Moving pictures across colonial boundaries: the multiple nationalities of the American Biograph in Southeast Asia

Dafna Ruppin and Nadi Tofighian

Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands; Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This article assesses the transnational exhibition, distribution, and marketing of films in Southeast Asia, primarily the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya, around the turn of the last century, by using the American Biograph as a case study. We have found various ‘American Biographs’ in the region – some directly linked to the American parent company, which was one of the world’s leading companies in early film distribution and projection, and others apparently using the Biograph as a branding tool. This article is divided into three sections, each devoted to an itinerant American Biograph company we have chosen to highlight: their Indian subsidiary, and their subsidiary from the Netherlands, the Java Biorama. By considering their film programming choices and ticket price categories, we map and discuss how early film pioneers, with their cinematographic devices and films, moved between colonial borders, as well as how they were received by their audiences and the local press in Southeast Asia. Their exhibitions created spaces where people from different ethnic backgrounds within the colonial societies could come together as film spectators, yet were segregated within that cinematic space through price levels and racial politics. Finally, the article reflects on the impact of the American Biograph companies on the film exhibition circuit in Southeast Asia, signalling that moving pictures were to become a permanent fixture on the popular entertainment scene.

The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company reached Southeast Asia in April 1899 when its Dutch sister company sent out Mutoscope devices and a Biograph projector for shows in Batavia, capital of the Netherlands Indies (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia). It then continued with a successful run in Java, Sumatra, and the Straits Settlements (present-day Singapore, Penang, and Malacca) over the next couple of years, in competition with other moving picture companies in the region, such as the Royal Bioscope, Parisian Cinematograph, and Japanese Cinematograph. This was not the only Biograph device in Southeast Asia at the time. Another American Biograph billed as the Java Biorama was active in Java, Sumatra, and the Straits from 1900 to 1902. In addition, the Indian branch of the
American Biograph performed in Singapore in 1901 and in Penang in 1903. Furthermore, other 'biographs' soon started appearing on the scene, such as the Netherlands Indies Biograph Company which was active, under various guises, from 1904 to 1913 (Ruppin 2016). This article uses the American Biograph as a case study for assessing the transnational exhibition, distribution, and marketing of films in Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Turn-of-the-century Southeast Asia was a popular site for travelling entertainers of different nationalities who moved through the region thanks to advancements in steam shipping, railways, and communication technologies. As the region is strategically located as a connecting point for India, China, and the Pacific Circuit, it became a stage where different colonial powers fought for commercial and political supremacy – and Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and the United States all had colonies in Southeast Asia. Since the idea of a modern nation-state was not prevalent in Southeast Asia at the time, we find that a transnational approach is particularly productive for studying itinerant showmen and women in the region, who were moving through geographical borders drawn (and, at times, redrawn) by the ruling colonial states. Furthermore, the transnational encounters that we discuss here take place in colonial settings with people from different ethnic backgrounds with varying degrees of national affiliation with several mother countries. Therefore, the experience of going to see the American Biograph in these colonial outposts cannot be reduced to essentialist national labels, but rather needs to be put into its proper sociohistorical and cultural context.

After the arrival of the first wave of film companies in Southeast Asia in 1896 and 1897, such as Talbot’s Scenimatograph, there were several different cinematographic companies and devices present in the region around the turn of the last century.\(^1\) We have chosen to concentrate on the American Biograph for three main reasons. Firstly, due to its central role in early film distribution and projection. The American Mutoscope Company with its Biograph projector became the leading motion picture company in the United States in 1897, when it also premiered in Europe and Australia. Two years later the company had eight sister companies in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Italy, and India (Musser 1990). Secondly, our research has found a proliferation of various ‘American Biographs’ in Southeast Asia, some of them directly linked to the American parent company and others building on the Biograph reputation as a branding tool. Thirdly, the variety of people with an ‘American Biograph’, none of whom were in fact from the United States, and their movement between different places, catering to audiences of very different and mixed ethnic backgrounds and cultural preferences, makes this an interesting case study of a transnational early film phenomenon.

This article is divided into three main sections, each one focusing on a specific American Biograph touring Southeast Asia around the turn of the last century (1899–1902). The first section is about the subsidiary from the Netherlands, the second section covers the Java Biorama, and the third section deals with the Indian subsidiary of American Biograph. By discussing the respective film programming and pricing choices, as well as the audiences and reception of each company in locations across the region, this article shows what was required of such travelling exhibitors when moving across colonial boundaries. It further reflects on the impact of the American Biograph in Southeast Asia and, finally, on the status of the terms ‘American’ and ‘Biograph’ in the local movie-going scene.
‘A Show Filled with Patriotism’: the Dutch subsidiary of the American Biograph

In December 1898, the Nederlandsche Biograaf- en Mutoscope Maatschappij was established in Amsterdam as a subsidiary of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. Apart from its dealings in Mutoscope devices and Biograph projectors in the Netherlands, from its very establishment one of the company’s stated goals was to trade in the Dutch colonies and overseas possessions, under the name ‘The International Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate’ (Koloniaal Verslag van 1900. Nederlandsch (Oost-) Indië, Bijlage D., [3.6.], 15). For the purpose of trading in the Netherlands Indies, the company partnered up with a local firm, the Anglo-Java Trading Company (Engelsch-Javasche Handelsmaatschappij), which was involved in import of bicycles, tracks and parts for electric and steam trams, highly durable flooring material for factories, machines for the sugar, coffee, tea and rice industries, as well as dynamite and petroleum residue fuel (De Locomotief, 2 January 1896 and 3 February, 24 March, and 23 June 1899). As a company with experience in trading with explosives, it was in an advantageous position for shipping celluloid films.

On 10 March 1899, De Locomotief reported that the Nederlandsche Biograaf en Mutoscope-Maatschappij had sent a technician to the Indies, along with the latest Biograph model, in order to hold performances in a specially rented and furnished building. The films on the programme included scenes of recent political significance and were promised to be of high artistic quality. The company reportedly also sent no less than 25 Mutoscopes, exhibiting throughout the day the same scenes screened publicly, life-size, by the Biograph in the evenings. Each mail boat arriving from Europe was expected to bring new scenes capturing the latest events, enabling the film programmes to be changed weekly (‘De Mutoscopen’, Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 18 April 1899).

