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AFRICAN DOCUMENTARIES, CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS: THE NON-FICTION FILM PRODUCTION AT THE ORIGINS OF FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN CINEMA

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Ousmane Sembène, the indisputable father of African cinema, is known for his numerous full-length feature fiction films. It is interesting now to explore the incubation period of his cinema and, more broadly, that of francophone African cinema, by examining the various productions of alternative audio-visual projects, including educational films and documentary projects made in the often-troubled contexts of colonial and post-colonial institutions. It is thus interesting to compare the diversity of film practices in the Africa of the *Independences* (1950–1970). Describing the premises of a cinematographic institution (*institution liminaire*, Biron, 2000), whose first players aim to establish a fair distance from the ex-colonial tutelage, allows us to re-examine the generally accepted version of history that begins with full-feature films. This is done by showing how this period is characterized by a diversified production of less glamorous cinematographic projects.

This article will thus explore the non-fiction films made by African pioneers, generally co-produced at different levels with the *Coopération française*. It will particularly address the ways in which filmmakers in West African Francophone countries (mainly Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Niger) used various tactics (Certeau, 1980) to adapt the diverse cultural, educational, and audio-visual projects—financed by the newly former colonial power (France) or by international institutions (UNESCO)—to their goal of creating movies. This process (Certeau called it

“perruquer,” 1980, p. 49), was the starting point of new audio-visual instances (“body-institutions”; Dubois, 1978) of production, training, and reception. In exploring the production of documentaries—or proto-documentaries—by African pioneers, the objective of this article is to highlight other forms of audiovisual production that occurred at the same time as the emergence of West African cinemas. Not seeking to be exhaustive, it will instead draft a number of lines of reflection structuring a host of cultural practices in the context of a nascent audiovisual institution. This article does not aim to be definitive, serving instead as an invitation to strengthen the research concerning a larger corpus of audio-visual productions.

Starting with the educational background of Senegalese directors and technicians, we will compare this system with the Sahelian experience, i.e., the collaboration between the *Comité du film ethnographique* and the *Centre culturel franco-nigérien* and the audiovisual production in the Upper Volta in the 1960s. First, we need to examine the general characteristics of the budding cinematographic institution as it was created in Senegal, Côte-d’Ivoire, Niger, and Upper Volta during the 1960s. First, it can be defined by a high level of interactions between agencies: the same person could occupy different institutional role such as production, validation, or distribution. At a preliminary stage, institutions have few rules, which results in a space of great flexibility. Since the filmmakers are coming from extra-cinematographic

backgrounds, subverting aesthetic or technical codes, and exploring various filming approaches, the result is often heterodox, and the delineation between genres is fluid.¹ More broadly, the emerging cinematographic field is dependent² on other local cultural institutions, on the political and social contexts, and the policies of the newly independent government as well as the ex-colonial power. Body institutions (*instances*) at a starting point cannot distance themselves from the social environment: there is a close proximity to the filmmakers' sociopolitical and the aesthetic intentions. The state control of the modes of production and distribution often interferes with the filmmakers' goals to express their own political views. Having defined themselves as artists and intellectuals connected with the masses, they appropriated Fanon's category of *intellectuel de la troisième période* (Fanon, 2002) and saw themselves as responsible for "decolonizing the imaginaries" and disseminating a postcolonial mode of thought. The West African cinematographic institution has a low level of autonomy from French cultural institutions: the first films were in French, more or less financed through cooperation, and greatly influenced by the practices current at that time within the French film academy. This remains true for the Senegalese, Nigerien, and Burkinabe examples.

FILMMAKER AND TECHNICIAN BACKGROUND IN SENEGAL

Like culture, a wide range of processes can be observed that are difficult to synthesize. As mentioned, this is characteristic of liminal cultural institutions, where there is a lot of flexibility and few standards: pioneers have difficulties in obtaining the right training. By definition, they come from another cultural tradition, and, without established methods of accreditation, they

have difficulty in getting recognition for their artistic practices. Thus many young participants try their hand in the industry before finding their path in other domains. This is particularly valid in the audiovisual sector due to the multiplicity of techniques to be mastered, the constraints related to the material, and large aesthetic margins. In this context, it is interesting to see how the filmmakers remembered in the institutions (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Ousmane Sembène, Alassane Mustapha, Oumarou Ganda, etc.) forged a path through chaotic situations.

In the case of West Africa, the corpus of post-independence films is relatively small and produced by a handful of filmmakers. Consequently, each individual's input takes on great importance and its own meaning. If we compare the training of Francophone film and television directors and technicians in West Africa (specifically Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Upper Volta), two models emerge: Senegalese or Ivorian filmmakers would obtain aesthetic and/or technical training while abroad in Europe (mainly France and the USSR). Upon their return, some would struggle to remain creators, whereas others chose comfort in administrative activity. The vast majority of Nigerien and Burkinabé (Voltaic) filmmakers began by making films before participating in short-term distance learning. Although not all who participated went on to become recognized directors, most of them continued their participation in audiovisual activity. Let us start with the example of the Republic of Senegal.

