

# belonging to the interwar world: tracing the travelogs of colin ross

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## **Introduction**

From March 2015 through February 2017 a team of four researchers, Katalin Teller, Joachim Schätz, Kristin Kopp, and this author, worked on a project, ‘Exploring the interwar world: the travelogs of Colin Ross (1885-1945)’, about the Vienna-born German travel writer, filmmaker, lecturer, and journalist. The research was carried out under the aegis of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for History and Society in Vienna. Its late director, historian Siegfried Mattl (1954-2015), and Michael Loebenstein, currently director of the Austrian Filmmuseum, initiated it. Funding was provided by the Austrian Science Fund FWF. The project’s main goals were to trace Ross’s career, domestically and internationally; recapture the historical relevance of his travelogs as interfaces of geopolitical, cultural, and (mass) media conditions; uncover the underlying business model and marketing concepts; and create a database of his colossal media output. Although Ross did his best-known work in the interwar years, the archival resources we uncovered allowed us to extend our research into his activities *during* the two world wars.

We selected Colin Ross as the focus of this project not so much because of the quality of his work, but rather for his simultaneous activities in various media and his sustained presence in the public eye between and during the two world wars. We were interested in him as a persona—a globetrotter, a geo-political expert, a Nazi propagandist—that had been largely developed through his self-initiated enterprises. We explored the ways in which he reported about his own work and uncovered the support he received from a few leading and powerful cultural companies with which he worked closely, notably newspaper publisher Ullstein, book publisher F. A. Brockhaus, and film production company Ufa, to

maintain that persona. Hence, we excluded his brief involvement in fiction filmmaking in the late 1920s, when his contributions, although exploited in publicity, were subordinate. A circumstance, finally, that decided in favor of Ross as a research subject was the scale of readily available documentation: besides all of his thirty-plus books, there were the two dozen reels of unreleased film footage of his 1938-1939 American journey his daughter Renate Ross-Rahte (1915-2004) had donated to the Austrian Filmmuseum; as well there was a political biography. With an analysis of these sources, along with further archival research and analysis of his *released* films, his journalism, and his lectures, and the reception of his output, we aimed to create an in-depth study of his work and its evaluation. At the same time, the project provided a rich opportunity to examine the intermediality that was so typical of the travelog form, yet has remained under-researched.

After a prominent, largely successful career between the early 1920s and 1945, Ross's work disappeared into oblivion after World War II ended. Surely this condition was expedited by his and his wife's self-chosen deaths on April 29, 1945, in the Bavarian village of Urfeld, in the house that belonged to the brother-in-law of Baldur von Schirach, a National Socialist Party protagonist and one of the couple's friends. According to Ross's biographer, the couple's apprehension of what the Allied armies might do to those who had played a role of some prestige in the Third Reich was probably misguided. Although both had been staunch Nazi supporters, Ross's only official position in the regime, not counting a few NS Party-commissioned reporting trips, was a stint in the German Foreign Office's Amerika-Komitee, beginning in 1941. He was promoted as its head in 1944 and put in charge of its propagandistic operations to undermine the re-election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>1</sup> As he considered himself an expert on the United States, this was just the sort of recognition Ross had always sought. However, the Nazi leadership never wholeheartedly accepted or appreciated him. His expertise and influence were, ironically, grossly overestimated in America.<sup>2</sup> In all likelihood, he would have been referred to the Allies' denazification program. But the outcome might have been less than dramatic. "Cultural survival" in the immediate postwar years in Germany was somewhat contingent;

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<sup>1</sup> Bodo-Michael Baumunk, *Colin Ross. Ein deutscher Revolutionär und Reisender 1885-1945* (Berlin, 2015 [1999]), 133-135; 124-127. Mapping Colin Ross, <http://www.colinrossproject.net>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> See: 'Report on Dr. Colin Ross', in: *U.S. Congress. House, 76th Congress, 1st Session, Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives, Hearings, vol. 11* (Washington, D.C.; 1939 December 28), 7189-7199, <https://archive.org/stream/investigationofu11unit#page/7188/mode/2up>. Accessed April 9, 2018.

supporters, fellow travelers, and even opponents of the Nazi regime were hard to distinguish, as one position could be made to mask another according to the circumstances. But workers in the cultural industries, certainly in the film business, were generally judged rather mildly. As a matter of fact, many documentary filmmakers and film companies of the Third Reich era, for example Hans Cürli's Kulturfilm-Institut, Hubert Schonger's Schongersfilm, or Paul Lieberenz Filmproduktion, were soon back in business.<sup>3</sup> So, notwithstanding Ross's erstwhile phenomenal popularity, his suicide, more than his political stance, may well have precipitated his erasure from cultural memory.

### **Dense fabric**

No wonder that, when I was approached to participate in this project, it was the first time I heard the name Colin Ross. Surprise mounted when I learned that his had been a household name in both Weimar and Nazi Germany. The foundation of his fame actually went back beyond the First World War. An engineer by training, Ross had quickly turned to journalism and made a name for himself with his eyewitness reports of the First Balkan War and Pancho Villa's revolution before he reported—as an officer—on various fronts during World War I. After the armistice, Ross held a few brief positions during the first, tumultuous, postwar year. He was an executive in the Workmen's and Soldiers' Council, a co-publisher of the short-lived semiweekly *Volkwehr: Zeitung für die Soldaten der deutschen Republik*, later renamed *Reichswehr*, a publication that the high-level military boycotted, even forbade, for its republican stance.<sup>4</sup> Next we find Ross and his family in Argentina, where he tried his luck as a correspondent. But frustrated by German expats and diplomats still loyal (down to the letterhead of their official correspondence) to the exiled Kaiser, he decided to travel through South America, taking along his wife Lisa (Elisabeth) and young Renate. Out of this undertaking came *Südamerika: Die aufsteigende Welt* (1922), his first major travel book-cum-study of German emigrants.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Zimmermann, 'Kontinuitäten und Wandlungen im Zeichen von 'Entnazifizierung' und "Reeducation"', in: Peter Zimmermann, Kay Hoffmann (eds.), *Drittes Reich 1933-1945* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam June 2005), 691-703.

<sup>4</sup> These activities at the radically left end of the political spectrum had always excited distrust at government level, especially at the Foreign Office, of both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich; Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 43-55, 102-105, 116-117.

It marked the beginning of a globetrotting career during which the Ross family (into which a son, Ralph Colin, was born in 1923) crossed every continent but Antarctica, having their travels astutely financed by arrangements with publishers and film companies and through sponsorships from film stock and camera manufacturers. No contracts have been retrieved, but the lists of illustrations in Ross's travel books acknowledge companies such as Agfa or Zeiss-Ikon, references to their products, such as still cameras or lenses—Contax, Mentor or Tessar—and nods to government tourist bureaus in Japan, China, Australia, and New Zealand for supplying the odd photograph that Ross and his companions had not taken themselves.<sup>5</sup> He rose to national and international fame with a ceaseless flood of (syndicated) newspaper and magazine articles. Together with his war reports, other essays and articles, he wrote an estimated 1,200 titles. Furthermore, he produced a large but unknown number of (mostly illustrated) lectures, over twenty-five travel books, and six feature-length travel films. Besides the availability of materials, then, the reason I concern myself in this essay with Ross's total output, rather than just cinema, is that he reused the same content for various media and/or reworked it for various target audiences. The success of these marketing strategies can be measured by Ross's celebrity during the interwar years. To his contemporaries, I therefore presume, it would have seemed inconceivable that, today, nine times out of ten the name Colin Ross receives no more response than "Who?" (Imagine a similar response, seventy years from now, on hearing the name of, say, Sir David Attenborough.)

Nevertheless, it was during unpropitious times that Ross began his travelog career in earnest. Throughout the devastating years following Germany's defeat, amid the Weimar Republic's volatile and violent politics and the "economic dislocation"<sup>6</sup> of the early 1920s, the book trade had suffered severe setbacks. In addition to staggering inflation hindering production, a large part of the publishing industry's prewar core, its *Bildungs*-oriented clientele, that is, readers interested in education and self-improvement, had been lost on the battlefields. In order to regain market share it widened its focus and branched out to more popular and affordable types of reading matter. Trying out new sales methods and products it targeted a hitherto *buchfernes Publikum*, referring to readers that did not

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<sup>5</sup> Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, '15 Photographien v.a. aus Neuseeland'. Nachlaß Ross, File 31.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Gay, *Weimar culture: the outsider as insider* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974 [1969]), 162.

frequent bookstores (although many of them were eager consumers of the so-called smut, trash or backstairs literature that was left to other sales networks, notably colportage).<sup>7</sup>

One new type of publication that appeared in the market was a travel account that, instead of the more scientifically informed expedition reports of the prewar era, mixed autobiography, adventure, journalism, and (geo)political reflections. The avalanche of such travel books written during the interwar era in Germany has been considered a uniquely successful instance of the book trade's new strategy.<sup>8</sup> Ross's bestsellers in this genre were just one instance of this success, albeit a long-lasting one.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, his high, and high-profile, literary output was his passport to a sustained presence in other media, along with many other contemporary German travel writers who similarly exploited their fame in print through (illustrated) lectures, photography or film. Examples are Hugo Bernatzik, Heinrich Hauser, Artur Heye, Arthur Koestler, Walter Mittelholzer, and Hans Schomburgk. Conversely, filmmakers such as Paul Lieberenz or Martin Rikli tapped into this market by writing books about their expedition film assignments. (In terms of fame and sales, though, all these authors were surpassed by the German translations of the immensely popular Swedish travel writer and geographer Sven Hedin.)

