

Complex Realism: Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and the Emergence of West African Documentary Film

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Abstract

*Born in Dahomey and trained in France, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra made his career in postcolonial Senegal. A director, producer, and film critic, his early films mark simultaneously the origins of the West African cinema and of West African documentary. When situated in its regional and transnational contexts, Vieyra's work demonstrates that early West African documentary was varied, innovative, and always political. In *Afrique sur Seine / Africa on the Seine* (1955), *Une Nation est née / A Nation Is Born* (1961), *Lamb / Wrestling* (1963), and *Môl* (1966), Vieyra experimented with both documentary content and style, exploring the boundaries between nonfictional and fictional narrative strategies and expanding documentary's formal and geographical boundaries. These films constitute an important contribution to global documentary, a revolution within a tradition that had been tightly bound to the French colonial project as well as a new tradition and model for contemporary African documentarists.*

In 1913, Georges Dureau, editor of the film magazine *Ciné-Journal*, described colonial documentary as “a living illustration of all of the corners of the world where the French flag flies . . . the exact representation of the nature and the people we cannot all go see.”¹ This assertion of objectivity, of a perfect match between reality and its representation, was characteristic of over half a century of newsreels, travelogues, and ethnographies shot in what Dureau and his compatriots knew as French West and Equatorial Africa. More than half a century later, however, West African filmmaker and critic Paulin Soumanou Vieyra would describe the “noxiousness of these productions,” declaring that they revealed “the spirit of colonization and the power of the cinema.”² Along with other members of the first generation of sub-Saharan African filmmakers, Vieyra challenged the purported realism of colonial film in order to reclaim Africa's cinematic image, explaining that “African cinema is reestablishing the truth about Africa, because Africans

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themselves have taken charge of their cinema.”³ His friend and colleague Ousmane Sembène described this transformation at a personal level: “What is important is for us to have our own cinema: that is to say, to see ourselves anew, to take control of ourselves, to understand ourselves via the mirror of the screen.”⁴

Born in Porto Novo, Dahomey (now Benin), in 1925, Vieyra was sent at the young age of ten to boarding school in France. He lived with a French family during school vacations and did not return home to visit his family for twenty-five years, at which point he was no longer able to speak his mother tongue.⁵ Soon after World War II, Vieyra developed the tuberculosis that would weaken him and entail several convalescent breaks during his studies, first of biology and then of cinema. His first contact with the French film industry came in 1947, when he was recruited from an international student residence hall to play the role of an African soldier in Claude Autant-Lara’s *Le Diable au corps / Devil in the Flesh*. Intrigued by the world of cinema and with a strong sense of its “great usefulness” in and for Africa, Vieyra prepared for and passed the elaborate and lengthy entrance exam for the French Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies (IDHEC). In 1953 he became the IDHEC’s first sub-Saharan African student.⁶

Vieyra’s oeuvre marks simultaneously the origins of sub-Saharan African cinema and of sub-Saharan African documentary film. Writing just prior to independence about “the responsibility of the cinema in the formation of an African national consciousness,” he envisaged six categories of independent African films, two-thirds of which were nonfictional: feature-length fiction, feature-length documentary, short fiction, short documentary, educational, and newsreel.⁷ Of the more than thirty films Vieyra directed during a career that lasted over three decades, the vast majority were documentaries. He also worked as a producer of African films, both feature and documentary, most notably in a long-standing partnership with Sembène, arguably the best known of all African directors. Sembène later wondered that “if it hadn’t been for my dense and deep connections to Paulin Vieyra, would I ever have made any films?”⁸ The author of four books and numerous articles about African cinema, moreover, Vieyra was both the first sub-Saharan African film critic and the first serious critic of sub-Saharan African films.⁹

Yet scholars have largely ignored Vieyra’s films, along with a larger West African documentary tradition that was born with independence. In proof of what Cameroonian documentarist Jean-Marie Teno calls a “disdain for African documentary film,” sub-Saharan African cinema is absent from almost every history of global documentary published in English, including Bill Nichols’s *Representing Reality, Blurred Boundaries*, and *Introduction to Documentary*; Stella Bruzzi’s *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*; Michael Chanan’s *The Politics of Documentary*; Brian Winston’s *Claiming*

the Real II; and Betsy McLane's *A New History of Documentary Film*.¹⁰ Documentaries shot by non-Africans in Africa, on the other hand, appear quite regularly in these overviews, particularly the ethnographic work of Jean Rouch and essay films by Chris Marker and Trinh T. Minh-ha. The second edition of Erik Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* is one of the few such books to mention even a single African film although, as evidence of "documentary film eruptions in new places," Barnouw cites the work of Sembène, illustrated by a still from *Tauw* (1970, Senegal).¹¹ *Tauw*, however, is a short fiction film and, of Sembène's more than a dozen movies, only the commissioned but never released *Empire Sonhrai / Sonhrai Empire* (1963) is a documentary. Barnouw joins a long line of European and North American literary and film critics who have understood African fiction only as an anthropological resource, as a reflection of customs and traditions rather than a work of art.

Perhaps more surprising than this ignorance of African documentary within documentary studies is its near absence from academic histories of sub-Saharan African cinema. The first books in English to recount the early decades of West African filmmaking, Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* and Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema*, did not systematically distinguish documentaries from feature films, instead characterizing all African film as realist fiction. Diawara touched upon the importance of newsreels in the 1960s, but his concluding analysis divided later African cinema into three feature fiction categories: social realist, colonial confrontation, and return to the source.¹² Ukadike mentioned "educational documentaries and newsreels" in a chapter he entitled "Francophone Origins," but he focused on the work of Sembène and Med Hondo and, more specifically, their transformation of African oral narrative into feature-length fiction.¹³ Ukadike went on to publish a short, groundbreaking essay on sub-Saharan African documentary, in which he dated an "emerging trend" only as far back as the 1990s. In earlier decades, he maintained, "in the dominant tradition of African cinema, the fictional and the documentary coexist to illuminate and expand the borders of reality."¹⁴ Burkinabé film critic Clément Tapsoba has similarly recognized documentary "tendencies" and not a "documentary school" in African film history, noting, for example, a "documentary temptation" in Sembène's *Borom Sarret / The Cart Driver* (1962, Senegal).¹⁵ Scholars such as Melissa Thackway and Anjali Prabhu, like Ukadike, have identified a trend of African documentary beginning in the 1990s and, although James Williams acknowledges the existence of early West African documentary in a footnote, he dismisses it as merely "formulaic exercises in ideological self-congratulation."¹⁶

As a consequence, perhaps, of their lack of attention to early documentary, Diawara and Ukadike cited Vieyra's print publications but barely

mentioned his film work. Other critics of African film have followed suit and, even in one of the first articles to address the history of African documentary, Alexie Tcheuyap includes multiple citations from Vieyra's written work while noting only in passing just one of his films.¹⁷ In what follows, I will examine Vieyra's exceptional career as a documentarist in order to draw attention to and elucidate his first films, but also to demonstrate that documentary was from the start an essential and dynamic component of independent West African cinema. Whereas French colonial films shot in North Africa were most often feature-length fictions that exoticized and romanticized the region and its inhabitants, the majority of those shot in sub-Saharan Africa were ostensibly nonfictional and, more specifically, ethnographic.¹⁸ This racist and definitional gaze participated in what Homi Bhabha, following Edward Said, has called the "radical realism" of colonial discourse, which "produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible."¹⁹ It inspired black African filmmakers to "shoot back," in Thackway's words, no matter the mode or genre in which they chose to work. And African documentary filmmakers in particular, acutely aware of the paternalism and inaccuracy of this European documentary tradition, were forced to rethink the conventions of their craft or, as Vieyra wrote, "use the same weapons to cure the illness."²⁰ Led by Vieyra, the first generation of West African documentarists reacted against prior representations of Africa and its people, innovating within a filmic mode that had been deployed against them in the service of colonial domination. They sought a revolution of documentary form as well as content.