The Biograph screenings, under the management of Mr. Van ten Broeke, were initially given in a structure rented by the Anglo-Java Trading Company, which previously served as the Fuchs stables (Manège Fuchs) at Tanah Abang, a fashionable European quarter in Batavia’s upper town (bovenstad, also known as Weltevreden), and home to plenty of other moving picture companies over the following years. The space was specially decorated for the performances which were to begin in April (see Figure 1), as soon as the next French mail boat arrived with the said devices, film reels, and a technician (‘De Mutoscopen’, Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 18 April 1899). The Mutoscopes were stationed in the most crowded places, such as European clubhouses (Sociëteit or, colloquially, Soos) and the Batavia zoo.2 By late July, the American Biograph moved its projected exhibition to a tent at Tanah Lapang Glodok (Glodok field), in the Chinese commercial district of Batavia, while Mutoscopes were placed at Tanah Abang and Meester Cornelis – the European neighbourhoods (Advertisements, Bintang Barat, 19 July, 3 August, and 8 August 1899). The tent, which later that year travelled to places such as Yogyakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Singapore, was promoted as the largest ever constructed in Java, at 12.5 metres in height, allowing exhibitors to show pictures on a screen 20 square metres bigger than in the Manège Fuchs at Tanah Abang (Advertisements, Bintang Barat and Java-Bode, 19 July 1899). The electric lighting was deemed good and the seats, particularly the box seats, comfortable, but it was felt the tent could do with better ventilation (‘Uit Soerabaja’, De Locomotief, 11 September 1899).

Wherever it was stationed, the American Biograph’s tent drew in a multiethnic composition of audiences and, similarly to other forms of popular entertainment such as circus acts or komedi stambul shows (popular Malay opera), its pricing and seating categories
were classified according to colonial racial categories. The Dutch colonial census system
differentiated between ‘Natives’ (*Inlanders*, 98.8% of the population of Java in 1905), ‘Foreign
Orientals’ (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*, 1%), and ‘Europeans’ (*Europeanen*, 0.2%) (Furnivall 1967
[2010], 347). Nevertheless, while the classification system was rigid, there was still some
fluidity within and between the categories, which encompassed a wide variety of ethnici-
ties. For instance, the category of ‘Native’ covered the entire spectrum of indigenous-born
Indonesians, which included Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, Buginese, and Dayaks. The
category of ‘Foreign Orientals’ represented mostly the Chinese, a term that was used to
refer to Indies-born Chinese or to new immigrants from China, but was further applied
to Arabs, Indians, and other Southeast Asians. Finally, an undetermined number of those
registered by the census as ‘European’ were in fact of mixed parentage, in most cases born
to an Indonesian mother and a European father. According to estimates around 1900, 80% of the Dutch population of the colony had been born in the tropics, and an unspecified but large majority of them had mixed parentage (Mrázek 2009, 9). The marker ‘Dutch’ was hardly used: since there was a wide variety of Europeans of other nationalities living and working in the colonies, the term ‘European’ was preferred in official parlance (van Dijk 2007, 17). As a comparison, the census of Singapore divided people into six categories, called either ‘Nationalities’ or ‘Races’: Chinese (71.8% of the population in 1901), Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago (15.8%), Tamils and other Natives of India (7.8%), Eurasians (1.8%), Europeans and Americans (1.7%), and Other Nationalities (1.2%), with each group being further divided into subgroups (Innes 1901, 21, 29–34).

Interestingly, while other entertainment troupes and moving picture companies often offered cheaper tickets and seating only to ‘Native’ spectators, the American Biograph went one step further by differentiating between third-class tickets at 50 cents for ‘Foreign Orientals’ and fourth-class tickets at 25 cents for ‘Natives’ (Advertisement, Java-Bode, 22 April 1899). Significantly, tickets for box seats at 1.50 guilders, first class at 1 guilder and second class at 75 cents, presumably for ‘European’ spectators, remained unmarked in the advertisements. In Singapore, the company had a five-tier price system in their tent on Beach Road in late 1899, charging $1.50, $1, $0.75, $0.50, and $0.20, where the latter seats were only for ‘Natives’ (Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 November 1899). The exchange rate between the Mexican dollar, or later the Straits dollar, used in British Malaya and Sumatra, and the guilder used on Java fluctuated during this period, but was around $0.7 per guilder (Scidmore 1898, 7; Tofighian 2013, 60; Wright and Cartwright 1908, 939). Our research has found no conclusive evidence that spectators were fully bound by these categories. Rather, we have encountered numerous cases in which transgressions of such boundaries occurred – mostly when class could be factored in, for example, in the case of ‘Native’ elites. Advertisements for moving picture shows also addressed European spectators directly to specify that Europeans would not be admitted to the section reserved for ‘Natives’. It thus appears that at least some Europeans had no qualms about sitting next to ‘Natives’, as long as they could save a few cents.

Appealing to such diverse groups and presenting attractive programmes to all members of colonial society was no mean feat. One of the most successful items on the programme in the Netherlands Indies were scenes from the inauguration of Queen Wilhelmina in August 1898, which were screened in Batavia for the first time by the American Biograph in April 1899 (Arrival of the Queen at the Palace, Amsterdam, The Coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland at Amsterdam, The Royal Procession to the Church before the Coronation Ceremony, The Royal Procession from the Church after the Coronation Ceremony, and Plechtige Intocht van H.M. Koningin Wilhelmina in Amsterdam [Official Entry of Queen Wilhelmina into Amsterdam], British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1898). These scenes, showing Queen Wilhelmina and her entourage enter and exit the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) in Amsterdam to the enthusiastic waving and cheering of the crowds on the street, were purportedly the high point of every American Biograph screening across the Indonesian archipelago over the following months. Spectators were invited to ‘go on leave to Holland for a few minutes’ with a programme that included beach scenes from Scheveningen, De Boulevard van Scheveningen (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898) (Advertisement, Java-Bode, 27 April 1899). Advertisements in Dutch and Malay newspapers read: ‘A show filled with emotions. A show filled with pleasure. […] A show filled with patriotism’ (Java-Bode, 29 April 1899;
These American Biograph screenings, often accompanied by the Dutch national anthem, were thus presented in a way that tried to foster a sense of a shared national identity around the figure of the Queen among the entire spectrum of spectators (‘Uit Soerabaja, De Locomotief, 11 September 1899).

