

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Colonial film: moving images and the legacy of the British Empire
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Colonial Film project produced a major new website housing an online catalogue of all films showing life in British colonies held by three major film archives (the British Film Institute National Archive, the Imperial War Museum, and the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum) from 1895 to the separate moments of independence. The project conserved and made newly accessible – both practically and intellectually – a significant global cultural heritage in the service of memorialising the frequently occluded history of the British Empire. It is now a major national and international resource, and has been utilised by its partner archives and others to improve their own cataloguing and hold new exhibitions.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The AHRC-funded Colonial Film project (2007–2010) was run in collaboration between UCL, Birkbeck, and three film archives: the British Film Institute (BFI), Imperial War Museum (IWM), and the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum (BECM). Of the two Principal Investigators, Lee Grieveson was Reader at UCL throughout that period; Colin MacCabe was then professor at Birkbeck and the University of Pittsburgh. The project team included senior archivists at the BFI (Patrick Russell and Nigel Algar) and the IWM (Kay Gladstone) and four postdoctoral researchers at Birkbeck (Drs Tom Rice, Annamaria Motrescu (until 2008), Francis Gooding, and Richard Osborne).</p> <p>The project was rooted in Grieveson’s own long-standing research on the ways in which, in the early twentieth century, states and corporations began to use film for propagandistic purposes. This guided subsequent research on how the colonial British state developed film institutions and new film forms to sustain its colonial project. In particular, Grieveson’s work considered the nature, form, purpose, circulation, exhibition and reception of films produced by both the British state and other interested institutions, and sought to elucidate the role of film as a form of state and corporate discourse [a, b]. MacCabe’s engagement in post-colonial theory supplemented this historical work. In assembling a team of academics and archivists, Grieveson and MacCabe sought to marry digitisation and archiving with contextual analysis as a means of bridging the gap between the archive and the academy in a project addressing a global public. This was particularly important in the context of the material on Britain’s colonial past: it is now widely argued that the British Empire constitutes the single most significant example of repression within our national memory, and that our failure to think through the process by which Britain came to dominate one quarter of the globe for the better part of two centuries significantly contributes to current traumas around race and religion. By making the visual records of Empire available, and by carefully contextualising this material, the project sought to contribute to a global reckoning with the history and legacy of Empire.</p> <p>In order to do this, the project team sifted through thousands of records to extract a comprehensive list of every film containing footage, however brief, of a British colony before independence, and to assemble a new joint and integrated catalogue. They recovered a dazzling array of moving pictures – some 6,000 film records in all – dating from the 1890s to the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. These included films of all places, and of all genres: documentaries, educational and instructional films, industrial films, propaganda, fiction, missionary and amateur films, few of which had previously been examined in any great detail. The newly integrated catalogue, which brought the entire corpus together for the first time, was housed within a major new website designed for the project [c]. Over 150 of the most significant films were digitised (in total more than 30 hours of footage) and a number of film programmes curated on the website. The website also includes over 350 written entries produced by project members in response to individual films, as well as focused essays representing original research on major themes, events and institutions, including Grieveson’s account of the Empire Marketing Board [d]. Further project outputs included two books co-edited by Grieveson and MacCabe [e], [f]; four international conferences (in the UK, India, and the USA); and two major public-facing film seasons at the BFI and the IWM.</p>

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3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] Lee Grieveson, 'The Cinema and the (Common)Wealth of Nations,' in Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe eds., *Empire and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2011), 73–113. Submitted to REF2.

[b] Lee Grieveson, 'On Governmentality and Screens,' *Screen*, 50:1 (Spring 2009), 180–187. Submitted to REF2.

[c] The Colonial Film Project website <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/>. (hosted and maintained by the British Film Institute).

[d] Lee Grieveson, 'The Empire Marketing Board,' Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire website, <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/empire-marketing-board>.

[e] Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe eds., *Empire and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2011). Peer reviewed. 292 pages. Available on request.

[f] Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe eds., *Film and the End of Empire* (London: British Film Institute, 2011). Peer reviewed. 302 pages. Introduction by Grieveson (1–13). Available on request.

