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Amateur films and the silent migration of female colonial identities

Abstract:

Recent interest in amateur cinema studies reinforces the importance of exploring the documentary merit of colonial amateur films. Their study contributes to the re-examination of imperial gender politics and also of colonial women's histories that are not necessarily evident in governmental and commercial productions such as documentaries, newsreels and feature films. This paper explores the aesthetic and ideological framework by which female colonial identities have been constructed, represented and misconstrued in amateur films made in India, Indonesia and Palestine between 1920s and 1940s.

This paper proposes a comparative analysis of several amateur films illustrating the migration of imperial female identities across diverse colonial contexts. It discusses gender and racial hierarchies as shaped by specific imperial rules and explores how the domestic, sexual and political identity of several women was confirmed or challenged by travelling, relocation and settlement. Visual narrative patterns are also examined to identify how, why and on what occasions amateur filmmakers (both male and female) recorded women as vectors of colonising credos or as commodified subalterns of imperial paternalism. Social conventions such as domestic commitments, education, labour networks, motherhood, holidaying and political engagements form the framework on which the migration of female imperial identities is located and interpreted.