

Instructional Cinema in Colonial Africa: An Historical Reappraisal

Dr. Femi Okiremuete Shaka

Abstract: Historians and critics of African cinema such as Diawara, Opubor and Nwuneli, Ekwuazi, Okome, Mgbejume, Malkmus and Armes, and Ukadike have cited the views of the sponsors, administrators and practitioners of instructional cinema in colonial Africa, views which were decidedly racist. They have concluded, often without seeing the films, that the films of colonial African instructional cinema were not different from those of colonialist African cinema.

In this paper, the argument which I present is different from that of the aforementioned scholars. In the main, I argue that the introduction of instructional cinema in colonial Africa was borne out of the desire to use the film medium as a vehicle for instruction, social mobilization, and community development efforts. In this respect, the way in which African subjectivity and culture, in its varied nationalities, is constructed in the films of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment and similar projects inspired by this pioneer effort, such as those of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) of the British colonial government, the Film and Photo Bureau and the Centre for Catholic Action Cinema (CCAC) of the Belgian Congo is different from that of colonialist African cinema. It is my opinion that the views of the practitioners of instructional cinema should not be used as a criteria for analyzing the films. Rather, the films themselves should be screened and analyzed to see how African subjectivity is constructed, to see if the films fulfill their objectives.

Introduction

Studies which have been carried out on the cinematic practices of colonial Africa such as those by Malkmus and Armes (1992:3-35), Smyth (1979), Richards and Aldgate (1983), Diawara (1992: 2-11) and Ukadike (1994:29-48), have failed to make distinctions between the two forms of cinematic representation which existed side-by-side in colonial Africa, i.e., *colonialist cinema*, on which I have carried out a detailed study in my article titled, "The Politics of Cultural

Conversion in Colonialist African Cinema," published in the June 1995 edition of *CineAction*, and colonial, instructional cinema, which was essentially an educational cinematic practice dedicated to teaching Africans modern methods of doing things. In this study, I will undertake a historical reappraisal, from an African perspective, of the practice of instructional cinema in colonial Africa. This is with a view to further clarifying the nature of the cinematic practices of colonial Africa.

The Historical Background of Colonial African Instructional Cinema.

The introduction of instructional cinema into sub-saharan Africa during the colonial era by the British colonial government, and other government and non-governmental agencies, was informed by the desire to exploit the educational capacities of the medium, as well as to counter the influence of Hollywood films in its colonies. Instructional film practice was introduced first in Nigeria in the late 1920s by the colonial government as a visual aid to an ongoing government campaign to eradicate an outbreak of the plague in Lagos in 1929. As a result of the success of this pioneering effort by William Sellers, the use of film as a medium of instruction and propagation of government developmental programmes was extended to other British territories. The Central Office of Information (COI) bulletin gave the following account of how the cinema was adopted as a medium of instruction and propagation of government policies in British colonies:

in the late 1920s lantern slides were being used to illustrate lectures on health in Nigeria, and it was in this territory, to combat an outbreak of plague in Lagos in 1929, that the film was employed for the first time in any colonial territory as medium of information and education. In the campaign, the film was used to illustrate to Africans the way in which rats carry the disease and to enlist the co-operation of Africans in killing the plague-bearing rats. The success of the campaign was such that from that time the film was increasingly used in West Africa (Central Office of Information (COI) Bulletin No.R. 3161, October, 1955).

In spite of the success of this pioneering effort, no immediate serious effort was made to institutionalise the practice of instructional cinema until 1939 when the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was established.

By the second half of the 1920s, however, the Colonial Office began to explore the implications of the cinema for the colonies and for colonial power. The initial impulse to regulate the influence of the cinema in British territories resulted from the perceived threat to British interests of the commercial cinema, especially Hollywood. Rosaleen Smyth has noted that:

in the African colonies the concern of the Colonial Office was how the cinema affected British economic and political interests, and how Britain might use the cinema to promote what it determined to be the economic, social, and moral welfare of the colonial peoples. Britain felt that both her economic and political interests in Africa were threatened by the stranglehold which the American film had gained on the commercial cinema circuit in the 1920s (Smyth, 1983: 129).

Attempts made to break the influence of Hollywood failed however because many colonies, especially those in Southern and Eastern Africa, had already entered into contractual agreements with South Africa-based film distributors for a supply of commercial films. As a result, the Colonial Office was forced to limit itself to the negative sanction of censorship, and in this regard, urged colonial governments to be aware of films which might discredit the armed forces or arouse undesirable racial feeling. At this period also the Colonial Office began to spare serious thought to an alternative form of cinema to the dominant Hollywood practice, one which would combine instruction with entertainment. Since most Africans were at this time illiterate, the cinema was thought to offer bright possibilities as a medium of instruction.