In 1952, Paulin Vieyra was admitted to the IDHEC, the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (now FEMIS). In 1954, he was the first West African graduate of IDHEC. In 1955, in collaboration with Mamadou Sarr and Jacques Caristan, he directed *Africa-sur-Seine* (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Mamadou Sarr, Jacques Caristan, 1955) about the situation of

African students in France. The film was shot entirely in Paris because it was impossible for Africans to obtain permission to film in the French colonies during the colonial period. From 1957 onward, Vieyra organized the Senegalese cinema and news service in the Senegalese government. While awaiting the arrival of the French collaborators, André Jousse and Christian Lacoste, Vieyra put himself behind the camera. Later, he recruited and trained Senegalese photographers, including Baidy Sow, Georges Caristan, and Momar Thiam. The training of audio and visual technicians varied. Some learned their trade on the spot; others collaborated with the elders trained in Europe or with French partners. Others were invited to take short courses in the main European schools. This was, for example, the case of Tidiane Aw, who first studied at the Film Institute in Hamburg (Germany) before completing his training at the Office for Radio Cooperation (OCORA) in Paris.

Initiated by Vieyra, Dakar became a center for the production of documentaries and educational films intended for distribution in West Africa. Although there are few traces of the distribution and reception of these films, one can still gain information about elements of production during this time. These activities inform us about the professional backgrounds of lesser-known filmmakers who were very active from the beginning. Among the latter was Blaise Senghor, the nephew of President Léopold Sédar Senghor. Senghor studied film at the IDHECD between 1958 and 1960, and then worked for Senegalese news outlets. In this context, he produced *Grand Magal à Touba* (Senghor, B, 1963, 25'), a color documentary on the Brotherhood of Mourides of Touba. On the one hand, the point of view is clearly Senegalese: the film is about an important topic in Senegal rarely considered by the French. On the other hand, the treatment of the subject

is classical and demonstrates nearly identical choices that would have been made by European filmmakers undertaking similar themes: the absence of direct sound renders the reality more abstract, and the commentary in French dictates the meaning of purely illustrative images. Certain expressions recall the characteristic exoticism of colonial productions: "Life continues, picturesque, noisy and colored" (10'00); "One relaxes, one is happy, one sways with the rhythm" (12'30).³ This holds true in the introductory maps of West Africa and Senegal that open the film. For these reasons, this film is representative of the weak autonomy of the Senegalese audiovisual production, both in terms of means and aesthetic forms.

Momar Thiam was a photographer, and then a cameraman, for the Senegalese Ministry of Information's Cinema Service. In 1963, he directed *Sarzan* (Thiam, Momar, 1963, 35'), a 16-mm black-and-white film shot "clandestinely": "At the time, in 1963, Senegalese cinema was virtually nonexistent. I took a risk to see what would come out of it!"⁴ The film tells the story of a veteran's return to his village and the difficulties he faces in reconciling his Western experience with the vernacular reality. The postcolonial-minded filmmaker questions the colonial conception of an inherently European civilization versus the depiction of the Africans with "manners of savages" (6'). Upon his return to the village, the protagonist refuses ceremonies, destroys fetishes, and insults the ancestors. He ends up going mad: "the genii have avenged themselves of him!" (28').⁵ This film clumsily attempts to outline a way of thinking specific to independence in which intellectuals sought the best of both worlds, grafting elements of Western modernity onto Senegalese traditions.

Furthermore, the film is very amateur in its form: the play of the actors composes with great

differences of tone; the aesthetic is non-homogeneous and integrates both original shooting angles, mounting jumps or shaky shots, filmed without stand. On the other hand, we have the impression that the director tried to mitigate the absence of synchronized sounds and images by post-synchronizing dialogues recorded during the shooting. For example, when the main character speaks alone in the bush, his lips move, but the sound of his voice is not synchronous. Similarly, a voiceover regularly guides the viewer, emphasizing the important inflections of the narration. This voice is not totally disembodied as it corresponds to that of the narrator in the introductory scene who introduces us to the soldier ready to return to his village. Thus the director positions himself as a storyteller who simultaneously amuses and teaches us. Thiam apparently made other films in the 1960s, documentaries such as *Luttes casamançaises* (Thiam, Momar, 1963, 20') and fiction films (*Simb*, Thiam, 1963, 20'; *La malle de Maka Kouli*, Thiam, 1963, 20'), which cannot be found in the *Direction de l'information* at Dakar, or in the *Archives françaises du film* at Paris. The lack of interest for Thiam's work is unfortunately representative of many movies from the early African film production.