As Vieyra was commencing his studies at the IDHEC in 1953, two other West Africans in Paris undertook film projects. Mamadou Touré shot *Mouramani*, a short film based on a West African tale, and Amadou Cissé established Publi Afric Film to make African newsreels.²¹ Yet if Vieyra was not the first West African to make a film, his films are the earliest extant, and he was the first to make a career in the cinema. He immediately identified himself as African in the opening credits to his student film, the somewhat autobiographical *C'était il y a quatre ans / It Was Four Years Ago* (1954, 9 min.): "Directed by Paulin Vieyra, originally from Dahomey (AOF)." As an unnamed African student reads Paul Hazard's *Crisis of European Consciousness*, the camera pans to a sheet of paper on which he has written "The crisis of westernized African consciousness??" Vieyra dramatized his own fraught position as an African student in France in his character's self-interrogation via a work of French intellectual history, as well as in the contrast between the character's memories of African music and dancing and the classical music his French girlfriend plays on a record player. After graduating from the IDHEC, Vieyra formed the African Cinema Group with friends Jacques Mélo Kane and Mamadou Sarr, both from Senegal, and

Robert Caristan, born in Vietnam to a family from French Guyana (fig.1). Prohibited from filming in West Africa as a result of France's 1934 Laval Decree, they decided to shoot in France and in 1955 completed *Afrique sur Seine / Africa on the Seine*, a twenty-one-minute black-and-white film depicting the lives of African students in Paris. The only of Vieyra's post-IDHEC films to have been shot in Europe, it is also, not coincidentally, the



Figure 1. Paulin Vieyra and the African Cinema Group. Image courtesy of PSV-Films and Stéphane Vieyra.

only to have received any sustained critical attention from scholars of both French and West African cinema.

During and after the shooting of *Afrique sur Seine*, Vieyra was an active participant in the vibrant African and African diaspora intellectual circles of 1950s Paris, and he also collaborated with French documentary filmmakers who shared his anticolonial mission and interest in African cultures. He published frequently in Alioune Diop's journal *Présence Africaine*, which sponsored the 1956 International Congress of Black Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne, attended by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright, among many others. Situating his work in an international context to argue that short-form documentary could combat prejudice and transform our vision of reality, Vieyra cited as examples films by Robert Flaherty, Joris Ivens, John Grierson, Sergei Eisenstein, and Jean Rouch.²² He also referred to the 1953 manifesto of the "Group of Thirty," members of the French film industry who advocated for continued government funding for the documentary short subject to facilitate the creation of strongly political and formally inventive work.²³ In several of his essays, Vieyra acknowledged René Vautier's *Afrique 50* (1950), Chris Marker and Alain Resnais's *Les Statues meurent aussi / Statues Also Die* (1953), and Rouch's *Jaguar* (1967) and *Moi, un noir / I, a Black Man* (1958) as exceptions to the rule of colonial nonfiction filmmaking.²⁴ And while in Paris, Vieyra was in contact with Vautier and Resnais, as well as with Rouch, whose Ethnographic Film Committee (CFE) at the Museum of Man funded *Afrique sur Seine*.

Vieyra described *Afrique sur Seine* as "an overview of the varied existences of black people in Paris . . . with a flashback to a mythic Africa and a circumstantial vision of the West, marked by its culture spreading itself out before our eyes in the monuments of Paris."²⁵ The flashback opens the film although, since Vieyra had been refused permission to film on his home continent, he rather paradoxically had to borrow images of young boys swimming and playing from footage shot by Vautier in Côte d'Ivoire (fig. 2). A voice-over commentary, cowritten by Vieyra and Mamadou Sarr, begins in the second-person plural, just a few years after the French government banned *Afrique 50* and censored *Les Statues meurent aussi* seeming to describe only the carefree, noisy children on-screen: "We called out our independence to the sun and to our ancestors, possessive, insouciant, unaware of the world that surrounded us." Imagining their future while acknowledging Vieyra's and Sarr's present reality, the narration then sets the scene for the transition to Paris: "It was necessary to grow up, leave the country, for Paris, capital of the world, capital of black Africa." After this cry of African independence and subsequent reminder of colonial power, both only partially hidden within praise of Paris, the camera pans slowly past monuments and



Figure 2. *Afrique sur Seine* (Paulin Vieyra, 1955). Screen grab by author.

monumental spaces in the colonial capital—the Sorbonne, the Pantheon, Notre Dame, the Quartier Latin—in a long shot described by David Murphy as designed to “inscribe the African presence in the city.”²⁶

Painting a comprehensive if not detailed portrait, *Afrique sur Seine* is by turns optimistic and pessimistic about this presence. The film follows unnamed black men and women through Paris, their experiences commented by the poetic, rather than explanatory, voice-over. Narrating images of smiling mixed-race couples, for example, the commentary speaks of unity and urges the overcoming of stereotypes: “the crowd in the Latin Quarter assembles and assimilates, trying to melt antique barriers of prejudice and of monuments to hate in the sun of love, in order to come closer, to understand itself despite the classifications that men have made out of the history of righteous peoples” (fig. 3). But we also see a less optimistic vision of African Paris, that of the beggar, the blind man, and the street cleaner, “the Paris of days without bread, the Paris of days without hope.” Filmmaker Sarah Maldoror, who was born in France to parents from Guadeloupe and would spend a significant portion of her career working in sub-Saharan Africa, described her realization upon seeing *Afrique sur Seine* that “We were watching others, we were no longer ‘the watched.’”²⁷ Filming their compatriots, Vieyra and his colleagues had broken the spell under which colonial French documentarists had claimed to fully know and accurately represent the lives of Africans.



Figure 3. *Afrique sur Seine* (Paulin Vieyra, 1955). Screen grab by Stéphane Vieyra.

