

Trans-Inter-National Public Spheres

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The short, non-fiction film *Jagd auf Silberreiher/Chasse à l'aigrette en afrique* (Pathé Frères, 1911) starts with the shot of a European hunter and his African guides crawling through the African bushland. The hunter points to a tree, where an egret or heron colony rests. He takes aim and shoots. Successful in his hunt, the guides attach the egrets to sticks and carry them over their shoulders. Moving to a boat, two white men are plucking the kill; in a close-up, two hands hold a dead heron, show where to find the most valuable feathers, and suddenly pluck them out to show a little bunch. An intertitle then states that every year thousands of these beautiful birds are killed to adorn fashionable ladies' hats. The last shots are not filmed in Africa. A female hand presents a bunch of heron feathers to the camera; a chic young lady tries on a feathered hat. In medium close-up, the young lady smiles at the camera and moves her head to show the feathers in a flattering way.¹

The film is typical of non-fiction titles for its time: part colonial travelogue, part hunting adventure, with a twist of European fashion at the end. It is emblematic for the exploitative character of colonial ideology and an example of what Anne McClintock calls the metamorphosis of imperial time into domestic space.² The motif of hunting and fashion suggests that it addressed a European male and female audience. In *Going to the Movies*, Maltby, Stokes and Allen remark that audiences' "primary relationship with 'the cinema' has not been with individual movies-as-artefacts or as text, but with the social experience of cinemagoing".³ Since a film's audience is not entirely determined by what appears onscreen, close textual analyses should be complemented with knowledge of films' circulation amongst stratified audiences in contexts outside commercial venues. The hunting film summarised above is a good starting point to demonstrate the importance of exhibition contexts in establishing audience stratification, and for my particular purposes of tracing film practices within voluntary associations such as social and fraternal clubs. Such associations kept minutes and records of their programmed events, and often their intentions in public education and entertainment, and their archives provide a wealth of neglected documentation of the non-theatrical use of moving pictures in a wider public sphere.

In her pioneering work on the public sphere of early cinema, Miriam Hansen argued for a diversity of publics and subject positions for any film or genre.⁴ This chapter, too, takes up the task of tracing alternative public spheres, in particular for audiences of non-fiction films. I argue against conceiving film reception through aesthetic structures alone, and seek an understanding of how alternative exhibition venues could produce different meanings for a single film. At the Amsterdam workshop "Nonfiction from the Teens", Ben Brewster remarked that early nonfiction film seems to exist apart from the aesthetic regimes of stylistic pressures and influences, making it difficult to tell

them apart over a ten-year period.⁵ Shifting from the textual analysis of film to a more concerted look at the film experience demonstrates that the meaning of non-fiction films might rest in its exhibition context – its ability to address distinct public spheres – rather than in its stylistic finesse.

Voluntary associations with national, at times transnational, connections routinely incorporated moving pictures into their activities and work; their significant prestige in local social networks provides a record of alternative public spheres in their own right.⁶ Sometimes they are the only existing source to learn anything about a particular film's audience. Studying the relation between film and associations deepens our understanding of exhibition and yet unknown distribution networks. I begin in Germany and first present an overview of the national character of associations at the turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of a role for moving pictures within it. Then I turn to a wider transnational context with the specific case of films used to advocate against game-hunting for feathers. Pursuing the potential of specifically transnational public spheres, I ultimately include a look beyond the silent era – although still using silent films – by considering the use of films by German immigrant associations in early 1930s rural hinterlands in Brazil.

Voluntary associations

Sociologically, an association is a group of individuals voluntarily agreeing to act as a collective or organisation to accomplish a specific purpose. Most often relying on events and social gatherings, as opposed to merely lobbying or campaigning, an association typically requires a meeting place such as a clubhouse or an assembly room for regular meetings, usually in the evening outside of working hours. To attract new members, and inform or entertain its membership, associations used media of all kinds from speeches and magic lanterns to leaflets, photography, and film. Associations can be considered public spheres in their own right and their internal structure can be studied with regard to class or gender composition and the resulting problems in establishing and maintaining a common interest. Mary Ryan has argued that gender was the most restrictive category to public access, and most often relegated to the private realm.⁷ Nancy Fraser's well-known critique of equitable, communitarian presumptions in ideas of the public sphere explained "that despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere ... was importantly constituted by ... a number of significant exclusions".⁸ Such revisionist accounts of Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere were transformed into a theory of "counterpublics" by Michael Warner.⁹ 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".¹⁰ The point emphasises the heterogeneity of the public sphere as an arena of continuous conflict and contest. 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 [...]".¹¹ The exclusionary character as well as the diversity of the public sphere allows the study 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.¹²