All these elements give a good idea of the implemented methods and the aesthetic intentions of the young filmmakers: a production based on a mode of appropriation⁶ of the limited resources available in the young republic of Senegal; a formal search for available material and filmmakers' ambitions, coupled with the desire to explain the stakes of independence to the greatest number of people. Due to their political and didactic intentions, but also because of their mode of production, these films are characteristic of an artistry dependent on social conditions (political, religious, moral, etc.).⁷

The experience of Ousmane Sembène is completely different: he became a writer and an intellectual, and, in 1961, he entered a film school in Moscow. In 1962, he made his first short film *Borom Saret* (the Cart), followed by *Niaye* in 1964. Although Sembène produced works of fiction (as a screenwriter and director), he was interested in other forms of audiovisual production from the beginning: in 1963 he responded to an offer by the Malian government, who was looking to produce ethnographic films. Through his production house based in Dakar, *Domirev*, "son of the country," he produced *Songhays* (Sembène, Ousmane, 1963), a 16-mm documentary on the lost Songhays empire. Similarly, in 1966, along with three other African filmmakers (Henri Duparc, Félix Ewande, and Paulin S. Vieyra), he responded to a call by the Bureau of Cinema (JR Debrix, French cooperation) to submit a proposal for a pedagogical film designed to combat alcoholism.⁸ For a variety of reasons, none of the project proposals were selected, and the film was never made. It is interesting to understand why filmmakers with at least some level of experience offered their services for such educational films. The first point certainly illustrates filmmakers' social commitment and their interest in helping to educate rural populations: for example, this aspect is evident in Sembène's oeuvre, including some short film projects such as *Tauw* (1969, 26'). Additionally, the directors and the technicians had little opportunity to practice their profession beyond these films: they saw non-artistic projects as ways of "practicing their art." For those, such as Sembène, who would perpetuate a private production structure, cooperating with the French made it possible to justify investments in new film equipment. Finally, it should be emphasized that these examples describe the porosity between the modes of production and aesthetic forms: all

filmmakers must negotiate these elements regardless of time or geographical location. Again, these points (social commitment; the need to film in order to gain experience; the flexibility regarding film genre) are linked to the audiovisual industry's liminal nature in West Africa.

NIGER: BETWEEN *COMITE DU FILM ETHNOGRAPHIQUE* AND *CENTRE CULTUREL FRANCO-NIGERIEN*

Let us now examine the individuals in the Sahelian countries, starting with the Republic of Niger. Alassane Mustapha, a self-described autodidact, claims he would have even “reinvented” the cinema:

At school I was known as an excellent artist, and I made a [Chinese] shadow puppet show one day. I could create lions, elephants for my peers . . . I was living at that time in N'Dongou, where I had been born. At that time, neither I nor my friends knew anything about cinema, we had never heard of it. [. . .] It was then that I thought to make a shadow puppet show in color. For this, I increased the power of light and worked on a material through which it could pass: the transparent packaging of cigarette packs! Later, I was finally able to see movies and I even went so far as to make a camera that works! I then went on to work with Rouch on developing shooting techniques and film equipment.⁹

He created his first cartoons: “which I engraved directly on film and that I showed to friends.”¹⁰ In 1960, with the technical support of Jean Rouch, he began to shoot *La bague au roi Koda* (Mustapha, Alassane, 1962, 22')¹¹ inspired

by a legend from Niger's Djerma. Despite numerous technical shortcomings (amateur images, shadow of the camera in the image, fittings in the axis, approximate angles of shooting, etc.), the film offers an innovative look at the traditions of Niger. It is a cross between an ethnographic documentary and a fictional reenactment with amateur participants. The entire film is narrated in French by a Nigerien narrator (probably Alassane Mustapha), except the final sequence, which is accompanied by the non-synchronous voice of the griot shown on screen.

In 1962, Mustapha, in co-production with the Ethnographic Film Committee and the French-Nigerien Cultural Center of Serge Moati, produced *Aouré* (Mustapha, Alassane, 1962, 30'),¹² a fable about the marriage between a young girl and a young fisherman. The film won several prizes, including the first prize at the St. Cast International Ethnographic Film Festival in 1962, and the silver medal for the 16-mm category at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival. The film borrows from several cinematographic genres: ethnographic investigation, sociological observation, and fiction. Despite the presence of musical instruments on screen, the wedding ceremony takes place without music (almost without sound), whereas the subsequent celebration is filmed with non-synchronous sound, which gives it the air of a documentary. Additionally, this film denounces the social context that makes it difficult for young people to get married: the youth are weighed down by clan rules and marriage expenses. Thus the explanatory commentary takes on a documentary form when it introduces the situation or lists specifics such as the cost of the dowry: “it is often a sum of 25 to 30,000 francs for young bride” (12').¹³ However, the montage breaks the homogeneity of this discourse, and the image often illustrates a counterpoint. While the narrator usually keeps a

relatively serious explanatory tone, the image plays on fictional registers, oscillating between romanticism and comedy. During one of the fisherman's visits to his future in-laws, the actress's actions contradict the voiceover: "While Mariam, hidden behind the shrubs, listened seriously to her uncle's conversation,"¹⁴ the young woman in the image is laughing. The voiceover also plays with this element of burlesque when the narrator imitates the characters' voices.

These two films attracted the attention of Claude Jutra, a Quebec filmmaker invited to Niger by Jean Rouch. Returning to Montreal, Jutra organized the funds to invite Mustapha for a training course at the NFB (Canada) in 1962 under the direction of animation master, Norman McLaren. This experience abroad was fundamental for Mustapha, who pursued his audiovisual animation career in his native country until 2015.