In 1927, Hans Vischer, Secretary to the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC), recommended to the Colonial Office Conference on Education in the Colonies, that the cinema should be used to spread general knowledge about health and economic development in the colonies. In 1929, Julian Huxley went to East Africa for ACEC to test African reactions to instructional films. He concluded, after observing reactions to the pilot programme for the education of adults, that the cinema could be used for both educational and propaganda means. At the time Huxley carried out his pilot programme however, local experiments were already being made on the use of film as an instrument for the dissemination of government health policies by two colonial government health officials, William

Sellers in Nigeria, and A. Paterson in Kenya (Smyth: 130).

After the pilot programme by Julian Huxley in 1929, the Colonial Office had agreed in principle that the cinematic medium was an invaluable tool for adult education and social development. Still, it would not commit itself financially to the implementation of its findings. Indeed, this lack of financial commitment by the Colonial Office towards the development of the colonies was the subject of several reports that were critical of British colonial administration which appeared just before the outbreak of the war. The consensus was that the British government needed to spend more money on colonial development, hence the enactment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 (Smyth: 131-132). As a result of the Colonial Office's lack of financial commitment to instructional cinema, the ultimate credit for the actual institution of the practice of instructional cinema goes to the pioneer of the programme, the International Missionary Council (IMC).

In 1932, the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the IMC sent a commission under the leadership of J. Merle Davis to Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo to study the effects of the heavy industries of the Copper Belt upon African customs and life-style. Among the findings of the commission was that the social fabric of African society was being undermined by the rapid pace of industrialisation in the region. One noted feature of this process was the widening gap between the outlooks and ways of life of urbanised Africans in contrast to those of the rural areas. Another finding was that there were a lack of recreational facilities for urbanised Africans who were getting cut off from their traditional forms of entertainment. As a result of their urbanized outlook, the youths, after their training in missionary or government schools, tended to live in a world that was quite bewildering to their elders in the villages. The commission therefore recommended that the cinema should be used as a means of explaining to the elders the new world which was rapidly advancing upon them, as well as a means of providing entertainment to urban dwellers. Towards this end, in 1933 the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the IMC attempted to organise a research project dedicated to the production and exchange of cultural films on an international scale. According to Merle Davis, on the advice of F.P. Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the scope of the project was limited to the East African region with emphasis on motion pictures as a means of adult education. It was at this stage in

the conception of the project, which was to become known as Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, that both Major L.A. Notcutt (rtd) and G.C. Latham were introduced into the project (Davis, 1937: 9- 13).

Before he was contacted, Major Notcutt, like some colonial government officials (e.g. William Sellers and A. Paterson,) had, under the inspiration of the documentary film movement spearheaded by John Grierson at the Film Units of both the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), and the General Post Office (GPO), been experimenting with instructional films. In 1926, Notcutt was managing a group of sisal plantations in East Africa, and like many other planters, thought that an estate cinema might be an effective method of maintaining a contented labour force. Towards this end, he made a few films with Africans as actors and was surprised that they were well received. It then occurred to him that there might be commercial possibilities in the development of a native cinema. In 1930, he returned to England and spent some time studying film production. The idea of using the cinema as a means of instruction rather than commerce was however inspired after reading Julian Huxley's *African View* - a report of his pilot programme. In addition, a letter to *The Times* by Frank Melland, a former provincial commissioner in Northern Rhodesia, further encouraged Notcutt to look towards the direction of instructional cinema rather than commercial cinema. He worked out a scheme in rough details and discussed it with Melland, who encouraged him, and linked him up with Merle Davis (Notcutt and Latham, 1937: 24).

In 1933, Notcutt received a letter from Davis asking for an estimate of the cost of a two-year experiment in the production of educational films for Africans. Subsequently, generous grants were made by the Carnegie Corporation of New York towards a project for experimenting in the production and exhibition of cultural, recreational, and educational films for Bantu people. This was how the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment - precursor to the instructional cinematic practices of the CFU, the Film and Photo Bureau, and the C.C.A.C.C. came into being. Other financial contributors to the project included the Roan Antelope Copper Mines Ltd, Rhokana Corporation Ltd, and Mufulira Copper Mines Ltd. The experiment was originally planned to last for two years but when a professional cameraman was added to the staff in accordance with the expressed wish of the Colonial Office, it had to be scaled down. The project was conducted under the auspices of the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the International Missionary Council in conjunction with the Colonial

Office and the British Film Institute. Frederick Luggard was appointed chairman of the Advisory Council of the project, which also included representatives of the principal British groups concerned with the welfare of the people of East Africa. Merle Davis was appointed director-general of the project, L.A. Notcutt as the field director, while G.C. Latham, a former director of Native Education in Northern Rhodesia, was appointed educational director.