Grants:

'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire,' Arts and Humanities Research Council, Major Resource Enhancement Grant, 2007–2010. £424,117. Grant number: AH/E009670/1. Grant holders Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe. Led to [c], [d], [e], [f] above

UKIERI Trilateral Research Partnership, 2013–2014, £50,000: to develop aspects of the Colonial Film project in a research partnership between UCL, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and the University of Pittsburgh. Peer reviewed, competitive grant competition.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The Colonial Film project made visible and accessible crucial aspects of the history of British colonialism. It facilitated public engagement with the visual records of colonialism, and made them available in a process of international exchange intended to be diametrically opposed to the exploitative exchange of colonialism. In cataloguing films which were previously inaccessible it uncovered valuable forms of cultural and artistic capital in which facets of world heritage are preserved and commemorated. The conservation of this significant resource and its interpretation (re-)connected audiences within and beyond the UK with that heritage. In particular, by illuminating aspects of colonial history that are frequently occluded in contemporary discourse, the research allowed an interrogation both of Britain's colonial heritage and of a shared global history. The project brought significant benefit to its non-academic partners: it enhanced their cataloguing and recording processes; supported development of new exhibitions and learning resources; and provided them with a model for future collaborations with academia.

The project's success in **promoting global engagement with the visual records of colonialism** is indicated by the large numbers of regular visitors to the website. Between January 2012 (the earliest date from which tracking data is available) and February 2013, 128,575 people visited the site. More precisely, 168,081 visits, with a total of 478,994 page views, were made to the site from across the world, with the top 9 countries being the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, Malta, Israel, India, France and Malaysia. Website traffic averaged about 32,000 page views per month [1]. The website's significance to these visitors is apparent from emails to the project: between its launch in September 2010 and July 2013, the project received over 300 emails, predominantly from users in the UK and former British colonies, including Ghana, Malaysia, India, Singapore and Nigeria.

While most are queries or simple expressions of appreciation, others exemplify its profound capacity to re-connect people with their family and national histories. Thus an email from a man in India, for example, explained that the project had allowed his family to see, for the first time, a film in which his father appeared as a young man in 1943. He wrote: 'It was, I can tell you, a jolt to suddenly see my father at an age when there were not even photographs of him. Strange too for my mother! In fact we asked someone to be with her when she got to see it, in case it was perturbing, but she took it in her stride.' [2] In January 2009, the BFI posted *Springtime in an English Village* (1944), a film from the project corpus showing a young African girl being crowned May Queen in an English village, on their YouTube channel, where it has since been viewed more

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than 45,000 times. One of those viewers was the subject's own daughter, now living in Maryland, USA; her identification of her mother in the film on YouTube led to the restoration of contact between the latter and people from the village in which she had spent time as a young girl: the extraordinary story was shared with the public via its coverage in the *Observer* [3]. Although they are unusual, these responses exemplify the website's capacity to support remarkable transnational and post-colonial exchange.

The project's capacity to **reconnect the British public with its own cultural heritage** (through our partner institutions in the cultural and museums sectors) was evident at its launch in 2010, which prompted substantial public engagement both with the films themselves and with issues relating to the truths they reveal about the British Empire. To celebrate the launch, a major public film series took place at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London. Grieveson and the project team assisted with the organisation of a commercial film season titled 'Film and the End of Empire'. This season, which set nonfiction films from the combined catalogue alongside better-known fictional feature films about Empire such as *Zulu* and *Windom's Way*, played in November 2011 to a paying audience of 1,033 [5]. It was accompanied by a two-month long, free exhibition of film posters, programmes, and archival documents, staged in the NFT's public gallery and accessible to all who attended screenings between October 2011 and December 2011. Both 'Film and the End of Empire' and the accompanying exhibition were covered in the press, including in *Sight & Sound*, the UK's top film magazine (19k subscribers) [6]. A smaller – but still substantial – audience of some 280 people also attended a film programme developed by UCL researchers and the curatorial team (shown at the Imperial War Museum during the first two weeks of July 2010 [4]), and a Tate Modern event entitled 'Out of the Archive: Artists, Images, History', which was shown in November 2011 and included screenings and panel discussions amongst scholars and artists about the use and place of film in historical research. Grieveson also curated a public film screening at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, Lyon, in November 2011, and answered questions after the screening from the audience.

In addition to providing public access to a catalogue of previously little-seen evidence of Britain's colonial past, the project has also provided an invaluable **new resource for use by heritage, cultural, and museums-sector professionals**. Its collation of over 6,000 films has preserved, catalogued and contextualised more than one hundred years of filmmaking practice, enabling archivists and film curators at participating collections and other external organisations (such as the Palestinian Film Foundation) to access and present this important – yet long overlooked – part of British and world history. The website received widespread acclaim amongst such professionals: it was a Finalist in the Focal Learning on Screen Awards in 2011; was praised by the British Library's Lead Curator of Moving Images, Luke McKernan, as a valuable resource for silent film [8]; and ranked 1st in the Film Studies for Free annual list of Online Film and Moving Image Resources [9]. The archive has also **inspired artistic production**: it was used as a resource by the video artist Filipa César, whose collage short *Black Balance* reflects on the language of these films and was shown at the Tate Modern (November 2011) and in London, Hyderabad and Pittsburgh during Colonial Film symposia.

