

A Witness to History: Production of Images of India in GDR Newsreels

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In East Germany and then in German Democratic Republic (GDR), newsreels played a vital role in the historical as well as cultural reconstruction of both parts of the country. Screened in the cinema houses during the interludes of screening of main feature films, they were the only source of audio-visual news until the introduction of television news, and thus they were entangled in the world of entertainment and cultural politics. While they tried to be interesting and entertaining, they also carried the political-cultural perspective of the state they were being produced in. In GDR newsreel production *Der Augenzeugen*, India occupies a crucial and interesting place in newsreel film productions. Through these films, that claim authenticity of being an eyewitness, specific kind of images of India were produced. The newsreels offer a layered case study of such a process, where a nation creates the series of images of social and political life of another nation while trying to create within its geographical and cultural borders a political community to be imagined as a nation. The prowess of cinema, as Alain Badiou puts it, lies in its being visual trace of a perpetual past. What appears on the screen affirms the preexistence of a certain past (time/space) that it refers and institutes at the same time. This paper will focus on newsreels centered around India and will try to locate their historical and aesthetic positionality vis-à-vis the contemporary political and cultural scenario. It will study how the newsreels produced in GDR worked as an agent of history and helped to construct a cultural self-identity of GDR by producing images of India. While trying to understand the political and aesthetic composition of these films, the paper will also look into political and cultural anxieties of GDR that can be traced in images of India produced in *Der Augenzeugen*.