The aims and objectives of the project as set out in the printed pamphlet issued on its launching were to find out how best the cinema could be used for the following purposes:

- (1) To help the adult African to understand and adapt himself to the new conditions which are invading and threatening to overwhelm him.
- (2) To reinforce the ordinary methods of classroom and lecture hall.
- (3) To conserve what is best in African traditions and culture by representing these in their proper setting as stages in racial development and as inheritance to be cherished with pride.
- (4) To provide recreation and entertainment (Notcutt and Latham: 27-28).

Some of the films produced included: *Post Office Savings Bank*, *Tanga Travels*, *Tax*, *The Chief*, *The Hare and the Leopard*, *Food and Health*, *Hookworm*, *Ugandan Boys Scouts*, *Infant Malaria*, etc. The most popular of these films, *Post Office Savings Bank*, treats the issue of home-kept savings and theft. It tells the story of two plantation workers who return to their villages after receiving their pay. One buries his money in the floor of his hut, and is seen doing so by a thief who watches through a crack in the wall. In the evening, the man and his wife go to a dance, and the thief, noting their arrival there, sneaks back to the hut and steals the money. The next morning the man looks at the place where he buried his money and, on discovering that it has been stolen, raises an alarm and informs his neighbours of the theft. One of them informs him that a stranger was seen early in the morning on his way to a nearby township. The man then sets off to the township with one of his neighbours who says he can identify the stranger. On arrival at the town, they meet his co-worker and the man tells him of

the theft of his salary. His co-worker tells them how he guards his money from thieves, and takes them to the Post Office where the workings of the Savings Bank are explained to them. On returning through the town, they see the thief outside an Indian shop buying a shirt; as soon as he sees them, he takes to his heels, thereby giving himself away. A Hollywood style chase scene then follows, after which he is apprehended and brought to justice. The film therefore propagates the importance and safety of the Post Office Savings Bank. According to Notcutt and Latham, this film was shown more than seventy times, and was always one of the most popular films of the project (Notcutt and Latham: 31-34).

Instructional Cinema in Colonial Africa: A Historical Reappraisal.

The Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment lasted from March 1935 to May 1937. Within this period, the team produced thirty-five films, which included nineteen on agriculture and six on health. A singular feature of the project was that the people who made the films also showed them throughout East and Central Africa. According to Rosaleen Smyth:

they were taken by Latham on lorry tours throughout East and Central Africa to test audience reactions. In five months he travelled nine thousand miles and gave ninety screenings to more than eighty thousand people, most of whom had never seen a film before (Smyth, 1983: 131).

The instructional cinema project, however, faced a lot of criticisms because of the poor technical quality of the films. Latham had conceived an ambitious plan for a central organ in London with local production units in the colonies, a structure later adopted by the CFU in 1939, but the East African governments were opposed to the institutionalisation of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment for financial reasons, and also because they felt the technical quality of the films was poor. There were complaints of imperfect synchronisation in the sound-on-disc technique adopted for the project. Latham, however, argued that given the limited finance available and the fact that instructional cinema was still at an experimental stage, one could not be too much of a technical purist. Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) was the only colony that favoured the continuation of the project. It was more cinema conscious than other parts of black Africa because, as a result of the mine cinemas on the comparatively urbanised Copper

Belt, it probably had then the largest concentration of African cinema-goers outside of South Africa.

Part of the explanation given for the termination of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment was lack of financial commitment by the Colonial Office. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, it was the policy of the British government that colonial governments should pay their own way. Colonial governments did not, however, particularly rate experimental instructional cinema as a top priority in the midst of more fundamental areas such as health, education, and agriculture. As a result of the criticism of the financial policy of the British government to its colonies, the Colonial Development Welfare Act of 1940 was passed in parliament. One of the positive results of the criticism of the British government's colonial stewardship was that the Colonial Marketing Board (CMB) managed to find £4,175 to pay the Strand Film Company to produce a propaganda film, *Men of Africa* (Alexander Shaw, 1939). This film adopted the instructional format of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment in its depiction of the role of colonial governments in the development of the colonies. Smyth has noted that

the case of *Men of Africa* demonstrates that it is easier to find money for films in defence of the empire, to counter criticism of British neglect of the colonies, than it was to find money for films as an aid in imperial development (Smyth: 132).

