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The Empire at the Movies: India in Newsreels, c. 1911 to 1947

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Newsreels are still a relatively neglected source for the study of history despite their undoubted importance as vehicles of information for cinema audiences during the first half of the 20th century. The new genre was born in 1909/10, when the Pathe brothers embarked upon filming events from around the country (and soon from around the world) and screened these in special shows, called the *Pathe's Animated Gazette*. The first purpose-designed newsreel cinemas opened soon after. Combining the power of the moving image with forceful music (from the cinema organ) and later off-voiced sonorous comments, the newsreels became a crucial source of information-cum-entertainment to the ever-growing cinema audiences, both in dedicated newsreel cinemas and as starters before the main feature film in 'normal' cinemas.[1]

To explore these newsreels and assess their value for historical teaching and research, this chapter will pose a rather simple question: How did they portray India and Indian affairs? In other words, what did average cinemagoers in Britain see and hear about India? India, taken here in a slightly wider sense including Burma (a province of British India until 1937), Ceylon, and other British possessions in the East, has been selected because of the prominent position it occupied in the Empire: often styled the 'brightest jewel in the crown of Britain', one should expect that events taking place in India would receive greater attention than events happening elsewhere. Not last, people such as Gandhi, who made headlines on global scale from the 1920s, should have secured India affairs wide attention.

In looking at the representations and perceptions of the Empire and its parts at home, this chapter feeds into what may simplistically be called the 'Porter-Mackenzie debate'. This

debate revolves around the question of whether the British were 'absent-minded imperialists' (Porter) or whether the multiple ways by which the Empire was propagated to society in Britain resulted in more proactive and conscious forms of participation in and engagement with the Empire (Mackenzie).[2] Newsreels or even films in general did not play a prominent role in that debate, but do provide fresh insights and therefore pose new questions. The debate as such seems to elude an easy answer; it not only requires definitions to be agreed upon,[3] but is also open to a host of aspects that can (and will have to) be studied in relation to the propagation and perception of the Empire by the British public. As perceptions, which are by nature individual and periphrastic, are hard to trace (and even harder to trace for the historian),[4] research has focussed on other mediums of communication – newspapers, telegraphy, radio, picture postcards, and, more recently, film.[5] Studies of the latter have shown that newsreels picked up pivotal events, often involving a member of the royal family – in the case of India, the Delhi coronation *durbars* of 1903 and 1911 – and wars.[6] As will be shown, the Second World War became a catalyst for securing India and more precisely the Burma-China-India theatre of operations, a fixed place on British cinema screens.[7] Subsequently, the independence and partition of India continued to receive newsreel coverage, though they tended to emphasize imperial ceremonies while neglecting the human suffering and massacres resulting from partition. This was to a degree due to Mountbatten's handling of the 'transfer of power' and his directing of the camera teams present in India.[8]

This chapter will analyse the portrayal of Indian affairs and events between 1903 and 1947 in three chronologically organized blocks, covering the years before the First World War (i.e., the Delhi *durbars* of 1903 and 1911), the interwar period, and the years from the Second World War through to independence. A brief reflection on the nature of newsreels and their potency for shaping public opinion will introduce these three sections. It should also be

emphasized that this survey is preliminary, based primarily on the archive of the Pathe company, and aims to highlight the *potential* of studying such films.

Newsreels and their Audiences

According to the standard definition, newsreels are a specialized form of film, consisting of a loose variety of short cuts, sometimes taken from (and also turned into) more purpose-made films. They are normally seen as forming a contrast to both fictional, scripted films and documentaries, but were once a common part of cinematic shows screening a main feature film. They presented visual news that tended to be entertaining and non-controversial.[9] This definition makes clear that, despite their name, newsreels did not necessarily present news, at least not in the modern sense of the word. Newsreels were about curiosities, spectacle and sensation but hardly selected their topics according to political importance. In fact, political information and news was more likely to be omitted intentionally.

It is not possible to distinguish newsreels as 'factual films' from the fictional, scripted ones, by claiming that the former presented a plain, unfiltered and undirected 'reality' (see chapter 2).[10] It is obvious that filming right from its earliest forms involved the creating, performing and staging of the images to be recorded, even in cases where simple street scenes or other parts of urban life were portrayed. The films produced by Mitchell & Kenyon on the streets of Manchester in the early 1900s attest this amply; they show how people in front of the camera responded to the directives of the cameraman or his aide. A similar blurred boundary exists between the newsreels and documentaries, which became a popular genre after the First World War.[11] Though pretending to document reality at greater length than the newsreels, documentaries possessed a script and often a storyline as well, but more importantly, they also provided the raw material from which the short films to be shown in newsreels could be cut. Moreover, the documentary movement owed much of its production to the fact that two major

companies, the Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office, had put their weight and resources behind it.[12]

With regard to content, newsreels displayed a preference for members of the royal family and representatives of royalty – the contemporary form of gossip before the Second World War– and curiosities such as primitive people, wild animals, and other strange phenomena of the Empire and the world beyond.[13] Sports, entertainment and other events compatible to filming made up another part of the coverage. The coincidence of the new medium of film with the occurrence of a major imperial war, the Boer War, around the turn of the century determined the third thematic focus of the newsreels. This link was further strengthened in the First and Second World Wars when newsreels (and not to forget the new genre: the war film – see also chapter 1 and chapter 11) became major propaganda instruments on all sides.[14] General political news in contrast played only a minor role, the more so if they concerned places as far afield as India or China; and above all tight censorship imposed upon the film companies further limited the amount and contents of topics put on display, as news and pictures deemed politically sensitive would have been swiftly banned.[15]

