

Maria Fritsche, *The American Marshall Plan Film Campaign and the Europeans. A Captivated Audience?*, London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018; xv + 337 pp.;£76 hbk; ISBN 9781350009356

Maria Fritsche's book is a work of Americanisation studies that engages with Cold War history, European integration, cultural diplomacy, propaganda, cinema and reception studies. It examines the Economic Cooperation Administration's film campaign to promote the European Recovery Programme, better known as Marshall Plan (MP), to European audiences. Between 1948 and 1954, around 200 MP films (mostly short documentaries) were exhibited in regular cinemas and through non-commercial screenings in places such as schools, union halls, and village squares. Fritsche's data indicates a considerable reach, especially in Italy, where allegedly over 58 million spectators saw an MP film between the summer of 1948 and December 1950 (p.183). These films may have shaped perceptions of the MP not only at the time, but also – as the book's opening suggests – afterwards, through their footage's uncredited inclusion in the CNN series *The Cold War*. This topic enables Fritsche to discuss three larger issues: the workings of 'cultural transfer' (a concept, according to Fritsche, that prescribes agency to the recipient without necessarily treating the process as an exchange between equal partners) (p.9); the Cold War's and the MP's cultural dimensions; and the political, economic and cultural dynamics across Europe that contributed to shape MP propaganda.

Fritsche begins by discussing the films and their background. Chapter one analyses the visual and narrative strategies to promote the MP. She highlights, for example, the use of extreme long shots of wide vistas (underlining the scale of the MP operation) and close-ups (promoting identification with the subjects benefitting from Marshall aid) (pp.37-8). Chapter two addresses the practice of producing films locally, zooming in on distinct cases, like Italy (the most prolific film producer), Greece (whose documentaries were mostly handled by foreign filmmakers), and France (where bureaucratic and political obstacles complicated production). The third chapter examines how the Cold War's escalation influenced the campaign, with the Korean War and the 1951 Mutual Security Programme (which brought together the overseas assistance programmes) ushering a greater promotion of European rearmament (pp.77-8). Chapters four and five address how the films translated the goals of productivity and integration into imagery, employing a variety of strategies (including animation) to praise individual entrepreneurship and rally support for a – somewhat ambiguous – notion of European unification.

The second part focuses on the actors involved in the campaign. Chapter six explores the roles of US information officers and European filmmakers, closely examining the biographies of key players in order to explain how similar cosmopolitan backgrounds helped align these groups' interests. Chapter seven addresses the receiving end, drawing on an impressive array of sources (including media impact studies, attendance figures, film print orders, institutional correspondence and policy guidelines) to assess the audiences' responses and the propagandists' efforts to grasp viewers' opinions. It concludes that the pragmatic attempts to tailor the material to the Europeans' evinced tastes and interests meant that European audiences unwittingly played their part in the transfer of US policies, ideas and values' (p.204). Chapter eight examines the dissemination of propaganda by analysing how national and local politics, infrastructure, cultural traditions and relations with other agencies influenced the exhibition and distribution of MP films. More tentatively, the conclusion tackles the difficult issue of impact.

Based on the analysis of almost 170 films, multilingual bibliography and documents from the US National Archives and European film archives, Fritsche's research uncovers some interesting

findings. For all their discourse of liberalism and modernisation, for example, MP narratives reinforced conservative views of gender roles, with men as breadwinners and women as housewives and consumers (pp.29, 120). By expanding the predominantly national scope of previous works on MP propaganda, Fritsche compellingly demonstrates how US strategies were influenced by different contexts. For instance, we learn that a film's English commentary is much sparser than the French version, signalling that the information officers may have found one type of audience to require less guidance than the other (p.42).

Overall, the book does veer close to the 'old wine in new bottle' formula. Despite its meticulous approach to a fascinating object, its main conclusions are not particularly surprising or challenging to current historiographical interpretations of postwar US-European cultural and political relations. Nevertheless, Fritsche plants valuable seeds for future research and reflection. For one thing, her holistic and comparative perspective serves to contextualise studies on the MP in general and on specific national cases, particularly on the countries that receive most of the book's attention, namely France, Greece, Italy and West Germany (although there is also potentially useful information about the campaign's Austrian, British, Danish, Dutch, Norwegian and Turkish stages). The focus on the MP's concerted effort to promote the US model and on Europe's partial resistance should help denaturalise the – often taken for granted – development of principles of liberal market economy in Europe. The mapping of the campaign's transatlantic dimension and the documentaries' intra-European production and circulation furthers the ongoing transnational turn in both film studies and Cold War history. Likewise, looking at cinema as part of an economic policy could prove inspiring for economic historians as well as film scholars. In particular, Fritsche's methodological combination of textual records with sharp visual analysis, articulating production, discourse, circulation and reception, is an example to be followed.