Oumarou Ganda made his first films under the influence of Jean Rouch and the Franco-Nigerien Cultural Center where he was a technical assistant. He met Rouch in Côte d'Ivoire at the end of the 1950s, as he was fleeing both his colonial military experience and a failed return to Niger. He went on to collaborate with Rouch on ethno-cinematographic research in *Zazouman de Treichville* (1957); he was also the main character in *Moi un noir* (1958). Upon his return to Niamey, Ganda participated in the "Culture and Cinema" club, where young French technicians (Moati, Letellier, and Delassus) provided training for young people who wished to pursue different professions in cinema: filmmaking, director of photography, and sound mixer.

The Cine-Club of Niamey pursued a double objective: "initiation to the art of photography and cinema, their history, their genres, their authors"; "by providing access to certain technologies that incorporate both the fields of

photography and cinema."¹⁵ As the cultural ambassador to the French Embassy in Niger noted in 1968:

This generation of youth will have learned through film clubs, theoretical courses, direct participation in film production and their access to a team of passionate cinephiles, to demystify and consider film as an instrument of culture. It is a generation of savvy spectators who will have been prepared.¹⁶

Similarly, this production program trained technicians: "capable Nigeriens freely use this material and are provided basic maintenance training, mainly under the direction of Moustapha Alassane and the supervision of Jean Rouch." The privileged access to production material allowed "two African [Nigerien] filmmakers [to reveal themselves]: Oumarou Ganda and Moustapha Alassane."¹⁷

An excellent student, Ganda quickly became an assistant to the French technicians; he assumed technical maintenance and began to train the younger filmmakers. He also developed familiarity with the materials available at the Cultural Center and the Ethnographic Film Committee (IFAN). In the mid-1960s, he began to write and direct *Cabascabo* (Ganda, Oumarou, 1968, 52'), a partially autobiographical film about the veteran *tirailleurs sénégalais* of Niger, in which he played the principal role. He included political reflection in his film, comparing the situations of the different colonial armies of France, Great Britain, and the United States. Throughout this film, Ganda tries to represent the horror of the fighting in Indochina, in order to account for the trauma he experienced. The technical elements (camera and sound recording) are perfectly mastered: fixed shots construct descriptive scenes. A

shoulder-held camera gives rhythm when required by the plot intrigue (war scenes or dramatic actions). Dialogues in Nigerien were recorded live and then resynchronized during the editing process. Oumarou Ganda, the best-known Nigerien filmmaker, is not unique. Other names emerge from the archives, including Djingareye Maïga, who was also formed by the Franco-Nigerien Cultural Center.

According to the information currently available in the archives, the situation appears to have been very similar in the Republic of Upper Volta: young Burkinabés were trained for careers in cinema through contact with French professionals.¹⁸ According to the archives and the testimony of the first employees of the CCF, the Ouagadougou Cultural Center focused solely on projection and aesthetic education. As witnessed by Souleymane Ouédraogo (1935–),¹⁹ the Ciné-Club was very crowded on Saturday evenings and included lively debates. It was organized by René Bernard Yonly (1945–), a teacher at the University of Ouagadougou who was also responsible for the University Library. Among the assiduous youngsters, Djim Kola was always present and active within the club, before continuing his studies in France and making his first film in 1971. Similarly, the Cultural Center contributed to the development of cinema in Upper Volta by training projectionists: Souleymane Ouédraogo was hired as an electrician before learning about screening at the CCF, which led to him obtaining audiovisual training in France. He then went on to train “hundreds of young projectionists,”²⁰ who would later become the leaders of the growing film industry in Burkina Faso.

Without accessible means of production, the CCF thus played a modest role in the training of future technicians. This training was done mainly by Serge Ricci, a film technician and filmmaker working for the CAI, the International

Audiovisual Consortium. Under the direction of the State Secretariat for Cooperation and in collaboration with the Information Department of Upper Volta, Ricci trained many young Burkinabés in cinematographic activities.

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION IN UPPER VOLTA: *CONSORTIUM AUDIOVISUEL INTERNATIONAL*

In order to better understand the ways in which the different agencies of the French Cooperation were organized, let us return to France’s audiovisual impact in its colonies after independence. France has a strong presence in the audiovisual sector of its former African colonies. The audiovisual policy of the A.O.F. (French West Africa) can be paradoxically summed up as regulating both filmmaking and cinematographic projections: every filmed image had to be validated by a committee so as not to conflict with colonial propaganda. The distribution of films was overseen by a harsh censorship committee who determined the authorized audience. Many films were censored—including *Afrique 50* (René Vautier, 1950), a documentary about French Africa whose distribution was severely limited, and *Les statues meurent aussi* (Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Ghislain Cloquet, 1953), a French documentary about the lack of consideration for African art in the colonial context. In comparison with the French government’s propaganda film system in Algeria in the late 1940s, the British (1930) and then the Belgians (1940) organized colonial projections relatively early. It was not until the referendum on independence (and the fears of seeing the former colonies turn toward the communist bloc) that the French authorities became concerned about the absence of an audiovisual propaganda system²¹ in their former African colonies.

