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The Situation and Tendencies of the Cinema in Africa

THE SITUATION AND TENDENCIES OF THE CINEMA IN AFRICA

PART I*

JEAN ROUCH

translated by STEVE FELD

The cinema began to take hold in Africa from the first years that followed its invention. In South Africa, for example, as early as 1896, cinema was introduced by a vaudeville magician who had stolen a "theatregraph" from the Alhambra Palace in London. And today, the word "bioscope," used from the turn of the century by "Warwick bioscope" projectors, is still the usual word for cinema in South Africa.

In West Africa, the first attempts at cinema projections date from 1905, the year that travelling cinemas projected the first animation strips in Dakar and surrounding areas. At the same time pioneers and explorers began to use the camera, and the French cinémathèque has several catalogs of George Méliès referring to the first films made in Africa.

Since this pioneering period, the cinema has developed considerably, but one must nevertheless note, along with Georges Sadoul, that Sub-Saharan Africa not only remains one of the most under-developed areas of the world in terms of films shown,¹ but moreover the most backward continent in the area of film production. While Asia, South America, and Indonesia have long been making films, Sub-Saharan Africa has not yet produced a single feature length film.

In the words of Georges Sadoul, "Sixty-five years after the invention of the cinema, in 1960, there is not to my knowledge a single true feature length African film production—acted, photographed, written, conceived, edited, etc., by Africans and in an African language. Thus two hundred million people are shut out from the most evolved form of the most modern of the arts. I am convinced that before the close of the 1960s this scandal will be but a bad souvenir of the past."²

It thus appears particularly opportune today, at a time when African cinema is being born, to take account of current productions in Africa, the possibilities of new productions and distribution, and to analyze the current tendencies in the new African cinema.

The plan of our study will be the following: (1) an account of commercial, educational, and documentary films made in Africa up to today; (2) an analysis of the importance of these types of film from filmic, cultural, and social

viewpoints; (3) an analysis of new tendencies and the conditions for the development of a true African cinema.

As to reference documents: It is important to note here the considerable difficulties of documentation in the field of African cinema. I apologize for many errors and omissions that are inevitable in this type of study; but I think that above all this report is a foundation, which after the necessary corrections and rectifications will give researchers access to information for their studies.

I have gathered these data by using: the classic literature—unfortunately very slight—on African cinema (Georges Sadoul, Leprophon, Thévenot); a review of the first and only international conference on "Cinema in Sub-Saharan Africa," organized in Brussels during the World Fair in July 1958; different UNESCO reports (in particular the report of January 1961, concerning the development of information media in under-developed countries), different articles on African cinema published in the journal *Présence Africaine*, and the special issue of *La Vie Africaine* on African cinema (June 1961). I have also made as much use as possible of reports of information services prepared by African republics in response to a questionnaire circulated by the Comité du Film Ethnographique of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Finally, I will make much reference to my own experience as a filmmaker and observer during the course of several trips to West Africa since 1941.

ACCOUNT OF AFRICAN FILMS TO PRESENT

In this rapid survey we will only distinguish two categories of film: (a) commercial and documentary films, and (b) educational films. In fact, it is not possible to establish very neat boundaries between commercial, documentary, scripted, and ethnographic films; these genres have frequently been mixed since the beginning of African film. On the other hand, educational films can be neatly placed to the side, as their appearance has been recent, and their aim and manner of technical production has been completely different.

Commercial and Documentary Films

The first films shot in Africa by foreign directors (and with rare exceptions, all of the films analyzed in this account are, unfortunately, of this type) were boldly exotic. One sees here a logical continuation from colonialist literature, which also, until the last few years, was aimed toward this sense of removal and bewilderment.

We know very little about the first Méliès documentaries or the films made by Pathé before 1925, but what their catalog titles indicate is the capricious foreignness of savagery and cannibalism; showing the African as a peculiar animal whose behavior is rather laughable, when not classed at the very limits of pathology.

The first World War allowed Europeans to discover another aspect of the African: the courage and good humor of the Senegalese sharpshooter favored the creation of the stereotype of the complacent childish Black, the "Uncle Tom."***

It is peculiar to note parallel images of the Black stereotype: In the United States, until the second World War the Black American was reserved for film roles of the smiling

This is the second in a series of translations of the major writings of Jean Rouch, translated by Steve Feld, which will appear in the first five issues of Studies. An introduction by Feld to the entire series of articles appears in Vol. 1 No. 1.

domestic, just as at the same time in African cinema the Black African was either the incomprehensible savage or the devoted servant, never lacking in a sense of humor.

The first noteworthy film about Black Africa is undoubtedly Léon Poirier's *La Croisière Noire*, made during the first automobile crossing of Africa, from north to south, by Citroën tractors (October 1924-June 1925). The basic subject of this film is auto adventure, but parallel to this real epic some representative aspects of populations encountered during the trip are shown. The travellers were undoubtedly in a hurry, but it is obvious that they took some time to choose and look at their subjects. The documents have aged, but remain as inestimable archival data, both in terms of the discovery of Africa and the evolution of African cultures. Without doubting the sincerity and good will of the filmmakers, two orientations are clearly apparent; the incomprehension of a world just glimpsed, and having stopped to look closer, the barbary of what is discovered there (platter-lipped women, circumcision rites, aspects of the daily life of pygmies, etc.). Although they are rendered as objectively as possible, these images remain frozen, if not ironic documents, quite far from the human warmth of the films made previously or at the same time by Robert Flaherty (*Nanook of the North*, *Moana*).