Screenings were attended by dignitaries, such as the Residents of Surabaya and Madura and the Sultan of Deli, and free shows were offered to orphans of all (Christian) denominations, as well as to soldiers of the lower ranks of the Dutch Royal Army stationed in Batavia (‘Nederlandsch-Indië, Java-Bode, 3 May 1899 and 8 May 1899; ‘Nederlandsch-Indië, Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad, 13 September 1899; Advertisement, Sumatra Post, 10 March 1900). ‘One can imagine how the soldiers, white and brown, were elated’, Albrecht’s Zondagsblad reported from a screening for a mixed audience of ‘Native’ and ‘European’ soldiers. The report continued: ‘The Javanese knew Her Majesty only from her still portrait and now, thanks to this wonderful invention, she appeared in front of them as if in flesh and blood’ (‘De Biograaf en het garnizoen van Batavia’, 14 May 1899). However, not all spectators were awed into submission by the images of the Queen. During a show in Surabaya that hosted students from the Dutch-run secondary school (Hoogere Burgerschool), the owner had to request spectators in the front – often the location of the cheaper seats for ‘Natives’ – to remain seated while the show was in progress, as they were blocking the view of spectators in the back. Several youngsters apparently accompanied the images with whistling and screaming. ‘Only rascals make such noise’, complained Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad (‘Biograaf’, 18 September 1899).

On 17 October 1899 Mr. Ten Broeke, director of the American Biograph, left for Singapore on board the steamship Japara, to be followed by the Biograph a week later (‘Nederlandsch-Indië, Soerabaja-Courant, 13 October 1899; ‘Vertrokken passagiers’, De Locomotief, 19 October 1899). It had a successful run of nearly two months in a tent located in front of the Beach Hotel in Singapore. The films that the American Biograph exhibited in Singapore included Dreyfus in the Rennes Military Prison and four other films about the Dreyfus affair likely filmed by the French subsidiary, Société Française de Mutoscope et Biographe (McKernan 2010), Launch of H.M. Battleship ‘Formidable’ at Portsmouth (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898), De Cuirassiers (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1897), Conway Castle: Panoramic View of Conway on the L.& N.W. Railway (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898), Niagara Falls Station (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1899), Duel to the Death (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898), Inch Disappearing Carriage Gun Loading and Firing, Sandy Hook (American Mutoscope Co., 1898), Playing Doctor (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898), The Black Cat and the Dinner for Two (British Mutoscope and Biograph Syndicate, 1898), A Railway Scene (could be any one of various railway phantom ride scenes filmed by different Biograph subsidiaries), Saved from the Sea, He and She in a Heavy Sea, and A Boxing Scene (Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 November 1899; ‘The American Biograph’, Straits Times, 15 November 1899).³ Many of these titles were also included on the American Biograph’s programmes in Java.

Before leaving Singapore and heading to Sumatra, the American Biograph offered up for sale in auction its portable engine and a dynamo: ‘1. A to H. P. Portable Engine, nearly new, by Marshall and Co. In perfect working order. 2. A Schukert Dynamo, 72 amperes, 110 volts, (direct) mounted on a 2 wheel tumbril. In good working order, with windlass for cable.’ (Advertisements, Straits Times and Singapore Free Press, 22 January 1899).
Sumatra Post later explained that these machines were left behind in Singapore since the local 'Centrale' electricity company could provide the operator with the necessary electric power for the shows (‘Plaatselijk Nieuws’, 21 February 1900). The only issue remaining was that the company provided alternating current, so the operator had to use a converter in order to get direct current to operate the device.

The branding of the Biograph was highly important, as the American Biograph took great pains to differentiate itself from the Kinematograph and other devices in its advertisements in each location where it was showing films (see, for instance, ‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 18 April 1899, ‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad, 18 August 1899, ‘The American Biograph, Singapore Free Press, 11 November 1899, ‘Plaatselijk Nieuws’, Sumatra Post, 20 February 1900). The company’s international flair was highlighted in its first advertisements in Batavia (Java-Bode, 22 April 1899), pointing out that the American Biograph, showing ‘Scenes from France. Scenes from England. Scenes from Holland. Scenes from America […]’, has been giving shows for ‘2 years at London’s Palace Theatre. 1¼ years at Paris’s Casino Theatre. 14 months at Berlin’s Wintergarten. 2½ years at New York’s Keith Theatre. 7 months at Amsterdam’s Circus Carré. The first show in the East Indies [on] Monday April 24’. Batavia, it implied, was now on the map too. Interestingly, Dutch newspapers in the Indies often advertised the show as American Biograph, while Malay newspapers tended to mention the Nederlandsche Biograaf en Mutoscope- Maatschappij. A report in Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad on 18 May 1899 suggests that foreign names were more attractive than the local variety, so the naming might have been a strategy for audience appeal, depending on each segment of the population and newspaper readership (similarly, the Royal Bioscope later was often advertised and/or referred to as Royal Bioscope in the Dutch press and as Koninklijke Bioscoop in the Malay newspapers).

In Singapore, the company immediately tried to distinguish itself from its competitors. A lengthy advertisement in Straits Times on 11 November 1899, which claimed to present ‘the latest and best invention for the representation of animated photographs’, read: ‘The public of Singapore are kindly requested to note that in no respect is the American Biograph to be connected with the Cinematograph, Kinematograph, Vicograph, or other machines which have shown animated pictures’. The spectators probably paid little attention to the technical differences between the various devices, caring more about the final result. As the Java-Bode wrote on 25 April 1899: ‘In what way does a biograph differ exactly from a kinematograph is a question that only the expert may answer; all we can say is that the canvas on which the images are projected is of much larger dimensions and the performances are therefore clearer and more interesting’. The Singapore Free Press noted on 14 November 1899 that ‘the flickering that has been so noticeable hitherto is entirely absent, thus enabling the pictures to be seen to greater advantage’. In Medan, where the American Biograph played from mid-February to mid-March 1900, Ten Broeke paid a personal visit to the offices of Sumatra Post to relay that the American Biograph ‘“is completely different from the kinematograph which was shown here recently”, […] But what it was exactly, he would not say’ (‘American Biograph’, 20 February 1900).

Ten Broeke and his wife travelled from Medan to Batavia on board the steamship Reyniersz on 20 March 1900 (‘Vertrokken passagiers, Sumatra Post, 21 March 1900), and the opening show of the second run in Batavia began on 4 April at the Manège in Tanah Abang (Advertisement, Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 2 April 1900). Advertisements stressed
that the hall was illuminated with electric lighting and cooled by electric fans, and the
highlights of the programme were scenes from the streets of Amsterdam, as well as pictures
depicting the Anglo-Boer War (Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 2 April and 4 May 1900). At this
point, the manager decided to sell whatever Mutoscopes were still in his possession, asking
to be contacted directly at the Manège for further details and prices. The advertisement was
signed by a new entity, ‘De Nederlandsche Indische Mutoscopen en Biograph Maatschappij’
(Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 14 April 1900). Some Mutoscopes were later still being operated
by Ten Broeke in Surabaya, where he obtained a licence to place Mutsocopes at Grimm &
Co. restaurant, located on one of the city’s main interchanges (‘Onze Nieuwtjes’, Soerabaja-
Courant, 22 May 1900). These Mutoscopes were finally offered up for sale in Surabaya in
June 1900 (‘Uit Soerabaja’, De Locomotief, 5 June 1900).