However, the interwar period also witnessed a degree of thematic expansion by way of documentaries. Often educational in nature, documentaries attempted ethnographic, geographic and economic portraits of the world to the cinema audiences at home. Although often scripted and with a storyline at their core, they retained an aura of truthfulness by claiming to present the world 'as it is'. This made them perfect instruments in the hands of the companies which produced them to drive home certain messages – 'buy Empire products', 'drink more tea' and 'come to know the country by using the railways'.

The screening of newsreels coincided with the rise of the cinema as the most popular place of entertainment for British society, which eventually replaced the music halls and theatres. From 1905, when the first purpose-built movie houses opened, to the 1930s, cinemas

not only grew massively in numbers – there were some 4500 of them – but also in size, with the largest theatres seating more than 1000 visitors.[16] Audiences increased accordingly. No serious figures are available until the mid-1930s, but credible estimates suggest that the number of tickets sold every week rose from around 7 million in 1914 to somewhere around 17 million in the early 1930s.[17] The seminal survey conducted by Simon Rowson in 1934 put the numbers of cinema audiences on safer footing for the first time. He showed that ticket sales averaged 18.5 million that year, which meant that every Briton above the age of 15 went to the movies approximately once every two weeks.[18] There were regional variations, too, which e.g. highlight a strong link between the working classes in the Northwest and cinema going. A separate survey for Liverpool revealed that 40 per cent of its population went to the movies twice per week.[19] The number of cinema-goers continued to grow until 1940, when attendance figures peaked at more than 20 million per week, even though cinemas had begun to close down by then due to damage done by the Blitz or lack of operators who had joined the army.

Of course, attendance does not necessarily leave a spectator with lasting impressions, even when exposed to a medium which combines vision and sound (by the end of the 1920s, talkies had conquered the cinema screens) in a uniquely effective way. It is clear, however, that spectators do not consciously perceive and actively remember the 'spectacle of actuality', the scenes and stories put before them. This effect results either from multiple exposures to the same scene – that is, they had to watch a newsreels three times or more – or through an existing, personal link to it, which may be momentary. In other words, the film watched has to remind the spectator of something or send a message that is meaningful to their current life (see also chapter 3).[20] It is obvious that such a message and its meaning to an individual cannot be examined by a historian, who is interested in how, for example, news relating to India was understood as 'imperial propaganda'. What can be examined are the figures for the frequency of cinema-going – less than once a week, as calculated above. This rhythm has to be set against

the frequency by which fresh newsreels went on show, which was once to twice per week. This means that an average British cinema-goer would usually see a piece of news, no matter whether concerning Britain, India or any other part of the Empire, only once or exceptionally twice. This was hardly often enough for a piece of news to become recognized or remembered, let alone enough to produce a lasting impression.

However, before the possibility of a piece of news from India making an impact upon a British cinema audience can be ruled out, another aspect has to be taken into account. Mass observations in cinemas conducted during the 1940s have shown that audiences did in fact watch the films and newsreels put before them consciously and to a degree critically.[21] Cinema-goers thus complained that a feature film contained too much propaganda – 'there's enough of it in the newsreels',[22] while the overall survey suggested that even such 'bad' feature films never received the level of dislike newsreels did.[23] These and similar such remarks suggest that audiences were well aware of the topics and ideologies brought before them, even if they had only a single opportunity to watch them.

Film and the *durbars*

India's life in the newsreels began with the *durbar*, which Viceroy Lord Curzon staged at Delhi in 1903 to celebrate the accession of King/Emperor Edward VII. Staging an imperial assemblage, on which the Indian princes could honour the new Emperor, was not an innovation, as the site at Delhi and the proceedings had already been determined by Lord Lytton, who celebrated Queen Victoria's official assumption of the Crown of India in 1877 with great pomp and circumstance.[24] However, Curzon did everything he could to display the power, splendour and progressiveness of the *raj*. His vehicles were the latest symbols of modernity: electric lights and electrically driven fans in the tents, telephones and toilets, a tramway and, for more distinguished guests, motorcars to take the visitors from the city to the *durbar* site, and film

teams to put the proceedings on record. British film pioneer Robert W. Paul and the Gaumont Film Company were among those to whom the latter task had been entrusted. In 1903, filming was still a delicate technology, the more so under tropical conditions, so only a short reel of less than two minutes survived. It shows a host of troops on parade, various maharajas on elephants, and of course the arrival of the Viceroy, who took the place of the absent King-Emperor.[25]

It is not known how the films from the 1903 Delhi *durbar* were received back in Britain, but bearing all the hallmarks that normally appealed to cinema audiences – featuring a member of the royal family, exotic animals, oriental pomp and spectacle – they will almost certainly have become an instant success. This can be seen more clearly from the fact that the procedures of the subsequent coronation *durbar* of King George V in 1911 were completely recorded in film. On this occasion, the King-Emperor was present in person, and consequently the procedures of the *durbar* became even more lavish, magnificent and elaborate. Some 60,000 spectators from around the world watched a ceremony involving almost 150,000 participants (besides the royal couple, virtually all Indian princes and about 55,000 troops), which lasted from 10am to 5pm.[26] No less than eight film companies were handed the opportunity to record the proceedings.[27] The newsreels were speedily developed to be rushed to the cinemas in Europe and elsewhere. The royal couple attended a show at Calcutta shortly before their departure from India in January 1912,[28] just before the first newsreels from the *durbar* were shown in Britain and the United States.[29] The short interval between the event and its screening represented the quickest means of transfer at a time when a journey from India to Britain on a steamboat would still take at least three weeks.