This argument is further reinforced by the fact that when money was indeed found for the establishment of a Colonial Film Unit (CFU), it was in furtherance of British defence and war strategies rather than for educational purposes. As noted earlier, when the Ministry of Information (MOI) established the CFU in 1939, to make and distribute war propaganda films in the colonies in aid of the British war efforts, there was already a fairly thriving tradition of government officials using films to propagate government policies. Beside earlier efforts such as those of Sellers and Paterson, the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment had also further demonstrated the instructional and propaganda potentials of the medium. When the Colonial Office decided to recruit staff for the take-off of the CFU, some of the veterans of instructional cinema such as William Sellers - who was appointed producer of the CFU - were drafted into war propaganda efforts (Jones, 1948: 4-8; Pearson, 1948: 23-27). The war propaganda films which the

CFU was charged to produce were meant to counter the German war propaganda machine which represented Britain as a decadent and rapidly dwindling world power with a slave empire ruthlessly exploited and cruelly repressed (Richards and Aldgate, 1983: 247; Mackenzie, 1984: 74-75). The CFU films were therefore meant to correct these views as well as inform Africans why the war was being prosecuted, and why they should support British war efforts.

To achieve its set objectives, William Sellers and Cicorge Pearson, respectively producer and artistic director of the CPU, developed a specialised type of filmmaking which they considered suitable for illiterate people: the films should be slow in pace, avoid trick photography, leave nothing to be inferred, and pay special attention to continuity, the basic assumption being that the comprehension of films is a gradually acquired skill rather than a natural talent. Stating the fundamental stylistic principles of the CFU productions, Pearson in a paper titled "The Making of Films for Illiterates in Africa", presented at the 1948 British Film Institute conference on "The Film in Colonial Development", argues as follows:

we hold fast to two fundamental rules in our screencraft. First, to keep rigidly to those principles of education based on the laws of all human mental progress. In essence, that all acquired knowledge derives from experienced sensations, of which those of the eye are ever the strongest; that these myriad sensations are held in the memory, to form our thought material - our perceptions; that with these stored perceptions stimulated by imagination we can move to new mental comparisons and associations - our conceptions. From the known to the unknown. That is our constant touchstone in shaping pictorial choice and pictorial flow; realising, always that all present thinking depends on past experience; knowing always our vital task is the arousing of the imagination that functions between past apprehension and present comprehension (Pearson: 24).

Working from these fundamental stylistic assumptions, Pearson argues that the narrative style of modern cinema, with its brief scenes carrying the story forward, with all the time and space gaps covered by narrative conventions of mixes, wipes, montages, and fades, varying its scene form with dolly shots, pans, etc., confuse illiterate spectators. He recommends fades as the most appropriate narrative convention for indicating the passage of time, because the approach of darkness and dawn helps the illiterate spectator to understand the fade-out

and fade-in as an indication of passage of time, of an ending or a new beginning. He also recommends the maintenance of visual continuity from scene to scene, and the avoidance of parallel montages, so that the attention of the spectator is not distracted. As he puts it: "It is all a matter of using the very simplest ways of explaining something with our *pictures*, in the same manner that a good teacher speaks with the simplest *words* to his pupil eager for understanding" (Pearson: 25).

Ordinarily, it would seem the fundamental stylistic principles of instructional cinema are very well suited to the set objective of using the film as a pedagogical instrument for social development, but a close scrutiny of the views of contributors at the conference, many of whom cite these production stylistics as keys to their arguments, reveals that they often use them as an approving stamp for the need to develop an alternative film aesthetics for Africans because they are inferior beings, incapable of distinguishing between facts and fictions. Most of the arguments are often anchored on the imagined negative impact of commercial cinema on Africans. Instructional cinema was therefore seen as a way of redressing the negative images of Europeans projected in commercial cinema and the negative impact they were imagined to be having on Africans. The idea was to use British and selected American instructional films to counter Hollywood images of Europeans (Jones, 1948: 4-8; Beale, 1948: 16-21).

The question which arises is, if Africans understand the narrative conventions of Hollywood productions, which after all established and canonised the narrative conventions of the cinema, why was it imagined that they would be confused when these same conventions are used in instructional films? In general, I do not see anything wrong with the production stylistics which Pearson has enumerated because I consider them suitable for the nature of film practice they were aimed at. However when considered in conjunction with the views of earlier practitioner of instructional cinema such as those of Notcutt and Latham, and new interpretations attached to them outside their original framework by people like Jones and Beale, I am much more inclined to believe, in common with other African scholars, that the production stylistics of instructional cinema were not inspired by the altruistic set objectives of instructional cinema. I will return to this point shortly.