The case of Ten Broeke and the Nederlandsche Biograaf-en Mutoscope Maatschappij is
an illustration of how colonial connections helped spread cinematic exhibitions. Beyond
transnational colonial connections, this case also highlights how easily and frequently the
company crossed national borders as it went back and forth between Java, Sumatra, and
Singapore. It appears that the Dutch overseas colonies were a natural business move for
this Dutch company, if it sought to expand beyond the limited market in the Netherlands.
Nevertheless, as many other Dutch entertainers discovered, rumours about handsome prof-
its to be made on travelling to the Netherlands Indies were often exaggerated and touring and
living conditions in the tropics were tough. By July 1900, the manager of the Nederlandsche
Biograaf-en Mutoscope Maatschappij back in Amsterdam was discharged by the company’s
board, in part, at least, due to poor management and reporting on business in the Indies
(‘Biograaf en Mutoscope’, De Tijd, 27 July 1900); the company was finally declared bankrupt
on 27 June 1902 (Advertisement, Algemeen Handelsblad, 28 June 1902).

‘Better than the American Biograph’: the American Biograph as Java Biorama

Another device, advertised as the American Biograph or Java Biorama, gave shows in the
region from October 1900 to August 1902 (‘Ditjes en Datjes uit Malang’, Sumatra Post
and ‘Uit Malang’, De Locomotief, 19 October 1900). Many films on the Java Biorama’s pro-
grammes appeared to repeat the American Biograph’s earlier selection, such as the inaugu-
ration of Queen Wilhelmina or scenes from the Anglo-Boer War. A newspaper report in
Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad (‘Java Biorama’, 18 September 1901) indeed noted that the pictures
had clearly been in use for a considerable time and some left much to be desired in terms
of clarity. The operator of the Java Biorama was Mr Herman Salzwedel, a German pho-
tographer living in Surabaya for many years, who began dabbling with moving pictures in
the form of dissolving views and kinematograph shows in 1897 (‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, De
Locomotief, 9 December 1897; ‘Uit Solo’, De Locomotief, 3 August 1898). It is possible that
Salzwedel took on the Biograph outfit from Ten Broeke or that they partnered up, since
Salzwedel’s name was signed at the bottom of advertisements in Soerabaja-Courant and
Ten Broeke was mentioned as a returning performer in Surabaya when the Java Biorama
performed there in March 1901 (‘Onze Nieuwtjes’, 16 March 1901). Moreover, in December
1900 the public in Surabaya was told to expect a visit by the American Biograph, a company
described as having toured some of the main locations in the Netherlands Indies over the
The Java Biorama had a successful run for almost two years, visiting locations such as Malang, Semarang, Pekalongan, Tegal, Cirebon, Surabaya, Bandung, and Batavia on Java, Medan and Binjai on Sumatra, and Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in British Malaya (Sumatra Post, 17 October 1900; De Locomotief, 17 December 1900 and 19 January 1901; Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad, 8 February 1901; Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië, 29 June 1901; Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 16 September 1901; Malay Mail, 15 February 1902 and 12 March 1902; Sumatra Post, 18 June 1902 and 22 August 1902; see Figures 2, 3, and 4). In advertisements the public was 'kindly requested not to confuse the Biograph with the Cinematograph, as the Biograph is an entirely new invention which has never been shown here before' (De Locomotief, 24 December 1900). It was billed in some places as 'an improved cinematograph, keeping flickering down to a minimum' or simply as the 'King of Cinematographs' (‘Nederlandsch-Indië, De Locomotief, 24 December 1900;
Figure 3. Advertisement in Dutch for Java Biorama/American Biograph in Medan, *Sumatra Post*, 12 July 1902. Source: Delpher, [http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010321642:mpeg21:a0006](http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010321642:mpeg21:a0006).

Figure 4. Advertisement in Malay for Java Biorama/American Biograph in Binjai, *Sumatra Post*, 29 August 1902. Source: Delpher, [http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010321682:mpeg21:a0067](http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010321682:mpeg21:a0067).
Advertisement, *Soerabaiaisch-Handelsblad*, 13 March 1901). In Medan, the Java Biorama was found to be even ‘better than the American Biograph’, which is peculiar considering that the Java Biorama repeatedly advertised that its shows were given by an American Biograph unit (‘Java Biorama’, *Sumatra Post*, 12 July 1902). Nevertheless, many of the new scenes offered by Salzwedel appear to have been 35-mm films, which were not possible to screen with a Biograph projector. So he might have travelled with more than one device on hand but chose to highlight the Biograph due to the positive reputation it had, or he was simply using the ‘Biograph’ as a marketing strategy without actually utilising a Biograph device.

The images that attracted most Dutch spectators’ attention were of ‘the Boers marching to the border, upon which the Transvaal anthem was heard’. ‘The applause did not stop’, the *Soerabaija-Courant* reported (‘Onze Nieuwtjes’, 20 April 1901). However, as the *Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad* later noted, this was actually a mistitling as the scenes were in fact of English volunteers, identified by the slouch hats they were sporting (‘Java Biorama’, 18 September 1901). Advertised as *Battle of the Boers at Spion Kop* (‘Gevecht der Boeren bij Spionkop’), it was probably used to achieve the exact opposite effect at locations with pro-Anglo sentiments. As *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* wrote on 18 September 1901:

‘The Departure [vertrek] of Boers to the Border’ drew a spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm from the Dutch section of the audience. Unfortunately, it was skullduggery [Boerenbedriegerij] and a tableau of double usage. Because as soon as the Biorama is displayed in an English site, the Bioramist will immediately change the Boers into Englishmen and call the tableau: ‘Cape Volunteers, advancing to the border’. The destination remains but the names of the trekkers change.