German historian Thomas Nipperdey has pointed out that around 1840 the enthusiasm for joining an association turned into a popular pastime of sorts, and a widespread passion for joining associations resulted in a nationwide network across Germany.¹³ Towns with a population of ten thousand citizens could easily host more than a hundred associations. Associations were “one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of the Wilhelmine epoch”.¹⁴ Most associations pursued rather apolitical goals such as entertainment and self-formation. The articulation of a common public interest (*Gemeinwohl*), however, also made voluntary associations the “most political medium in Imperial Germany”.¹⁵

A “common public interest” was part of the self-conception of the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*), which aimed at creating a colonial consciousness in the German public. Founded in 1887, the German Colonial Society was the biggest colonial pressure group, with hundreds of local branches in Imperial Germany. The Society was open to all citizens, but a high annual membership fee excluded those with low incomes. Starting with illustrated lectures to inform the public about the situation and progress in the colonial territories, the society began to integrate cinematographic screenings into its propaganda in 1905 when lectures with lantern slides were losing their appeal.¹⁶ Film screenings immediately became popular among the society’s members and other associations such as patriotic, educational, or commercial associations with whom the Colonial Society collaborated.¹⁷ The target audience for the Colonial Society was members of the upper-middle class with a clear interest in overseas business.

Colonial propaganda policy changed in early 1907 when the Society decided to institutionalise film screenings and hired a professional exhibition company, the *Deutsche Bioscope*. Within the positive political climate for colonial issues in German politics in this year, screenings at the Society’s branches became very similar to regular screenings of a local or travelling cinema.¹⁸ Already in the first year of colonial film screenings, 1905–06, members started to complain about programs composed exclusively of pictures of the colonies, and asked for a more varied film program including animation shorts and European actualities. A more popular program went hand in hand with the Society’s redefinition of their policy towards the German public. The Colonial Society’s major task for the future was the intensification of popular (*volkstümliche*) lectures that also addressed a working class audience.¹⁹ In addition to showing the significant link between the colonies’ natural resources and the worker’s own job in the processing of these resources, colonial lectures also had to show that the colonies presented an alternative for the ordinary worker to start a new life as an independent craftsman, farmer, or settler.²⁰

Ironically, these colonial film programs became substitutes for regular film programs in sparsely populated farming regions – where a local commercial cinema culture was not yet established – rather than in already serviced industrial regions where most of the working class lived. The majority of reported colonial film screenings in 1907 and 1908 were in smaller communities, where even an ideologically charged film program could become the talk of the town. Voluntary associations thus became a serious competitor of the itinerant film business, and cut into the profitability of travelling film exhibitors in rural areas. In his research on early film exhibition in Germany, Joseph Garncarz has shown that small towns and sparsely populated regions were especially attractive for traveling exhibitors since they did not encounter any competition; permanent cinemas instead first emerged in bigger cities, while fairground exhibitors

concentrated on relatively densely populated regions.²¹ Associations' change to a more popular program did not go unnoticed by itinerant exhibitors, who complained early in 1908 about the unfair competition.²² Beyond their use of film in nationalist activities within Germany, associations also used moving pictures outside commercial contexts to advocate for a transnational perspective on some topics.

From national operation to international cooperation

The circulation of films like *Jagd auf Silberreiher*, discussed above, provides an interesting way to expand upon the national-level use of film by the German Colonial Society. Films about game hunting, such as this one, certainly belonged to the colonial film repertoire of that time, but they could be used for entirely different ideological purposes. Rather than merely show the colonies as territories of infinite resources, such images could become examples of wasteful cruelty when used by a group such as the Association for the Protection of Birds (*Bund für Vogelschutz*, BfV), founded in 1899.