The same feeling was present in all of the written or filmed reports of expeditions of the period; the West discovered the rest of the world with a lens little different in viewpoint from the pen of Marco Polo.

Unfortunately, the situation degenerated, and in succeeding films Africa was but a continent of barbarism and inhumanity. Clearly, Africa was not the only continent subjected to this treatment: Asia, South America, Greenland, and generally all colonized countries were recalled on the screen from meager images of wild dances, guitar players, or primitive hunts. Titles like *Among the Cannibals*, *Among the People Eaters*, and *Bali, Island of Naked Breasts* sufficiently evoke the spirit, or rather the lack of spirit, of the period.

Raymond Barkan, in a particularly well documented study—"Vers un cinéma universel" (*Cinéma 61*)—describes several typical scenarios:

An ivory hunter (frequently accompanied by the widow of an explorer) abandoned by his porters, captured by a ferocious and vociferous tribe, is saved at the last minute by the bullets of an emergency squad. Or: In the debilitating climate of the tropics, a white man (generally a plantation owner) and a white woman, in the midst of dreadful love-life complications, are aggravated by an indigenous rebellion, or occasionally by an earthquake or floods. Or: In India, the polo addicted officers of His Majesty's Britain, gain fame at the head of their Sepoys against revolting bands. Or: In the Sahara, foreign legionnaires or Arab troopers (their captain joined the Army in a fit of the blues) victoriously battle against a group of pillagers. These explorers universally dream of civilization penetrating the Dark Continent, vehemently attacking the powers of sorcerers, and blazing the trail for missionaries who would convert the natives to Christianity and doctors who would immunize them against sleeping sickness.

"We are writing with a minimum of humor and dramatization" observes Barkan justly.

As a completely new means of expression, the cinema neither had the spare time nor the desire to read the works of Lévy-Bruhl and Frazier. Working at the level of newstand adventure novels, the racism of these films was more stupid than deliberate. If cinema sacrificed itself to all of the commonplace colonialist ideas, it was equally for purposes of commercial conformism as for political

conformism . . . In truth, the Hindus, Africans, Indians, and Arabs were of little more consequence than the lions, tigers, orangutans, cobras, and scorpions among whom they accomplished their missions in the jungle, the tropical forest, or the desert.

And Barkan concludes: "Whatever antipathy comes from this cavalier treatment inflicted on our colored brothers, there is no proof that it added to the racialism upheaving mankind."

From this period, dominated in France by the colonial exposition of 1931, we are reminded of *Trader Horn*, where one of the chief attractions was an African being devoured alive by a crocodile (and from the statement of the filmmakers it was never really clear whether the sequence was faked or accidental) and above all of *Bozambo* (also known as *Sanders of the River*), a sound film with music, starring the Black American singer, Paul Robeson. I will dwell upon this latter film at length for two reasons: *Bozambo* was one of the first quality sound films made in Africa, and, chiefly, *Bozambo* was quite an appreciable success in France and is still a considerable success in Africa.

On the musical level it is interesting to note that thanks to Paul Robeson's extraordinary voice, a low quality pseudo-African music was successfully imposed on both European and African listeners. For example, I've heard young Africans sing the canoer's tune, *ayoko*; this is a very rare example of musical falsification simultaneously abused by foreigners and natives alike.

The African success of this film is even more peculiar, because there has never been a film which so elevates the glories of colonialism. Based on a novel by Edgar Wallace, the film is the story of a British colonial administrator, Sanders (nicknamed "Sandy the strong") who with his African servant, Bozambo, arrives at a river area in his administrative district to put down traditional authority and maintain colonial order. For the most part, the film takes place in Nigeria; for the needs of certain action some exteriors were also shot in the Congo among Wagenia fishermen, and in animal reserves in Kenya. These authentic settings served as the basis for the studio sets in Hollywood, where the rest of the film was shot.

One can see, equally on the visual, auditory, and ideological levels, that this is one of the most faked films that has ever been made, and yet, the film continues to enjoy quite a success in Africa. Some African friends with whom I've discussed this problem have perhaps given me the key to understanding this success: for the first time in film, a Black plays a leading role, and even if it is as a puppet of a British colonial administrator, it is nevertheless sufficient to create considerable sympathy among African audiences.

Bozambo opened the way for an African fantasy cinema, and the hero that followed was not Black but the white Tarzan of the familiar unending film series. The raceless ape-man and his fantastic adventures against men and beasts became a pastime whose prodigious success touched upon the entire world.

In order to finish with films of this tradition made between the two wars, we will just note two very interesting films by Léon Poirier: *Cain*, made in Madagascar, and *L'Homme du Niger*, made with Henry Baur in the interior Ségou region of the Niger delta. Despite the defects of these two films, the directors deserve credit for not faking

anything. For the first time, cameras were set in place and shot natural surroundings and real people. In reviewing these films today it is strange to discover, because of the time since an earlier viewing, a sort of inversion in the pictures: the environment being the principal object of interest, to the detriment of the actors, who are transformed into secondary accessories.