Other Boer War scenes found during the Java Biorama’s tour of Java were: *Ambulance in South Africa* (Warwick Trading Co., 1900 or R.W. Paul, 1899) and *President Kruger* (Warwick Trading Company, 1898) or *Ex-President Kruger Leaving Hotel De Ville* (Société Française de Mutoscope et Biographe, 1900) (‘Onbekend maakt onbemind’, 24 December 1900; ‘Nederlandsch Indië’, *De Locomotief*, 2 January 1901). These pictures similarly attracted the attention of the Malay press, which highlighted the comic aspect of the scenes showing ‘big and fat’ President Kruger carried by a large horse-drawn carriage (‘Hindia Ollanda, *Primbon Soerabaia*, 15 February 1901). The Chinese population in Semarang were singled out as ‘enthusiastic visitors’ who attended both shows given every evening; the first show from 7 pm to 8 pm at f1 for first class, f0.75 for second class, f0.25 for third class, and f0.15 for fourth class; and the second show from 9 pm to 10.30 pm at f1.50, f1, f0.50, and f0.25 (fourth class for Javanese only) (Advertisement, *De Locomotief*, 24 December 1900; ‘Promotie’, *Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad*, 12 January 1901). The admission prices in Surabaya in 1901, where only one show was given each evening, were the same as for the late night screening above, which in turn were similar to the ones charged by the American Biograph in 1899 (Advertisements, *Bintang Soerabaia*, 11 February and 18 April 1901).

The Java Biorama stayed in the Netherlands Indies until early 1902, when it went to British Malaya. Salzwedel, with his wife and kids, travelled from Batavia to Singapore on board the steamship *Mossel* on 17 January (‘Vertokken Passagiers’, *De Locomotief*, 20 January 1902). In February 1902, Salzwedel advertised the American Biograph in Kuala Lumpur, where they performed for a month on High Street. Admission prices in Kuala Lumpur, which was not as frequented by travelling entertainment companies, were quite high: $3 for front seats, $2 for second seats, $1 for third seats, and $0.50 for fourth seats, without making any distinctions who the respective seats were for (Malay Mail, 15 February 1902).
Within three days, however, the novelty had worn off and the prices were quickly lowered ($2, $1.50, $0.80, and $0.30) (Malay Mail, 18 February 1902). For the concluding performances, the prices were lowered even further ($1.50, $1, $0.50, and $0.30) (Malay Mail, 12 March 1902). When Salzwedel and the American Biograph returned to Singapore in 1902, the exhibitions in their tent at the foot of Fort Canning initially had a price structure of $3, $2, $1.50, $1, and $0.50, where the latter seats were reserved for ‘natives’ (Singapore Free Press, 21 April 1902; Straits Times, 23 April 1902). Yet again a novelty premium was paid to see the show during the first few days, and thereafter admission prices were cut in half: $1.50, $1, $0.80, and $0.30 (Straits Times, 25 April 1902). Despite the universal appeal of the films, the cinematic space was quite segregated and Europeans reportedly occupied all first-class seats (Straits Times, 7 May 1902). The last days of the performances, prices were lowered again: $1, $0.50, $0.25, and $0.10 (for ‘natives only’) (Straits Times, 12 May 1902). The latter price of 10 cents illustrates the affordability of film exhibitions, and the efforts of film exhibitors to attract people from all levels of society (for more on admission prices, costs of living, and cinema’s relative affordability in Southeast Asia, see Tofighian 2013, 178–188).

The programme included 25 films, and almost all titles were mentioned in a review in Straits Times, probably to bolster attendance. The films in the programme were Piccaninnies at Lion Cubs (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), Photographing of a Ghost (George Albert Smith, 1898), The Immature Punter (Cecil M. Hepworth, 1898), Créations Spontanées (Georges Méliès, 1898), Les Rayons Röntgen (Georges Méliès, 1900), Luttes Extravagantes (Georges Méliès, 1900), La Lune à un Metre (Georges Méliès, 1898), Man Overboard (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), The Railway Cycle Race (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), A Children’s Party, Reminiscences of Two Old Sports, and Jerusalem. There were also military scenes in the form of Major Wilson’s Last Stand (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), Infantry Parade, Highlander’s Drill, and African Troops. The highlight of the programme was, reportedly, two other films by Georges Méliès, Le Miroir de Cagliostro (1899) and Neptune et Amphitrite (1899), which ‘would more than compensate any inconvenience endured by passing the tent a visit’ (‘The American Biograph’, 6 May 1902).

The American Biograph as Java Biorama returned to Sumatra for almost two months in July and August 1902, after performing in British Malaya for a couple of months. Its shows in Medan, ‘with the improved American Biograph’, reportedly included ‘historical scenes from wars’, stories from ‘1001 Nights, nice fantasy pieces, ballets, African dances, and what not’ (Advertisement, Sumatra Post, 12 July 1902; ‘Java Biorama’, Sumatra Post, 14 July 1902). At first, the tent was not entirely full; but as the shows continued and newspaper reviews persistently praised Salzwedel’s programme and the quality of his tent, the shows filled up, particularly – and importantly – the first-class section, which was mostly filled with Europeans (‘Het Java Biorama’, Sumatra Post, 17 July 1902). The Sumatra Post claimed that since the shows were well attended Salzwedel decided to extend his stay in Medan by another week (‘Java-Biorama’, 4 August 1902). Admission prices were $2, $1, $0.50, and $0.25, with the cheapest tickets reserved for ‘Natives’, in line with prices other cinematographic exhibitors charged on Sumatra (Advertisement, Deli Courant, 21 July 1902). The last Java Biorama/American Biograph shows we have found in the Netherlands Indies was given in Binjai in August 1902, after which Mr. Salzwedel, with his wife and two children, left on board the steamship Sumatra for Penang on 4 September 1902 (‘Het Java-Biorama’, Sumatra Post, 5 September 1902).
This section has further illustrated the transnational nature of early cinema. The German photographer Herman Salzwedel used a device presumably from the United States, calling his show either Java Biorama or American Biograph, and travelling for more than two years in Dutch and British colonies exhibiting films for mixed audiences consisting of Chinese, Malay, Javanese, Indian, Buginese, Japanese, and Europeans. This case also underlines the ease of transnational movements within the Malay Archipelago where the national borders of the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya were colonial constructs, as the Java Biorama moved freely and repeatedly between cities and countries.