Afrique sur Seine shows young Africans in Paris from an African point of view, but this human reality is illustrated neither by a montage of previously recorded footage nor by a purely observational camera. The students we see are acting for the camera, and in fact the film's title contains an untranslatable double meaning, both *Africa on the Seine* and *Africa on Stage* (*sur scène*). The performed scenes, however, contain neither coherent characters nor a developed storyline, and the actors' names appear in the film's opening credits under the vague heading "With the Cooperation of." Maria Loftus calls Vieyra's film a docufiction, deeming its voice-over documentary and its images fictional, but it is difficult to oppose these two components so neatly.²⁸ And this term, used to designate works that combine nonfiction and fiction, leaves them in limbo, neither one nor the other. Scholars of nonfiction film, moreover, have amply shown that documentary has always relied on strategies associated with fictional narrative, including performance, rendering the term "docufiction" unnecessary if not meaningless. This is not merely a question of terminology, since categorizing *Afrique sur Seine* as documentary instead of docufiction allows us to, in the words of Michael Renov, "expand the received boundaries of the documentary form."²⁹ And whereas Renov was writing about generic boundaries, the boundaries under consideration here are also geographic. Vieyra's first film inaugurates a tradition of West African documentary that merits a place in global film history.

Renov, who along with Bill Nichols pioneered a new wave of documentary studies in the early 1990s, notes that narrativity has never been exclusive to fiction filmmaking; documentarists construct characters and often use “poetic language, narration, or musical accompaniment.”³⁰ And, although it is based on an almost exclusively European and North American, when not almost exclusively Anglophone corpus, scholars of documentary cinema have established a genealogy for narrative, character-driven documentary, which begins with Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922, United States) and *Moana* (1926, United States) and Merien Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack’s *Grass* (1925, United States) and *Chang* (1927, United States), all ethnographic films. The two decades of nonfiction filmmaking that preceded *Nanook of the North*, in fact, are often forgotten in the wake of Flaherty’s dramatic storyline, woven around epic stagings of Inuit traditions. Nichols argues that the use of reenactments, which he defines as “the more or less authentic recreation of prior events,” was common in documentary film until the 1960s, at which point American filmmakers allied with the direct cinema movement demanded the recording of reality as it unfolded.³¹ This “observational” approach relied, according to documentarist David MacDougall, on a belief in the “invisibility and omniscience” of the filmmaker, just as had the French colonial films characterized by Vieyra as “noxious.”³² Reenactments became popular again in the late 1980s, when documentaries like Errol Morris’s *Thin Blue Line* (1988, United States) demonstrated their power both to access unrecorded past realities and to affect current social and political realities.

Afrique sur Seine’s voice-over commentary provides information, in a function conventionally coded as documentary, and at the same time imparts poetic reflections. The film’s images are recordings of streets and monuments, but also of young men and women moving through these spaces for the camera. These performances can be understood as what Nichols calls documentary “typifications,” reenactments in which characters perform for the camera not specific prior events, but representative “past patterns, rituals, and routines.”³³ A strategy used by Flaherty, Cooper, and Schoedsack, it was taken up and politicized by John Grierson and the British documentary school in the 1930s. Two decades later, it became useful to early West African filmmakers. In *Afrique sur Seine*, we witness archetypal African students in a colonial capital in the last decade of colonial rule, with a varied voice-over commentary guiding our understanding of their presence in this space that is both foreign to them and appropriated by them. In the decade after independence, Vieyra and his colleagues would use typifications in their portrayals of Africans at home instead of abroad. Unlike Flaherty but like Grierson, in *Afrique sur Seine* and in subsequent films, they did so from a point of view located within the societies they were filming, rather than as outsiders.

Vieyra asserted that he and his colleagues in the African Cinema Group, working in France during the last decade of French colonial domination in Africa, “fought for independence in their own way, for there was no doubt that the cinematographic expression of an authentically African reality would come only with the national sovereignty of African countries.”³⁴ Jean Rouch described *Afrique sur Seine* as “without a doubt the first black film” and, for French journalist Elisabeth Lequeret, it signals “the birth of black African cinema.”³⁵ Yet although African filmmakers and scholars since the 1960s have honored Vieyra as an influential pioneer, some have been ill at ease with the idea of an African cinema born in Europe. Senegalese director Cheikh Ngaido Bâ argued that Momar Thiam’s *Sarzan* (1963, Senegal, 35 min.) was the first sub-Saharan African film, dismissing *Afrique sur Seine* as made “in a school in Paris with students.”³⁶ Samba Gadjigo, biographer of Sembène, specifies that, although Vieyra did indeed make a film first, Sembène was “the first African to make a film about Africa in Africa and for Africans.”³⁷ As a compromise, *Afrique sur Seine* is commonly credited as the first film directed by a black African and Sembène’s *Borom Sarret* as the first black African film. Without debating the moment of origin of an authentically West African cinema, I would like to suggest that, if we remember Vieyra as the first West African filmmaker, we find that West African cinema began as documentary.

Both Bâ and Gadjigo, when naming *Sarzan* and *Borom Sarret* as the first black African films, neglect not only *Afrique sur Seine* but also several important documentaries shot in Africa by Vieyra and fellow West African filmmakers Blaise Senghor and Moustapha Alassane. The members of the African Cinema Group left Paris for Dakar, Senegal in 1957, soon after the French Parliament passed the “Loi-cadre” giving a certain amount of autonomy to colonized sub-Saharan African territories. In the three years that followed, Vieyra held three jobs, in a career path that mirrored the quickly changing political and cinematic landscapes just before and just after independence. In 1958, he became the director of the Cinema Section of the High Commissariat of French West Africa (AOF) and, while in this position, made the short newsreel *Le Niger aujourd’hui / Niger Today*. In 1959, Vieyra took over as head of the Cinema Service of the Mali Federation; that same year, he shot *Présence Africaine à Rome / Présence Africaine in Rome*, a chronicle of the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. In 1960, after independence and after the merging of the Cinema Services of the Mali Federation and Senegal, he joined the *Actualités Sénégalaises*, the newsreel section of the Senegalese Ministry of Information. Vieyra trained filmmakers, shot footage, and edited newsreels, many of which documented President Léopold Sédar Senghor’s trips abroad as head of state (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Paulin Vieyra with Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor and Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. Image courtesy of PSV-Films and Stéphane Vieyra.

In his history of the Senegalese cinema, Vieyra maintained that “any state that becomes independent wants to have primarily national news.”³⁸ The *Actualités Sénégalaises* at first produced newsreels biweekly, but struggled to obtain distribution. 80 percent of movie theaters in Senegal were owned by European conglomerates SECMA and COMACICO, which contracted instead to show newsreels produced by the *Actualités Françaises* and private French studios such as Pathé and Gaumont.³⁹ The Senegalese government quickly passed a law banning foreign newsreels, and by 1961 the Ministry of Information was able to produce a weekly newsreel that was shown first in Dakar and then traveled to theaters around the country. This model was adopted in other former French colonies, including Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Dahomey, Togo, and Cameroon. In addition to newsreels and reportages, the *Actualités Sénégalaises* occasionally produced short documentaries, and this, Vieyra noted, “allowed independent filmmakers to take their first steps.”⁴⁰ Vieyra began to re-edit footage shot for newsreels into more complex and creative films. *Écrit du Caire / Written from Cairo* (1964, 8 min.), for example, a satiric short, used footage shot during the Conference of African Heads of State in Egypt, which Vieyra attended with Senghor. Vieyra pointedly distinguished between his two types of work, newsreels and documentary films,

writing, "All of my films are the result of experimentation, other than a few simple newsreel reportages covering official travels."⁴¹

In 1963, the third year of what François Kodjo called not the postcolonial but the neocolonial period of African filmmaking,⁴² the French Ministry of Cooperation created the Cinema Bureau, which administered a program called "Aid to African Cinema." France offered African filmmakers financial and technical assistance to edit and print films in exchange for noncommercial distribution rights. This structure meant not only that directors were responsible for finding the initial resources to shoot their films, but that the films' subjects and style could be taken into account when funding decisions were made, with requirements often placed on how films would be finalized during editing.⁴³ Controversial among African filmmakers, this "cooperation" nonetheless enabled the completion of a number of African films, including documentaries, in the first decade after independence.⁴⁴ France was the primary but not the only European country to fund early West African cinema; filmmakers from countries aligned with the Soviet bloc or who studied there had other opportunities for collaboration, while facing other kinds of censorship.