On the other hand, the first true documentary films began to appear at this time. Previously, Marc Allégret, accompanying André Gide in the Congo, brought back the naïve but pretty pictures of *Voyage au Congo* (1928), where most frequently aesthetics took precedence over ethnographic and social documentation. If the film had been the cinematic mirror of Gide's classic book bearing the same title—a violent testimony against the excesses of colonialism—it would certainly have oriented those to follow in the 1930s, thus playing for Africa a comparable role to that played for Asia by Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928) or, above all, for America by Eisenstein's *Thunder over Mexico*.

But it would be necessary to await the images of the Ivory Coast rescued by Vautier (*Afrique 50*) in order for the number one problem of Africa in the twentieth century—its relation with the White world—to be evoked with sincerity, if not impartiality.

In the area of documentary film, the experience of the period between the two wars was already very conclusive. Marcel Mauss, uncontested master of the French school of ethnology, had already professed in his lectures an interest in adding still photography, cinema, and sound recording to traditional ethnographic research. And it is interesting to note that it was infinitely easier then to depart on an exploration with a 35mm camera and Edison cylinder recorder than it is today to pull together a simple expedition to the Sahara. But in fact, if for most present day leaders in French ethnology—Leroi-Gourhan, Lévi-Strauss, Bastide—this teaching of Marcel Mauss remains theoretical, a few pioneers made the first African ethnographic films during the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, which went from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, under the leadership of Griaule, Schaeffner, and Leiris. The first attempts were made particularly among the Dogon of the Bandiagara cliffs, and in 1938, Marcel Griaule, during a second mission, made two model 35mm sound ethnographic films.

Au Pays Dogon is a short fifteen-minute film illustrating aspects of the daily life, material culture, and religion of the Dogon. And *Sous les Masques Noirs* shows funeral ceremonies of a village in the cliffs, and documents the construction, role, and use of large masks, which through ritual dances permit the soul of the deceased to be returned to the dwelling of its ancestors in the next world.

At about the same time, in 1936, Jean d'Esme shot *La Grande Caravane* (35mm, sound) in Eastern Niger; it retraces the voyage of a salt caravan from Agadès to Bilma, where the salt mines are found. Unfortunately, despite the passionate images, the author could not escape the manner of the early sound documentaries, namely, the use of a gossipy and exasperating narration, and tedious music in the style of the *Persian March*.

It is the same defect which marred a short and completely forgotten film, *Coulibaly à l'Aventure*, made in 1936, in Guinea, by G. H. Blanchon. This was the first African

sociological film, and its subject is one of the most important phenomena found in West Africa—the migration of young people from the savannah to the cities of the coast. The adventures of Coulibaly, leaving upper Guinea in order to earn the dowry for his fiancée working as a docker in Conakry, and then as a miner in Sigiri, could have been an extremely valuable document, if it wasn't spoiled by the propagandist narration (in the "benefits of our civilization" style).

Outside of the scene in French Colonial Africa, and some spectacular type pseudo-documentaries which I have already said too much about, I would only mention a single valuable ethnographic film, *Pêcheurs Wagénia*, shot by Surbeck, at Stanley Pool, upstream from Stanleyville in Belgian Congo.

One had to wait until after the war to finally see the development of the African cinema, both in the realm of fiction film as well as that of documentary film.³

Finally, one other aspect of filming between the wars should be noted. It is probable that Africa was the subject for several German filmmakers who were travelling all over the world in the 1930s, making the large series of UFA and Tobias films that included Walter Ruttmann's *Melody of the World* (1929). Unfortunately, all of our research in this area has been in vain, and only documents dealing with South America and the Far East are in the cinémathèque of the Musée de l'Homme.

The second World War indirectly favored the development of "cinema on the move" ("cinéma au long cours," following the excellent phrase of Jean Thévenot), because during this period Army film units used portable materials rather than the more perfected 35mm cameras, which were heavy, cumbersome, and could not leave the studio. It was at this time that 16mm, previously only an amateur format, gained its first stronghold.

Most professional filmmakers, at that time, were reticent about 16mm (and many still are today). Yet the first color 35mm enlargements made from 16mm films about aircraft carriers and flying fortresses in operation had drawn the attention of some filmmakers, as well as some young researchers (like myself) impassioned with the cinema and the wonderful possibilities of the 16mm medium.

These divergent options created in France two opposing currents, which have a tendency to unite today—35mm professional film, and 16mm exploration and research film.⁴

It was in France chiefly, just after the war, that the new movement had its birth. French youth, leaving the occupation, the liberation movement, the armed forces, or the underground, were desirous of a means of escapism, a feeling that has been accurately portrayed, though through a romantic veil, in Jacques Becker's *Rendez-vous de Juillet*. The Musée de l'Homme effectively became a magnet of attraction for all youth seeking adventure and discovery. Around ethnologists like Marcel Griaule, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, Reverend Leenhardt, and Theodore Monod, and great travellers like Paul-Émile Victor or Bertrand Flornoy, there developed a spontaneous grouping of young, well disposed people ready to go off to Greenland, the Antarctic, Borneo, Tierra del Fuego, New Guinea, or Africa. Noël Ballif, a young organizer out of the underground, put together a short Musée de l'Homme mission, the 1946 Ogooué-Congo expedition, which was the first collaboration of ethnologists

and filmmakers and which remains a model of this genre. During this mission the first quality sound recordings in Africa were made; in addition, they allowed for making film sound tracks that would not have to fake exotic music. The three 35mm black-and-white films made during this trip—*Danses Congolaises*, *Au Pays des Pygmées*, and *Pirogues sur l'Ogooué*—remain the first high quality images and sounds of Sub-Saharan Africa, and they constitute first rate documents on traditional Congo dances, the daily life of the Ba-Binga pygmies, and canoe transportation from the Lastourville falls to Lambaréné, on the Ogooué river.⁵