‘The greatest and most mournful procession of the century’: the Indian subsidiary of the American Biograph

Another American Biograph arrived in Singapore in July 1901. It was the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India, a subsidiary of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, which was incorporated in May 1899 and had its head office first in Bombay and then in Calcutta, and with William Sundheimer as its managing director (Brown and Anthony 1999, 138–139; ‘The Biograph: An Infringement of Rights’, Singapore Free Press, 11 July 1901). The company arrived to Singapore after exhibiting in Calcutta and Rangoon (‘The Royal Funeral by Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 4 July 1901). As it was another branch of the American Biograph, the company proclaimed that they were in Singapore ‘for the first time’, and its advertisements stressed its exceptionality (Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 July 1901; see Figure 5): ‘The Biograph is the Biograph. It is not the Cinematograph, the Vitroscope, the Bioscope, the Biogen, the Warograph, or any other “Scope” or “Graph”.’ These advertisements seem to have brought more confusion than clarity, especially as another company in Singapore at the time called itself the New Biograph Company. A letter, ‘The Biograph: An Infringement of Rights’, by William Sundheimer published in Singapore Free Press on 11 July 1901 tried to clarify the distinctions, as well as market the company:

The Biograph Company which will open in the Town Hall on Saturday evening is a Company registered in London and has acquired all the rights of use of the new patented method of showing animated pictures. It is called the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India, Limited, and has patents in most parts of the world. In yesterday’s paper was an advertisement of another performance to be given shortly, by the persons, under the name of the New Biograph Company, which is an infringement of the right of the registered Company no doubt made through inadvertence. The types of machines for showing pictures in rapid succession in order to produce the effect, through persistence of vision, of an actually moving object, and thus of reproducing the scene itself to the spectators have been called by many names, of which the Biograph is one, but the original Company having acquired the sole right to the use of that word, are naturally indignant at the use of it by others. They are the only proprietors of the instrument they use, which is very different from its predecessors; and although natives may be very well satisfied with the former class of machine, which was to be seen in the Parsee Theatre not long ago; yet it is well that the public should recognise the fact that it is a very poor substitute for the great improvements that have been made by the Biograph company, which is not only very far in advance of all previous systems but is carried out in a very complete way in various parts of the world (one subsidiary company is now in Italy) at considerable expense.

The American Biograph occasionally had separate screenings for Europeans and ‘natives’ at the Town Hall in Singapore in July 1901. One advertisement read: ‘Positively the Last Night for Europeans. [...] Next week, the Biograph will be shown at the Town Hall exclusively for Natives’ (Figure 6; Straits Times, 19 July 1901; also see ‘The Biograph’, Singapore Free Press,
20 July 1901). This practice was, however, highly unusual, and is the only occasion where we have found racially exclusive screenings, outside the social clubs, throughout Southeast Asia during the period. The admission prices were initially $3, $2, and $1 (Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 July 1901). The American Biograph exhibition, under the patronage of Governor Frank Swettenham, was advertised as ‘The Biggest Evening’s Entertainment ever given in the Straits’, and claimed that it was first exhibition in Singapore of ‘The Original American Biograph’ (Singapore Free Press, 13 July 1901; Straits Times, 15 July 1901). The location of the exhibition, as well as the presence of the Governor General, was thus central in terms of pricing. Charging such high prices was only made possible by creating and advertising a very special event (Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 12 July 1901; Advertisement, Straits Times, 13 July 1901; ‘To-night’s ’Biograph’ Performance’, Singapore Free Press, 13 July 1901; ‘The Biograph’, Straits Times, 15 July 1901; ‘The Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 17 July 1901).

Figure 5. Advertisement distinguishing the American Biograph from its competitors, Straits Times, 9 July 1901. Source: Singapore Free Press © Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Reprinted with permission.
The company exhibited many films from the Boer War at the Town Hall in Singapore, as they were particularly relevant for audiences in the British colony. To add excitement and market the films, reviews described ‘many stirring scenes from the Boer War, where some of the Biograph men took their pictures whilst actually under fire’ (‘The Royal Funeral by Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 4 July 1901). The Boer War scenes the American Biograph exhibited were reportedly ‘enthusiastically received’, and included Naval Guns Firing at Colenso (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1899), Gordon Highlanders Leave for the Boer War (Unknown, 1899), Repairing the Broken Bridge at Frere (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1899), Lord Roberts Hoisting the Union Jack at Pretoria or The Entry of Lord Roberts into Pretoria (Warwick Trading Co., 1900), Marines and Other Troops Going to the Front in Armoured Trains or Off to the Front by Armoured Train (Warwick Trading Co., 1900), The Dis-embarkation at Cape Town from the S.S. Nineveh of the N.S.W. Lancers (Warwick Trading Co., 1900), Unloading Stores for the Front at Durban, The Return from Reconnoitring of a Party of Mounted Light Infantry, and General Buller. The films with Lord
Roberts and General Buller were reportedly ‘greeted with loud cheers’ by the audience (‘The “Biograph”, Singapore Free Press, 15 July 1901). The next day an additional number of films were exhibited: *The Embarking of the Northumberland Fusiliers* (Warwick Trading Co., 1899), *Gordon Highlanders in Ladysmith* (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900), *The Despatch of Reinforcements by Troopships*, and *Flag-wagging on Outpost Duty*. The most appreciated films were once again those with Lord Roberts, which were ‘very warmly applauded’. Attitudes towards General Buller (who was applauded the day before), however, were more ambiguous. The reviewer in *Singapore Free Press* remarked: ‘In passing, it was quite inappropriate to play the “Conquering Hero” for General Buller, who was guilty of that shocking and quite avoidable fiasco at Colenso’ (‘The Biograph’, 16 July 1901). Despite all these films from the Boer War, there were complaints in the *Straits Times* (‘The Biograph’, 17 July 1901) that there were too few: ‘The pictures of a military character were as keenly watched as any; and the only fault to be found was that there were not nearly enough of them.’

Films from the Boer War were exhibited together with scenes of the Boxer Uprising (or Chinese War, as it was called in the local press), such as *A Sikh Regiment on Parade at Shanghai* or *The Sikhs’ Camp at Shanghai* (Warwick Trading Co., 1900) and *U.S. Cavalry and Infantry Attacking one of the Pekin Forts*, as well as films from the funeral procession of Queen Victoria. Other films in the programme were scenes from *The Coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland at Amsterdam* (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1898), *A Hotel Fire in Paris* (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1898), and ‘*The Charge of the White Infantry*’ (‘The Biograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 17 July 1901; ‘The Biograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 19 July 1901). The funeral procession of Queen Victoria, who passed away on 22 January 1901, was described as ‘the attraction of the evening’. Many films were shown depicting the procession from several different views, and the press wrote that ‘one could imagine the sad and touching scene as though one were present amongst the packed crowds of spectators who lined the route on either side’. The audience were sitting ‘in respectful silence, as was proper to the occasion’, and the Singaporean press recommended everyone to attend the film exhibitions: ‘No one should miss the chance of seeing these reproductions of that which can only be described as the greatest and most mournful procession of the century’. Interestingly, the funeral procession was followed by images of the Queen when she was alive, as if to illustrate the life-giving potency of the medium. The exhibition that started with war pictures and a funeral procession continued with the late Queen reviewing the troops before they went to the South African front, and concluded with images of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra opening Parliament and the King and Queen saying farewell before their royal tour on board the *Ophir*. The final scenes were met with loud applause, and afterwards when ‘the latest Photo of Their Majesties King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra was shown, the audience rose and sang “God Save the King”’. (‘The Biograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 15 July 1901; ‘The Biograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 16 July 1901). Once again we see how early film programmes could be used for different imperial, commercial, and national aims.