By 1944, the total number of films carrying the CFU's label

was 115, although not all were actually produced by the CFU. The Colonial Office, which all this while played only an advisory role in the activity of the CFU, objected to the narrow concentration on war propaganda films and lobbied successfully to have the CFU's work extended to include the production of instructional films. To this end, in 1942, as the CFU widened its scope, funds and staff were increased, although the Treasury insisted that the main activity of the CFU should continue to be the production of war propaganda films. During the war period, however, the Colonial Office continued to plan ahead for the post-war era when it expected that the CFU would concentrate on the production of instructional films. In anticipation of a drive for mass education to be launched after the war, with funds to be provided under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, ACEC produced the report, *Mass Education in African Society* (1944), which acknowledged the cinema as the most popular and powerful of all visual aids in mass education. The report further advised that documentary films should be used to broaden the outlook of rural dwellers and help them to adjust to changes in the political, economic, and social conditions of their societies. The content of the report therefore had much in common with the aims and objectives of the Bantu Education Cinema Experiment launched almost a decade earlier.

The war propaganda films can be classified into three categories: war information films, exhortation and goodwill films, and the projection-of-England films. Most of the war information films carried titles like, *There is an Anti-Aircraft Gun* (Pearson, 1941) or *This is a Barrage Balloon* (Pearson, 1941). Others were devoted to Africans fighting in the war, such as, *Pilot-Officer Peter Thomas, RAF* (Pearson, 1943), about a Nigerian who was the first African to qualify for a commission in the Royal Air Force. The majority of the war information films were geared towards explaining the mechanics of modern warfare. Others, such as, *Food from Oil Nuts* (Pearson, 1944) and *We Want Rubber* (Pearson, 1944), exhorted Africans to produce more rubber to help overcome the critical shortage of this commodity after the fall of Malaysia to the Japanese. On the other hand, films such as, *Comfort from Uganda* (Pearson, 1942) and *Katsina Tanks* (Pearson, 1943) were goodwill films made to show British appreciation for contributions made by the colonies towards the war efforts. The projection-of-England films, such as *Mr. English at Home* (Gordon Hales, 1940) and *A British Family in Peace and War*

(Pearson, 1944) were films geared towards explaining English culture to Africans.

Towards the end of the war, as the clamour for independence grew louder in Africa, the British colonial film policy was directed towards ensuring that the colonies stayed within the Commonwealth. The main objective was to persuade Africans that western democracy had more to offer them than communism. In this campaign, the weekly newsreel, *British News*, was considered invaluable, and news items were carefully selected for their informational, prestige, and trade promotional values. Throughout the war years, the CFU produced only war propaganda films, and they were mostly all directed by the veteran filmmaker, George Pearson. After the war however, the Central Office of Information (COI) replaced the MOI, and the CFU became a department of the COI under the controller of the Films Division. The COI had no policy-making power, it was simply an agency whose function was to supply technical advice and facilities to ministerial departments. The film production policy of the CFU was therefore formulated by the Colonial Office. Consequently, in keeping with its post-war plans of laying emphasis on instructional cinema, the Colonial Office instructed the CFU to develop infrastructures in the colonies for the production of instructional films. Most of the post-war instructional films were directed by Lionel Snazelle. They included *Toward True Democracy* (Snazelle, 1947), *Good Business*, (Snazelle, 1947), which dealt with cocoa marketing co-operatives in Nigeria, *Village Development* (Snazelle, 1948), *Better Homes* (Snazelle, 1948), *Mixed Farming* (Snazelle, 1948), and *Animal Manure* (Rollo Gamble, 1950). As the titles indicate, most of the films were geared towards teaching Africans forms of popular democracy, village planning and development, and modern methods of farming.

To facilitate easy exhibition of its films, the CFU established in each colony a Mobile Film Unit (MFU) which took these films on extensive exhibition tours of both rural and urban areas. The MFUs were first designed and operated in Nigeria before the system was extended to other British territories. The Central Office of Information (COI) bulletin, in its accounts of the origin of MFUs, states as follows:

the first mobile cinemas - usually in improvised vans - were in use as long ago as 1929. It was in 1931 that the specially designed mobile cinema van was evolved in Nigeria, and since then the design has been steadily improved. Modern vehicles carry their own power-supply, are fitted for the

projection of 16mm. films, silent or sound, and include film strip projectors, public address equipment and radio. The mobile cinema van is a many purpose vehicle, for according to the composition of its crew and programme, it becomes a mobile health centre, a veterinary centre, or a school for a literacy or agricultural improvement campaign (Central Office of Information (COI) Bulletin No. R. 3161, October, 1955).

Once the popularity of this form of free cinema was established, itinerant salesmen began to exploit the system by setting up their own MFUs to promote sales of their merchandise. The salesmen's film exhibitions were often much more popular than those of the government's MFUS because they showed mostly Hollywood westerns while the MFUs showed mostly non-fictional instructional films. However, through the combinatory efforts of both groups, a thriving film culture was firmly established throughout British colonial territories in Africa.