Concurrently, a young French filmmaker, François Villiers, shot two very different films in Equatorial Africa: *Autour de Brazzaville* and *Amitié Noire*. The first told the story of how the Middle Congo rallied behind Free France during the war, and the second, narrated by Jean Cocteau, was a poetic essay on the cultures of Chad. It is necessary to say that these films are not of great interest, but nevertheless constitute one element of the renewal of African cinema.

The films of Villiers and the Ogooué-Congo mission were shot in 35mm, in the same way that conventional commercial productions were made; they required the use of heavy equipment and reliance on a camera crew. This was due to the influence of the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (IDHEC), which advocated the use of 35mm materials and technical crews for the production of all films, even those shot in the most remote areas. Yet at the same time this institute was also interested in the experiments by young groups of travellers and researchers who were voluntarily oriented toward 16mm.

For example, at the same time as the Ogooué-Congo mission, the author of this report, with two comrades, Ponty and Sauvy, descended the Niger river by canoe, and made 16mm black-and-white films during the trip. I must note that we had chosen 16mm as a last resort, because commercial cinema producers were not interested in our project. If the results were disappointing (in particular, we used a very fast negative film, and we didn't have the money to deal with problems of heat and humidity), a document on hippopotamus hunting by harpoon on the Niger river was nevertheless completed. From these pieces, *Actualités Françaises* made a 35mm blowup (the first black-and-white blowup to be made in France) and edited a ten-minute film entitled *Au Pays des Mages Noirs*.

From this point on there was a split in African cinema between two options: 35mm films with commercial and technical guarantees, and 16mm films for eventual blowup or use in lectures.⁶

Here we must note a single exception to the general rule of 16mm's evolution (i.e., shooting in 16mm and then enlarging to 35mm). This is the case of Albert Mahuzier, who began by making 35mm films on hunting in Chad for *Actualités Françaises*, and later created a sort of family enterprise of world travel (including a trip across Africa with his wife and nine children) and directed 16mm films for lectures. These films have been an enormous popular success in France and Belgium, but concern Africa only in a secondary manner, as the principal subject was the life of the Mahuzier family in the course of their expeditions.

After 1948 films made in Africa multiplied; it is not

possible to mention them all; I will nevertheless try to group them by types, illustrated by a few titles.

The first post-war African fiction film seems to be *Paysans Noirs* (titled *Famoro, le Tyran* in Africa) by Georges Rénier; the film was shot and produced by the same crew that made the Ogooué-Congo films. Despite the naïvete of the scenario (Voltaic countrymen are terrorized by a Black despot and it is only the intervention of the colonial administration that brings them happiness and prosperity) this film represents an important stage in the development of African cinema. For here, alongside the story, a real Africa—its countrysides, its peoples, and above all its dialogues—appeared for the first time. After *Paysans Noirs*, all African films shot on studio sets appeared singularly null. For example, *Le Char des Dieux*, a film made at about the same time in Cameroon by Alfred Chaumel, and then edited using footage from all over Africa, was outdated before it reached the screen.

Another noteworthy pre-1950 effort was Thorold Dickenson's *Le Sorcier Noir* (*The Black Witch Doctor*). This film was shot in a studio near London and was deliberately non-documentary, both in terms of framework and characters. Nevertheless, it was the first treatment of the problem of the confrontation of White and African civilization.

Also before 1950, 16mm developed further due to the new possibilities of color film and printing 16mm sound composite copies. Thus, I myself made three films in 1948: *Les Magiciens du Wanzerbé*, *Circoncision*, and *Initiation à la Danse des Possédés*. These films, like those I made preceding them, were attempts to illustrate systematic ethnographic studies in the loop of Niger. However, in the course of projections limited to professional film people, I realized that with a portable 16mm camera an ethnographer-filmmaker could bring back documents whose scope could reach beyond limited specialist audiences. After 1948 it was thus necessary to envision 16mm to 35mm color blowups,⁷ but this operation was not technically possible in Europe until after 1951. In the United States this experiment had already proved possible using the technicolor process. Unfortunately this process necessitated printing a great number of copies in order to be commercially feasible, and was not applicable to films where the maximum demand to be hoped for would not exceed ten copies.

The year 1950 is an important turning point in the evolution of African film. The attempts of the preceding years marked the end of the cheap exoticism so characteristic of the pre-war films, and showed the necessity of discovering and understanding African cultures if one wanted to communicate about them to members of other cultures. Moreover, 1950 historically marked the opening of the colonial crisis and the first independence movements in African countries. From this point until present one sees the following trends in African films:

Exotic Africa. Outside of the Tarzan films, for which Africa was but a backdrop, a certain number of filmmakers, chiefly Americans, continued to exploit the "cannibal" and "witch doctor's dance" film genre. Africa, as before the war, was no more than scenery, and the Africans themselves functioned only as the unfortunate extras that one never hesitated to dress up in costumes of materials from the far

Atlantic, and paint with dreadful tatoos in order to take advantage of "local color."