One of the first major campaigns of the BfV was fighting against hunting silver-egrets and birds of paradise for their precious feathers – exactly the scenario shown in *Jagd auf Silberreiher*. In 1912 the German public was asked to sign petitions, or “lists for the renunciation of buying feathers” (*Federnverzichtslisten*) from birds of paradise, egrets, or humming birds. This was a joint campaign with the Feminist Association for Women's Right to Vote (*Bayrischer Verein für das Frauenstimmrecht*), which considered the use of feathers in fashion to be unworthy of the modern woman as it put her on the same evolutionary step as wild and childish primitive cultures.²³ In their 1910–11 annual report, the BfV reported that the protection of the wildlife “concerned the German public as it had never done before”.²⁴ The society's tireless efforts had wide-reaching consequences. In November 1913 the Colonial Society set up a special commission for the protection of egrets and birds of paradise.²⁵ In 1914 the State Secretary of the Colonial Office, himself a member of the BfV, placed a ban on importing feathers. Moreover, the BfV's campaign against killing of birds of paradise and silver egrets was coordinated transnationally with the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Audubon Society in the United States, who achieved a New York State Audubon Plumage Law in 1910 prohibiting the sale or possession of feathers from protected bird species.²⁶

To support its public campaign, the BfV used film screenings to depict the cruelty of hunting animals for sport and leisure. In February 1913 the association's public mouthpiece *Ornithologische Monatsschrift* (Ornithological Monthly Bulletin) remarked:

Also the events and meetings that are organized by us are used to draw the attention to the disgrace and through cinematographic screenings to give an insight into the conditions. These screenings we were allowed to show on the occasion of our general meeting to Her Majesty the Queen of Württemberg, who, as it is known, has gained particular merits for the fight against the egret fashion, and at the general meeting of the German Society for the Protection of Birds to His Majesty King Friedrich August of Saxony.²⁷

Obviously, hunting films had a quite different purpose for the wildlife protection movement than for the passionate colonial adventurer. Watching the film in the context of transnational advocacy, as indicated above, a film such as *Chasse à l'aigrette en Afrique* had now two alternative distribution networks beyond the commercial mainstream, and thus at least two distinct audiences.

The film may have started as a conventional film about shooting birds in Africa, but its conclusion may have been a visual indictment of the senseless slaughter of helpless birds. The meaning of the film's ending becomes ambiguous. Does the film care about

wildlife protection or does it support the use of feathers in fashion? Should women feel guilty when watching the film? Do egret feathers' beauty justify hunting their hunt, or is the film's ending a cynical comment on ladies' perverse pleasure in fashion? Did Pathé Frères know about the world-wide campaign to ban the import of feathers, and did this influence their distribution of the film? Was the initial idea of the film to document the hunt and the feathers' beauty, or did the film care about wildlife protection or both? The colonial commitment was perhaps tempered by the international effort to band hunting endangered species for feathers when the film was distributed in an off-cinema network to a different audience.

In order to push the limits of this argument, I turn next to an example of associations using film in a later period and very different national context: film screenings of the German-Brazilian Film Service in the 1930s. In this case it becomes evident that silent film programs could address viewers of any national origin, no matter what language they spoke, and further could address viewers that had no access to other forms of entertainment.

Associations from a transnational perspective

The urban Brazilian film audience was familiar with German films, documentary and fiction, but most German immigrants in Brazil lived in rural areas, and the distribution of cultural films (*Kulturfilme*) did not begin in remote regions until the 1930s. The Association of German Teachers in São Paulo (*Deutscher Lehrerverein São Paulo*) purchased a film projector in 1930 to promote the screening of educational films in schools on the outskirts of the city. Two years later, in São Leopoldo in the state of Rio Grande de Sul, a certain Dr Kosche founded the German Brazilian Cultural Film Service (*Deutsch-Brasilianischer Kulturfilmdienst, DKD*), soon administered by the National Association of German-Brazilian Teachers (*Landesverband Deutsch-Brasilianischer Lehrer*).²⁸ The LDL Film Service received support from the overseas branch of the German Reich Railway (*Deutsche Reichsbahn*) in Brazil as well as from companies such as Zeiss, Agfa and Siemens.²⁹