At the time of independence, the French administration underwent rapid reform, changing the form of its relationship with the new African countries: colonial administrators were replaced by a system of diplomatic representation, and the colonial ministry gave way to a Secretary of State Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the actual African policies were always directed from the Elysée Palace,²² in the office of Councilor Foccart. It is on this basis that neo-colonial elements of French-African relations came to be put in place²³: political and cultural control; economic and social development (business partners); disguised subsidy systems (loans, sale of obsolete equipment, misappropriation of public funds, etc.). Important decisions were made at this level, including questions of audiovisual propaganda and the control of intellectuals.

The regular French government was officially responsible for continuing the “civilizing mission,” incorporating Foccart’s guidelines in their projects. It was in this context that the Cinema Office was created in 1963, directed by Jean-René Debrix and organized around three objectives: to take charge of the production of newsreels in the former colonies (television); to participate in development efforts (educational films); and to “help” the former colonies develop cultural productions in French. As confirmed by Debrix in 1976, the rise of the cinema “as an instrument of information, of formation of the masses and of cultural development is, in the context of the modern world, one of the greatest African tasks.” As a *cinéphile* and film teacher, Debrix showed a great passion for helping “young promising filmmakers”; he stated that “any African director who claims to have a film project will find cooperation and technical selection in the Office of the Cinema and the possibility to carry on with the project without any [fear of]

censorship being exercised against [the end result].”²⁴ The Cinema Bureau was supposed to coordinate the activities of various governmental agencies in the field of cinema (National Cinema Center - CNC, French News, International Audiovisual Consortium - CAI, Cooperation Missions, Cultural Advisors, Cultural Centers, etc.). In reality, it was often short-circuited, especially by the Foccart regime.²⁵

The relatively late arrival of these agencies explains the difference in models between the coastal countries (such as Senegal) and the countries of the Sahel: in 1963, the first Senegalese filmmakers were already active, and the new government had already launched an ambitious audiovisual policy centered on news and educational projections. France supported this effort (financially and technically) but did not need to create favorable conditions for the emergence of such audiovisual production bodies, as it did in Niger and Upper Volta. For example, it is wrong to think that the French Cooperation did not provide any assistance to Sembène during the filming of *Borom Sarrett* (Sembène, Ousmane, 1962, 22'). André Zwobada (in charge of French News in Senegal) is listed as co-producer, since he provided the camera and 16-mm film.²⁶

On the other hand, in the countries of the Sahel, the Cinema Office and the network of French Cultural Centers arrived at the right time to help structure projects launched by European or African participants. According to the information presented in reports by the French administration, it appears that each national audiovisual production was centered on a single French director: Jean Rouch in Niger; Serge Ricci in Upper Volta, Rouquier in Chad; Cheminal in Gabon; and so on. As already mentioned, Rouch’s experience in Niger was obviously different from that of other filmmakers: it was financed by the *Musé de*

l'Homme in Paris and by UNESCO. He did not produce any topical or educational films but documents related to his ethnographic research. He led numerous projects and collaborated with many people, including young Nigeriens that he would go on to train in his "cinematic madness" (*folie cinématographique*).

Conversely, the experience of Serge Ricci seems relatively representative of other French filmmakers. Acting as director and cameraman, he made most of the ethnographic and educational films screened in Upper Volta in the 1960s and was also the main operator for newsreels. He eventually became the principal operator of CAI in Upper Volta, and his unit was quickly recognized as a model for the production of educational films:

Under the support of Serge Ricci, a strong base of production and diffusion of 16 mm (except laboratories) developed in Ouagadougou. Although the first films were particularly political in nature (at the dawn of Independence), since 1961, the Center has started, with the help of locally trained African technicians, the production of strictly educational films.²⁷

In 1966, the "Ricci-Haute-Volta" program was financed directly by the cultural activities branch of the Cultural and Technical Cooperation Department (120,000 F²⁸). Ricci produced a large number of newsreels and educational films in collaboration with other cooperatives (such as the technical or health services) and other relevant ministries in Upper Volta:

It is important to highlight the achievements of the cinematographic information service under the authority of Mr.

Ricci and in particular, a short film of excellent quality on the culture surrounding peanut cultivation. This documentary, the production of which was financed by the cultural service, was filmed and edited in Ouagadougou and is an example of what can be done on site, with a low budget, for the education of the masses. This was a team effort involving specialists from the Ministry of Agriculture and ORSTOM.²⁹

Ricci was also recognized by the French administration as an advisor when it came to reorganizing the French cultural and technical cooperation in audiovisual matters. When Le Franc came to the Upper Volta Mission in February 1967, he met the Minister of Information of Upper Volta and all the authorities of the French Embassy. However, his report was based primarily on the point of view of the filmmaker, who always gave a concrete opinion based on the reality of the field.

To assist him in his various projects, Ricci trained local technicians, including Issaka Thiombiano, Sékou Ouédraogo (cameramen and chief operators), and Jean-Pierre Ouédraogo (projection and administration), all attached to the Cinema Service of the Directorate of Information of Upper Volta. According to Jean-Pierre Ouédraogo,³⁰ Ricci's relationship with the employees of the Cinema Service was always very friendly: he was a natural leader, and everyone respected his "professional skills." He readily shared his knowledge and encouraged everyone to take responsibility in their area of expertise. Ricci also negotiated to provide additional training to his deputies: for example, "Sakou [*sic*] Ouédraogo" appears as "operator-reporter" "Voltaic formed in Paris," in the archives of the Ministry of Cooperation.³¹ Similarly, after

training in Bamako in the 1950s, Jean-Pierre Ouédraogo was sent to Paris in the 1960s for an advanced training course in 16-mm projection.