As an example one can cite *King Solomon's Mines* (which started the Tutsi dancers of Ruanda-Urundi on their film career), whose very first images—a wounded elephant supported by its cows—are the only ones worth the trouble of keeping. Other examples are *Nagana*, a ghastly gangster film made among the Peul of Cameroon, but which could just as well have taken place in Marseilles or Chicago, and finally, a film made in Gabon by the production crew that made *Lost Continent*, for which a plastic skeleton was brought from Rome for the witchcraft scenes. This genre of film is far from exhausted, and today, in Kenya or Chad, someone is still shooting some new production in which Africa will serve as a country of beasts and savages, precisely fitting the White man's standard of adventure.⁸

Ethnographic Africa. Here we find filmmakers and ethnographers trying, sometimes rather clumsily, to show the most authentic aspects of African cultures. The influence of ethnographic film has not been limited to scientific research, and has already modified quite a few commercial films made in Africa.

In the purely ethnographic field, we must first note the films of Luc de Heusch, one illustrating an ethnographic thesis on Tutsi kinship (*Ruanda*), another concerning the lineage system of the Hamba of the Kasai (*Fête Chez les Hamba*). Here the ethnographer turned filmmaker, and tried to use film as a contribution to the techniques of ethnographic research. These two unpretentious but very carefully made films remain the only authentic documents on cultures of the Congo before the troubles of independence. And in comparison, the numerous high-budget Belgian films made in the Congo, such as *Congo*, *Splendeur Sauvage*, or most of the short films by Gérard de Bœe, seem less faithful.

The case of Henri Brandt is different: he was a filmmaker who came to ethnography in order to make a film in Africa. After a preparatory mission among the Peul bororo nomads of Niger, Professor Gabus, director of the ethnographic museum at Neuchâtel, sent Brandt out to the field for a year alone with these savannah pastoralists. Working in 16mm, Brandt brought back an extremely valuable document, accompanied by remarkably well recorded location sound. Brandt's *Les Nomades du Soleil* remains a classic film, even though it has never been distributed commercially.

From the beginning, all of these efforts were not particularly well greeted in scientific circles, and when the Comité du Film Ethnographique was created at the Musée de l'Homme, and charged with the responsibility of initiating students of ethnography to the techniques of cinema, a certain number of ethnographers reproached us for placing the research of an image before ethnographic research itself.⁹ Despite this slight resistance, a true school of Africanist-filmmakers has developed, some working alone, others working with the aid of film technicians. We should mention the following.

Among the ethnographers: Capron, who with filmmaker Serge Ricci made *Noces d'Eau* (fertility rites of the Bobo and Bambara in the San region of Mali) and *Bobo-Oulé* (daily life of the Bobo-Oulé on the border of Upper Volta and Mali;

Igor de Garine, who alone shot *Gourouna*, *Bergers Sacrés* and *Les Hommes du Logone* (both concerning daily life and religion of peoples in Chad); Claude Millet, who despite problems with a bad camera made one of the most disturbing films on rites of passage in Equatorial Africa, *Rites de la Circoncision Chez les Mongom*; Monique and Robert Gessain, who illustrated their work on large initiation ceremonies of the Coniagui (Guinea-Senegal border) with the color film *Le Temps du Caméléon*; Guy le Moal, ethnographer and director of the Research Institute in Upper Volta, who during the many years of research for his thesis on the Bobo-Fing made a film on the role of children in religious masking traditions, *Les Masques des Feuilles*; and Dr. Zahan, anthropology professor at the University of Strasbourg, thanks to whom I was able to make a film on the funeral ceremonies of Mossi chieftans in Upper Volta, *Moro-Naba*.

Among the filmmakers: Jacques Darribehaude, who made two 16mm color films in Mali, *Pays Mandingue* and *Saison Seche* (daily life in Malinke country in the goldfields of the Sigiri region); Georges Bourdelon, who made a 16mm documentary on artisans of the Sahara, *Forgerons du Désert*; Pierre Ichac, who while out shooting a film on wild animals brought back a 16mm synthetic documentary on populations of Chad, *En Regardant Passer le Tchad*.¹⁰

Even professional filmmakers began trying to make truly ethnographic films. Jacques Dupont, filmmaker of the 1946 Ogooué-Congo expedition, later made, in 1951, a remarkable film, *La Grande Case* concerning Bamiléké, Peul, and Bamoun chieftainships in western Cameroon. Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau (also a former member of the Ogooué-Congo mission) made a series of films in Guinea on the Toma, Bassari, and Nalou peoples; *Forêt Sacrée* (first version in 1953), *Pays Bassari*, and *Naloutai*. Following these first documents Gaisseau went back to Africa with two European friends in order to be initiated into the secret societies of the Toma. The long version of *Forêt Sacrée* is the story of their attempt. Little by little they are received by members of Toma society, are tattooed, make a retreat into the forest for purification rites, but then, at the last moment, are not allowed to penetrate into the sacred forest. Sick and demoralized, they abandon their attempt. This film, which was contested by a number of ethnologists who felt that being initiated into another society was the surest way to lose the objectivity necessary for scientific study, nevertheless brought an entirely new aspect of ethnography to the screen. For the first time one is an actual witness to the research, which perhaps was hopeless, but nevertheless shows an unbounded respect for African culture. For in the end, this defeated attempt is a defense of the forest, which refused to be violated by unknowns, despite the fact that they had made relatively considerable accomplishments.¹¹

Evolving Africa. Here filmmakers tried to show the problems posed by contact between traditional Africa and the modern world. In this instance the cinema is up against the same obstacles as African sociology. In both cases the principal stumbling block appears to me to be an ignorance of traditional cultures in the process of evolution. This fault is particularly serious when manifest in films of a propagandistic tendency, where the filmmakers preferred to mock

traditional African cultures, rather than attempt to understand them.