In contemporary comments, the new travelog's success was attributed, unsurprisingly, to the current traumatic economic and geopolitical changes. Literary historian Heinrich Houben, for example, who was also literary editor of F. A. Brockhaus,

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<sup>7</sup> Jasmin Lange, *Der deutsche Buchhandel und der Siegeszug der Kinematographie 1895-1933. Reaktionen und strategische Konsequenzen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Kaspar Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen. Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970* (Frankfurt am Main Fischer, 2007 [1997]), 58-59, 163-173.

<sup>8</sup> Andy Hahnemann, *Texturen des Globalen: Geopolitik und populäre Literatur in der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918-1933* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), 7-11. For the Third Reich era specifically, this trend seems to be confirmed by a graphic of Ross's book publisher F. A. Brockhaus, leader in the field of travel books, titled 'Annual title output without lexica 1933-1943'. It shows that throughout this period its number of travel titles well-nigh consistently and increasingly exceeded its other book and magazine titles; see Thomas Keiderling (ed.), *F. A. Brockhaus 1905-2005* (Leipzig - Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 2005), 158. Lexica, incidentally, were the company's other long-lived commercial backbone.

<sup>9</sup> Ross's first major travelog *Südamerika. Die aufsteigende Welt* went through eight editions between 1922 and 1941. Other successful titles were *Die erwachende Sphinx. Durch Afrika vom Kap nach Kairo*, 11 editions between 1927 and 1941; *Mit Kamera, Kind und Kegel durch Afrika*, 25 editions between 1928 and 1942; *Mit Kind und Kegel in die Arktis*, 10 editions between 1934 and 1942; *Amerikas Schicksalsstunde. Die Vereinigten Staaten zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*, 12 editions between 1935 and 1942; *Das neue Asien*, six editions between 1940 and 1942. An anthology of his travel and geopolitical writings, *Die Welt auf der Waage. Der Querschnitt von 20 Jahren Weltreise*, went through 34 editions between 1929 and 1941.

To a certain extent, though, these numbers are deceptive, as longsellers outnumbered bestsellers: late in Ross's career, according to the typescript minutes that his publisher Brockhaus customarily made of its meetings with the writer, one of its managers divulged to him that for years the company, for reasons of publicity, gave each of his books' print runs of a thousand copies a new edition number. But, he added reassuringly, "Nowadays there's no need for that anymore." Sächsisches Staatsarchiv-Leipzig (henceforth: SäSta-L), 'Protokoll 28.11.[19]40', 6-7. Archiv F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 21083/790.

publisher of the books of both Ross and Hedin, argued that Germany's failed imperial ambitions, the lost war, and the lost colonies had created an increased need for ersatz travel as a compensatory substitute for the real thing. But retrospectively, too, sociologist and film critic Siegfried Kracauer, for instance, regarded these travel accounts as flights from the distressing circumstances that prevented most people in postwar Germany from going abroad.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Ross himself professed that these momentous changes had prompted his world travels: "Noting that the world that I knew from my prewar travels had ceased to exist, it was important and beneficial to quickly see and understand its new shape and impart it in a vivid way to those who did not have the opportunity to go abroad ... and see with their own eyes."<sup>11</sup>

Besides developing and extending the market for travel literature, publishers looked even more intently at cinema for customers and new products, while hoping, as historian Corey Ross suggests, to borrow some of its glamor.<sup>12</sup> In fact, before the war, in 1913, booksellers and writers surveyed by *Börsenblatt*, the weekly magazine of the German book trade, had reported on the trade's early interest in the popular entertainment of cinema. While some respondents expressed skepticism and low expectations, others claimed that screen adaptations increased sales of titles. Publishers reported on experiments with the cinema theater as a new avenue of publicity, where brochures were distributed or advertising slides were screened. But it was only in the late 1920s and early 1930s that both publishers and bookshops advertised their books with more generally acknowledged success inside cinema theaters. They exploited program booklets, placards, authors' public appearances, slides, and, especially, advertising, information, and industrial films.<sup>13</sup> So, by promoting film's modernistic connotation as a publicity vehicle itself, and with the help of advanced image technology, a spate of more or less richly illustrated film-related print publications were marketed: photo albums and how-to books, low-priced *Filmromane* (novels based on screenplays), novelizations of feature films, or the so-called *Filmexpeditionen* or *Fotosafaris*, which were expedition accounts adorned with film stills or

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<sup>10</sup> Hahnemann, *Texturen des Globalen*, 90-91.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Ross, *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Welt* (Berlin: Lichtbild-Bühne, n.d. [1925]), 8. Mapping Colin Ross, <http://www.colinrossproject.net/>. Accessed February 16, 2018. (*author's translation*)

<sup>12</sup> Corey Ross, 'Cinema, radio, and "mass culture" in the Weimar Republic: between shared experience and social division', in: John Alexander Williams (ed.), *Weimar culture revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 [2011]), 43-44, n. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Lange, *Der deutsche Buchhandel*, 38-42; 214-236.

set photos.<sup>14</sup> Ross's attempt to profit from this trend was unsuccessful, however. *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde* (1926) was an experiment but, as far its page layout is concerned, is a rather confusing attempt to substitute text for image—photographs and a few (cropped) frame stills. The fact that it is Ross's only book not subsequently reprinted seems to confirm that it failed.

Publishers of newspapers also staked a claim in this potential goldmine by introducing, commonly in cooperation with film companies, specifically structured serial stories, *Fortsetzungsromane*, from which book editions and feature films were subsequently spun off. One documented case is the establishment, in 1920, of the Berlin-based newspaper publisher Ullstein's film production company, Uco, whose best-known releases are *SCHLOß VOGELÖD* (1921) and *DR. MABUSE, DER SPIELER* (1922). After disappointing commercial results, the publisher began to produce under its own name from 1924 onwards, including Ross's first sound film, *ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN! DAS DOPPELGESICHT DES OSTENS* (1930).<sup>15</sup> In fact, it had been through Ullstein (where Ross's brother Fritz had a managerial position) and its syndicated newspapers and magazines that Ross had been enabled to attain wider exposure.

While writing was the scaffold for Ross's career, its foundation rested on a “dense fabric”, as our project calls it, of interrelated products across a range of popular media. Its durability was based on consistent marketing concepts, especially those implemented by the Brockhaus company. It published all of Ross's books in a cheap, small format of 13x19.2 cm, specifically designed for the new travelog.<sup>16</sup> It also capitalized on Ross's unique habit of traveling with his family by developing it into a distinct brand, suggesting clean, instructive, and entertaining domestic reading material. This differentiated his books from the more bohemian and leftist publications, such as those of the equally popular journalist-cum-travel writer Egon Erwin Kisch—who later was expelled from Germany and whose work was forbidden in early 1933. Ross' branded identity was reflected in four of his books

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 117-165; Roland Gruschka, 'Programm- und Vermarktungsstrategien populärwissenschaftlicher Reiseberichte im Verlag F. A. Brockhaus von 1874 bis 1945', in: Thomas Keiderling, Lothar Poethe, Volker Titel (eds.), *Leipziger Jahrbuch zur Buchgeschichte 12* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 56; Lars Lorra, *Sachbuch und Film im Dritten Reich* (Mainz - Berlin - Bonn: Forschungsprojekt Das populäre deutschsprachige Sachbuch im 20. Jahrhundert-Institut für Buchwissenschaft der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Schüler, *Der Ullstein-Verlag und der Stummfilm: Die Uco-Film GmbH als Ausdruck einer innovativen Partnerschaft* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013). See also: Lange, *Der deutsche Buchhandel*, 89, for a brief description of the contract specifications for *ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN!*

<sup>16</sup> Keiderling, *F. A. Brockhaus*, 111.

that carried a main or subtitle with the phrase *Mit Kind und Kegel*—with the whole family—followed by a geographic designation.<sup>17</sup> It ensured, furthermore, that new books and personal appearances at film premieres or lectures were often occasions for publicity in newspaper or radio interviews.