Ivorian director Timité Bassori bemoaned both the focus of African governments on newsreel production and the European control of film distribution in Africa, which together left African filmmakers with very limited options other than neocolonial funding. A true African cinema, Bassori believed, must be creative: "Filmed images, even originating in reality, can only attain the 'cinematographic miracle' if this reality is aesthetically formed into a work of art."⁴⁵ Senegalese filmmaker Blaise Senghor noted the same problem. African directors trained in Europe, then returned to Africa with the desire to make African films. They found jobs at national newsreel services, but soon realized that they had become civil servants, only rarely able to pursue an artistic vision.⁴⁶ When West African directors were able to make films other than newsreels, with or without French funding, these were screened only in European festivals or, in Africa, only at French Cultural Centers. At the 1966 World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, a series of resolutions was adopted to address the predicament of African filmmakers and promote the development of African cinema. These included calls for the creation of an inter-African administrative body for production, distribution, and exhibition, for national cinemathèques, and for the reinvestment of box office proceeds into production.⁴⁷ The second half of the 1960s also saw the creation of two African film festivals, the Carthage Film Festival (JCC), in 1966, and the Pan-African Film Festival in Ouagadougou (FESPACO), in 1969. The Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) was formed in 1969 and inaugurated the next year in Carthage, with the goal of advocating for African national cinemas and African control of distribution and exhibition circuits.⁴⁸

Given these scarce and complex funding structures, it was relatively easier to make a short film than a feature-length one, and relatively easier to make a documentary, without sets to build and actors to rehearse, than to make a fiction film. With Vieyra leading the way, the documentary short subject would play a crucial role in 1960s West African cinema, as it had in 1950s French cinema. Midway through the decade, Cameroonian filmmaker Urbain Dia-Mokouri argued that sub-Saharan African directors, without a long filmic tradition behind them, “must act like all technical orphans: risk, produce, film, in a word, live, and even live dangerously.”⁴⁹ The risks taken by early African documentarists as they worked to create a tradition were financial and ideological, as well as aesthetic. Vieyra believed that nonfiction films could, and should, be works of art and a “lifelong occupation,” not just a first step before moving on to direct feature fictions.⁵⁰

While at the *Actualités Sénégalaises*, Vieyra documented a number of African independence ceremonies in newsreels such as *The Independence of Cameroun*, *The Independence of Togo*, *The Independence of Congo*, and *The Independence of Madagascar*, all shot during his travels with Senghor. In 1961, he became the head of the Cinema Service of the Senegalese Ministry of Information, no longer responsible only for newsreels. In the same year, to celebrate the first anniversary of independence, the ministry funded a very different kind of independence film, Vieyra’s *Une Nation est née: La république du Sénégal / A Nation Was Born: The Republic of Senegal* (19 min.), an overview of Senegalese history from pre-colonial times to the present. Vieyra noted that, although the film was widely successful in Senegal and won prizes at the Karlovy Vary Festival in Czechoslovakia and the Locarno Festival in Switzerland, it was “ostracized” by French authorities for having told “the principal truths about the French colonization of Senegal.”⁵¹ Although Patrick Ilboudo described *Une Nation est née* as a reportage about Senegalese independence, the film neither resembles nor functions as a newsreel.⁵² Vieyra instead mixed recorded footage with reenactments, experimenting with the genre of the newsreel in order to represent an Africa that was never filmed, convey a strong message of and about independence, and heighten his film’s emotional effect on the spectator. Writing about the role of the political documentary in African cinema, Vieyra cited *Une Nation est née* as an example of the fact that “the limit between the documentary short and the short fictional film is not always well drawn.”⁵³

Une Nation est née begins before colonization, with panning shots no longer of Paris, but of Senegal. The film’s first few minutes are accompanied only by music, as we take a tour of forests, traditional villages with farmers, and oceans and rivers with fishermen. A voice-over, written by Vieyra and read by Bachir Touré, then begins, “A long, a very long time ago, in this

corner of Africa . . . a hardworking and peaceful population lived by the rhythm of the seasons, in love with work well done.” An allegorical vision of West African life in pre-colonial times follows, featuring a series of images of hunters, boat builders, and artisans, dancing, drumming, and wrestling. Vieyra introduces his viewers to Senegal via what he calls its four landscapes—the forest, the sea, the savanna, the village—as a couple dances in each of them in turn. Dancers Abdoulaye Diop and Henriette Bathily of the famed Ballets Africains appear in the credits not as actors with assigned roles but as “artistic collaborators;” their performances are illustrative rather than narrative (fig. 5). An extraordinary portrayal of colonial conquest follows, as the voice-over commentary cites Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s then newly published anticolonial novel *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961): “Strange dawn of the West! . . . It was a morning of birthing pains... a birth that took place in mud and in blood. . . . Those who were arriving were white and frenzied. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. . . . They fought among themselves to dominate the land.” Africans, again represented by Diop and Bathily, first make gestures of welcome then, when we hear artillery fire on the soundtrack, hurl clumps of dirt at their attackers and fall to the ground. The victorious invading nations are symbolized on-screen only by their flags; there are no European characters in Vieyra’s story.



Figure 5. *Une Nation est née* (Paulin Vieyra, 1961). Screen grab by author.

Ambiguous Adventure, like Vieyra's student film *C'était il y a quatre ans*, had autobiographical resonance for the filmmaker. The novel tells the story of a young man from a royal West African family who is sent by his father to study in France. Upon his return home years later, Samba Diallo discovers that, although he never felt at home in Europe, he has lost a fundamental connection to his native culture and religion. Having evoked colonial violence as well as what N'gugi wa Thiong'o called the colonization of the mind, Vieyra's commentary for *Une Nation est née* describes the torture of colonial forced labor before moving on to the period of anticolonial resistance that led to the birth of the Republic of Senegal. Not until two-thirds of the way into the film, and only after his history reaches independence, does Vieyra finally include newsreel footage of independence festivities and speeches. These are accompanied by a triumphant voice-over recital of the words of the Senegalese national anthem, written by President and poet Senghor and concluding with "Arise brothers, and behold Africa, united." The most directly political of all of Vieyra's documentaries, the film ends with images of both rural and urban areas of the country and the announcement of a "new battle" for economic independence.