The LDL Film Service was created to reach the entire German speaking population in Brazil, especially in remote areas, and to provide "[...] pictures in lifelike form from German the countrysides, historic places and sites of German labor" and "to bring the great national festivities to life".³⁰ As a "living link" with the tribal home (*Stammesheimat*) the films were aimed to maintain German folklore and strengthen the German schooling system in Brazil.³¹ In turn, films produced by the Film Service were sent to Germany to profile "Germanhood in Brazil".³² Very soon after Hitler's rise to power, the German Ministry of Propaganda also began collaborating with foreign organisations such as in Brazil by providing financial support and supplying films and other materials.³³ The LDL Film Service was the prominent association for such activities among German-Brazilians, and its headquarters in São Paulo was soon connected to many other regional, district and city branches, finally reaching to Bahia in the remote Northeast. Film programs could be rented free of charge minus expenses, although only silent films in 16mm and some 24mm prints were available through the service.³⁴ The problem of nonexistent or unstable electricity at some venues made some of these film screenings in the interior of Brazil masterpieces of improvisation. Some of these programs were the first screenings ever given in small villages in the interior of Brazil.³⁵

Although the nationalist rhetoric of the LDL Film Service's mandate suggests their intended audience was exclusively those of German origin, a closer study of their reports shows the film service was only viable with the support of the Portuguese-speaking population. Only ten to fifteen out of 200 viewers were German at a screening

in Congonhas do Campo in Minas Gerais in 1938.³⁶ Another show in Cosmópolis had to be relocated to a local cinema because of its success with the Portuguese-speaking audience. The final report on this particular exhibition noted:

Though the stories in the films were easy to comprehend [...] especially the Brazilians lamented that the texts were edited in German and not in Portuguese. Without any doubt we would be more successful if we considered this request in future.³⁷

In contrast, another screening in São Caetano in March 1935 seemed to include Brazilian viewers from at the planning stage. Along with films more clearly fulfilling the German national mandate – *Von Ammergau zum Staffelsee* [From Ammergau to the Lake Staffell], *Die Ostsee* [The Baltic Sea], and *Sport im Schnee* [Winter Sports] – more popular fare was included, such as the animated shorts films *Os 3 Cavalheiros* [The three Gentlemen] and *Koko e o Cacique* [Coco and the King].³⁸ Although there is no record of which language the accompanying lecturer spoke, this remarkable combination of German and Brazilian titles, of cultural and animation films, seems to anticipate and prevent the dilemma in Cosmópolis, where the Portuguese-speaking part of the audience was disappointed. The Film Service's policy of using only silent films thus seems to have been good strategy to satisfy the largest audience irrespective of ethnic origin or language spoken.

Studying the structure of the film programs shows that the Film Service's screenings were not standardised, but varied according to the specific local needs and inquiring institutions. It would be too easy to understand their film shows exclusively as extra-territorial extensions of national-socialist propaganda. For the Brazilian viewer the film shows could also be an interesting part of local cultural life. German-Brazilian viewers could react in very different ways: Films could strengthen the bond of an *imagined community* – but not necessarily that of Germans in Brazil, let alone instilling German fascism overseas. These film programs could also strengthen the bond of an imagined Brazilian community that was composed of both Brazilians and German-Brazilians.

Corinna Müller and Haro Segeberg have remarked that public spheres cannot be conceived without media and should be considered pluralistically as media-constituted, segmented public spheres (*Medien-Teilöffentlichkeiten*).³⁹ Voluntary associations' use of film to maintain or attract membership has been neglected as a key aspect of the history of non-theatrical film. Associations are generally accepted as public spheres in their own rights, working both inclusively and exclusively to give and deny membership and identity – and taking part in audiences for film screenings. The national propaganda of the Colonial Society, the international campaign of the wildlife protection movement, or the transnational work of the German-Brazilian Film Service all offer important venues for exploring cinema's alternative public sphere. Of course, not every association used film, and not every association maintained international cooperation, but the example of the Cultural Film Service in Brazil shows that cinema only existed in some marginal locations because of the networks of associations. Associations contributed to the social experience of cinemagoing, and their archives and records help to expand the history of cinemagoing.

Notes

1. The film was internationally distributed and existed in different language versions. The German version *Jagd auf Silberreiher* is archived at the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin, the English version *Shooting Egrets in Africa* is archived at the National Film and Television Archive in London. A Dutch version exists in the Eye Film Institute Netherlands.