Our research has found no trace of this company in neighbouring countries, and we are therefore not sure what happened next to William Sundheimer and the company. By the time the shows in Singapore reached their conclusion in late July 1901, travel to the Netherlands Indies was particularly difficult due to raging cholera across the archipelago (‘De Gezondheidstoestand in Java’, *Sumatra Post* 30 August 1901). Several touring entertainment companies – particularly those that had to enter by steamship from locations outside
the Indies, such as Harmston’s Circus – were struggling to obtain permits for their shows (‘Een kopje voor Harmston’, De Locomotief, 24 September 1901). Even companies already on site were facing problems related to hygiene and healthcare. For instance, in September 1901, the Batavia police had to remove a ‘Native’ employee of the Java Biorama who was diagnosed with cholera and shut down the tent for three days while the area was being disinfected (‘Verspreide Indische Berichten’, De Locomotief, 23 September 1901). The Java Cineograph was stuck in Yogyakarta for weeks on end since none of the surrounding towns provided permits for shows (‘Uit Djocja’, De Locomotief, 12 December 1901). This may have deterred Sundheimer from travelling to the Indies, if that was part of his intended route. Possibly, he returned to India. Another American Biograph, or possibly the same, came to Penang and the Straits Settlements from India and Burma in November 1903 (‘American Biograph’, Straits Echo, 13 November 1903).

The case of William Sundheimer and the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India reminds us how colonial affiliation directed transnational movement. Entrepreneurs and companies could move from country to country and still remain within the large British Empire. It was thus common with entertainment companies moving from India to Burma and British Malaya and back (which sometimes would include stops and detours in Siam and the Netherlands Indies). Furthermore, some ethnically segregated screenings by the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India complicates the notion that the cinematic space in Southeast Asia, albeit stratified by different price classes, was an inclusive space attracting and mixing people from all ethnic backgrounds.

Final discussion

The relative success of the various American Biograph companies in Southeast Asia can be gleaned from the reviews and newspaper reports discussed here. Yet perhaps the strongest indication of the American Biograph’s status in the region is the numerous companies using ‘Biograph’ in their names. As of 1899, there were several companies that claimed they were exhibiting the American Biograph. Even before the Dutch subsidiary of the American Biograph arrived in the Netherlands Indies, the Beresford-Pettitt Comedy Company, also referred to as the Beresford-Pettitt Surprise Party, toured Java for several months from March 1899 and throughout British Malaya in July and August 1899. S. Louis Beresford, from Lancashire, performed with songs, comic acts, and dances, whereas Peter Pettitt exhibited films accompanied by Miss E. Wood on the piano. Interestingly, the company called their film programme the ‘Biograph’ on Java and the ‘American Biograph’ in Singapore, which was likely a consequence of seeing the success of the Dutch subsidiary when they were on Java (‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 9 March 1899; ‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 29 March 1899; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 1 August 1899, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 16 August 1899, 2; ‘Beresford-Pettitt Surprise Party’, Singapore Free Press, 22 August 1899, 3; ‘Johore’, Singapore Free Press, 28 August 1899, 2).

Altogether, there were 10 different companies that called themselves a variation of the ‘Biograph’ between 1900 and 1905. Among them was an unidentified ‘biograph’ rented by the Sultan of Deli for private shows; Yap Gwan Thay, a famous Chinese entrepreneur and former owner of the popular Malay opera troupe Komedia Stamboel from Surabaya, who was reportedly experimenting with ‘an improved biograph’; the New Biograph Company from Bombay performed for a month in Batavia in June–July 1904; and E.H. Stevenson’s Royal
Biograph, which started in Australia in 1901, continued touring in Southeast Asia throughout 1904 and 1905, and by 1906 was offering shows to sugar and coffee factory owners on Java as a form of entertainment for their workers (‘Brieven uit Deli’, Bataviaasch-Nieuwsblad, 7 May 1900; ‘Uit Soerabaja’, De Locomotief, 4 May 1901; ‘News Summary’, The Clarence River Advocate, 25 October 1901; Bintang Betawi, 1 June 1904; Advertisement, Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad, 17 May 1905; Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 12 January 1906).

In conclusion, the American Biograph companies were instrumental in developing the film exhibition circuit in Southeast Asia by providing the basis for a more long-term presence of film exhibitions. Beyond showing different scenes from around the world, the ‘American Biograph’ companies tried to differentiate themselves by higher image quality. And while the ‘America’ encountered by Southeast Asian spectators of the various American Biographs was removed from its point of origin by their multinational exhibitors and patriotically adjustable shows, ‘American’ became almost synonymous with novelty in connection with moving picture shows, often causing confusion in newspapers when describing newly arrived devices over the next few years. For instance, the Surabaya-based Java Cineograph Company was referred to in Semarang by the geographically confounding name ‘American Java Cineograph’ (‘Cineograaf’, De Locomotief, 7 May 1901). Indian showman Abdulally Esoofally’s successful Royal Bioscope was similarly misidentified in one newspaper at the beginning of his tour of Java as the ‘American Bioscoop’ (‘Bioscoop’, Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië, 1 April 1903). The meaning of ‘American’ was also negotiated by its context; for instance in the Philippines, which was a US colony, the term had other associations. The frequent use of ‘American’ may also be attributed to Edison and his inventions in the field, which had been exhibited throughout Southeast Asia since the 1880s. In fact, animated photography was initially so strongly identified with Edison’s Kinetoscope that, at first, newspapers in the Netherlands Indies kept referring to Edison when reporting about Talbot’s Scenimatograph, which was rather a device of French origin (‘Nederlandsch-Indië’, Java-Bode, 10 October 1896; Advertisement, Het Nieuw Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 5 August 1897). This can be further illustrated by a case in Manila in May 1899 where a company calling themselves the Edison Biograph presented ‘the most wonderful spectacle of the age’, namely ‘Edison’s latest Biograph’ (Advertisement, Manila Freedom, 18 May 1899). Thus, in this transnational entertainment landscape, the elasticity of the ‘biograph’ as a brand name was matched by the mobility of ‘American’ as an indicator of technological innovation, often wholly disconnected from the entity alluded to by this marker of national identity.