As the criticism of the British colonial government's stewardship grew louder after the war, government propagandists once more employed film - as they did earlier just before the outbreak of the war, as in the case of *Men of Africa* - to defend the achievements of colonial rule. The product of this exercise was the widely acclaimed £30,000 dramatised documentary, *Daybreak in Udi* (Terry Bishop, 1948), which was produced by the Crown Film Unit which is a different government agency from the CFU, to demonstrate the progress being made in the Udi Division of Nigeria. *Daybreak in Udi* is a classic example of an instructional film. It deals with the mass mobilisation undertaken by the people of the Udi Division, under the supervision of their District Commissioner, E.R. Chadwick, who plays himself in the film, to develop the district. The film won the 1948 Academy Award for documentary film, and a British award for documentary film in 1949 (Smyth: 141).

Beside this brief intervention by the Crown Film Unit, the main objectives of the CFU in the post-war years was the promotion of instructional film production in the colonies, whose governments, it hoped, would ultimately assume full financial and administrative responsibilities for the work in their respective territories. Toward this end, emphasis was placed on the decentralisation and Africanisation of the activities of the CFU. As part of this indigenisation process, the CFU branch set up in Nigeria in 1945 was renamed the Federal Film

Unit in 1946; the Central Film Unit was set up to serve Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi) in 1948; and the Gold Coast (Ghana) Film Unit was established in 1949. Altogether, between 1945 and 1950, the CFU established twelve film production units in eight countries in East and West Africa. The units were mandated to make films on subject matters suggested by local territorial governments, and to train indigenous people in film production. To achieve this aim, a Film Training School was established in Accra, Ghana, in 1948. However, after the first six months, the Film Training School moved to Jamaica, and then back to London. By 1955, the CFU declared that it had fulfilled its goal of introducing instructional cinema to Africans. The CPU then changed its name to the Overseas Film and Television Centre, a place where African filmmakers, their counterparts from other former British colonies, and other Third World filmmakers could buy film equipment and undertake post-production activities (Smyth: 138-140; Mgbejume, 1989: 38-39).

The activities of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment and the CFU inspired similar projects in the Belgian Congo (Zaire), where the Belgian Ministry of Information established a Film and Photo Bureau in 1947 to produce films specifically for the Congolese. The Chief of the Film and Photo Bureau felt that just distributing films from Europe and the United States would not meet the need of providing Africans with their own cinema. The Bureau's project therefore included the production of educational films for Africans as well as newsreels and documentaries about Africa for the Belgians. The films were shot with 16mm camera, and most of the post-production work, except for the laboratory processing of rushes, was done on the spot in the Belgian Congo. The Catholic Church in the territory, within this period, also became aware of the proselytisation potentials of the cinema. Accordingly, it established a film production centre called the Congolese Centre for Catholic Action Cinema (C.C.A.C.C.) headed by Father Alexandre Van den Heuvel. Under the C.C.A.C.C., three major film production companies were established in the Belgian Congo. Father Van den Heuvel was in charge of the Edisco-Films in Leopoldville (Kinshasa); Father Van Haelst managed Luluafilm production company in Luluabourg (Kanaga), in the western Kasai region; while Father De Vloo headed Africa Films in Bukavu and Kivu. The most popular instructional film produced by the C.C.A.C.C. was a series of animated colour cartoons called *Les*

Palabres de Mboloko, directed by Father Van den Heuvel. In 1960, when Zaire became independent, both the C.C.A.C.C. and the Film and Photo Bureau stopped their African film production activities (Diawara, 1992: 2-11). Many African film scholars such as Kehinde Vaughan (1957: 218), Hyginus Ekwuazi (1987: 2-11), Onyero Mgbejume (1989: 1-16), Manthia Diawara (1986, 1992: 2-11) and others, have criticised the philosophy or general reasoning behind the institution of instructional cinema, especially as articulated by its practitioners. For instance, in their published report of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, Notcutt and Latham gave the following reasons for the introduction of instructional cinema in Africa:

yet surely reflection will convince any unprejudiced person that, with backward peoples unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, it is surely our wisdom, if not our obvious duty, to prevent, so far as is possible, the dissemination of wrong ideas. Should we stand by and see a distorted presentation of the white races accepted by millions of Africans when we have it in our power to show them the truth? There is much that is silly and sordid in the life of the West, but white people have other interests than money-making, gambling, crime and the pursuit of other people's wives and husbands (Notcutt and Latham: 22-23).