Many of the West African independence ceremonies of the early 1960s were recorded on film not by Africans, but by French directors. The news service of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) hired Serge Ricci to make *À Minuit, l'indépendance / At Midnight, Independence* (1961, 67 min.) to celebrate the anniversary of the independence of Dahomey, Niger, Upper Volta, and Côte d'Ivoire. Ricci had previously worked in French West Africa as an ethnographic filmmaker, and in the contrast between his film and *Une Nation est née* we can grasp the extent of Vieyra's innovation. Although produced at the same time and for the same occasion, *À Minuit*, made up of footage of independence ceremonies interspersed with performances of traditional singing and dancing, is quite different in both form and content. Ricci directed, shot, and edited the film, and he also wrote and read its uniform, third-person omniscient commentary. Despite its ostensible focus on independence, *À Minuit* relies on speeches by African leaders and French delegates, accompanied by images of West African and French flags flying together, to stress unity with France rather than separation. Ricci's voice-over asserts that African civil servants trained by the French "will be the first to create a synthesis of the values brought by Western culture and the ancient African wisdom inherited from their ancestors." In an excerpted newsreel shot in Niamey, Niger, Charles de Gaulle's representative Louis Jacquinet declares, "Yesterday Dahomey, today Niger, and tomorrow Upper Volta and Côte d'Ivoire, gain independence. They do so with feelings of solidarity, friendship, and fraternity with France." And in footage from Upper Volta, President Maurice Yaméogo proclaims independence, thanking the French

for having trained his country's civil servants, and calling out, "Long live independent Upper Volta! Long live France!"

Claims for Thiam's *Sarzan* and Sembène's *Borom Sarret* as the first independent sub-Saharan African films ignore, then, not just *Afrique sur Seine*, shot in France, but also *Une Nation est née*. They likewise overlook two significant documentaries completed by other West African directors in 1962. Blaise Senghor, who was seven years younger than Vieyra, also studied filmmaking at the IDHEC and then returned home to Senegal. His first and only film, *Grand Magal à Touba / Grand Magal in Touba* (1962, 20 min.), was funded by his private production company, UCINA (Union Cinématographique Africaine), based in Dakar. Shot in 35mm color, it won a Silver Bear in the short film competition at the Berlin Film Festival and thus gained critical attention in both Africa and Europe. *Grand Magal à Touba*, unlike *Afrique sur Seine* and *Une Nation est née*, features a didactic commentary, which Vieyra later criticized for being "ponderous."⁵⁴ The spectator sees exactly what is being described as the voice-over narration explains the stages of the yearly Mouride pilgrimage to the Touba mosque. From the train station in Dakar, members of the brotherhood travel on trains and buses past Thiaroye, Rufisque, and Thiès; arriving at the mosque, they are greeted by performances and other entertainment. The following day, the pilgrims line up to be blessed by the Caliph, then visit the tomb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. At the end of the film, the voice-over concludes, informatively if prosaically, "The Caliph's secretary, the President, and the Caliph himself will speak to thank the crowd and recall the principles on which the brotherhood is based, the pledge of membership and the economic role of these ardent workers in the country's development."

Senghor's *Grand Magal* is evidence that early West African filmmakers were eager to document and interpret African societies and cultures for audiences both at home and abroad. Non-African ethnographers, however, could not conceive of a filmic category in which they would do so. Rouch, who shot more than one hundred ethnographic films in West Africa between the mid-1940s and his death in 2009, defined ethnology as "the study of a culture which is not your own. That's it."⁵⁵ In the classic ethnographic paradigm, moreover, the society and culture represented on-screen were foreign to the audience as well as the filmmaker; Nichols has described the model as: "We speak about them to us."⁵⁶ Keenly aware of the colonial tradition that preceded him, Vieyra himself did not use the term ethnography for films like *Grand Magal*, precisely to distinguish them from French ethnographic documentaries. He instead maintained that African documentaries about African societies and cultures should be called "social anthropology films" or "sociological films."⁵⁷ Cameroonian filmmaker Moïse Zé, who similarly wished to indicate a break with European ethnography, later spoke of an African

“research cinema,” declaring, “We will no longer speak about ethnographic cinema on our continent, then, but of a research cinema aiming for a true understanding of men.”⁵⁸ Rather than Vieyra’s very academic “social anthropology” or Zé’s very general “research cinema,” I will adopt the term “auto-ethnography” from the work of Mary Louise Pratt, who used it to describe “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms.”⁵⁹ The first independent African filmmakers were no longer colonized subjects but, working within what was in many ways a neocolonial system, they were taking up a medium and modes that had been exploitative in European hands. Describing a 1958 workshop on sub-Saharan African cinema in Brussels, Belgium, Vieyra commented that, given “the paternalistic spirit of the formulations of certain proposals, and the possessive adjectives abusively employed by some to speak about African populations, it was necessary to acknowledge that for African cinema to be truly African it would have to be the work of Africans themselves.”⁶⁰ Just as Vieyra had transformed the documentary newsreel in *Une Nation est née*, he and his colleagues would experiment with ethnographic documentary, another format in which Africans had previously been filmed objects rather than filming subjects.

Moustapha Alassane met Rouch while working as a clerk at Niamey’s Fundamental Institute of Black Africa (IFAN), and Rouch helped to arrange an internship for him with Canadian animator Norman McLaren. Now known primarily for his animated shorts, along with filmic adaptations of traditional tales and a parody western, Alassane also made several short documentaries, including one that was among the very first West African films. He described *Aouré / Marriage* (1962, 30 min.), a coproduction of the IFAN and the French Ministry of Cooperation, as a “short film of an ethnographic type, that described a Djerma [Zarma] marriage,” and the film won both a silver medal at the Cannes Amateur Film Festival and the Prize for Ethnographic Film at the African and Malagasy Film Festival of Saint-Cast.⁶¹ Early in Alassane’s voice-over commentary, he informs the spectator that “marriage is of great importance in our country,” with this auto-ethnographic “our” identifying himself as an African, and more specifically Nigerien, documentarist, representing his people on-screen.

Unlike *Une Nation est née* and *Grand Magal*, *Aouré* uses a certain amount of character development to draw in its spectator, illustrating marriage traditions through the story of a young couple, Mariam and Garba. The voice-over both summarizes actions on-screen and speaks occasional lines of dialogue, recounting the couple’s story as a traditional, and typical, Nigerien one. When the two decide to marry, the commentary narrates the steps of the process, all of which involve the community of their village. Garba makes a promise to Mariam, then speaks to his father, then the griots visit Mariam’s family to



Figure 6. *Aouré* (Moustapha Alassane, 1962). Screen grab by author.

ask for her hand in marriage. After giving a positive response, Garba's father, a fisherman, hands over the dowry, which Alassane specifies is "often a sum of 25,000 or 30,000 francs." Mumbling the requisite prayers from the Koran, the voice-over narrator again places himself within the filmed community: "Marriage is quite a remarkable ceremony in Niger," he continues. After the ceremony, we are told, the young couple will return to their day-to-day occupations. Garba will fish, and Mariam will cook, clean the house, and later, take care of the children. *Aouré* concludes with a short scene scripted to exemplify, with a bit of humor, the state of marriage. Mariam wants to buy a pillow cover from a traveling merchant, but Garba refuses. They argue, and Mariam prevails (fig. 6). Once Garba buys the fabric, calm returns to their household, and work begins again.