Ricci collaborated with Sékou Ouédraogo, “camera operator,” who appears in the credits of many films made by Ricci in Upper Volta, including *Usage du savon* (S. Ricci, 1967, 20’), a short film on the sanitary importance of properly using soap. Several times Ricci recommended giving more autonomy to Sékou Ouédraogo, especially when it came to producing local news.³² Although Sékou Ouédraogo is sometimes presented as the first Burkinabé filmmaker, I prefer to include him in the first generation of technicians who would go on to encourage the emergence of a generation of “young” filmmakers, including Gaston Kaboré (1951), Idrissa Ouédraogo (1954), and Pierre Yaméogo (1955). Sékou Ouédraogo’s experience was essential during their first film production.

The case of Mamadou Djim Kola is significantly different: student at l’École normale d’instituteurs (teachers’ training college) in Ouahigouya, he was stationed successively in Bobo-Dioulasso, Rollo, Tiébélé, and Tanghin Dassouri (25 km from Ouagadougou). In 1961, he enrolled in a long-distance training course to prepare for the admissions competition to the Independent Center of French Cinema (*Centre indépendant du cinéma français*, CICF). Despite passing the examination, the Upper Volta’s Ministry of Education denied his request for leave: “the country needed more teachers than the filmmaker he foolishly wanted to become.” He took advantage of his relative proximity to Ouagadougou to follow the activities of the Cine-Club at the CCF while undertaking more long-distance courses. He eventually traveled to France, where he studied cinema aesthetics at the Sorbonne. During a short stay in Upper Volta, he directed *Le sang des Parias* (Djim, Mamadou Kola, 1971,

90’), a 16-mm color film, considered the first feature film of Upper Volta. Produced with the help of the *Fonds de Développement du Cinéma Voltaïque* (Voltaic Film Development Fund), the film is a fictionalized examination of social issues: “The themes developed by Kola in his feature films are didactic and moralizing, as is normal in a young country where contradictions between certain outdated aspects of tradition and social progress appear.”³³

After a number of other personal projects, such as *Kognini* (Djim Mamadou Kola, 1972),³⁴ he collaborated with Maurice Bulbulian, a Canadian director, to produce a documentary on urban planning in *Ouagadougou Cissin ... cinq ans plus tard* (Maurice Bulbulian, 1982, 38’). Djim Kola played an important role in the professionalization of Burkinabé cinema, as technical director of the Inter-African Center for Film Production (CIPROFILM - 1976–1979), then as president of the Burkina Faso National Film Association - 1987), and finally to the Ministry of Information and Culture (1990–1993). For example, in the 1970s he was one of those who insisted on creating a West African training school for aspiring filmmakers. Djim Kola also opened the door to other filmmakers and teachers. In 1973, René Bernard Yonly realized *Sur le Chemin de la réconciliation* (René Bernard Yonly, 1973), a film that attempted to show the dangers of multi-partyism. Similarly, in 1976 Augustin Roch Taoko directed *M’Ba-Raogo* (Augustin Taoko, 1976). Unfortunately, these films did not launch their cinematic careers, and both Yonly and Taoko returned to teaching.

In 1976, the African Institute of Cinematographic Studies (L’Institut africain d’études cinématographiques, IN.AF.E.C.) was founded in Ouagadougou. It offered two specializations: one in cultural animation and one in audiovisual production. Each specialty provided a double

formation: technical training, adapted to each track, and a solid general education in anthropology, linguistics, history and sociology of information and media, public studies, development, Black art, and culture studies. Thus producers learned about projection and programming. Creators learned all the trades of cinema and television, from filming and sound recording to editing and mixing. The operational plan of INAFEC was based on an agreement between the countries of the subregion:

INAFEC was meant to become a regional institution receiving financial backing and students from different African countries, but it never achieved that goal. While a few students from surrounding West African countries did graduate, 80 percent of its funding was supplied by Burkina Faso, and after ten years of operation the school proved too costly to maintain and was shut down.³⁵

Without the collaboration of other West African countries, the educational structure quickly became overdeveloped for a small country like Burkina Faso. Failing to unite other countries, Burkina Faso had to cut funding for its film school. It is regrettable that there was such a lack of mobilization among the other countries of the subregion: a school in a neighboring country would have given access to vocational training to more young filmmakers and perhaps revealed other talents. Moreover, with the development of the audiovisual sector in the 2000s, it is likely that the school could have diversified its training and professionalized a sector that still suffers from inconsistent levels of skill.