Another marketing strategy became apparent with Ross's third major journey, from winter 1923 through late September 1924 in the USA, the Pacific, and in east and south Asia, when his experiences were for the first time published in multiple travel books, each with a different emphasis, topic and/or location. As these books basically collected the articles he wrote as a correspondent for newspapers and magazines while en route, some were published even before his return. This prepared audiences for the resulting film (if any) and the illustrated lectures about the trip—which in their turn were opportunities, his publisher reminded Ross, to plug both the published and the upcoming books. With regard to the abovementioned journey, for instance, Brockhaus may well have brought out the first book, *Das Meer der Entscheidungen: Beiderseits des Pazifik* (1924), before or upon the Ross's arrival back in Germany.<sup>18</sup> Next, the film *MIT DEM KURBELKASTEN UM DIE ERDE* was released in January 1925, with footage from the entire journey. Later in 1925, the second book, *Heute in Indien. Durch das Kaiserreich Indien, Ceylon, Hinterindien und Insulinde* came out, dealing

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<sup>17</sup> Besides the two books mentioned above, in 1933 *Haha Whenua. Das Land das ich gesucht. Mit Kind und Kegel durch die Südsee* was published. A year later, in a meeting with the Brockhaus management, Ross proposed to end this quasi-series, as his children were getting too old for books that also targeted youthful readers; see: SäSta-L, "Protokoll 9.3.[19]34, 9. Archiv F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 21083/790." It was only in 1937, however, that the last book with this phrase in the title appeared: *Der Balkan Amerikas. Mit Kind und Kegel durch Mexiko zum Panamakanal*.

<sup>18</sup> Its foreword was datelined "Singapore, Summer 1924", before they set out on the last leg of this journey, to the Netherlands East-Indies. There, Dutch-language newspapers reported on Ross's visit to the offices of a local daily on July 22, 1924; later a lengthy interview was published the day before Ross and his wife, according to passenger lists, embarked a ship at Batavia—today's Jakarta—for Amsterdam, on August 27, 1924. 'Bezoek van een Duitsch journalist', *De Preangerbode*, 29, no. 203 (July 24, 1924) and *Indische Courant*, 3, 259 (July 25, 1924) mention Ross's visit to the office of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* in Bandung, on July 22. The interview was printed as 'Een wereldreiziger', *Sumatra Post*, 26, no. 199 (August 26, 1924). See also: 'Scheepsberichten', *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 40, no. 224 (August 26, 1924); 'Passagiers', *Sumatra Post*, 26, no. 200 (August 27, 1924), *De Preangerbode*, 29, no. 237 (August 27, 1924), and *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 81, no. 264 (September 23, 1924). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten>. All accessed February 16, 2018.

The visit to the newspaper's premises, the interview, and the passenger lists are, in fact, the only solid evidence that locate Ross in certain places at certain times. Indeed, it was not uncommon that in his reports, books or films he obfuscated the chronology of his travels for convenience's or argument's sake; datelines, too, could be misleading. Surely the order of Ross's itinerary in *Heute in Indien*, the book that contains the south Asian part of this voyage, seems counterintuitive, as it starts in Singapore and other places in British Malaya, continues in Siam all the way up north to Bangkok before he finally visits colonial Indonesia, although the latter was only hours away by boat from Penang or Singapore. The book's final chapter, incidentally, is called 'Ceylon', yet it primarily consists of Ross's reflections on southeast Asia while sailing from Batavia to Colombo, the first port of call on the way to Europe, where passengers could go on land for 48 hours. See also: Nico de Klerk, 'Colin Ross covers his tracks: on the impossibility of mapping the written accounts of the 1930s American journeys'. Mapping Colin Ross, <http://www.colinrossproject.net/covershistracks/>. Accessed March 4, 2018.



with locations that film spectators already could have seen. In addition, in 1926, another book named after the film was issued, albeit by another publisher.<sup>19</sup>

This strategy, then, with his embarkations or returns from a sojourn in one or more continents made into occasions for publicity, provided Ross a continuous presence in the public sphere. Meanwhile, his books, product endorsements, introductions written for other people's books, his reports as a correspondent, and his articles in numerous magazines kept him in the public eye while traveling. In short, Ross was a German public figure far away from Germany.

### **Documentary heritage**

Besides a number of workshops, print publications, and paper presentations, the project's website, Mapping Colin Ross (<http://colinrossproject.net/>), is the most comprehensive result. It consists of three parts. A Library section collects as many as we were able to retrieve of Ross's books, articles, essays, films, lectures, radio talks, a small selection of anthologies of (excerpts of) his work, and secondary literature published since World War II. As well, it contains coverage *about* Ross in periodicals both domestic and foreign.

The second part is the Mind Map, arranged according to case studies of four major elements or episodes in Ross's work. One is theme-based: geopolitics. Another is media-based: his lectures. Two are travel-based: the Oceania-Asia trip of 1928-1930, and the two American journeys of 1933-1935 and 1938-1939. Thirteen topics were identified that played a more or less consistent role in Ross's entire output, and annotated as digital objects.

The third part, Geo-map, uses maps and digitized film footage to chart the Oceania-Asia and the second American journeys.

The overwhelming volume of materials retrieved should not fool the reader into thinking that the archive is exhaustive, or that it ever will be.<sup>20</sup> Since its launch in November

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<sup>19</sup> Colin Ross, *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde*. This was one of a few books that broke out of the Brockhaus "mold", all of which were, perhaps willingly, published elsewhere. See: Nico de Klerk, 'Zum Stillstand kommen. Text und Bild in den Reisebüchern von Colin Ross', *Fotogeschichte: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie*, 38, no. 147 (2018), 23-30.

<sup>20</sup> There are many reasons for this almost unattainable goal. An account both instructive and sobering regarding digitized materials was recently posted by Michael Cowan: 'In defense of the poor digitization: reflections on the Domitor Journals Project'. Domitor Blog Post (February 17, 2018), Domitor, <https://domitor.org/defense-poor-digitization-reflections-domitor-journals-project-michael-cowan/>. Accessed February 19, 2018.

2017, corrections have been made and newly found materials added, but the website's main goal is not absolute completeness, but rather to spark further research that will branch in different directions. During the project's assembly, a number of histories, studies, and collections of essays, as well as Baumunk's biography, became available in which Ross resurfaced more or less extensively. Almost all of these publications had a German-historical approach (*Kaiserreich*, Weimar, and/or Third Reich), or German thematic focus (political, cultural) that was largely decontextualized from the specific locations where either the writing, publishing, filming, screening or lecturing had taken place. Our research and assembly of vast archival materials, by contrast, encourage scholars to follow the traces of Ross, the institutes he contacted, or the companies that sponsored him in *foreign* local media, business papers, government records, etc. This allows scholars not only to explore the extent that Ross became part of the archival sources in locations where he had visited, but also to evaluate those sources as they contributed to the "formation of a documentary heritage."<sup>21</sup> Besides his domestic fame, refocusing on the internationalism of Ross's legacy also firmly establishes his significance for literary, media or other local histories outside Germany. That, I think, is the full implication of the term "interwar world".

After all, besides research in archives and libraries in German-speaking countries, the documentation we retrieved has a substantial international dimension, the result of our search in institutes (and/or their websites) in Amsterdam, Canberra, London, Moscow, Riga, and Washington, D.C. and (mostly) open source databases produced in Australia, Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This has yielded a sizable volume of materials in a number of non-German languages: to date we have found documents in Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, and Spanish. For those interested in the subject and proficient in any of these languages there may be more to discover and value. The question becomes, to what

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<sup>21</sup> Hans Booms, 'Society and the formation of a documentary heritage: issues in the appraisal of archival sources', *Archivaria*, 24 (Summer 1987), 69-107, passim; originally published as 'Gesellschaftsordnung und Überlieferungsbildung. Zur Problematik archivarischer Quellenbewertung', *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 68 (1972), 3-40. In their introduction to the English version the translators explain that in their choice for the term *documentary heritage* as a translation of *Überlieferungsbildung* they preferred "painful awkwardness" to being "superficial and incomplete" in order to "salvage as many of the nuances of meaning Booms draws upon throughout the article. *Überlieferung* is usually translated as *tradition*, but this does not convey enough of the image of a culture being passed on from the past to the present and into the future. *Überlieferung* is also something that must have a concrete but perishable form which present day society, as heir to the past, must actively acquire and preserve" (69).

extent do these traces reflect the mass-mediated traffic of ideas and viewpoints across borders, regardless of “interwar” or other convenient time frames?