Vieyra's *Afrique sur Seine* and *Une Nation est née* had illustrated West African history and contemporary realities from a West African perspective, but without *Aouré's* auto-ethnographic focus. Vieyra's next documentary project, released a year after *Aouré* and in the same year as *Sarzan* and *Borom Sarret*, was *Lamb / Wrestling* (1963, 20 min.), a short film in color about traditional Senegalese wrestling. Produced by the Senegalese Ministry of Information, it became, in Vieyra's words, the first "entirely African film" to be screened in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival.⁶² Like *Une*

Nation est née, Lamb is a combination of performances and recorded footage, in this case of wrestlers illustrating their sport and of wrestling matches, both accompanied by voice-over commentary. Vieyra described *Lamb* as a documentary film with an “educational dimension” that used humor to appeal to its viewers.⁶³ It addressed a diverse audience, with the goal of presenting Senegalese wrestling “at the same time to connoisseurs and to those who know nothing about it.”⁶⁴ Neither conventional ethnography nor conventional educational film, not a simple “reportage,” it was a film in which “fiction mixes with documentary footage to make of the ensemble a creation, that is to say the expression of a personal point of view on wrestling.”⁶⁵

Continuing the nationalist political message of *Une Nation est née, Lamb* begins by asserting a Senegalese unity made up of diverse occupations and ethnic groups. Images of landscapes, cattle, and pirogues are accompanied by commentary stating: “They are farmers. They raise livestock. They are fishermen. Wolof, Toucouleur, Serer, Djolof. They are children of Senegal.” Traditional wrestling brings all of them together; “truly a national sport,” it “goes beyond sport.” The voice-over continues, less formally than that of Vieyra’s previous films: “To appreciate it, you have to know it. And so here is a demonstration.” *Lamb* shows and explains *lamb* to its spectators, step by step, from wrestlers training on the beach, smiling and swinging their arms as they jog, through the conclusions of several matches. The commentary describes each move as two men wrestle on a beach, watched by a few fishermen, and a single wrestler performs the different positions for falling (fig. 7). Vieyra then cuts to recorded footage of a match in a small stadium, and the expository narration continues. We observe the rituals of wrestlers preparing for the match, busloads of spectators arrive, and suddenly, in a transition via overhead shots of traffic, we see a much bigger stadium in a large city. The match footage is edited discontinuously throughout the remaining two-thirds of the film, alternating between close-ups and long shots, views of the wrestlers and their audiences from different angles, and wrestling matches in different stadiums.

Like its editing, *Lamb*’s commentary is heterogeneous and unconventional, by turns informational, literary, philosophical, joking, and enthusiastic. The film’s montage and voice-over weave together many aspects of wrestling and various examples of wrestling. Introducing the match in the large stadium, the voice-over explains, “This muscle festival is a festival of the people, from the Head of State to the most humble citizen, they come to see, they come to hear, for here, the word makes the man, and it makes him a hero.” Next, as if a participant in the event rather than the narrator of already filmed, fixed, images, he cries out excitedly: “To your seats! The show is about to start!” As we see and hear a band, the crowds, and the wrestlers, he works in a reference to Senegalese literature. Citing Birago Diop’s poem “Souffles”



Figure 7. *Lamb* (Paulin Vieyra, 1963). Screen grab by Stéphane Vieyra.

(1951), he urges, “Listen, as the poet said, listen more often to things than to beings, the voice of the ancestors will be heard;” then calls out again, “To your seats!” Sembène, at the time a rising young filmmaker, appears in an on-screen cameo, listening to a wrestling match on the radio. The voice-over interjects, once again interpolating the spectator as if he or she were at the stadium, “The show is about to start! Place your bets!” As *Lamb* comes to an end, Sembène and his friends celebrate a win by their favored wrestler, and we see spectators at several different matches leaving their stadiums. The commentary concludes that *lamb* is “[a] sport, a spectacle, a game, life,” and the film’s last images are of two children play-wrestling. Vieyra’s documentary has elaborated the present reality of an African tradition, one that these boys, like Alassane’s Mariam and Garba, will carry into the future.

When Vieyra had arrived in Dakar from Paris in 1957, his first project was a film tentatively entitled *Un Homme, un idéal, une vie / A Man, an Ideal,*

a Life. The African Cinema Group lacked the funding, however, to edit and add a commentary and soundtrack to the silent, color footage they shot; it took almost a decade to complete and release what became *Môl / Fisherman* (1966, 27 min.). The film depicts life in a fishing village near Dakar through the story of a central character, a young man named Ousmane. Following the opening credits, we see a boy standing on a beach, throwing stones into the ocean, and the voice-over begins, "When Ousmane was a child, he dreamed of becoming a man of the sea, a great fisherman." After a panning shot of the village of Cayar, the commentary becomes informational, identifying and describing it as "one of the most important fishing centers in the region," then narrating Ousmane's day at work and his visits to friends afterwards, stating that both are typical of young men in Cayar. We also see Ousmane's girlfriend Aissata doing her daily chores and visiting her female friends. "Today," the voice-over recounts, "Ousmane will confide in Aissata that he has decided to buy a motor for his pirogue." This decision, we learn, is a result of a transformation in local fishing patterns: "The fish are going farther and farther from the coast. The work of a fisherman is getting more and more difficult and dangerous. And it would be absurd not to use what progress offers."

Like *Aouré, Môl* constructs characters, but does not account for the fullness of individual lives. Vieyra's project was rather to illustrate and analyze the life of a Senegalese fisherman, working in a traditional occupation that is facing contemporary pressures and opportunities. The elders of Cayar are concerned, according to the voice-over, that "Ousmane's project will interfere with customs. And how will the spirits answer?" They deliberate and then consult the ancestors. Vieyra conveys the ancestors' approval through quick, intercut shots of a baobab tree, masks, and drumming, time-honored cultural symbols. When Ousmane leaves on his journey to buy the motor, *Môl's* commentary explains his departure rituals and reassures us that "all was done according to tradition" (fig. 8). Ousmane first visits his uncle in Saint-Louis, in an unsuccessful attempt to borrow the money he needs to make his purchase, then goes to Dakar. Once he arrives at the industrial equipment office of the CFAO (Compagnie Française de l'Afrique de l'Ouest), a colonial trading company that began to distribute American agricultural machinery in the 1950s, the commentary relates the explanation of the system of credit provided to Ousmane. Ousmane then works at the port to earn the money for his down payment; when he returns to Cayar, the village is overjoyed to see him again and to "welcome progress." As the men of the village watch, a shiny red Johnson boat motor is taken out of its box. Ousmane, now in a position to marry, goes to see Aissata, and the film closes with another shot of a young boy on the beach. He turns and walks toward the camera, as the voice-over concludes, "And thus, sometimes, the dreams of a little boy are fulfilled."