However, the results obtained by INAFEC were quite significant:

In this short period, it gave initial training to some well-known Burkinabe directors, including Idrissa Ouedraogo and Fanta Nacro. The stimulus of government initiatives even inspired a Burkinabé businessman to start a fully equipped private film studio in Ouagadougou (Cinafric), hoping to capture some of the processing that was sent abroad.³⁶

It is important to note that former students have made an impact on the industry as administrative executives of FESPACO, such as Jean-Yves Nana, or as foreign filmmakers, such as the Malian Salif Traoré (Mali, 1954).

CONCLUSION

The picture of the cinematographic situation in West Africa would not be complete without (at least) the mention of the films' diffusion platforms and their modes of validation. For example, the journal *Présence africaine* and, specifically, its founder Alioune Diop, a Senegalese intellectual, played a leading role in the emancipation of African cultures, including its cinemas.³⁷ Similarly, the careers of filmmakers would not have been the same without the Panafrikan Festival of Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou FESPACO, created in response to the initiative of film aficionados.

The distinction between the "coastal" (Senegalese) and the other "Sahelian" model is clearly a simplification. Nevertheless, this distinction allows us to highlight the diversity of individual paths within the emerging film institution in post-independence Africa. It appears that the importance of non-artistic audiovisual productions in the first years of African cinemas served a fundamental purpose. Nowadays, television

production, news or telefilm production, as well as the production of educational films are very important. However, their impact on film production, particularly on what is commonly called the “FESPACO model,” is, with exceptions, relatively negligible.

As Dubois (1978) and Biron (2000) showed, the close proximity between different forms of cultural production is characteristic of a liminal institution: before training, production, financing, validation, or distribution body institutions are in place, filmmakers must “navigate” in order to gain experience and the necessary cinematographic tools to help them find their style and their own voice and aesthetic. Significantly the traces of these compromises have been systematically erased from the stories of African cinema. Specialists consider these aspects to be negligible or perhaps fear some degree of discretization. On the contrary, we could choose to highlight them in order to show, for example, the timeless difficulties of cinematographic activity, as well as the political and social roots of West African audiovisual production.

NOTES

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¹ “L’orthodoxie n’exerce aucun charme sur l’écrivain liminaire. C’est même tout le contraire: moderne désinvolte, l’écrivain liminaire emprunte à gauche et à droite, dans une sorte de désordre chronologique et géographique tout à fait symptomatique du système hétérodoxe qui caractérise son écriture” (Michel Biron, *L’absence du maître*, 2000, pp. 24–25).

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Le Marché des biens symboliques*, 1971, p. 56.

³ “La vie continue, pittoresque, bruyante et colorée” (10’00); “On se détend, on est heureux, on se balance avec le rythme” (12’30), translation by Dana Vanderburgh.

⁴ “À l’époque, en 1963, le cinéma sénégalais était quasiment inexistant. Je me suis risqué pour voir ce que ça donnerait!” (Thiam, *Cinémaction*, 1979, p. 130, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).

⁵ “manières de sauvages” (6’) ; “les génies se sont vengés de lui !” (28’), translation by Dana Vanderburgh.

⁶ or *perruquage*, Michel de Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 1990, p. 49.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, 1972, p. 56.

⁸ Source *Campagne audio-visuelle contre l’alcoolisme. La lutte anti-alcoolisme en Afrique Noire*. (Archives AN 19930381/14).

⁹ “J’ai été, à l’école, un excellent dessinateur, et je suis arrivé un jour à faire des ombres chinoises. Je pouvais montrer à mes camarades des lions, des éléphants... Je vivais à ce moment-là à N’Dongou ou je suis né. Ni moi, ni mes amis ne connaissions à cette époque-là le cinéma, nous n’en avons jamais entendu parler. [...] C’est alors que j’ai pensé réaliser un spectacle en couleurs. Pour cela, j’ai augmenté la puissance de la lumière et travaillé sur une matière à travers laquelle elle pouvait passer: les emballages transparents des paquets de cigarettes! Plus tard, j’ai pu voir des films. Et je suis même allé jusqu’à fabriquer une caméra qui marche ! Ensuite j’ai travaillé avec Rouch à la prise de vues et au