2. Anne McClintock, "Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity racism and imperial advertising", in *The Visual Culture Reader*, Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 506–518.
3. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (eds), *Going to the movies: Hollywood and the social experience of cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 2.
4. Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds. (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 228–246.
5. Daan Hertogs and Nico de Klerk (eds), *The 1994 Amsterdam Workshop: Nonfiction from the Teens*: (London: British Film Institute, 1994): 32.
6. Wolfgang Fuhrmann, "Locating Early Film Audiences: voluntary associations and colonial film", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22 (2002): 291–304.
7. Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century", in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun (ed.) (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute for Technology, 1992), 259–288.
8. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy", in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute for Technology, 1992), 109–142.
9. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute for Technology, 1991).
10. Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 306
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 291.
13. Thomas Nipperdey, "Verein als soziale Struktur in Deutschland im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Fallstudie zur Modernisierung", in Thomas Nipperdey (ed.), *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 175–205.
14. Roger Chickering, *We Men who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan German League, 1886–1914* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin 1983), 183.
15. Chickering, *We Men who Feel Most German*, 184.
16. Wolfgang Fuhrmann, "Bilder aus den deutschen Kolonien: Lichtbilder und kinematographische Aufnahmen", *KINtop, Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films* 8 (1999): 101–116.
17. For a more detailed discussion of the distribution within the colonial lobby see Fuhrmann, "Local entertainment and national patriotism: The distribution of colonial films in Germany", in Frank Kessler and Nana Verhoff, eds., *Networks of Entertainment: Early Film Distribution 1895–1915* (London: John Libbey, 2007), 246–254.
18. In December 1906 the German Reichstag was dissolved due to a controversy about the budget for the German South West African colony. The election in January 1907 was won by a conservative coalition, who supported colonial efforts.
19. *Berichte über die Sitzungen des Ausschusses der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* (Berlin: Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, 1893–1914), 1 February 1907, 4–5.
20. Sybille Benninghoff-Lühl, *Deutsche Kolonialromane 1884–1914 in ihrem Entstehungs- und Wirkungszusammenhang* (Bremen: Selbstverlag des Übersee-Museums, 1983), 40.
21. Joseph Garnarcz, *Maßlose Unterhaltung. Zur Etablierung des Films in Deutschland 1896–1914* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2010).
22. "Die Kinematographen-Theater und der Deutsche Flottenverein", *Der Kinematograph*, 60 (19 February 1908): 1.
23. Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 1001/7771, 34–38.
24. *Ornithologische Monatsschrift* 37, no. 2 (1912): 9.
25. Richard Victor Pierard, "The German Colonial Society, 1882–1914", PhD Dissertation (Iowa State University, 1964).

26. Audubon Society's online Timeline of Accomplishments, www.audubon.org/timeline-accomplishments
27. *Ornithologische Monatsschrift* 38, no. 2 (1913): 131.
28. *Allgemeine Lehrerzeitung für Rio Grande de Sul* 5 (May 1934): section 13.
29. Olga Rodrigues and Moraes von Simson, "Imagem e memória", in *O Fotográfico*, Etienne Samain (ed.) (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 2005), 21–34.
30. Bericht Deutsche Schule São Paulo (1934), 74.
31. Bericht Deutsche Schule São Paulo (1936), 88.
32. Bericht Deutsche Schule São Paulo (1934), 75.
33. Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika. Die Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile und Mexiko, 1931–1945* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1997), 65.
34. Bericht Deutsche Schule São Paulo (1934), 75.
35. Bericht Deutsche Schule São Paulo (1934), 76.
36. Archivo Instituto Martius- Staden (AIMST), Correspondência Landesverband Deutsch-Brasilianischer Lehrer 1937–1938, correspondence from 22 April 1938.
37. AIMST, GIV f Nr. 25/ Schubert Chor, Bericht des Deutschen Lehrervereins-São Paulo über die Filmvorführungen, correspondence from 22 May 1931; AIMST, Correspondência Landesverband Deutsch-Brasilianischer Lehrer 1937–1938, correspondence from 22 April 1938.
38. AIMST, GIV f Nr 25/ Schubert-Chor, correspondence from 13 March 1935.
39. Corinna Müller and Harro Segeberg (eds), *Kinoöffentlichkeit (1895–1920) = Cinema's public sphere (1895–1920): Entstehung, Etablierung, Differenzierung: Emergence, settlement, differentiation* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2008), 13.