We have already mentioned the first film on acculturation—*Coulibaly à l'Aventure*, made in 1936. This topic was not dealt with again until 1950, when a young student at IDHEC (the French Film Institute), Vautier, clandestinely made *Afrique 50*. This film shows the struggle of the young RDA party in the Ivory Coast, which was then under attack from the colonial administration. Shot in 16mm, black-and-white, with a makeshift soundtrack added later, *Afrique 50* was prohibited in Africa and France, and limited to cinémathèque showings.

Another banned film was Alain Resnais and Chris Marker's *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*, made in European African museums by means of a remarkable montage of archive documents from Africa. The thesis was that the statues of African art in Western museums are degraded because they have lost the meaning of their representations, and the new African art that has been influenced by the West is already completely decadent. This violent and admirable film was censured and has only been seen by a privileged few.¹²

At the same time, the first African students at IDHEC, unable to obtain administrative permission to film in their own countries, turned the situation around and began making African films in Europe. If Mamani Touré's *Mouramani*, a story based on Guinean folklore, is only of slight interest, *Afrique sur Seine*, by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Jacques Melokane, Mamadou Sarr, and cameraman Caristan, is truly the first Black film. It is an interesting attempt to show the lives of Africans in Paris; unfortunately it only remained an experiment since the final editing and the sound track were never carried to completion.

Besides these more or less ill-starred films of the 1950s, a great number of films were shot in all countries throughout Africa on the subject of acculturation. But as already noted, they were made in ignorance—if not contempt—of traditional cultures in the process of evolving. In these films, as before in *Paysans Noirs*, *L'Homme du Niger*, and even *Bozambo*, African cultures were considered as archaic, and as unworthy of surviving contact with Western culture. Their existence was simply to be assimilated over time by "progress." In this connection I should mention *Men of Africa*, made in East Africa by Grierson and his group. This film treats the rivalry of the educated Blacks of the savannah and the primitive pygmies of the forest. Also, *C'était le Premier Chant*, by Carlos Vilardebo, a story of a young French civil servant who tries to improve the situation of a Cameroon bush village that is impoverished by both dryness and the lack of initiative of its inhabitants. Other films are *Bongolo*, made in Belgian Congo by André Cauvin, a story that follows the misadventures of a young Bapende girl who runs away from her village to be reunited with her fiancé, a sanitary assistant, because her parents want her to marry against her will.¹³ Finally, *The Boy Kumasenu*, made by Sean Graham and the Ghana Film Unit in 1952, a story of the difficulties of a young fisherman who runs away from his village in the lagoon and falls into the corrupt city, where he turns from justice to delinquency.

Two films made by Claude Vermorel in Gabon and Guinea, *Les Conquérants Solitaires*, and *La Plus Belle des*

Vies, must be put in a somewhat different category. Here the author has tried to treat the reverse aspect of acculturation: the European who lets himself be taken in by the African cultures which he first set out to discover.

The political struggles for independence have equally inspired a certain number of films but, unfortunately, very few seem satisfactory. It was singularly the Mau-Mau struggle in Kenya that inspired the largest number of films. An example is Peter Brooks' *Something of Value* (1953), which tried to show the evolution of a friendship between two young students, one White and one Black, who as a result of circumstances find themselves in two opposing camps. This tremendously naïve and quite evidently prejudiced film is one more example of the unconscious attack on African dignity. Once again the African and his civilization are placed on an inferior level. For example, the major scene in the film shows the confession of an African nationalist leader who betrays his compatriots because he was afraid of a calamity.

Simba, made by Brias Desmond Huerst in 1955, is an incredibly violent expose about an African medical doctor whose father is the chief of a Mau-Mau group named Simba; the doctor can find no other solution to this drama than death. *Freedom*, an extremely costly film made by Moral Rearmament stresses the movement's customary theme of redemption of sin by confession. Properly speaking, and despite its title, this is not a film about political emancipation, but a propaganda film for the International Moral Rearmament Organization.

A rather similar category includes films made by African film units on the occasions of their countries' independence. A typical example is *Freedom for Ghana*, by Sean Graham, concerning the independence of Ghana on March 6, 1957. The historical interest of this film helps one forget its slightly irritating propaganda angle.

It is too soon to discuss Joris Ivens' *Demain à Nanguila*, made in Mali during the summer of 1962. This film treats the possible evolution of a peasant community supported by the government party.

Outlines of a true African cinema. All of the films just discussed were attempts by foreigners using film to convey their impressions—or their knowledge—of certain African problems. Here again the influence of ethnographic film, despite its modesty, is really considerable. Very quickly we have filmmakers wanting to reach below the surface, wanting to transcend the stage of exoticism, wanting to make the spectator enter easily into the African world, be it traditional or modern. And these are the first efforts toward a true African cinema of tomorrow.