Notes

1. Talbot’s Scenimatograph is the earliest example of moving picture projection found in our research, with the first show given by Batavia-based photographer Louis Talbot in October 1896 (Advertisement, Java-Bode, 9 October 1896). Showing films he obtained from Europe in addition to local views that he had shot himself on Java, he then continued touring in Java, Sumatra, and the Straits Settlements throughout 1897 and 1898. For more on Talbot’s Scenimatograph in Southeast Asia, see Ruppin 2016, 49–64 and Tofighian 2013, 79–81.

2. Three of the Mutoscopes were available throughout the four-month initial stay of the American Biograph in Batavia in three different locations in the capital’s suburbs with a predominantly European population: at the G.W. Versteeg restaurant in Noordwijk, at the Batavia zoo, and at the bicycle shop Mijer & Co. in Rijswijk (ibid.). The latter location was also named in advertisements as the ticket office for reserving tickets for the Biograph shows. Another Mutoscope at the Chinese kampung of Glodok was advertised only in the Malay
newspapers, and may have moved later to the nearby Pasar Senen (Advertisements, *Bintang Barat*, 7 June and 10 July 1899).

3. In order to identify the film titles mentioned here and elsewhere in the paper, which were often advertised or reported about in the newspapers under different names, we have used a variety of sources, including McKernan [1997] 1999; Bottomore 2007; McKernan 2010, Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire, Bousquet, http://www.cinetecadelfriuli.org/gcm/ed_precedenti/edizione2000/biograph2000.html. If no production company is mentioned, this means we have not been able to identify the film.

4. Mr Obdam, a member of the *Indische Bond* (the union of Indo-Europeans) in Surabaya, was trying to convince fellow members to take over the operation of the ‘mutoscope company’ with an investment of 8500 guilders, namely: 100 guilders per share – accounting for 8000 guilders, in addition to 500 guilders for the cost of operation and exchange of new film reels. This enterprise was expected to prove profitable and to provide employment for union members (*‘Uit Soerabaja’, De Locomotief, 5 June 1900*).

5. At the same time, newspaper reports raise questions regarding the credibility of the image that exhibitors were trying to portray of themselves and their shows through advertisements. For example, while the Java Biorama’s tent was advertised as being fully ‘packed’ every night, ‘well-ventilated and completely waterproof’, reports from Semarang reveal that all early evening shows in January (the rainy season) were called off since the conditions were too wet (Advertisement, *Bintang Soerabaia*, 11 February 1901; ‘Biograaf’, *De Locomotief*, 7 January 1901). Another report from Surabaya a month later discloses that only 20 spectators arrived at the tent one night and the show was cancelled (*‘Uit Soerabaja’, De Locomotief*, 14 February 1901). Similarly, in Bandung, spectators did not find the boggy terrain on which the tent was set up particularly appealing for an evening’s outing (*‘Uit Bandoeng’, Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 3 July 1901).

6. Edison was, by that point, a well-established brand name in the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya after a couple of decades of exhibitors touring the region with highly popular phonograph shows. The first Edison Kinetoscope was exhibited on Dr Harley’s tour of the region from June 1896 to April 1897 (*‘Onze Buren’, De Locomotief*, 1 June 1896; (*‘Harley’, *Straits Times*, 15 March 1897, 3; *‘Dr. Harley’s Entertainment’, Straits Times*, 2 April 1897, 2). For more on the phonograph in the Netherlands Indies, see Suryadi 2006. For more on the Kinetoscope in Southeast Asia, see Ruppin 2016, 44–49 and Tofighian 2013, 69–72.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Notes on contributors**

*Dafna Ruppin* is an affiliated researcher at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON) at Utrecht University. Her PhD from the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University, completed in 2015, formed part of the research project ‘The Nation and Its Other’, which was funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Her book, *The Komedi Bioscoop: Early Cinema in Colonial Indonesia* (2016), based on her doctoral dissertation, is published as part of the KINtop Studies in Early Cinema Series by John Libbey.

*Nadi Tofighian* is a postdoc at the Film and Media Studies Program at Yale University. He has previously been a lecturer at Stockholm University and Linnaeus University in Sweden and at De La Salle University Manila in the Philippines. He completed his doctoral dissertation, *Blurring the Colonial Binaries: Turn-of-the-Century Transnational Entertainment in Southeast Asia*, at the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University in 2013, and has published on early cinema, colonial history and Southeast Asia.
References

Bottomore, Stephen. 2007. Filming, Faking and Propaganda: The Origins of the War Film, 1897–1902. Ph.D. diss, Utrecht University.

Brown, Richard, and Barry Anthony. 1999. A Victorian Film Enterprise: The History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1897–1915. Trowbridge: Flicks Books.

Furnivall, J. S., [1967] 2010. Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Innes, J. R. 1901. Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on the 1st March 1901. Singapore: Government Printing Office.

McKernan, Luke. [1997] 1999. The Boer War (1899–1902): Films in BFI Collections, National Film and Television Archive. 2nd ed. London: National Film and Television Archive.

McKernan, Luke. 2010. “Lives in Film no. 1: Alfred Dreyfus – part 2.” Accessed March 2, 2016 http://thebioscope.net/2010/03/11/lives-in-film-no-1-alfred-dreyfus-part-2/

Mrázek, Rudolf. 2009. Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Musser, Charles. 1990. The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907. New York: Scribner.

Ruppin, Dafna. 2016. The Komedi Bioscoop: Early Cinema in Colonial Indonesia. New Barnet: John Libbey.

Scidmore, Eliza Ruhamah. 1898. Java: The Garden of the East. New York: The Century Co.

Suryadi. 2006. “The ‘Talking Machine’ Comes to the Dutch East Indies: The Arrival of Western Media Technology in Southeast Asia.” Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde (BKI) 162 (2/3): 269–305.

Tofighian, Nadi. 2013. Blurring the Colonial Binary: Turn-of-the-Century Transnational Entertainment in Southeast Asia. Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University.

van Dijk, Kees. 2007. The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914–1918. Leiden:KITLV Press.

Wright, Arnold, and H. A. Cartwright. 1908. Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources. London: Lloyd’s Greater Britain Publishing Company.