One of the more abundant harvests so far consists of Dutch-language reports, reviews, interviews, and announcements of or advertisements for Ross’s books, films or lectures on his travels. This archival paper trail points to circumstances—sometimes related to media-specific issues, at other times to issues of wider moment—that may have shaped the reception of Ross’s work in the Netherlands. These were largely mined from the Royal Library’s open-source database Delpher (<https://www.delpher.nl/>), which contains a vast, and growing, selection of digitized newspapers published in the Netherlands and its East- and West Indies colonies.<sup>22</sup> Together with a few dozen magazine articles, we found around 380 items about or by Ross published between November 1915 and February 1945, not counting some 200 items spawned by the Dutch releases of the famous fiction film *GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE* (1926), for which Ross co-wrote the script and in which he appeared in a cameo role, and the 1927 fiction film *DIE PFLICHT ZU SCHWEIGEN*, for which he was credited as “scientific consultant”. There are also a dozen or so German-language articles that appeared between 1941 and 1945 in the *Deutsche Zeitung in den Niederlanden*, a newspaper published between June 5, 1940, and May 5, 1945, practically the entire period of German occupation of the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup>

For the remainder of this article I want to zoom in on these materials, what they say and don’t say, and suggest a few topics for possible follow-up research that could not be pursued within our project’s constraints. I also propose them as approaches, considerations, or questions that might be relevant for other non-German materials, too.

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<sup>22</sup> Besides a large selection of newspapers published between 1618 and 1995, this database also contains over 230 Dutch magazines and journals published since the 19th century, over 80,000 Dutch-language books published since the late 1500s through the twentieth century, and a fast-growing number of books from Dutch academic collections made accessible through Google Books. As well, it contains 1.5 million digitized Dutch radio bulletins between 1937 and 1984. See: Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/>. Accessed July 13, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> This newspaper had no significant popular readership, let alone propagandistic effect, as it was largely read by Germans working in the civil administration and the occupation army. See: Gabriele Hoffmann, *NS-Propaganda in den Niederlanden. Organisation und Lenkung der Publizistik unter Deutscher Besatzung 1940–1945* (Munich - Pullach - Berlin: Verlag Dokumentation, 1972), 78; 89-93. The *Deutsche Zeitung in den Niederlanden* was one of twenty-seven German-language newspapers in occupied territories. Rather than directly spreading propaganda, it was meant to “demonstrate ‘the way one had to write’ to the Dutch press.” As the paper itself was subject to no less than three censorship offices—the National-Socialist Party, its publisher Europa Presse, and Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry—*DZN* had an “intermediary position.” See: Christoph Sauer, ‘Structures of consensus-making and intervention: the concept of Nazi language policy in occupied Holland (*Deutsche Zeitung in den Niederlanden 1940-1945*)’, in: Ruth Wodak (ed.), *Language, power and ideology: studies in political discourse* (Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), 16-17.

## Traces

The traffic of ideas and viewpoints includes propaganda, even though the direction of its flow is, of course, more regimented. One question that arises in connection with Ross's work is whether he intended his newspaper reports on the battles of World War I, the earliest of his writings published in the Netherlands, to propagate the German cause. They were published in the German liberal daily *Vossische Zeitung* and syndicated after a week or so to a number of mostly local and regional papers. The first string of these translated reports, from Serbia, appeared between November 1915 and February 1916; from April through June 1916 they reported from northern France during the Battle of Verdun; and in July 1916 from Poland and Ukraine. Then there was an interruption, more or less parallel with the gap in the German-language reports between August and November 1916, when Ross was being treated for a war wound.<sup>24</sup> The second batch appeared in Dutch papers from January 1917 onwards and went on through June 1918. It contained reports on major battles on both the western and eastern fronts. Their publication was nevertheless sparse—a few reports from northern France, one from east Galicia, one from Estonia—and more disconnected than the earlier ones. In early 1918, moreover, Ross was a liaison officer for a few months in the short-lived Ukraine Republic. Reports coming from this mission were classified.<sup>25</sup>

Ross's translated accounts in the Netherlands papers could usually be found on a full-page section, with general titles like 'The war' or 'The battles on various fronts'. As in Germany, this was not uncommon, but in the Dutch-language papers most of the official statements or foreign correspondents' reports on both sides of the conflict were reproduced *without* comment, a reflection of Holland's rigorously neutralist policy. And though this may have mitigated the propagandistic effect of Ross's unmistakably partisan viewpoint, his firsthand reports do stand out for their evocative detail and their quality of

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<sup>24</sup> Baumunk's biography situates Ross's recovery a year earlier, in the summer of 1915. He further states that during this time Ross wrote a book about his war experiences; Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 15. These assertions, however, don't agree with the dateline of the book's foreword: "Dresden, July 1916, Red Cross Hospital" nor with the two-year timespan in the book's subtitle; see: Colin Ross, *Wir draußen. Zwei Jahre Kriegserleben an vier Fronten* (Berlin - Vienna: Ullstein, 1916), 13. Mapping Colin Ross, [www.colinrossproject.net](http://www.colinrossproject.net). Accessed February 22, 2018. Moreover, judging from its chapters' titles, *Wir draußen*—as so many of Ross's later books—collects a selection of his previously published reports, some of which were written between November 1915 and July 1916, clearly after the alleged period of convalescence. The foreword, then, was probably the only thing Ross wrote for this book during his recovery. The time saved, however, does lend credibility to Baumunk's claim that while recuperating from his injury Ross finished his translation of Frank B. Gilbreth's *Primer of scientific management*.

<sup>25</sup> Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 21-23.

being 'on the ground'. It was for these reasons that during the war Ross had been recruited by the Militrische Stelle (Military Office), a propaganda section of the German Foreign Office. His journalistic talent, it was hoped, would enhance Germany's reputation in the neutral foreign press.<sup>26</sup> Whether or not it did, a future research topic would be whether these reports were not just syndicated, but even offered by the *Vossische Zeitung's* owner, the Ullstein publishing company (with German political leadership possibly prodding in the background), to Dutch and other neutral countries' newspapers with the aim of swaying public opinion.

Considerations of a different order suggest themselves, secondly, with regard to Ross's films. It was in late May 1925 that the first announcement appeared of the screening of MIT DEM KURBELKASTEN UM DIE ERDE, his second feature-length travelog. (His first film was ZENTRALASIATISCHE REISE V. COLIN ROSS, also known as WEG NACH OSTEN, but neither records nor prints have been found.) Over the following fortnight KURBELKASTEN caused a brief outburst of announcements, advertisements, reviews, and an interview, mostly in newspapers based in The Hague. The film was shown there three times a day between June 3 and 9 (followed by a short extended run with screenings twice daily). Advertisements mentioned that Ross would personally introduce the film and give a lecture about the countries and colonies visited. Touted as a "unique film in its genre!!", its contents were exoticized by the promise of "unknown customs and dances, magnificent ceremonies and festivities at indigenous courts," disregarding footage shot in the United States and Japan.<sup>27</sup>

Ross's personal appearance in a legitimate theater that, between 1917 and late 1925, was also used intermittently as a cinema indicates that these were exceptional screenings.<sup>28</sup> Ross personally chose the music and selected the four-piece ensemble. The 50% discount on the matinee show for the city's school children highlighted its educational cachet. It seems that this was a special, local event; no newspaper items of any kind about the film's

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 16-21. However, Ross's reports from Serbia in particular reminded at least one Dutch newspaper commentator of the atrocities committed by the German army when it invaded neutral Belgium in the summer of 1914. It led him to criticize Ross's similarly callous indifference of the fate of Serbian villagers left by the wayside in the pouring rain after having been thrown out of their homes by German soldiers to billet themselves; see: Arnold ten Haeghen, 'De Duitse oorlogvoering', *De Telegraaf*, 23, no. 9227 (December 4, 1915). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed February 17, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> 'Een wereldreisfilm', *Het Vaderland*, 57 (May 29, 1925); [Advertisement Princesse-Schouwborg for MET DE CAMERA DE WERELD ROND], *Ibid.* (May 30, 1925); 'Een wereldreisfilm in den Princesse Schouwborg', *Haagsche Courant*, no. 12971 (May 30, 1925). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed February 22, 2018. This exoticizing lasted through June 4, after which date the list of countries was dropped from the advertisements.