Insert picture 1 somewhere here

Except for the sheer scale of the ceremony, the 1911 *durbar* hardly outshone its 1903 predecessor. Its only innovative element of displaying cutting-edge technology was coloured

film. This was the recently patented invention of Charles Urban, an American entrepreneur, who had set up a film company in London. Urban successfully used coloured filters for both the camera and the projector to produce 'natural' colours; a technique he trademarked as 'Kinemacolor'.[30] In India, Urban and his team recorded not only the ceremonies of day but also followed the royal couple on their tour through India. Their efforts produced hours of film, which went onscreen in spectacular fashion from February 1912. *With our King and Queen through India* (1912) was screened at London's *Scala* cinema, which had been fitted out in the style of the Taj Mahal, and the shows (which lasted 2.5 hours in average) were accompanied by a 48-piece orchestra, 24 singers, and an electrical lightshow.[31] The final triumph came when the royal family attended a show in May 1912,[32] but even without the royal blessing, the shows became a spectacular success and earned Urban a small fortune.[33] What caught the imagination of the audience, apart from being presented in colour and showcasing a perfect blend of celebrities (the royal family) and the exotic, was one scene which had by then already made headlines in press. The maharaja (or 'Gaekwar') of Baroda, one of the leading native rulers of India, had dared to break with the protocol, variably described as only nodding the Emperor when formally paying obeisance, swinging his walking stick and even turning his back to the King when leaving the elevated canopy which served as a throne hall. The news of the alleged insolence had been spread by observers present on the occasion and picked up by British newspapers, and cinemagoers were eager to respond to the scene with hissing.[34]

The Interwar Period

The First World War not only provided the defining topic for the newsreel companies (besides Pathe, Gaumont had entered the market just before war), the war also stopped the production of films in faraway places almost completely, as necessary materials were rationed and

maritime transport connections became restricted. Above all, tightening censorship turned the companies into crucial allies of the state at its home front. The end of the war brought further changes. First of all, further competitors appeared on the scene: by 1922, five companies – besides Pathe and Gaumont, these were Paramount, Movietone and Universal – sought to bring their films before the audiences.[35] Secondly, American influence in the market grew considerably, as three of these companies were American-owned and moreover American investors had acquired a substantial share in Pathe.[36] However, the companies soon found it more practical and economic to pool their resources and share the films they were producing. What looked like a competition between five companies was in fact a joint business, particularly when it came to filming in places outside Europe and the US.[37]

Coverage of Indian and Far Eastern affairs remained therefore limited even though one of the companies, Pathe, claimed worldwide presence including a 'Far Eastern Office'.[38] More commonly, a company would send a film team to the East, often to accompany a member of the royal family or some other celebrity on an official tour. The topical mix from the pre-war days, consisting of royalty/celebrity news and the curiosities of the Orient including primitive people and exotic animals, remained mostly unaltered, as a cursory survey of the Pathe archive shows. The Duke of Connaught's (Prince Arthur) visit to India in January-February 1921 provided an opportunity to send a film team along, which covered the Duke's activities in a lengthy documentary, but also threw an eye on the Indian people, life and religion.[39] Interestingly, political news in the narrow sense were rarely touched upon, even though they constituted the actual reason for the tour of the Duke. In 1920, a major constitutional reform, the Montagu-Chelmsford reform, had been introduced in India, which enfranchised a slightly larger part of the Indian population and enabled Indians to take executive responsibilities in the provincial governments under the 'dyarchy' scheme. The opening of the Legislative Assemblies and Chamber of Princes at Calcutta and Delhi on behalf of the King-Emperor were

the central duties of the Duke and occupied most of his time,[40] but were hardly recorded on film save for very brief references in connection with the Duke's opening of the Chamber of Princes and the Bombay Legislative Councils.[41]

The same year, 1921, witnessed another royal tour through India, this time by the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII). It received even more coverage, as the accompanying film team produced a full bi-colour documentary entitled *Through India and Burma with H.R.H. The Prince of Wales* (1922) that was shown in cinemas across Britain during 1922. The Cinechrome company had been experimenting with colour films for about a decade, but despite the promotion gained through the royal tour the company seems to have abandoned the film business a few years later.[42]