The first example comes from South Africa, where in 1948 the Reverend Michael Scott made an extremely violent black-and-white film, *Civilization on Trial in South Africa*, which shows the reactions of Black South Africans to problems of racial segregation. Also from South Africa came the first film with a truly African story, even though it is told by a White. The film is Englishman Donald Swanson's *Magic Garden*, based on a ballad by a young Black man from Johannesburg (Ralph Trewheela, who plays the role of the lame flutist). The film recounts the amazing adventures of a thief who robs forty pounds from a church, loses it, then recovers it, and so on, with someone helped at every turn

along the way, until the money is finally returned to the church. This little masterpiece has unfortunately passed unnoticed in France owing to the fact that its French adaptation was particularly difficult.

In Ghana, Sean Graham followed something of the same idea in *Jaguar (High Life)*, a ballet based on the theme of a popular song making fun of "been to" Africans who had studied in Great Britain.

Other films were already in the works. In South Africa an American director, Lionel Rogosin, made *Come Back, Africa* (1959) which presented an even stronger message about the victims of South African racism. Undoubtedly, one might demand to know whether this film is not more the testimony of Rogosin on apartheid, than it is a cry of revolt by the victims of segregation themselves. But letting the role of the filmmaker be what it may, at some moments it is Africa which speaks, and the director is no longer the master of the door he has unlocked.

It is in this same spirit that I, too, have worked over the last several years. As far back as the making of my conventional ethnographic film *Les Fils de l'Eau* I tried to avoid the traps of exoticism. Flaherty had already shown me a way of directing the documentary; by organizing and ordering the authentic elements of a culture the filmmaker takes them out of their alien framework and renders them accessible to a world public. But no one could hope to rival Flaherty's achievement of making Nanook the friend of men who had never seen an Eskimo. I thus tried another path, that of giving a voice to Africans themselves and asking them to comment directly on their behavior, actions, and reactions. In 1955 I used this method in *Jaguar* (not yet edited with a final sound track),*** giving three young Nigerian migrants the opportunity to tell of an imaginary—though plausible—voyage to Ghana. In 1957 I had the same experience in the Ivory Coast with *Moi, un Noir*. During the shooting I projected the silent film footage tracing the life of a poor dock worker from Abidjan to this same docker who had acted his own part, and asked him to improvise a narration. The result was remarkable: the docker, Robinson, stimulated by the projection of his own image improvised an astounding monologue in which he not only reconstructed the dialogues for the action but explicated and even judged his own actions and those of his fellow actors.¹⁴

African cinema by Africans for Africans. The attempts that I have just discussed have arrived at their own limits. For when all is said and done, neither Rogosin, Graham, nor I will ever be Africans, and the films that we make will always be African films by Europeans. This shortcoming is not bad in itself, nor does it prevent us from continuing to make African films. But it is time that the statement is made, as it has been by Georges Sadoul (*Ibid.*) "that Africans make African films using African money." This is starting to happen (I will discuss the technical training of African filmmakers a bit later) and already Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, the earliest of the African students trained at IDHEC, teaching in Dakar for several years, has produced a film, though perhaps still a bit awkward. *Un Homme, Un Idéal, Une Vie* portrays the misadventures of a fisherman on the Senegal shore who violates tradition by putting a motor on his canoe. But despite the awkwardness, what ingenuity!

Here the African tradition is not judged; it is stated and exhibited, and if the forest trees speak and join in with the counsel of village elders, no one dreams of ridiculing it.

Owing to lack of funds this film has never been completed. But Paulin Soumanou Vieyra has other projects, and he is no longer alone. Just to mention French-speaking Africa, it is from Vieyra and his comrades, Blaise Senghor, Timité Bassari, Thomas Coulibaly, Jean-Paul N'Gassa, and others, that we must wait for this film which we all hope for—above all, we European directors of African films.¹⁵

NOTES

¹ Europeans go to films on an average of thirty or forty times per year; Indians, Middle Easterners, and North Africans one time per year; Africans one time every thirty or forty years, and in some African countries once per century.

² See Georges Sadoul, "Le Marché Africain," *Afrique Action*, Tunis, May 1, 1961.

³ We should note a film shown in Paris in 1935: *Soeurs Noires*, a religious propaganda film in which the actors spoke Zulu. It is mentioned by Georges Sadoul in *La Vie Africaine*, June 15, 1961: "Africa has remained, until now, a country of filmic poverty."

⁴ In the United States, on the other hand, the problem was previously studied by Walt Disney Studios. They decided to shoot in 16mm and then enlarge to 35mm; their celebrated series of films that included *The Living Desert* was done in this fashion. Despite their technical ingenuity, these films are of limited scientific interest.

⁵ These films were made by Jacques Dupont, assisted by an exceptional ethnographic team (Raoul Harweg, Gilbert Rouget, Guy de Beauchêne) as well as an exceptional film crew (Edmond Séchan, Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau, Andre Didier, Nef, Francis Mazières). All of them have continued in these paths since this first experience.