<sup>28</sup> 'Princesseschouwborg', *Cinema Context*, <http://www.cinemacontext.nl/>. Accessed February 22, 2018.

screenings elsewhere in the Netherlands have been found.<sup>29</sup> Local reviews hinted at the film's specific custom-made qualities: The print's intertitles were in Dutch; it was a purpose-made compilation; and there was the "sympathetic" gesture of including so much footage of the Netherlands East-Indies. And even though the latter remark reflects a lack of information—the richly illustrated 1926 book of the same name contained more photos of the East-Indies than all the other countries it featured—there is nevertheless reason to surmise that the print may have been temporarily imported and/or purposely adapted to both the occasion and the venue, The Hague being the major residence of former colonial expats.<sup>30</sup>

Ross's next feature-length travelog to come to the Netherlands was his 1927 *DIE ERWACHENDE SPHINX: MIT COLIN ROSS VOM KAP NACH KAIRO*. The film was distributed by UFA Film Maatschappij, the Dutch branch office of the major German production company Ufa, and passed by the censor for general release on October 29, 1928.<sup>31</sup> First shown between November 1928 and May 1929, its market setting allowed the film to be seen in a variety of screenings, illustrating the travelog's "open form" as both entertaining and educational.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, it was screened in a way that was characteristic of "scientific" documentary film shows in the Netherlands during the 1920s through the early 1940s: as one-off or a limited sequence of early Sunday matinees in cinema theaters, their screening beginning around noon so as not to interfere with the regular matinees that usually began

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<sup>29</sup> Records of a wider Dutch distribution may be held in municipal archives (the digitized records of the national censorship office only go back to 1928, the year it was established).

<sup>30</sup> 'Met de camera de wereld rond', *Haagsche Courant*, no. 12974 (June 4, 1925); 's-Gravenhage. Met de filmcamera de wereld rond', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 98, no. 31699 (June 5, 1925); 'Princesse-Schouwborg: Met de camera de wereld rond', *Het Vaderland*, 57 (June 4, 1925). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed February 22, 2018.

"Dutch intertitles" could mean that the original German intertitles had been replaced in a new, purpose-made print; that they had been removed from an existing print with Dutch title panels spliced in; or that they had been "shuttered" while Dutch intertitles were projected as slides. In 1925, projectors were still equipped with a device to show slides alongside film. But with no print surviving in Dutch archives the phrase "Dutch intertitles" cannot be disambiguated. Furthermore, the length of the scenes shot in the Netherlands East-Indies cannot be established; all three prints inspected, at Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin, and Gosfilmofond, Moscow, are incomplete, with each containing some footage of, respectively, Java and Sumatra, Sumatra and Bali, and Bali only. These areas agree with the books about this trip, but to what extent these scenes are complete cannot be established with certainty.

<sup>31</sup> 'DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX', Filmkeuringsrapporten. Nationaal Archief, <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00402/>. Accessed March 3, 2018.

No records have been found of screenings of its spin-off *ALS DREIJAHRIGER DURCH AFRIKA* (1928), in which Ross features his three-year old son in arranged scenes mostly made en route in Africa intercut with more straightforward travel footage.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Ruoff, 'Introduction: the filmic fourth dimension: cinema as audiovisual vehicle', in: Ruoff (ed.), *Virtual voyages: cinema and travel* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

around 1:30 pm.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, unusually, the film appeared as the upper half in week-long theatrical programs, paired with a commercial feature fiction film. As this slot was customarily reserved for a program of shorts, one suspects that its screening here may have been the result of an impromptu decision to give the film a commercial run, with the feature spot allotted to fiction films with a relatively short running time of just over one hour. For instance, in January 1929, in Rotterdam, Ross's film was screened with the 1927 Soviet feature *THE FORTY-FIRST* (censored length 63 minutes). In May 1929, in an Ufa-owned theater in The Hague, it was announced as the "main film before the intermission" and shared the bill with the 1928 American feature *YELLOW LILY* (censored length 74 minutes).<sup>34</sup> In the spring of 1936, now under a Dutch title, the film was shown in educational settings under the auspices of the Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit (Cinematographic University), an organization founded in 1933 for the purpose of screening popular science films with lectures.<sup>35</sup>

Ufa released Ross's first sound film in November 1930, *ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN! DAS DOPPELGESICHT DES OSTENS*, an account of a voyage to Australia, New Zealand, New

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<sup>33</sup> 'De ontwakende sphinx. Expeditiefilm der U. F. A.', *De Maasbode*, 61, no. 22163 (November 13, 1928); [Advertizement of Rembrandt Theater, Amsterdam, for screening of *DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX*], *Het Volk*, 29, no. 9348 (November 15, 1928). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed March 2, 2018.

The Amsterdam Rembrandt Theater, a former opera house, was bought in 1919 by Ufa through its Dutch-registered company NV Neerlandia Maatschappij voor Film- en Bioscoopbedrijf and converted into a 1200-seat cinema theater; see: Ingo Schiweck, 'De Ufa in Nederland', in: Frans Westra (ed.), *100 jaar branchevereniging van bioscopen in Nederland: van Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond naar Nederlandse Vereniging van Bioscopen en Filmtheaters* (Amsterdam: NVBF: 2018), 93-94.

<sup>34</sup> [Advertizement of the Rotterdam Centraal Theater for "the best program of our contract with Ufa," featuring both *DE 41E* and *DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX*. Cultuurfilm der Ufa'], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 86, no. 10 (January 10, 1929); [Advertizement of the Hague Asta Theater for its new program featuring *DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX*. *MET DE CAMERA VAN KAAPSTAD NAAR CAIRO*], *Het Vaderland*, 61 (May 9, 1929); [Advertizement of the Hague Asta-Theater for *DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX*], *Haagsche Courant*, no. 14185 (May 10, 1929); 'Asta-Theater. *DE ONTWAKENDE SPHINX*. *NARCIS, DE VERLEIDELIJKE*', *Ibid.*, no. 14186 (May 11, 1929). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed March 4, 2018. 'NARCIS, DE VERLEIDELIJKE', Filmkeuringsrapporten; 'DE 41E', *Ibid.* Nationaal Archief, <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00402/>. All accessed March 4, 2018.

In 1922, the Hague Asta-Theater, another 1200-seater, was also bought by Ufa through the NV Neerlandia Maatschappij voor Film- en Bioscoopbedrijf; see: Schiweck, 'De Ufa in Nederland', 93-94. In Rotterdam, too, Ufa owned a large theater, the Luxor. During the interwar years Ufa appears to have been the only foreign, vertically integrated film company to have owned, albeit indirectly, theaters in the Netherlands; see: Clara Pafort-Overduin, *Hollandse films met een Hollands hart: nationale identiteit en de Jordaanfilms 1934-1936*, doctoral thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 2012, 307 and n. 790.

<sup>35</sup> 'HET ONTWAKEN VAN ZWART AFRIKA: Een belangwekkend cultuurhistorisch document in de Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit', *Haagsche Courant*, no. 16314 (April 11, 1936); 'HET ONTWAKEN VAN ZWART AFRIKA: Film van de Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit', *Het Vaderland*, 67 (April 11, 1936); 'HET ONTWAKEN VAN ZWART AFRIKA', *Ibid.* (April 18, 1936); 'HET ONTWAKEN VAN ZWART AFRIKA in het Passage-theater', *Haagsche Courant*, no. 16319 (April 18, 1936); 'Expeditiefilm van de Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit', *De Tijd*, 91, no. 28834 (June 14, 1936); 'Het ontwaken der sphinx', *De Telegraaf*, 44, no. 16461 (June 20, 1936); 'Het ontwaken der sphinx', *De Tijd*, 92, no. 28846 (June 21, 1936). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed April 9, 2018.

'Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit', *De Telegraaf*, 41, no. 15246 (February 8, 1933). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed March 4, 2018.

Guinea and nearby islands, Guangzhou in China, and India. Dutch audiences, however, got to see the film in a truncated form. This Dutch-titled variant, titled NAAR HET LAND DER MAORI EN PAPOEA'S, was passed for general release on February 9, 1931, with a censored length of 67 minutes.<sup>36</sup> A week later, in mid-February 1931, it opened the film program at the Hague Ufa theater, followed by the Ufa feature DAS FLÖTENKONZERT VON SANSSOUCI (1930), a program that was held over for another week.<sup>37</sup> Later that year, Amsterdam-based newspapers advertised *Naar het Land van Maori's en Papoea's* as a "popular science" film for three consecutive early Sunday matinee screenings in November.<sup>38</sup>

This account of Ross's films in the Netherlands reveals the circumstances that shaped their release, screening, and, undoubtedly, their reception. One of these circumstances is what I call appropriation: a set of locally taken measures that adapt a foreign film to domestic conditions, such as laws, language, customs, tastes, etc., to make it legal, apprehensible, acceptable, and/or attractive.<sup>39</sup> Besides invasive measures such as translation, censorship cuts, trademarks added by local distributors, permutations, additions or removals (of sound, for example), it also entails contextual measures such as choice of venue, programming, marketing and publicity; all significantly contributing to the ways a film was presented in a certain location. Some of these measures were simply routine, either practical (translations) or legal (censorship). Others were self-imposed and it is here that differences between the screenings in one country or another are most conspicuous.