For the rest of the 1920s, the already mentioned focus of the newsreel films continued to rest on the curious and exotic side of India on the one hand and the personalities of British India. The former include reports of festivals at Benares (1924 and 1926), a Hindu festival at Hardwar (1927), and a portrait of Indian temples (1929), while the latter chronicle events such as the arrival of the new Viceroy, Lord Irwin (1926), and his wife (undated, probably the same year), his trip to Lahore (1926) or the inauguration of the new governor of Bombay.[43] The Viceroy's visit to Burma provided an opportunity for filming there. Pictures produced include a day at the Rangoon races, *Burma's Ascot* (1924), the funeral of a monk and very likely general scenes from life in Rangoon and Burma, *Life in Rangoon* (undated), as well. This rather narrow thematic focus was rarely abandoned, notably when modern achievements required it, for instance the opening of the Imperial Airways services to India (1923) or the commencement of a daily flight connection between London and Delhi in 1927.[44]

Political news from India was mostly suppressed save for a cursory mention of Gandhi addressing a rally of the Indian National Congress in 1922. Having been sentenced to imprisonment in the aftermath of his first campaign and again in 1929-31, Gandhi was seen as

a criminal and a corrupter of the masses, who had to be kept away from the cinema audiences in Britain, let alone in India.[45] However, Gandhi's moment on the screen came in 1931 in the context of another constitutional reform to be introduced in India. In 1929, the Simon Commission toured India to assess whether a larger part of the Indian people, especially those living in rural areas, could be enfranchised. The work of the commission and the response of the INC, which demanded *purna swaraj* or 'full independence', was duly reported in a rather long newsreel, aptly entitled *India today – the Empire's greatest problem* (1929). To emphasize the INC's demand, Gandhi staged his second campaign of 'civil disobedience', which began in 1930 with the famous 24-day Salt March. As Gandhi became the champion of the Indian peasants, who began to feel the impact of the Great Depression, Viceroy Lord Irwin, fearing their rebelliousness, persuaded Gandhi to travel to London and participate in the upcoming second meetings of the Round Table Conference. This official recognition by the Viceroy and Gandhi's subsequent journey to England made it impossible to keep him out of the news any longer. A set of newsreels from 1931 show Gandhi's Salt March, his arrival in London and even his subsequent conflict with B.R. Ambedkar over the question of whether India's Untouchables should be given the right to vote as separate electorates.[46]

Insert Gandhi picture somewhere here

After this brief interlude, the coverage of India in the newsreels returned to the usual mixture of important people, oriental splendour, curiosities and sports (for instance a cricket match between an English and an Indian side in 1936). Technological advances such as the opening of an international telephone connection between London and Delhi, *Hello India* (1933), were still deemed important news, but the bulk of the reports were about a maharaja's wedding party (Mysore 1935 and Patandi 1939) or diamond jubilee (Kapurthala 1938), the Viceroy at the Calcutta Races and the like. Possibly, the new transport link to India by plane made it easier to send a film team over without a member of the royal family determining the

time and route.[47] Gaumont, for instance, produced two series of films named the *Secrets of India* (1934) and *Indian Town Studies* (1937), which were essentially documentary in nature but could also be used for news coverage.[48]

The elimination of politically sensitive information at this time becomes even more obvious when one looks at wider Asia. In 1931, Japan invaded and annexed Manchuria, in what was to form a prelude for the Second World War in Asia. This event, however, found hardly any mention in newsreels, as the American-made panoramic Pathe reel entitled *World Troubles 1914-1934* (1934) illustrates. It throws brief spotlights on both Gandhi and Manchuria, to conclude (with much pro-American bias) that in this world of madness and chaos only the U.S. stood firm and properly armed.[49]

The War, Partition and Independence

This situation changed completely with the outbreak of war in 1939 and its possible spread to the East. As Lant has observed, companies producing newsreels and documentaries benefitted from the war as their pictures became critical vehicles of propaganda for the home front.[50] The war necessitated a shift in the official perception of India, which supplied troops, money, raw materials and manufacture for Britain's war effort, besides providing a training ground and deployment zone for the re-conquest of the lost territories of Burma, Malaya and Singapore. Any attempt to communicate to the cinema audiences in Britain that the war could be won required an appreciation of the sacrifices and contributions made by people in the colonies. Initially, this was no easy task as the Asian theatres of war produced only news of defeat and retreat. Rather than boosting morale at home, newsreels reporting Asian affairs were disheartening.[51] Only India seemed to be capable of producing positive headlines, serving as a bulwark against the Japanese tide, sheltering refugees from Burma, re-organising the remnants of an army originally meant to defend the Empire, supplying China through its eastern airfields,

and not least providing the recruits for what would become the world's largest volunteer army.[52] Filming these events was at first restricted to India – though some cameramen seem to have stayed in Burma up to its fall, as will be shown below – but when the Allied forces opened the Burma-China-India (CBI) Theatre of operations, several film teams followed their trail. Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of that theatre, in particular was eager to give the cameramen access to the action on the battlefields. One street through his headquarters at Peradeniya (Ceylon) was dubbed 'Hollywood Lane' for all the film teams, which had their offices there.[53]

As the newsreels produced in and about India and those subsequently in the course of the Burma campaign have been examined already in detail and under various aspects, this need not be repeated here.[54] But what should not be overlooked is that a good survey of war correspondents, photographers and cameramen especially for the Second World War theatres in the East is still wanting.[55] A few prominent examples such as John Hersey, Darrell Berrigan or Harold Guard notwithstanding, who are known for their publications during and after the war,[56] these reporters often remain hidden behind their pictures. Filming war action from close to the frontline is more usually associated with wars from the second half of the 20th century, notably the Vietnam War. But it had already happened in Burma: when George Rodger, photographer for the American *Life Magazine*, flew into Rangoon in January 1942, he met there two cameramen, Alec Tozer from Movietone News and Maurice Ford from Paramount.[57] Ford produced a number of newsreels from Burma including one shot from air, when he accompanied a small RAF squadron on a reconnaissance flight to Martaban in Lower Burma, and one recording Chiang-Kai-shek's visit to Burma.[58] Tozer and Rodger together went on a trip along the Burma Road to the Chinese border and back to Rangoon,[59] and all three presumably left for India before the Japanese finally conquered Burma.