⁶ We cannot speak here about lecture "exploration" films as most of them have disappeared owing to the absurd lecture circuit system that required projecting the original. These lecture circuits began to be extraordinarily popular in France in 1946 (the "Connaissance du Monde" series held at Salle Pleyel, as well as series in the provinces) and in Belgium in 1950 (the "Exploration du Monde" series). Here we will simply report the format of these lectures: 16mm color films of about one hour in length, with direct narration by the lecturer-filmmaker. As a matter of fact, from the beginning of these lecture circuits Africa was one of the weakest attractions. So the loss of African films here is not very serious. The only valuable documents were edited elsewhere, had sound added, and were then marketed; we will discuss these films shortly.

⁷ The instigator was filmmaker René Clément, who had made a 16mm color film of a trip to Yemen, around 1939. Titled *L'Arabie Interdite*, the film was only shown at lectures.

⁸ We should also mention Denis' TV films of safaris in Kenya, where one finds some remarkable sequences on wild animals (baboons attacking an antelope who is giving birth), but where Africa and Africans are merely scenery.

⁹ The Comité du Film Ethnographique was founded by the permanent advisory committee of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences during the Vienna meetings in 1952. Its creation followed the projection of films by the author which were presented under the heading of an ethnographic contribution. These films were made with the help of Roger Rosfelder in Niger in 1951-52. They were all 16mm Kodachrome with original sound tracks: *Bataille sur le Grand Fleuve* (hippopotamus hunting), *Cimetière dans la Falaise* (funeral rites of the Dogon of the Bandiagara cliffs), *Yenendi: Les Hommes qui Font la Pluie* (rainmaking rites among the Sonrai and Zerma). These films were later joined together and blown up to 35mm—one of the first made in Europe—and retitled *Les Fils de l'Eau*.

¹⁰ We should also mention François Balsan's *L'Expédition Panhard-Capricorne* on the Kalahari desert of South Africa, Fiévet's films on Nigeria, especially *Kano*, the films now being edited by

Father Pairault on Northern Cameroon, and Civatte's films on Niger. All of these films are 16mm Kodachrome, unfortunately reserved for limited distribution.

¹¹Also deserving of mention is *Omaru*, a film made in 1954 in 35mm Agfacolor by Quendler, an Austrian filmmaker. Shot among the Kirdi and Peul of the Mandara mountains, its subject is a sort of African epic about the unhappy loves of a young Kipsiki shepherd. Without any scientific pretensions whatsoever, this film offers some interesting views of the life of the Kipsiki and the Peul chiefdom of Rai Bouba.

¹²The commercial release of *Statues* was an emasculated version that has been publicly rejected by the authors.

¹³André Cauvin has since made a film on the visit of King Badouin to the Congo, and another on Congolese independence. The editing of these two films together with a film on present day Congo (1961) would make Cauvin's collected work into the most important document on the evolution of a single African state.

¹⁴Finally we should mention the American TV films made in Kenya for Time-Life Inc. by Richard Leacock, formerly Flaherty's assistant on *Louisiana Story*. For the first time in Africa, Leacock and his crew used a portable camera synchronized to a portable tape recorder. I will return to this subject in the third part of this report.

¹⁵I have not cited the films made in South Africa by local companies (particularly the films of Jack and Jamy Ulys) treating typically South African subjects. Although the production of these films is important and liable to increase given the favorable conditions in South Africa, they cannot be considered as African films since they are almost exclusively films made by Afrikanders, in Afrikaans, and dealing only with subjects of interest to Afrikanders.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

*English translation of "Situation et tendances du cinéma en Afrique" which appeared as an appendix, pp. 374-408, of the *Premier Catalogue Selectif International de Films Ethnographiques sur*

l'Afrique Noir, Paris, UNESCO, 1967. Rouch's paper was first written and presented to a UNESCO symposium in 1961. A translation of the 1961 original was prepared by UNESCO for limited distribution. Portions of the first third of the article, slightly edited and modified, formed the basis of a short article, "The Awakening African Cinema" published in the *UNESCO Courier*, March 1962. Otherwise, Rouch's extensive knowledge of African cinema has not previously been accessible to an English-reading public. The translation is by Steve Feld, Anthropology Film Center, Santa Fe; special thanks are again due Ms. Marielle Delorme of the Comité International des Films de l'Homme in Paris for review and for locating a copy of the 1961 UNESCO translation. Due to the unusual length of the article it will appear in two parts. Rouch's own footnotes are numbered through the text; asterisks refer to translation notes.

***"... le courage et la bonne humeur du tirailleur 'sénégalais' favorisèrent la création du stéréotype du Noir bon enfant, style 'Y a bon Banania.'" The Senegalese sharpshooter is a common West African stereotype. Marielle Delorme informs me that "Y a bon" is a publicity slogan for Banania, a commercial breakfast cocoa with bananas. The picture illustrating the product shows a smiling Black brandishing bananas and speaking pidgin French. The image of the happy banana-eating African is perhaps most similar to the "Uncle Tom" and "Aunt Jemima" stereotype of Black Americans.

****Jaguar* was finished in 1967. The catalog to which Rouch's paper is appended lists a French version of 130 minutes. A 90-minute version with English subtitles has been available in the United States since 1972.

EDITOR'S NOTE. *My apologies to Marielle Delorme, translation consultant on this series, whose name was inadvertently transformed to "Deloriné" in the Editor's Introduction to the first issue of Studies (Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 2).*—SW