As a matter of fact, in the Netherlands, self-regulation, partly in response to what were felt to be local administrative encroachments, strongly impacted the film trade.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> 'HET LAND VAN MAORI EN PAPOEA'S', Filmkeuringsrapporten. Nationaal Archief, <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00402/>. Accessed Marh 4, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> 'NAAR HET LAND DER MAORI EN PAPOEA'S. (ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN!)', *Het Vaderland*, 62 (February 14, 1931); 'Asta-Theater. DAS FLÖTENKONZERT VON SANSSOUCI', in: *Ibid.* (February 21, 1931). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed March 2, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> [Advertisement of Amsterdam Rembrandt-Theater for the screening of Ross's HET LAND VAN MAORI EN PAPOEA] and its repeat screenings, *Het Volk*, 32, no. 11155 (October 29, 1931); *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 104, no. 34017 (October 29, 1931); *De Tijd*, 87, no. 26300 (October 31, 1931); *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 104, no. 34024 (November 5, 1931); *Het Volk*, 32, no. 11168 (November 5, 1931); *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad*, 67, no. 26 (November 6, 1931); *De Tijd*, 87, no. 26306 (November 7, 1931); *Ibid.*, 87, no. 26310 (November 12, 1931); *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 104, no. 34031 (November 12, 1931). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed March 1, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> See for more on appropriation: Nico de Klerk, *Showing and telling: film heritage institutes and their performance of public accountability* (Wilmington, DE - Malaga: Vernon Press, 2017), 94-104.

<sup>40</sup> André van den Velden, Fransje de Jong, Thunnis van Oort, 'De bewogen beginjaren van de Nederlandsche Bioscoop Bond, 1918-1925', *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 16, no. 2 (2014) [unpaginated]. TMG-online, <http://www.tmgonline.nl/index.php/tmg/article/view/82/136>. Accessed March 3, 2018.



various ways in which Ross's travelogs were screened reflect the extent to which the Dutch cinema market was organized. For instance, whether a foreign film was contractually and theatrically released or imported under specific temporal and spatial conditions clearly widened or narrowed the range of possibilities. Certainly, since the mid-1920s, the Nederlandsche Bioscoop-Bond (or NBB; Dutch Association of Cinema Theaters), a business association of both exhibitors and distributors, stipulated that films could only be rented or sold between its member companies. Hence, it kept a close watch on the provenance of what its members showed and where. With regard to *DIE ERWACHENDE SPHINX*, for example, its distribution by UFA Film Maatschappij facilitated its screening in both commercial and educational settings. (The latter, as noted, were often screened in the same member theaters where its theatrical shows took place). Nonetheless, the rationale for other educationally framed screenings of this film in unlikely venues begs further research. After all, it was only in 1936 that NBB began to keep a "List of no objection (...): a registry containing cultural, social or educational institutions that were allowed to screen films without formal NBB membership, but under strict conditions that prevented them from competing commercially with regular exhibitors."<sup>41</sup>

The exhibition of *ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN!* points up another circumstance, one that is typical—though not exclusive—of countries with a modest or small production sector. Largely dependent on foreign product, they are more vulnerable to decisions made in the country of production about the ways a film was meant to be screened. Although corroborating evidence would be needed, the releases of this film in the Netherlands and elsewhere, as either truncated or in separate parts<sup>42</sup>, may well have been influenced by its

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<sup>41</sup> Thunnis van Oort, 'Resurrection in slow motion: the delayed restoration of the cinema exhibition industry in post-war Rotterdam (1940-1965)', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'Histoire* (2017), 10. DOI, <http://dx.doi.org/1080/13507486.2017.1374928>. Accessed March 12, 2018. See also: Eye, 'I. Lijst van Geen Bezwaar,' in: *Nieuwe leden- en zakenbesluit* (Amsterdam: February 10, 1936), 16. Archief Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond, 137/A1/1.

<sup>42</sup> A short film that also passed by the Dutch censorship board in February 1931, the 14-minute *CHINA, DE OOSTERSCHE SPHINX*, was attributed to Ross. But its title is too general for the footage shot in the port of Guangzhou. The film, moreover, is longer than the Guangzhou section in the most complete print of the film retrieved to date. As no further reports of its screening or title were found, let alone of the material Ross had shot in India, it remains unclear whether this contains (parts of) the remaining footage; see: 'Asta-Theater', *Het Vaderland*, 62 (February 28, 1931). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed March 2, 2018; 'CHINA, DE OOSTERSCHE SPHINX', Filmkeuringsrapporten. Nationaal Archief, <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00402/>. Accessed March 4, 2018.

In France, the film was released in two parts titled *L'Australie Inconnue* and *Merveilles de l'Extrême-Orient*—the latter contained footage of all of the rest of the voyage.

performance in the *German* market, where the film was a box-office flop.<sup>43</sup> What probably explains its lack of appeal is that, unlike his earlier travel accounts, it had no plausible itinerary. Spectators saw the Rosses arrive in Australia—which they did—and later return to Europe from New Zealand’s South Island—which they did not. In reality, they embarked for their return trip from Colombo, in today’s Sri Lanka, while in the meantime cinemagoers watched them visiting China, India, and New Guinea, in that order! Whether or not the earlier films faithfully followed the actual trips, they did propose a credible route, often utilizing subtitles, such as “From Cape to Cairo.” ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN!, however, replaced chronology with a geopolitically inspired rhetorical structure based on conditions observed in the countries traversed. This was most saliently exemplified by the juxtaposition of Australia’s “space without people” versus China’s and India’s “people without space”. Possibly the foreign releases’ geographically more accessible and coherent parts were meant to mitigate the fiasco of the domestic print’s jumbled itinerary.

Indeed, there is no record that an unabridged print of this film was ever shown in the Netherlands. As late as December 1935 and February and July 1937, in the educational matinee screenings organized by the Museum voor het Onderwijs (Museum for Education) and the Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit, Ross’s film was advertised as NAAR HET LAND VAN MAORI’S EN PAPOEA’S, its familiar Dutch title.<sup>44</sup> Whether this reflected Ufa’s Dutch distributor’s policy and/or a simple matter of convenience by the organizing bodies we don’t know. But viewing these circumstances from a wider, international perspective

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<sup>43</sup> Premiered in November 1930, it was not until April 1932 that the film’s German release had generated any revenue, albeit a very meager 116.05 Reichsmark, which distributor Ufa duly transferred to production company Ullstein, which in its turn transferred to Ross a third of this sum, to which he was entitled. In June of that year Ullstein received its last share of the profits, RM 1,574.57, after which it was written off as a failed investment. See: Lange, *Der deutsche Buchhandel*, 89-90.

<sup>44</sup> [Advertisement for the screening of NAAR HET LAND DER PAPOEA’S EN MAORI’S at the Hague Passage-Theater, on December 15, at 12pm, organized by the Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit], *Het Vaderland*, 67 (December 13, 1935); [Advertisement of the Hague Passage-Theater for screening of NAAR HET LAND DER PAPOEA’S EN MAORI’S], *Haagsche Courant*, no. 16214 (December 13, 1935); [Advertisement of the Hague Passage-Theater for the repeat screening of NAAR HET LAND DER PAPOEA’S EN MAORI’S], *Het Vaderland*, 67 (December 20, 1935); [Advertisement of the Hague Passage-Theater for repeat screening of NAAR HET LAND DER PAPOEA’S EN MAORI’S], *Haagsche Courant*, no. 16220 (December 20, 1935); [Advertisement for NAAR HET LAND DER PAPOEA’S EN MAORI’S], *De Telegraaf*, 43, no. 16288 (December 28, 1935). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed March 1, 2018. ‘Museum voor het Onderwijs: in het land van Maori en Papoea’, *Het Vaderland*, 68 (February 20, 1937); ‘In het land van Maori en Papoea’, *Haagsche Courant*, no. 16578 (February 23, 1937); ‘Land van Maori en Papoea. Film van Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Nieuw-Guinea’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 110, no. 36078 (July 10, 1937); ‘Land van Maori en Papoea’, *Ibid.*, 110, no. 36085 (July 17, 1937); ‘Maori en Papoea’, *De Tijd*, 93, no. 29505 (July 17, 1937). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. All accessed April 3, 2018.

‘ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! ACHTUNG ASIEN!’. Cinema Context, <http://www.cinemacontext.nl/id/F011015>. Accessed March 1, 2018. ‘Film en bioscoop: het land van Maori en Papoea’, *Haagsche Courant*, no. 17237 (April 15, 1939). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed April 2, 2018. Later still, on April 16, 1939, a screening with lecture, in the Hague Building for Arts and Sciences, was similarly announced.

reflects how local cinema landscapes adapt to the forces of appropriation, self-regulation, the local power of foreign production companies, and, of course, state-imposed measures, such as censorship, quotas, and taxation.