The relative safety of India and Ceylon, where the reorganization and training of the Allied Forces were planned and realized, gave film companies an opportunity to send their own film teams there. These film teams then followed troops into the battlefields of the CBI. Their work was much facilitated through Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Southeast Asia, who had invited film companies to set up offices at his headquarters in Peradeniya (Ceylon) and often provided transportation for the film teams. Portraits of and references to Mountbatten were accordingly plentiful in these films.[60] The role of propaganda being undisputed – and the CBI now finally providing positive news for the audiences back in Britain – the Indian Government felt obliged to contribute to this aspect of the war through sponsoring another newsreel company, Indian News Parade, which supplied mainly the home market.[61]

In view of the wide coverage given to warfare in the CBI, the victory parades and even the trials of Japanese officers accused of crimes against humanity, interest in Indian affairs seems to have shrunk considerably after the war, despite the crucial developments taking place there. The focus was back on Britain and Europe, while the preparations for the transfer of power in India only appeared when they involved British politics and decision-making, with Mountbatten once again taking centre-stage after becoming Viceroy of India.[62] This was as much a return to the former imperial reporting of the interwar period as it satisfied Mountbatten's lust for publicity. The lack of coverage of general affairs becomes most apparent in respect of the partition of India and the amount of population movements and violence it triggered. In relation to the scope of the event – partition caused some 12-15 million refugees and more than one millions casualties – an amazingly small number of newsreels were produced. This might seem to lend support to the theory that the unfolding of events caught the outgoing British and incoming Indian/Pakistani Governments alike by surprise.[63]

It is however also clear that not only were there a mere three film companies working in India when the tragedy unfolded, the film teams based at Delhi also found it difficult to get through to the hotspots of communal violence in the worst affected Punjab province.[64] After all, a near-to complete collapse of public order put the lives of the cameramen at risk, too. Much of the available film material was therefore filmed at the outskirts of Delhi, and very little of it has recorded the clashes and massacres that marked the partition during the weeks from mid-August 1947.[65]

Concluding reflections

This chapter has explored how India (plus a few other parts of the British Empire in Asia) was presented to the British public by way of newsreels screened in cinemas. Newsreels were potentially influential sources of information and opinion-making as they combined the power of the image (and later sound) with an extremely wide outreach – even the smallest of the newsreel companies had a larger audience than Britain's biggest daily newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. Like all films, newsreels were subject to strict censorship that would prevent the display of any kind of news deemed politically sensitive. The coverage of India in these newsreels was therefore limited to 'people news', usually related to members of the royal family or Viceroys, and portrayals of the 'exotic' – maharajas (and other strange people) and their splendour, religious festivals and natural beauty. This came to its height at the Delhi *durbar* of 1911, which headlined the newsreels in British cinemas from January 1912 and became a major cinematic event in the subsequent months.

Even a figure as prominent as Gandhi remained outside the news, though his case was special insofar as he had been discretely embargoed due to his conviction for sedition. The sole 'Gandhi moment' of the newsreels came in 1931 when he toured Britain after being rehabilitated (half-heartedly, but nevertheless) by the Viceroy, so his absence from the news

could neither be hidden nor justified. The screening of Gandhi's political activism, however, remained an episode, and not only did he disappear from the scene again, but also the portrayal of India returned to its scope of the 1920s, with its focus on maharajas, vice regal tours, sports and nature. The coverage did not change until the outbreak of the Second World War in the East, which turned India into a powerhouse of Allied war production and recruitment and thus pushed it into the limelight of propaganda on the home front. The re-conquest of the territories lost to Japan in 1941-42 was closely observed and recorded by several newsreel companies, with the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Southeast Asian theatre, Lord Mountbatten, supporting their work as far as possible.

Whilst the changing image of India on British cinema screens can be examined rather easily and concisely (though again, this survey is by no means comprehensive), the further question of how effective newsreels were in impressing people and shaping their perception of India is less conclusive. The outreach of newsreels was undoubtedly very wide, as cinema-going became the preferred pastime of the interwar period and audiences grew consistently. At the end of the 1930s, newsreels reached on average a much larger audience than any national newspaper. The conclusion that cinema-goers would therefore be more conscious of affairs concerning India or the Empire more generally will however have to be set against the 'default function' of the human brain, which tends to ignore those bits of information that are irrelevant for a person's current life and condition. Alternatively, such pieces of information may be admitted to the memory if people are exposed to them repeatedly. Even if growing attendance rates and regional variations are factored in, the exposure of cinema audiences to news from and about India (or again, the Empire more generally) may have been too infrequent to provide for a memory effect. This will have to be set against the results stemming from the mass observation of cinema audiences in the 1930s, which revealed that they were actively engaging with the news put before them – a phenomenon also seen in their responses to the Gaekwar

incident on the Delhi *durbar*. On the other hand, their often wholesale rejection of the propagandistic content of newsreels indicates that audiences may have paid little interest to the newsreels put before them.