Most of the African scholars whom I noted have criticised the general reasoning behind the institution of instructional cinema in Africa, and have either cited the above views of Notcutt and Latham or similar views expressed by other practitioners to argue that the whole project of instructional cinema was motivated more by paternalistic attitude than by genuine altruism. For instance, other practitioners of instructional cinema such as William Sellers and George Pearson, producer and director respectively of the CFU, reasoned that Africans needed a specialised, simplistic kind of filmmaking that is slow in pace, avoids trick photography, and so on. Van Bever, head of the Film and Photo Bureau in the Belgian Congo, also argued along similar lines when he stated as follows:

for the great majority of Africans it would be necessary to film with a special technique. We must, therefore, make, ourselves, the largest share of films destined for Africans

(cited in Diawara, 1992: 13).

But while the practitioners reasoned that Africans were incapable of distinguishing between "truth and falsehood," and that they needed a special simplified cinema, Africans themselves, with their wealth of storytelling traditions, were giving their verdict on instructional cinema by showing preference for commercial entertainment films whose stock in trade is the peddling of what Biodun Jeyifo elsewhere refers to as 'the truthful lie' (Jeyifo, 1985). Indeed, a cursory look at the few instructional films that were popular such as, *The Post Office Savings Bank*, *Les Palabres de Mboloko*, and *The Boy Kumasenu*, would reveal that their style of narration lean more towards feature film than to documentary. Furthermore, in 1958 Sellers himself told a conference in Brussels on the cinema in sub-Saharan Africa that although the CFU's films were of technical and pictorial quality, many aroused little emotional interest among rural audiences. He recommended that more feature films with African subjects, directed by Africans themselves, should be encouraged (Smyth: 138). A year earlier, in 1957, Kehinde Vaughan had similarly attested to the unpopularity of instructional cinema and its special simplified narrative techniques when he argued that:

Africans film audiences, daily growing larger, when faced with the choice of seeing the "simplified screen narratives" produced by the "Colonial Film Unit" and the foreign "commercial entertainment film" have overwhelming decided in favour of the latter products in spite of their "complicated technical conventions". In African towns like Freetown, Accra, Kumasi, Lagos or Nairobi, Charles Chaplin and many popular stars of the screen are already household names (cited in Diawara, 1992: 4).

Manthia Diawara, in a recent assessment of the instructional cinematic practices of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, and the CFU, equally drew the conclusion that the whole enterprise was driven by paternalistic attitude rather than by altruistic aspirations. In his opinion, the Bantu Cinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit were in many ways paternalistic and racist. They wanted to turn back film history and develop a different type of cinema for Africans because they considered the African mind too primitive to follow the sophisticated narrative techniques of mainstream cinema. Thus they thought it necessary to return to the beginning of the film history - to

use uncut scenes, slow down the story's pace, make the narrative simpler by using fewer actors and adhering to just one dominant theme, the ideology of these units denied that the colonised peoples had elementary human qualities (Diawara: 4).

Though I hold similar opinion to those expressed by the African scholars with respect to qualifying the views of the practitioners of instructional cinema as paternalistic and sometimes out rightly racist, I should like to argue that these views should be distinguished from both the stated aims and objectives of instructional cinema, and from the films themselves. The stated aims and objectives were to teach Africans modern methods of social development, hence the emphasis on film as a teaching aid, on modern medicine, modern methods of farming, banking, village and urban planning for hygienic purposes, co-operative societies, etc. The films do not represent Africans as lacking knowledge of these things; they merely posit them as doing things in the old and traditional ways.

The representation of African subjectivities in instructional cinema as knowing and knowledgeable beings, as people with independent minds of their own capable of making decisions about what they want, and most importantly, as people capable of acquiring knowledge to improve themselves, is antithetical to the practice of colonialist cinema which represents Africans by drawing analogies between them and animals, either showing them as people who are bestial in behaviour or as people incapable of social development. As a result of the progressive manner in which Africans are posited in instructional cinema, the practice needs to be distinguished from colonialist cinema.

Having said this, perhaps I should add that the line between instruction and propaganda is indeed very thin with respect to these category of films. The reason for this can be traced more to the political atmosphere within which they were produced and how they were perceived by people both in the colonies and in the metropolis, than in the nature of the representation. Most of the films were produced, as I noted earlier, in the heat of post-war criticism of British colonial stewardship. In the colonies, the post-war period witnessed a period of intense demand and movement for independence. These demands, rather than being accepted as indications of a growing wish for self-rule, were often interpreted as signs of dissatisfaction with the level of development within the colonies. The period therefore witnessed the initiation of various development projects, many having to do