### **On the lecture stage**

Much of Ross's renown and income derived from his many public (illustrated) lectures. While they commonly followed on the heels of a new book and/or film about his travels, the lectures of his two extensive Dutch tours deviated from this pattern. And while their topics were based on travel observations, it is clear—and characteristic for the later years of Ross's career—that his journeys had become more programmatic: their real purpose was propaganda.

The two lecture tours took place during the German occupation of the Netherlands. Both times he was invited by the Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap (or NDK; Dutch-German Cultural Fellowship). This was a foundation initiated by the highest authority in the occupied Netherlands, *Reichskommissar* Arthur Seyß-Inquart, to promote cultural life through cooperation and cultural exchange between the two countries.<sup>45</sup>

During the first tour, from October 1 through 15, 1941, Ross lectured in fifteen Dutch cities and towns on “The European-Asiatic Steppe Continent: from Genghis Khan to Stalin,” illustrated with his own slides.<sup>46</sup> The topic was based on his journey across the Soviet Union in early 1940.<sup>47</sup> This lecture, severely critical of Stalin's rule, was presented, of course, after Germany's unilateral termination, on June 22, 1941, of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its subsequent invasion of Soviet Russia. In the third week of September 1941, the first

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<sup>45</sup> Johannes Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart und die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in den Niederlanden (1940-1945)* (Vienna - Cologne - Weimar: Böhlau, 2015), 497-498; Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (henceforth NIOD), Amsterdam, 'Bericht der Rechnungskontrollstelle über die Prüfung der durch die Niederländisch-Deutsche Kulturgemeinschaft Den Haag vorgelegten Bilanz mit Kapitalrechnung zum 31.12.1942', 2. Archief Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap, 175/15.

<sup>46</sup> Ross was paid a hefty 2,770.50 Dutch guilders for this tour, the highest fee paid in the 1941-1942 season; NIOD, 'Begroting van ontvangsten en uitgaven van de Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap', June 22, 1942, 2. Archief Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap, 175/12; 'Bericht der Rechnungskontrollstelle', Appendix 8. Ibid., 175/15.

<sup>47</sup> Although not widely reported in the Dutch press, this journey was in fact the unforeseen, final leg of the Rosses' 1938-1939 trip through the United States and east Asia. It was amid Asia's European colonies, in early September 1939, that they suddenly found themselves potential enemy aliens should France and England declare war on Germany after its invasion of Poland. Taking refuge in the German legation in Siam after having escaped from French Indo-China, they managed after a three-month stay to sail surreptitiously to Japan, from where they crossed most of the Soviet Union and flew back to Berlin in February 1940. See: Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 113; see also: 'Een wereldreiziger keert terug uit het Verre Oosten. Hoe Colin Ross ontsnapte uit Indo-China', *De Telegraaf*, 48, no. 17831 (April 2, 1940), 'Terug van een reis om de wereld. Een vraaggesprek met Colin Ross', *Het Nationale Dagblad*, 4, no. 153 (April 5, 1940). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten>. All accessed April 7, 2018.

announcements began to appear. Insofar as they elaborated on Ross's career they were based on an NDK press release, a draft of which can be found in the organization's papers.<sup>48</sup>

The following year, from October 31 through November 15, 1942, Ross returned for a second lecture tour in thirteen locations on 'The World-political Battle for Africa', illustrated with color slides.<sup>49</sup> It was based on an intelligence trip through Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia that had been commissioned by the Foreign Office to gauge the attitude towards Germany in the region. Back home, Ross had been lecturing on it since the spring of that year.<sup>50</sup> The first tour generated extensive, albeit quite uniform reporting, an effect of the occupation. By that time the German civil administration, or Reichskommissariat, had brought the Dutch press into line when its Press Section began to summon daily press conferences in order to 'instruct' Dutch journalists in covering the news.<sup>51</sup> Reports about the second tour, while plentiful too, were less extensive. Hardly an item exceeded the length of a column, often much less. This was the time when most of the remaining Dutch newspapers had been forced to limit their issues to a mere four pages.<sup>52</sup> Yet the pattern of reporting was similar, with more or less uniform announcements (parts of it often echoing those of the previous year) and reviews. Ross's appearance at a daily press conference, as one report mentions, where he answered journalists' questions possibly contributed to its uniformity.<sup>53</sup> (Unreported at the time, something similar might well have been arranged on the occasion of the former tour.)

The German secret service, in 1937, had characterized the Dutch press, and newspapers in particular, as having a predominantly anti-Nazi attitude.<sup>54</sup> It is for that reason, perhaps, that the German civil administration decided to apply a "nurturing

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<sup>48</sup> NIOD, 'Aktennotiz. Betr. Vortrag des Weltreisenden Dr. Colin Ross über das Thema: "Das eurasiatische Steppenkontinent von Dschingis Khan bis Stalin"', September 18, 1941, 1-2. Archief Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap, 175/76.

<sup>49</sup> NIOD, 'Aktennotiz. Betr. Vortrag Dr. Colin Ross [...] "Der weltpolitische Kampf in Afrika"', October [19], 1942. Ibid., 175/76.

<sup>50</sup> Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 119-121. It also occasioned Ross's last major travel book, *Umkämpftes Afrika. Kriegsreise durch Marokko, Algerien und Tunesien* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1944). Mapping Colin Ross, <http://www.colinrossproject.net>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart*, 253; Hoffmann, *NS-Propaganda*, 121, 228-229.

Insofar as these reports elaborated on Ross's career they were based on an NDK press release, a draft of which can be found in the organization's papers; NIOD, 'Aktennotiz. Betr. Vortrag des Weltreisenden Dr. Colin Ross über das Thema: "Das eurasiatische Steppenkontinent von Dschingis Khan bis Stalin"', September 18, 1941, 1-2. Archief Nederlandsch-Duitsche Kultuurgemeenschap, 175/76.

<sup>52</sup> Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart*, 253-254.

<sup>53</sup> 'Afrika toekomstig kolonisatie-gebied voor Europa. Colin Ross besprak actuele problemen', *Het Volk*, 43, no. 17470 (November 11, 1942). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Frank van Vree, *De Nederlandse pers en Duitsland 1930-1939: een studie over de vorming van de publieke opinie* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1989), 353.

method” in order to estrange the Dutch press no more than was unavoidable.<sup>55</sup> Despite bureaucratic infighting this strategy of “controlled self-nazification” towards print publications and broadcasting prevailed. A patronizing, ‘soft’ policy, one of its results was that about half of more than 100 Dutch newspapers and 70% of circa 4,000 magazines ceased publication during the years of occupation, besides 70% of 600 newsletters and advertizers and no less than 90% of some 2,000 parish magazines (shortage of paper, although to a certain extent real, was often used as a pretext to shut a publication down).<sup>56</sup>

Under such circumstances, of course, any evaluation of Ross’s activities based on press reports has to be made with caution. Furthermore, one has to assume, if not establish, the extent to which Dutch media at the time were able to *bypass* non-obligatory reporting about Ross (and other German topics), except those that may have been more or less obligatory (for instance because Seyß-Inquart was present<sup>57</sup>). Because apart from the two lecture tours and a few, mostly identical reports of a speech Ross gave at the European Youth Congress, in Vienna in September 1942, hardly anything was written about him during the war years. A single, and singular, review of his 1940 film *DAS NEUE ASIEN*, which seems either to have been copied from the German *Kölnische Zeitung* or, given its jubilant praise for Japan, was written according to instructions, does not allow any comparison, as the film was not distributed in the Netherlands.<sup>58</sup> But the lack of attention during the war for his books *Das neue Asien* (1940), *Die “Westliche Hemisphäre” als Programm und Phantom des amerikanischen Imperialismus* (1942), and *Umkämpftes Afrika: Kriegsreise durch Marokko, Algerien und Tunesien* (1944) is in sharp contrast to the consistent prewar reviewing of Ross’s publications.

A casual inspection of the wartime arts and letters columns (or what was left of them) shows that often they only announced *forthcoming* items, mostly German publications or performances, thereby preempting any evaluative, let alone critical, comments. And in view of the abovementioned restrictions on volume, reports on art (whose practitioners, incidentally, were also forced into line by obligatory membership of

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<sup>55</sup> Hoffmann, *NS-Propaganda*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart*, 253; Hoffmann, *NS-Propaganda*, 228-229.