The participating archives, at the BFI, Imperial War Museum and, until its demise the Commonwealth Museum, also benefited from the research. The project preserved fragile celluloid film through digitisation, saving significant but under-valued and under-studied films from deterioration or indeed loss. The BFI in particular noted that its records and cataloguing had been improved, as researchers brought records to a high standard, and even corrected errors directly into the BFI's own database [10]. Archivists identified three additional ways in which the project impacted positively upon their collections and work:

A) Bringing new traffic to their websites and **new interest in their collections** from both researchers and the public. According to a senior archivist at the Imperial War Museum: 'From the moment of its launch the new site attracted a more numerous and diverse range of researchers than the IWM's own film catalogue was then capable of attracting,' and called it the most important means of popularising the museum's collections internationally since the Thames Television *World at War* documentary series in 1974. [7]

B) Providing a **model for future collaboration between the archives and academic institutions**. The IWM, for example, modelled its inclusion of a database of film materials used in a

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project exploring the inter-war experiences of empire on the Colonial Film archive [7].

C) The use of academic contextualisation provided by the research team to **bring new meaning to film texts** languishing, untouched, in archives. The IWM reported that contextual and analysis pieces produced during the project were vital resources in themselves, and models of how it could 'enhance popular understanding of other parts of its collections' in future projects [7]. Its Department of Research produced similar contextual essays, launched in February 2013, to accompany a research project on digitised films of World War I [11]. The catalogue and contextual information produced during the project likewise **enabled the BFI to make far fuller use of their holdings**. As with *Springtime in an English Village*, the BFI included several films uncovered and digitised by the research team on their YouTube channel, facilitating global public engagement with this unique material and the archive as a whole. From July 2010 to July 2013, videos in the 'India, Pakistan, Tibet' playlist were viewed over 499,000 times [12], and films uncovered through the project have been included in the BFI's Mediatheque-curated collections on India and Colonial Africa (the collection 'Cape to Cairo: Moving Images of Colonial Africa' [10]), freely available to viewers at six locations around the UK.

Films uncovered during the research have also been used by other cultural organisations, including the Egyptian film collective Mosireen, and the Palestinian Film Foundation, whose annual film festival at the Barbican in April 2012 drew on project resources (several films from the archive were shown) and expertise (a former postdoctoral researcher introduced the films) in a special programme on British Colonial Films in Palestine. The interest this raised is apparent in the sudden spike in hits to the Colonial Film website around the time of the annual festival. [1]. Furthermore, the project's work led to new international partnerships, including on a collaborative project with the Universities of Hyderabad and Pittsburgh exploring cinema and economy, led by Grieveson and funded by the British Council [see section 3, above].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Unless otherwise indicated, all items are available on request.

[1] Website traffic: Google Analytics (Jan 2012–Feb 2013) provided by the British Film Institute.

[2] Email to the Colonial Film website, April 2012. The film in question was *District Officer* <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1331>.

[3] Vanessa Thorpe, 'Propaganda Coup of England's First Black May Queen,' *Observer*, 21 June 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/21/black-may-queen-youtube>.

[4] Imperial War Museum Cinema Programme July 2010, with annotations provided by IWM giving attendance figures [11].

[5] Internal BFI National Film Theatre data supplied to Lee Grieveson, 11/02/2013.

[6] *Sight and Sound*, December 2011, articles by Dylan Cave and Tom Rice, p. 12–13.

[7] Statement provided by Senior Curator, IWM Film Archive 27/03/2013 (collaborator in project) describing influence of project on subsequent IWM projects; IWM Whose Remembrance spreadsheet available on request.

[8] Luke McKernan 'The Colonial Gaze', 11 Nov 2010. <http://thebioscope.net/2010/11/11/the-colonial-gaze/>, accessed 28/2/2013.

[9] Film Studies for Free annual list of Online Film and Moving Image Resources (<http://bit.ly/1aXssl6>, accessed 28/2/2013).

[10] Statement, BFI Curator (collaborator) describing improvements in its cataloguing.

[11] Statement, IWM Curator, Film and Video Archive on influence of the project on the European Gateway project. See also <http://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/content/efg1914-film-digitisation-project-first-world-war-launches>.

[12] India, Pakistan and Tibet playlist (view counts for films given individually) <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7D797E776FFB98ED>.