These findings add an – albeit small – piece of evidence to the debate about the presentation and perception of the Empire in British society. As mentioned above, Mackenzie, the leading advocate of a highly propagated Empire has referred to films, though in a rather vague manner, and has not mentioned newsreels at all. If nothing else, this may indicate the author's uneasiness with the way cinema screenings of films and newsreels fit into his argument. The opposite voice, Porter, did not refer to films at all, though paradoxically they might have substantiated his standpoint better than that of Mackenzie, if one accepts that audiences in 1930s Britain had much too little exposure to affairs of even such a crucial part of the Empire as India, and that they may not have paid too much attention to the newsreels for their alleged propagandistic tweaking of reality. This hypothesis, however, requires further investigation to move beyond a single case study (India) and medium (newsreels). It will be required to examine films more broadly and compare the evidence from films to that of other media, notably newspapers.

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[1] The following articles and overviews have been seminal for the writing of the paper: R. Low, *History of the British Cinema*, vols. 5 and 6 (London: Routledge, 1971); S. L. Althaus, 'The Forgotten Role of the Global Newsreel Industry in the Long Transition from Text to Television' *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 15, no. 2 (2010): 193-218; *'The Story of the Century': An International Newsfilm Conference*, (London: National Film Theatre, 1996); N. Pronay, 'The Newsreels: The Illusion of Actuality' in P. Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 95-120; L. McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (London: BUFVC, 2002); J. Hammerton, 'The Spice of the Perfect Programme. The Weekly Magazine Film during the Silent Era', in Andrew Higson

(ed.), *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930* (Exeter: University Press, 2002), 162-178.

[2] J. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: University Press, 1985); B. Porter, *The absent-minded Imperialists. Empire, society and culture in Britain* (Oxford: University Press, 2004). An investigation of how the Empire has been presented to and perceived by British society – incl. its media, channels and addressees – has of course wider implications which cannot be adequately tackled in an article. Besides the two works mentioned above, see e.g. C. Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire. A Reader* (Manchester: University Press, 2000) and numerous other volumes in MUP's "Studies in Imperialism" series; F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; and now Andrew Thompson (ed.), *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011).

[3] Both Porter's category of 'participation' and Mackenzie's term 'propaganda' have quantitative and qualitative properties, which are not easily distilled from the sources.

[4] An exception is James Burns, who explores how cinema-going shaped debates about the Empire and imperial identities both at home and in the colonies. The focus of his work is however on colonial people, and newsreels occur only occasionally. J. Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[5] See e.g. C. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, c. 1888-1922* (Manchester: University Press, 2003), and idem, *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience. Britain and India in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave, 2014); E. Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email. Technologies of Presence* (London: Routledge, 2010), esp. chapter 2 'The Postcard', 93-135.

[6] For the topics of the newsreels, see Mackenzie, Propaganda, 71-2. For the *durbars*, see S. Bottomore, ‘’An Amazing Quarter Mile of Moving Gold, Gems and Genealogy’: Filming India’s 1902/03 Delhi Durbar”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995): 495-515; idem, ‘’Have You Seen the Gaekwar Bob?’: Filming the 1911 Delhi Durbar’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 17, no. 3 (1997): 309-345. L. McKernan, ‘'The modern Elixir of Life': Kinemacolor, royalty and the Delhi Durbar’ *Film History: An International Journal* 21, no. 2 (2009): 122-136.

[7] I. Jarvie, ‘The Burma Campaign on Film’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, no. 1 (1988): 55-73; P. Woods, ‘Filming the retreat from Burma, 1942: British Newsreel coverage’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 3 (2015): 438-453. S. Higashi, ‘Melodrama, Realism, and Race: WW2 Newsreels and Propaganda Films’, *Cinema Journal* 37, no. 3 (1998): 38-61.

[8] P. Woods, ‘'Business as Usual'?: British Newsreel Coverage of Indian Independence and Partition, 1947-1948’, in C. Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145-159; C. Kaul, *Indian Independence, the British Media and Lord Mountbatten* (Delhi: IIC Occasional Paper no. 26 (2011)): 12-13.

[9] B. McFarlane and A. Slide, *Encyclopedia of British Film* (Manchester: University Press, 2013, 3rd ed.), s.v. “Newsreels” (511).

[10] This has already been pointed out by Pronay in his initial analysis of the relationship between films and history, N. Pronay, ‘The Moving Picture and Historical Research: The State of the Art’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 3 (1983): 365-9 (here 369). Also see P. Taylor, ‘Introduction’, in idem (ed.), *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 5, who specified that there is no intrinsic difference between ‘factual’ and ‘fiction’ film as far as they represent mass communication.

