreasing interest in colonial films. As local cinemas became more established and cinema-going became a common cultural practice, demand for new films grew. Voluntary associations such as the DKG could not compete with an emerging new media industry that was quickly establishing a professional network of production and distribution. If people wanted to watch films from the colonies, they could easily attend a local cinema at almost any time or day.

German Völkerkunde, as will be discussed with the case study on Karl Weule in Part Three, aimed at exploring the colonies in the most systematic way and at making ethnological knowledge available to colonial administrators. Sharing the DKG's conviction that film's mechanical reproduction was the most objective and authentic way of representing the filmed object and subject, filming became part of colonial ethnographic field work. However, while ethnographers primarily wanted to understand cinematographic recordings of indigenous people from Africa or New Guinea as scientific records, shots of bare-breasted African women could trigger rather unscientific 'viewing pleasures' if screened in a local cinema.

Part Four discusses colonial films in public cinema. Unlike the DKG, cinema owners had to address a broad audience. Film programming in the public cinemas required a certain skill from the exhibitor, and programming a film from the colonies was not necessarily aimed at offering a specific colonial viewing experience. The focus on the colonial travelogue shows the ambivalence of the films. The overtly racist degradation of individual African workers into a depersonalized mass of '*Arbeitsmaterial*' (material for labour), as cited in a review of the film *Die Wilden beim Eisenbahnbau* (The Savages Constructing Railway) (Raleigh & Robert, 1907), needs no elaborate deconstructive analysis to show German colonialism's racist orientation.<sup>75</sup> However, colonial films could also offer an aesthetic experience, such as virtual time travel, or provide an association with a new Heimat or the thrilling entertainment of big game hunting. Films on hunting are a particular case in point. Were

the films made for the enthusiastic hunter and adventurer or were they propaganda for the emerging wildlife protection movement?

The last two chapters, Part Five, shift the focus from nonfiction to fiction and discuss feature-film-length colonial propaganda dramas, which were shown in prestigious cinema palaces during the First World War. The films of the DEUKO aimed at addressing the broad cinema public. Unlike nonfiction films that gave viewers the chance to explore the colonies from the perspective of the colonizer, the colonial tourist, the ethnographic scholar or the intrepid German hunter killing African 'beasts', the DEUKO's melodramatic colonial potboilers offered an identification with the white hero or the suffering but ultimately passionate heroine. Through their nationwide distribution the films joined the official discourse of war propaganda by creating an ideological bond between the colonies and the German Heimat.

## Notes

1. *Vossische Zeitung*, 12 April 1905; *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 11 April 1905.
2. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn, London: Verso, 1991.
3. Cf. I. Christie, "'The Captains and the Kings' Depart: Imperial Departure and Arrival in Early Cinema", in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds), *Empire and Film*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 22.
4. Cf. G. Maletzke, 'Propaganda: Eine begriffskritischen Analyse', *Publizistik*, 1972, 17(2), 156.
5. The 2000 annual FIAF conference in Rabat was dedicated to the colonial film heritage and challenged the 'mechanical link' between colonial cinema and colonial ideology. A. Benali, 'Le cinéma colonial: patrimoine emprunté', *Journal of Film Preservation*, 2001, 63(10): 4.
6. See H. Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004, 25.
7. *Ibid.*, 25–33.
8. K. Roller, "'Wir sind Deutsche, wir sind Weiße und wollen Weiße bleiben" – Reichstagsdebatten über koloniale Rassenmischung', in U. Van der Heyden and J. Zeller (eds), *Kolonialmetropole Berlin. Eine Spurensuche*, Berlin: Berlin Edition, 2002, 73–79.
9. A. J. Knoll and L. H. Gann (eds), *Germans in the Tropics. Essays in German Colonial History*, New York, Westport, CT, London: Greenwood Press, 1987, xiii.
10. For an overview see S. Lennox, 'From Postcolonial to Transnational Approachers in German Studies', in U. Lindner, M. Möhring, M. Stein and S. Stroh (eds), *Hybrid Cultures – Nervous States. Germany and Britain in a (Post)Colonial World*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010, xlvii–lxxiii.
11. See G. Paul, *Visual History. Ein Studienbuch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.
12. E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
13. An overview of recent publications is given in the bibliography.



14. A. Oksiloff, *Picturing the Primitive. Visual Culture, Ethnography, and Early German Cinema*, New York: Palgrave, 2001.
15. T. Nagl, *Die unheimliche Maschine: Rasse und Repräsentation im Weimarer Kino*, Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2009.
16. G. Convents, *A la recherche des images oubliées: Préhistoire du cinéma en Afrique: 1897–1918*, Brussels: Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma et de l'Audio-visuel (OCIC), 1986, 13.
17. Grieveson and MacCabe (eds), *Empire and Film*. On the Boer War see: J. Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England, 1894–1901*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997.
18. A. Benali, *Le Cinéma colonial au Maghreb*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998; F. Ramirez and C. Rolot, *Histoire du cinéma colonial au Zaïre, au Rwanda et au Burundi*, Brussels: Musée royal de l'Afrique central, 1985.
19. E. Shohat and R. Stam (eds), *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, New York: Routledge, 1994, 16.
20. Retrieved 28 March 2014 from <http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Default.htm>. Exemplary for the preservation and accessibility of a colonial film heritage is the database of the above-mentioned project 'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire', retrieved 28 March 2014 from <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/home>.
21. It is impossible to say how much film material actually has survived. A screening of all the film material from the German colonies that was located during the research for this book probably would not last longer than an evening screening. A list of all available films can be found in the filmography at the end of this book.
22. J. Blankenship, "'Leuchte der Kultur': Imperialism, Imaginary Travel, and the Skladanowsky Welt-Theater", *KINtop: Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films*, 2006, 14/15: 41.
23. *Der Kinematograph*, 10 July 1907.
24. *Ibid.*, 19 February 1913.
25. *Ibid.*, 13 January 1907.
26. See also: T. Gunning, 'The Whole World within Reach: Travel Images without Borders', in R. Cosandey and F. Albera (eds), *Cinéma sans frontières 1896–1918. Images Across Borders*, Lausanne: Nuit Blanche Editeurs/Edition Payot, 1995, 24.
27. R. Allen and D. Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1985, 38.
28. E. Bowser, 'The Brighton Project: An Introduction', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 1979, 4(4): 509–38. The conference is documented in R. Holman (ed.), *Cinema 1900–1906: An Analytical Study. Proceedings of the FIAF Symposium Held at Brighton*, FIAF, 1978, vols 1 and 2.
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30. M. Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, 24.
31. Elsaesser, 'The New Film History', 247.
32. F. Heidtmann, *Wie das Photo ins Buch kam*, Berlin: Verlag Arno Spitz, 1984, 512.
33. K. Belgum, *Popularizing the Nation: Audience, Representation, and the Production of Identity in 'Die Gartenlaube', 1853–1900*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, 151.
34. D. Barth, *Zeitschrift für alle. Das Familienblatt im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein sozialhistorischer Beitrag zur Massenpresse in Deutschland*, Ph.D. dissertation, Universität Münster, 1974, 203.
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