<sup>57</sup> Seyß-Inquart made a habit of attending openings, first nights, etc. whenever it involved performances of prominent personalities; Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart*, 254; 492-494; Hoffmann, *NS-Propaganda*, 116-118.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Het Nieuwe Azië. Colin Ross filmde het Verre Oosten’, *De Maasbode*, 73, no. 29561 (November 30, 1940). Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/>. Accessed April 8, 2018.

the Chamber of Culture—or not practice at all) may not have been felt as having priority, while what remained of editorial discretionary powers within these limits may have tipped the balance against Ross. Although, as noted, the Delpher database is incomplete, all but the most Nazi-friendly newspapers suffered these restrictions. I assume, furthermore, that the underground press, although it was not included either, was unlikely to have reported on Ross.

What is nevertheless strikingly absent in the records are references to Ross's national-socialist views, which he began to vent explicitly after 1933 in books that increasingly mixed travel accounts with propaganda. While this absence may have been a matter of the division of labor between the Foreign News and Arts sections, one does notice the sympathy usually extended to the more outspoken manifestation of the culture of German letters *within* the Netherlands, after Hitler came to power, in the shape of the so-called *Exil*, referring to the writers and publishers who had fled Germany after the Nazi takeover in January 1933, or Austria after its German annexation—the *Anschluß*—in March 1938. Along with a few other European cities Amsterdam, until occupation, had become a haven for German-language writers, among them Klaus Mann and Joseph Roth, and publishers, notably Fritz Landshoff and Walter Landauer, each of whom set up a German-language imprint within an Amsterdam publishing house and between them published many of the internationally dispersed German authors.

Filmmakers, too, went into exile in the Netherlands. But while they left a mark of professionalism, the Dutch film industry was too insignificant to hold on to such directors as Max Ophüls and Detlef Sierck (the later Douglas Sirk) or a director of photography as Eugen Schüfftan for more than one or two film productions. Although American features dominated the Dutch market (distributing 52% of the titles in 1934-36), German feature films were second in popularity (providing 27% of titles screened).<sup>59</sup> As noted, Ufa, the only European company of a scale comparable to any of Hollywood's vertically integrated companies, owned large theaters in the country's three most populous cities and had a Dutch branch office for distribution. Both it and Dutch distributors flooded the Netherlands

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<sup>59</sup> Pafort-Overduin, *Hollandse films*, 315.

with German product.<sup>60</sup> A more detailed study of the German documentary or educational films distributed there would be required to assess Ross' comparative status as a producer. Did his films constitute a popular brand? Was he considered a name director within this niche market? The number of repeated screenings of some of his films years after their original release suggests name recognition, yet this should be measured against other titles and filmmakers. Stock publicity phrases as "by popular demand" to recommend Ross's films may point as much to genuine popularity as to, say, a lack of available product. To date, not enough is known about foreign films within this so-called nontheatrical market to provide a reliable answer.

### **Conclusion**

These circumstances and conditions, along with most newspapers' principled anti-Nazi stance dating back to the 1930s,<sup>61</sup> actually bring out the need for additional contextual information more generally, as a number of questions cannot be answered without inventorying and consulting archival sources. Delpher, after all, is a database compiled from dispersed collections of the publicly distributed artifacts by organizations in the business of making (predominantly) Dutch-language periodicals that are held in public and private repositories in the Netherlands and elsewhere. While it has obviously made the work of researchers easier, it is not the product of a repository that has preserved the private records of these and other relevant organizations' conduct of their daily affairs. Ideally, Ross's relevance within the documentary heritage of interwar and wartime Dutch media would probably be more dependably established with reference to the correspondence, minutes, white papers, budgets, readership, membership or visitor statistics of the organizations and companies involved—not just the periodicals, but also the records of film exhibitors and distributors, trade and cultural associations (such as NBB, NDK), the various popular universities, booksellers, as well to the policies and measures of other players

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<sup>60</sup> Here a search in the Delpher database needs to be complemented with research in other sources because not all cinemas advertized their programs in newspapers; *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>61</sup> Van Vree, *De Nederlandse Pers*, 264-295, 355.

(notably governments) that affected their operation.<sup>62</sup>

We may glean Ross's prewar ideas and viewpoints from newspaper reviews and reports. In interviews he was commonly presented as a prominent geopolitical thinker; book reviews generally appreciated their entertaining and evocative narrative style, yet often they faulted his analyses for being anecdotal and superficial. But how did he compare to authors in similar genres? German letters were important in the Netherlands before occupation. Ross's German-language books (not just translations) were consistently reviewed in Dutch newspapers; and Germans like Ross lectured at many venues in the Netherlands. (The prevalence of the German language in the prewar years, in terms of both active and passive command, seems to have been comparable to that of English today, albeit limited to a smaller section of the population. Indicative of this level of proficiency were the quite common announcements in Dutch newspapers at the time of interviews or talks broadcast by German radio stations.) Reviews or opinion pieces, furthermore, commonly referred to articles in the German press, such as the *Vossische Zeitung* or the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, publications that printed Ross's work.

For these as well as for other topics (such as Ross's views on colonialism or his prediction of the end of white supremacy) more research is required to gauge his impact and relevance, or lack of it, for the documentary heritage in the Dutch interwar world, and wherever he worked or was published.

The current documentation shows, for instance, the obvious contrast between Ross's wartime lectures in the Netherlands and his last public appearances in the USA. In the Netherlands, the German administration and a cowed press made sure that Ross's performances took place in an environment insulated from open criticism. But during his last American journey, between October 1938 and March 1939, his speaking engagements caused controversy. Upon his arrival, his local management informed him that bookings

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<sup>62</sup> From 1933, and throughout the pre-occupation years, German government departments stepped up their pressure to silence individual correspondents in Berlin by intimidation, punishment, and expulsion, or to neutralize unwelcome reporting, directly or indirectly, particularly through the Dutch government; *Ibid.*, 249-257; see also: William L. Shirer, *The nightmare years: 1930-1940* (New York: Bantam, 1985 [1984]), 229.

To preempt a possible ban on the screening of newsreels under pressure of the German government, NBB's executive committee, in the spirit of neutrality, set itself the task during the months preceding the occupation to remove explicit war propaganda from newsreels before prints were submitted to the Central Board of Censorship, an initiative that itself raised the Germans' ire and increased their pressure on the Dutch Foreign Ministry; see: Eye, 'Verslag der werkzaamheden van den Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond vanaf 1 januari 1940 tot 1 januari 1944', 5. Archief Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond, 54/A1/233.



were increasingly difficult to get, especially after the *Kristallnacht* Nazi rampage in Germany on the night of November 9-10, 1938. But whenever he did get an opportunity to speak, his pro-Nazi stance drew vociferous disapproval and protests. One speaking engagement was cancelled, while another, a planned San Francisco debate in March 1939 with the fiercely anti-Nazi New York mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia, was split into two separate non-confronting speaking engagements (but when La Guardia delivered his speech Ross had already left town and sailed for Japan).<sup>63</sup>

This was a phase in Ross's work when his lectures, writings, and his last film were overtaken by fascist ideology. The erstwhile balance between autobiography, travel account, journalism, and politics fell apart while the elements of family and travel also faded away. Particularly in the works he produced in the late-1930s and the 1940s, the books *Unser Amerika* (1936), *Das neue Asien* (1940), and *Die "Westliche Hemisphäre"* (1942), and to a lesser extent the film *DAS NEUE ASIEN* (1940), show Ross's propagandizing on the rise. And although he once had bragged that "he could write and say whatever he wanted," and although he doesn't seem to have been forced to say what he said,<sup>64</sup> he didn't seem to need much prodding to say it.

To properly evaluate Ross's significance for the documentary heritage in the Netherlands (or anywhere else), the archival records that I have consulted sometimes show Ross in constant focus, the center of interest, and at other times he is in the background. As the abovementioned examples show, in the records of the German authorities in the Netherlands Ross's speaking engagements were a routine administrative affair, while in America they had prompted federal investigation, surveillance, and a report submitted to Congress. I therefore conceive of this project less as a biographical than as an archival approach. It is meant to "weave" Ross's viewpoints and opinions within the local events and discourses of the interwar world and, when this isn't possible, to try to fill in the white spots in these histories.

*I thank Stephen Bottomore, Nicholas Hiley, and Joachim Schätz.*

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<sup>63</sup> Baumunk, *Colin Ross*, 106-112.

<sup>64</sup> Once Ross stated to his publishers that the Propagandaministerium had assured him that neither his books nor his lectures were censored; see: SäSta-L, 'Protokoll 11.12.[19]35', 4. Archiv F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 21083/790; Nico de Klerk, 'Nazi penetration'. Mapping Colin Ross, <http://www.colinrossproject.net/detail/exhibit/nazi-penetration/>. Accessed November 15, 2018.