- matériel de tournage” (Mustapha, *Cinémaction*, 1979, p. 15, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 10 “que je gravais directement sur pellicule et que je montrais à des amis” (Mustapha, *Cinémaction*, 1979, p. 15, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 11 Production cost: 8 340 F, *Note sur la diffusion du film français en Afrique* (Archives AN 19930381/14).
- 12 Production cost: 7 587 F, *Note sur la diffusion du film français en Afrique* (Archives AN 19930381/14).
- 13 “c’est souvent une somme de 25 à 30 000 francs pour les jeunes filles” (12’).
- 14 “Tandis que Mariam, cachée derrière les seccos, écoutait sérieusement la conversation de son oncle.”
- 15 “initiation à l’art de la photographie et du cinéma, à leur histoire, à leurs genres, leurs auteurs” ; “par l’accès à une certaine technologie qu’implique toute création dans le domaine de la photographie et du cinéma” (P. Sentilhes, Lettre d’introduction au Compte rendu des activités de la section cinématographique (1967–1968), Centre culturel franco-nigérien, Niamey, 1968, Archives AN 19930381/7, p. 1, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 16 “Cette jeunesse y aura appris par les ciné-clubs, les cours théoriques, la participation directe à des tournages de films et par la fréquentation d’une équipe de passionnée de cinéma, à la démystifier et à l’envisager comme un instrument de culture. C’est une génération de spectateurs avertis qui aura été préparée” (P. Sentilhes, Lettre d’introduction au Compte rendu des activités de la section cinématographique (1967–1968), Centre culturel franco-nigérien, Niamey, 1968, Archives AN 19930381/7, p. 1, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 17 “des Nigériens capables d’utiliser en toute liberté ce matériel et d’en assurer l’entretien élémentaire, principalement sous la responsabilité de Moustapha Alassane et grâce à la supervision de Jean Rouch” ; “deux cinéastes africains [nigériens] [de se révéler] : Oumarou Ganda et Moustapha Alassane” (P. Sentilhes, *Lettre d’introduction au Compte rendu des activités de la section cinématographique (1967–1968)*, Centre culturel franco-nigérien, Niamey, 1968, Archives AN 19930381/7, p. 2, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 18 “Séances au Centre Culturel et à l’université organisées dans le cadre du Programme des Études Cinématographiques de l’Institut Audiovisuel de l’Université” (Colonne, *Échanges culturelles avec la Haute-Volta*, 1977, AN 20000138/3, p. 5).
- 19 Interview with Souleymane Ouédraogo (1935–), February 2017, Ouagadougou.
- 20 Interview with Souleymane Ouédraogo (1935–), February 2017, Ouagadougou.
- 21 To draw a complete picture, it would be necessary to raise the UNESCO resolutions in favor of an educational audio-visual system.
- 22 French presidential offices.
- 23 Source: Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart parle: entretiens* (Paris: Fayard: Jeune Afrique, 1995).
- 24 L’essor du cinéma “comme instrument d’information, de formation des masses et de développement culturel est, dans le contexte du monde moderne, une des grandes tâches de l’Afrique.” “Tout réalisateur africain qui prétend “avoir un film dans le ventre,” trouve au bureau du cinéma de la coopération et à sa section technique la possibilité de le réaliser librement, sans qu’aucune censure ne s’exerce à son encontre” (J. R. Debrix, *Administration et gestion du bureau du cinéma*, 1963–1976, Archives AN 19930381, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 25 Source: Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart parle: entretiens* (Paris: Fayard: Jeune Afrique, 1995).
- 26 Source: Guy Hennebelle, Ruelle Catherine (dir.), *Cinéastes d’Afrique noire*, *Cinémaction* no. 49, 1979.
- 27 “Sous l’impulsion de Serge Ricci, une base complète de production et de diffusion en 16 mm (sauf laboratoires) s’est montée à Ouagadougou. Si les premières réalisations ont eu surtout un caractère politique (*A minuit, l’Indépendance*), dès 1961, le Centre a commencé, avec l’aide de techniciens africains

- formés sur place, la réalisation de films strictement éducatifs” (Jean Rouch, Situation et tendances actuelles du cinéma africain, UNESCO, 1962, Archives AN 19930381/19, p. 24, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 28 Archives AN 19930381/16.
- 29 “Il faut signaler à ce propos, les réalisations du service cinématographique de l’information placé sous l’autorité de M. Ricci et en particulier, un court métrage d’excellente qualité, sur la culture de l’arachide. Ce documentaire, dont la production a été financée par le service culturel, a été monté et sonorisé à Ouagadougou et constitue un exemple de ce qu’il est possible de faire sur place, sans grands frais, pour l’éducation des masses. Il s’agit d’un travail d’équipe auquel ont pris part les spécialistes du Ministère de l’agriculture et de l’ORSTOM” (Ambassade de France en Haute-Volta, *L’action culturelle française en Haute-Volta*, 1963, Archives AN AG/5(F)/3344, pp. 8–9, translation by Dana Vanderburgh).
- 30 Interview with Jean-Pierre Ouédraogo (1925–), February 2017, Ouagadougou.
- 31 *Note pour M. Mandelkern*, Ministère de la coopération, Paris, juillet 1967, Archives AN 19930381/16, p. 1
- 32 Le Franc, *Mission en Haute-Volta, Ouagadougou février 1967*, Paris, 1967 (Archives AN 19930381/16).
- 33 Bachy, *La Haute-Volta et le cinéma*, 1983, p. 29, translation by Dana Vanderburgh.
- 34 “Le Film a été financé en partie par les Américains et le complément apporté par la SAED. Mais cette société n’a pu honorer ses engagements et j’ai été obligé de négocier jusqu’au stade actuel, c’est-à-dire le montage artistique du film” (Kola, cité in Bachy, *La Haute-Volta et le cinéma*, 1983, p. 30).
- 35 Saul, “Art, Politics, and Commerce in Francophone African Cinema,” in R. Austen and M. Saul (Eds.), *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 2010, p. 144.
- 36 Saul, “Art, Politics, and Commerce in Francophone African Cinema,” in R. Austen and M. Saul (Eds.), *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 2010, p. 144.
- 37 On this question, consult Iwiyé Kala-Lobe, “Alioune Diop et le cinéma africain,” *Présence africaine*, 1983, no. 125, pp. 329–350.

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