[11] R. Low, *History of British Film*, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1971), 285; P. Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); I. Aitken, *Film and Reform. John Grierson and the documentary film movement* (London: Routledge, 2013)

[12] It should not be forgotten here that a similar structure of companies sponsoring film units to advertise their products was found in India and Ceylon, see N. Majumdar, 'Film Fragments, Documentary History, and Colonial Indian Cinema' *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 16 no. 1 (2007): 63-79 (on films produced by the Indian Railways), and the Ceylon Tea Board, which had the EMB produce *The Song of Ceylon* (1934): Available online: http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/486 (accessed 4 May 2016).

[13] See Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, 71-72.

[14] For the Boer War see Low, *History of British Cinema*, vol. 5, 47. For later wars, see e.g. R. Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (London: Dent, 1974); S. Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (London 1988). For India, see now S. Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War* (London: Routledge, 2001), and for Japan D. Desser, "From the Opium War to the Pacific War: Japanese propaganda films of WW2" *Film History* 7 (1995): 32-48.

[15] Low, *History of British Cinema*, vol. 6, 17.

[16] Low, *History of British Cinema*, vol. 5, 47, and S. Rowson, 'A statistical survey of the cinema industry in Great Britain in 1934' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99, no. 2 (1936): 76.

[17] N. Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s, 1', 412-413; Rachel Low, *History of British Film*, vol. 4, 47.

[18] Rowson, "Statistical survey", 70. Also see N. Hiley, 'Audiences in the Newsreel Period' in *'The Story of the Century': An International Newsfilm Conference* (London: BFI, 1996), 60.

[19] S. Jones, *The British Labour Movement and Film* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 7; and Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s, 1', 413-414.

[20] L. Anderson, 'The Porous Boundaries of Newsreel Memory Research' in *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences,* ed. D. Atwell, 71-86. (London: Arch. Press, 1980).

[21] T. Harrisson, 'Films and the Home Front. The evaluation of their effectiveness by mass-observation', in *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-1945*, ed. N. Pronay and D. W. Spring, 234-245. (London: Macmillan, 1982).

[22] Ibid., 237.

[23] Ibid., 241.

[24] A. Trevithick, 'Some structural and sequential aspects of the British Imperial Assemblages at Delhi, 1877-1911' *Modern Asian Studies* (1990): 561-578.

[25] Four of Paul's films survive, which are available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKF_lie2Wc8 (accessed 31 March 2016). The first part, filmed from ground level, is also available online: http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1956 (accessed 31 March 2016).

[26] See R. E. Frykenberg, 'The Coronation Durbar of 1911: Some Implications' in idem (ed.), *Delhi through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society* (Delhi: Open University Press, 1993), 369-390. The manual containing the list of official guests ran up to more than 200 pages: *Coronation Durbar, Delhi 1911. Official Directory with Maps* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1911).

[27] Bottomore, 'Have you seen the Geakwar', 312-316.

[28] McKernan, 'Modern elixir of life', 130.

[29] Ibid.; *New York Times*, 23 Feb 1912, 7, and ibid., 17 Mar 1912, 5 (Urban's visit to New York).

[30] L. McKernan, 'Putting the World before you: The Charles Urban Story' in A. Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930* (Exeter: University Press, 2002), 65-76. McKernan's research on Urban is now available as a monograph (*Charles Urban. Pioneering the non-fiction film in Britain and America, 1897-1925*, Exeter University Press, 2014).

[31] McKernan, 'Putting the world before you', 73. A breakdown of the film's contents, curated by Luke McKernan, is available online: http://www.charlesurban.com/documents_durbar.html (accessed 31 March 2016).

[32] *The Observer*, 12 May 1912, 9.

[33] McKernan, 'Putting the world before you', 73. The splendour of the *durbar* and the success of the cinema shows seems to have inspired further *durbar*-themed performances: In January 1912, Oswald Stoll, owner of the Coliseum theatre, contracted Edward Elgar to compose a musical play (or 'masque') entitled 'The Crown of India'. First rehearsals began in late February, and the show ran between 11 March and the end of April – parallel to Urban's film screenings. See N. Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj. India and the English musical imagination, 1897-1947* (Oxford: University Press, 2014), ch.2, 53-104.

[34] Bottomore, "Have you seen the Gaekwar, Bob?", 334-335. As Bottomore has pointed out, there were several similarly-clad Indian princes behaving unusually, and it is neither clear who did what nor which of their actions constituted the *lese majeste*.

[35] Low, *History of British Film*, vol. 6, 13; Pronay, 'Illusion of actuality', 112.

[36] Ibid. Elsewhere, Pronay has drawn attention to the fact that, when the war broke out in 1939, the British government were dependent on American goodwill in producing propaganda films: N. Pronay, 'The newsmedia at war' in idem and D. W. Spring (eds.), *Propaganda, politics and film,* 186.

[37] Low, *History of British Film*, vol. 6, 13 and 17.

[38] I haven't been able to establish where this office was located, with Hong Kong or Shanghai being probable places.

[39] Newsreels such as *The Duke of Connaught in India* and *The Duke of Connaught Hunting* were all part of the film *With the Duke of Connaught in India* (1921). Other episodes were screened under titles such as *An Indian Carnival* and the *Maharaja of Jhalawar*. These and all the other films referred to here (unless otherwise stated) are available online: www.britishpathe.com (accessed 31 March 2016).

[40] See *His Royal Highness The Duke of Connaught in India 1921. Being a collection of the speeches delivered by His Royal Highness* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1921).