Figure 8. *Môl* (Paulin Vieyra, 1966). Screen grab by Stéphane Vieyra.

Môl, like *Lamb*, is among other things a variation on the educational film, a third mode of documentary with colonial European roots in sub-Saharan Africa. Ousmane's traditional dream has been fulfilled thanks to modern technology, a technology that, as *Môl* assures us, has been approved by the ancestors. Auto-ethnographic, in the daily life and customs it represents, the film is allegorical but also political. Like *Une Nation est née* and *Lamb*, it brings together regions of Senegal, in this case Cayar, Saint-Louis, and the capital city of Dakar, where Ousmane is both amazed and overwhelmed by the modern skyscrapers, broad streets, and international port. The film's voice-over encourages spectators to welcome new technology into long-standing traditions, and it also explains how to buy on credit in order to do so. Documentary typification reinforces this message, as does the story of a central, if minimally developed, fictional character. Vieyra was ultimately critical, however, of the final version of his film's voice-over, written by Renée Clarke and read by Mauritanian actor and future filmmaker Med Hondo. He felt that "its European sensibility was not compatible with African poetry. The commentary was too realistic, repeating the image and explaining it, a common fault in French film commentaries."⁶⁶ Unlike *Lamb*, *Môl* ended up being too conventionally ethnographic, not creative enough for its director.

Many French ethnographers who had worked in sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period continued to shoot there after independence. Guy Le Moal, Abel Bourlon, Jacques Masson, Marc Piaux, Igor de Garine, and Serge Moati, all associated with Rouch's Ethnographic Film Committee in the 1950s, kept filming in Africa throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, and their films were better funded and more widely distributed than those of Vieyra, Senghor, and Alassane. In 1966, Blaise Senghor, Sembène, and the other African filmmakers who attended a conference on documentary film sponsored by the Vienna Institute for Development noted the neocolonial attitude evident in the choice of films screened for participants, most of which were made by Europeans. With characteristically perceptive forthrightness, Sembène stated, "I have the impression . . . that we were invited here to see what Europe wants to do in Africa and how it is trying to understand us."⁶⁷ In an interview conducted during the first FESPACO in 1969, Alassane, like Vieyra and Sembène, stressed the urgent need for African documentary, rather than European documentary filmed in Africa. Alassane criticized European ethnographers for not portraying "contemporary African reality," for depicting a timeless and unchanging Africa: "In this situation, it is important that we, as African filmmakers, prove to these European spectators . . . that the past is over, that today Africa is independent."⁶⁸ Doing so, he and his colleagues experimented with documentary content, editing, characterization, and voice-over narration as they worked to expand colonial cinema's narrow approach to nonfiction.

Of the sixteen African films screened at the first FESPACO, seven, or almost half, were documentaries, including *Grand Magal*, *Aouré*, *Lamb*, and *Môl*.⁶⁹ When we omit early West African documentary from African and global film history, we not only lose these specific films, but we fail to recognize the emergence of an important tradition. Jean-Marie Teno notes the irony of current European-funded and European-led training programs for young sub-Saharan African filmmakers: "Fifty years after the first generation of African filmmakers began the struggle to challenge and rectify colonial representations of Africa, Europeans are back to train our youth to look at and represent themselves, often taking as examples and references the ethnographic images they are familiar with, rather than the works of other African filmmakers."⁷⁰ Contemporary African documentarists have more than European documentary models available to them; they can look to an African tradition that was itself avowedly both local and global. Senegalese director Samba Félix Ndiaye, whose prolific and creative documentary career began in the mid-1970s and lasted, like Vieyra's, more than three decades, described the West African films that preceded his as

“principally documentaries” and deliberately acknowledged their importance to his own work.⁷¹

Early African film was of necessity international and cosmopolitan. Aspiring filmmakers trained for the most part in Europe, where they studied a wide range of cinema histories and filmmaking techniques while living and working in communities of Africans from a multitude of regions and ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Yet, looking back almost forty years after independence, French film historian and critic Pierre Haffner argued that the African cinema arose from African, and essentially Franco-African, newsreels and was therefore “for a long time stuck in a sort of *realism complex*.”⁷² I hope to have shown that this was not the case for the films of Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, who from the start of his career instead explored and exploited the complexities of documentary realism. Vieyra insisted on the importance of the African cinema for showing “African realities,” and he believed equally strongly that the African cinema would be an “extremely important contribution to universal art.”⁷³ Committed to creating a counter-tradition to the French colonial newsreels, ethnographic documentaries, and educational films that had come before, Vieyra, along with Senghor, Alassane, and other African documentarists, reclaimed realism and reinvented documentary for Africa. To appreciate fully their contribution both to African cinema and to global documentary film, we must not just remember their films, but work to understand them in their transnational historical and theoretical contexts.

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Notes

1. G. Dureau, “La Cinématographie coloniale,” *Ciné-Journal* 257 (1913): 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

2. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Réflexions d'un cinéaste africain* (Bruxelles: OCIC, 1990), 61.

3. *Ibid.*, 132.

4. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Sembène Ousmane, cinéaste* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), 166.

5. Françoise Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 289.

6. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma et l'Afrique* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), 18.

7. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Responsabilités du cinéma dans la formation d’une conscience nationale africaine,” *Présence Africaine* 27, no. 28 (1959): 309. Many of Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s films are now available on DVD in new digital transfers, thanks to his son Stéphane Vieyra and PSV Films, an independent association created to preserve and distribute his father’s work.

8. Ousmane Sembène, “Moment d’une vie: Paulin Soumanou Vieyra,” *Présence Africaine* 170 (2004): 22.

9. Excerpts from Vieyra’s critical writings have recently been translated into English for the first time. See Mélissa Gélinas, “In Translation: Paulin Soumanou Vieyra,” *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58, no. 3 (2019): 118–36.

10. Jean-Marie Teno, “Writing on Walls: Reflections on the Documentary Tradition in African Cinema,” in *Through African Eyes: Conversations with the Directors*, vol. 2, ed. Mahen Bonetti and Morgan Seag (New York: African Film Festival Inc., 2010), 91. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2007). Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Betsy McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film* (New York: Continuum, 2012). A list of anthologies and edited volumes on documentary that ignore the African cinema would be too long. For a recent exception, see Jonathan Kahana, ed., *The Documentary Film Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), which includes Teno’s “Writing on Walls: The Future of African Documentary Cinema” and my “Mixing Impossible Genres: David Achkar and African AutoBiographical Documentary.”

11. Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206.

12. Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 58–59, 65, 71, 141, 152, 159.

13. Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 69. Ukadike did identify a specifically documentary tradition in Angola and Mozambique. See Ukadike, *Black African Cinema*, 231–45.