[41] Available online: http://www.britishpathe.com/video/with-the-duke-of-connaught-in-india-reel-1 (Bombay LC), and http://www.britishpathe.com/video/with-the-duke-of-connaught-in-india-reel-2 (Chamber of Princes) (accessed 31 March 2016). Also see Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, 82.

[42] There is little information on this company even in the BFI's website. For a brief note, see H. Mario Raimondo-Souto, *Motion Picture Photography – A History, 1891-1960* (Jefferson: MacFarlane, 2007), 48.

[43] Another short newsreel from 1923, produced by Gaumont, shows the new Governor of Burma (Spencer Harcourt Butler) taking up office, available online: www.itnsource.com/en~BurmaFootage (accessed 3 February 2016).

[44] See also Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, 82.

[45] Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, 82, and C. Deprez, 'India', in *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film,* ed. I. Aitken, 400. (London: Routledge, 2013).

[46] 'Gandhi Fast brings new India Crisis' available online: http://www.britishpathe.com/video/gandhi-fast-brings-new-india-crisis-aka-ghandi-

fas/query/gandhi [sic]; (accessed 3 February 2016). The film is dated to 1930, though Gandhi's fast against the Communal Award, which would have given separate electorates to India's Untouchables, was first announced in London in early 1932 and did not start until September 1932. As the film's intermediate slide says, the statement by Frederick Sykes, Governor of Bombay, was recorded during the world cruise of the 'Empress of Britain', which took place between December 1931 and March 1932. The newsreel was therefore compiled in 1932.

[47] A film showing the unveiling of a statue of Lord Irwin in 1934 was declared to have been shot 'by our cameraman now travelling the East'.

[48] Available online: http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1774 (accessed 31 March 2016). The main purpose of that series seems to have been to film Mt. Everest from a plane. The 43-min documentary was screened as *Wings over Everest*.

[49] http://www.britishpathe.com/video/world-troubles-1914-1934/query/Prohibition.

[50] A. Lant, 'Britain and the End of the Empire', in *The Oxford History of World Cinema,* ed. G. Novell-Smith, 369. (Open University Press, 1966).

[51] Pronay, 'The Newsreels: the Illusion of Actuality', 116.

[52] J. Voigt, *India in the Second World War* (Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1988), esp. ch. 2.

[53] A. Jackson, *The Colonial Film Archive and the British Empire at War, 1939-1945* (London: Defence Studies Dept., King's College, 2010) [= Research Papers 1]

[54] See Jackson, *Colonial Film Archive*; Jarvie, 'The Burma Campaign on Film'; Woods, 'Filming the retreat from Burma, 1942'. The 'colonialfilm' website gives 350 and 798 hits respectively for the search terms "India" and "Burma". For the rise of film and newsreels ('March of Time') in U.S. cinemas, see R. Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (London: Dent, 1974).

[55] B. Best, *Reporting the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2015), has two brief sections on the events in Asia.

[56] J. Hersey, *Hiroshima* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946); H. Guard, *The Pacific War Uncensored* (Havertown: Casemate, 2011). Berrigan stayed on in Southeast Asia after the war and eventually became the editor and publisher of his own magazine, the *Bangkok World*. He was killed in 1952 under uncertain circumstances, his killer never being caught.

[57] G. Rodger, *Red Moon Rising* (London: Cresset Press, 1943), 11.

[58] The Imperial War Museum has a series of reels from Burma in its collection, all shot in February to April 1942, available online: http://film.iwmcollections.org.uk (accessed 31 March 2016). I've noted the *RAF Raid of Mataban*, dated April 1942, not only for its misspelling of 'Mataban' (for Martaban) in the title as well as the somewhat boisterous claim of a 'raid' on that city (which was in British hands until mid-February 1942), but also for showing the visit of Chiang-Kai-shek to Burma on 5 April of that year. According to Chiang's biographer, he should have been accompanied by Stilwell and the American publisher Henry Luce on that occasion, who are both absent in the film. Probably the reel shows his earlier stop-over at Lashio on 27 February, when only his wife and son were with him. See J. Taylor, *The Generalissimo* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 196 and 202.

[59] Rodger, *Red Moon Rising*, 60.

[60] Jackson, 'Colonial Film Archive', 16-17 and 19. On Mountbatten's attitude towards filming, see also Kaul, *Communications*, ch. 5, 172-218.

[61] P. Sargent, 'Indian News Parade', in *The Story of the Century*, 90; B. D. Garga, *From raj to swaraj: The Non-fiction Film in India* (Delhi: Penguin, 2007), 62. Also see S. Roy, 'Moving Pictures: The post-colonial state and visual representations of India' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1-2 (2002): 233-263, who perceives a continuation between

wartime and post-war film production and screening, which she discusses in context of post-war attempts of nation building.

[62] Kaul, *Communications,* ch. 5; Woods, 'Business as Usual', 148-149.

[63] The debate about British preparations.

[64] Woods, 'Business as Usual', 147-152. The teams originally consisted of those working for Paramount and Movietone, with a third team, led by John Turner, arriving just days before independence. The local enterprise, Indian News Parade, had its operations temporarily suspended due to the uncertainty of its role and perspective in the partition process.

[65] Films produced by Pathe only display the transfer of power and the celebrations. Much of the existing film material has been included in the BBC documentary *The Day India Burned* (2007).