14. Frank Ukadike, "African Cinematic Reality: The Documentary Tradition as an Emerging Trend," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (1995): 91.
15. Clément Tapsoba, "Filmer l'Afrique," *Ecrans d'Afrique* 16 (1996): 51.
16. Melissa Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 97. Anjali Prabhu, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 157–71. James S. Williams, "A Thousand Suns: Traversing the Archive and Transforming Documentary in Mati Diop's *Mille Soleils*," *Film Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2016): 95n11.
17. Alexie Tcheuyap, "Documenter l'Afrique: Enjeux théoriques et politiques," *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 33, no. 1 (2018): 18, 26.
18. For more on French colonial documentary in sub-Saharan Africa, see Peter Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), as well as my "War by Documentary," *Romance Notes* 55, no. 3 (2015): 409–23, and "From Ethnography to Essay: Realism, Reflexivity, and African Documentary Film," in *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Kenneth Harrow and Carmela Garritano (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 358–78.
19. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 71, 70.
20. Vieyra, *Réflexions*, 63.
21. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma africain, des origines à 1973* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975), 15. Victor Bachy, *Le Cinéma au Mali* (Bruxelles: OCIC, 1983), 11.
22. Vieyra, *Le Cinéma et l'Afrique*, 107–8.
23. Steven Ungar, *Critical Mass: Social Documentary in France from the Silent Era to the New Wave* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 178.
24. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Quand le cinéma français parle au nom de l'Afrique noire," *Présence Africaine* 11 (1956): 142–45. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Le Cinéma et la révolution africaine," *Présence Africaine* 34, no. 35 (1960): 92–103.
25. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma au Sénégal* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983), 53.
26. David Murphy, "Francophone West African Cinema, 1955–1969: False Starts and New Beginnings," in *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*, ed. Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy (Cambridge: Legenda, 2014), 52.
27. Sarah Maldoror, "À toi Paulin..." *Présence Africaine* 170 (2004): 23.
28. Maria Loftus, "The Appeal of Hybrid Documentary Forms in West Africa," *French Forum* 35, nos. 2–3 (2010): 40. Whereas Loftus uses the term "docufiction" instead of documentary to describe *Afrique sur Seine*, James Genova characterizes all West African fiction films from the 1960s and 1970s as docufiction. James Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 93, 113, 144.
29. Michael Renov, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 34.
30. Michael Renov, "Introduction," in *Theorizing Documentary*, 2.
31. Bill Nichols, *Speaking Truths with Film: Evidence, Ethics, Politics in Documentary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 34.
32. David MacDougall, "Beyond Observational Cinema," in *Movies and Methods, Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 278.
33. Nichols, *Speaking Truths*, 45.
34. Vieyra, *Le Cinéma et l'Afrique*, 8.
35. Jean Rouch, "L'Afrique entre en scène," *Courrier de l'UNESCO* 3 (1962): 14.

Elisabeth Lequeret, *Le Cinéma africain: un continent à la recherche de son propre regard* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003), 5.

36. Françoise Pfaff, *À l'écoute du cinéma sénégalais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 52.

37. Pamela Cohn, "Samba Gadjigo and Jason Silverman," *Bomb Magazine*, 2015, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/9106421/samba-gadjigo-and-jason-silverman>.

38. Vieyra, *Cinéma au Sénégal*, 19.

39. For more on the creation and development of national cinema services and inter-African cooperation in the former French colonies, see Diawara, *African Cinema*.

40. Vieyra, *Cinéma au Sénégal*, 20–21, 38.

41. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Le Film africain d'expression française," *African Arts* 1, no. 3 (1968): 65.

42. François Kodjo, "Les Cinéastes africains face à l'avenir du cinéma en Afrique," *Tiers-monde* 20, no. 79 (1979): 608.

43. Vieyra, *Cinéma au Sénégal*, 38.

44. Jean-René Debrix later claimed that the Cinema Bureau funded 125 of the 185 films produced in the former French colonies of West and Central Africa between 1963 and 1975. Guy Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle, *Cinéastes d'Afrique noire* (Perigueux: Jeune Cinéma, 1978): 153. For a detailed overview of the functioning of French aid to African cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, see Claire Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema: Financial and Technical Assistance between 1961 and 1977," *Framework* 38–39 (1992): 27–46. With respect to French support for documentary production in the early years of independence, see Vincent Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions: The Non-Fiction Film Production at the Origins of Francophone West African Film Production," *Critical Interventions* 11, no. 3 (2017): 214–27.

45. Timité Bassori, "Un Cinéma mort-né?" *Présence Africaine* 49 (1964): 112.

46. *Vienna Symposium*, "The Documentary Film in Africa and Asia" (Vienna: Vienna Institute for Development, 1966), 18–19.

47. Jean-R. Debrix, "Le Cinéma africain," *Afrique contemporaine* 40 (1968): 6.

48. Diawara, *African Cinema*, 40.

49. Urbain Dia-Moukouri, "Intuition d'un langage cinématographique africain," *Présence Africaine* 61 (1967): 208.

50. Vieyra, *Réflexions*, 127.

51. Vieyra, "Le Film africain," 66.

52. Patrick Ilboudo, *Le FESPACO, 1969-1989: Les Cinéastes africains et leurs oeuvres* (Ouagadougou: Éditions La Mante, 1988), 431.

53. Vieyra, *Réflexions*, 128.

54. Vieyra, "Le Film africain," 65.

55. Guy Hennebelle, "Jean Rouch et l'éthique du cinéma ethnographique," *L'Afrique littéraire*, 61–62 (1981): 47.

56. Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, 86.

57. Vieyra, *Réflexions*, 128.

58. Julien Sormery, "'J'ai vu le Mvet': introït pour un nouveau cinéma africain," *Cinéma pratique* 129 (1974): 8.

59. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

60. Vieyra, *Le Cinéma et l'Afrique*, 140.

61. Hennebelle and Ruelle, *Cinéastes d'Afrique noire*, 15. Amélie Garin-Davet, at the

Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, recently organized the first North American retrospective of Alassane's films, including *Aouré* and a later documentary, *Shaki* (1973).

62. Vieyra, *Cinéma au Sénégal*, 58.

63. Vieyra, *Le Cinéma africain*, 157.

64. Vieyra, "Le Film africain," 66.

65. Vieyra, *Cinéma au Sénégal*, 58.

66. Vieyra, "Le Film africain," 66.

67. *Vienna Symposium*, 99.

68. Hamidou Ouedraogo, *Naissance et évolution du FESPACO de 1969 à 1973* (Ouagadougou: Imprimerie Nationale du Burkina, 1995), 67.

69. *Ibid.*, 51–52.

70. Teno, "Writing on Walls: Reflections on the Documentary Tradition in African Cinema," 91. Cowritten by Teno and Melissa Thackway, *Reel Resistance: The Cinema of Jean-Marie Teno* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2020) is the first comprehensive examination of his documentary oeuvre.

71. Samba Félix Ndiaye, "Le Temps des grands frères . . ." in *Catalogue du Festival Cinéma du Réel* (Paris: Centre National Georges Pompidou, 1996), 52.

72. Pierre Haffner, "Nations nègres et cinéma," *Les cahiers de médiologie* 1, no. 3 (1997): 151.

73. Vieyra, *Le Cinéma africain*, 246.

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