with the building of infrastructures, schools, hospitals, the development of the agricultural sector of the economy. In pursuing these development projects, the cinema was perceived as a facilitator, a means of orienting and demonstrating to the people within the colonies, a new and modern way of doing things. The proceedings of the 1948 conference on the cinema and colonial development clearly demonstrate that colonial governments saw the cinema as an aid to the propagation of developmental projects such as health and environmental sanitation programmes, agricultural extension services, public information network, and so on. But before this time also, the production of colonialist films such as *Sanders of the River*, *Song of Freedom*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *She*, etc., was already going on in the colonies and because of the images projected in these films, there was a growing hostility to the way the cinema was being used, in general, in the colonies. For instance, in his response to the release of *Sanders of the River*, Nnamdi Azikiwe, one of the nationalist politicians of the day, noted that:

whoever sees this picture will be shocked at the exaggeration of African mentality, so far as superstitious beliefs are concerned, not to speak of the knavery and chicanery of some African chiefs. I feel that what is being paraded in the world today as art or literature is nothing short of propaganda (Azikiwe, 1968: 153-154).

Similar views were often extended to instructional cinema for different reasons. Many of the critics whom I have cited used the paternalistic views of the producers of instructional cinema to judge the films. To them, it is not so much a question of the very *nature and purpose* of the films themselves as of the views of their producers. Using these views, they condemn the narrative styles in these films as simplistic. But when one takes a closer look at films like *Men of Africa* and *Daybreak in Udi* as examples of colonial instructional cinema, one finds that they are not more simplistic in narrative than most films of the period. Besides, the *purpose* for which they were made is often overlooked. Others considered them uninteresting because of the emphasis on documentary practice. They would have preferred striking a balance between fictional narratives and the documentary mode. To the emergent political elites on the other hand, little distinction was made between these films and the commercial

ones. While the commercial ones were condemned for their negative representation of Africa, the instructional films were either treated as continuing the practice of colonialist cinema or as colonial government propaganda.

The lack of distinction between colonial instructional cinema and colonialist cinema which one finds in the works of most historians and critics of African cinema is therefore a product of the politics of interpretation of both colonial governments' intentions and the views of the practitioners of instructional cinema, on the one hand, and of the vexatious practice of colonialist cinema on the other. While colonial governments considered the CFU productions as instructional films, the emergent political elites of the time as well as most post-colonial African film historians considered them as propaganda pieces. Certainly, most of these films would have been packaged for the metropolis as informational/instructional works showing the role of the British colonial governments in the development of the colonies. But taking cognisance of the criticism preceding the enactment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 and the subsequent institution of the practice of instructional cinema, it is indeed difficult to draw a strict line between propaganda and instruction in these films. If I am considering them here strictly as instructional films, then it is because I am much more concerned with the *nature and purpose* of these films, with respect to the representation of African subjectivity and culture, than with the politics underlining their production.

Bibliography

- Azikiwe, Nnamdi. 1968. *Renascent Africa*, London Frank Cass & Co.
- Beale, Colin. 1948. "The Commercial Entertainment Film and its Effects on Colonial Peoples," in *The Film in Colonial Development: A Report of a Conference*, London: The British Film Institute.
- Diawara, Manthia. 1992. *African Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Diawara, Manthia 1986. "Sub-Saharan African Film Production: Technological Paternalism," *Jump Cut*, No. 32, April, 61-68.
- Ekwuazi, Hyginus. 1987. *Film in Nigeria*, Jos: National Film Corporation.
- Jeyifo, Biodun. 1985. *The Truthful Lie: Essays*, London & Port of Spain.

- Mackenzie, John M.C. 1984. *Propaganda and Empire: The Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Malkmus, Lizbeth and Armes, Roy. 1992. *Arab and African Film Making*, London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Mgbejume, Onyero. 1989. *Film in Nigeria: Development, Problems and Promises*, Nairobi: African Council on Communication Education.
- Nichols, Bill. 1983. "The Voice of Documentary," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 36 (3) (Spring): 17-30.
- Notcutt, L.A. and Latham, G. C. 1937. *The Africa and the Cinema*, London: The Edinburgh House Press.
- Okome, Onookome (1995). "Cinema and Social Change in Nigeria: The Political Imperative," in Onookome Okome and Jonathan Haynes *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa*, Jos: Nigeria Film Corporation.
- Opubor, Alfred E. and Nwuneli, Onuora E. (1979) *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, Lagos: National Council for Arts and Culture/ Third Press International.
- Pearson, George. (1948) "The Making of Films for Illiterates in Africa," in *The Film in Colonial Development: A Report of a Conference*, London: The British Film Institute.
- Richards, Jeffrey and Aldgate, Anthony. (1983) *Best of British Cinema and Society, 1930-1970*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.
- Shaka, F. O. (1998) "The Effects of British and French Colonial Policies on Film Production in Anglophone and Francophone Africa," *The Literary Griot* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring): 28-42.
- (1995) "The Politics of Cultural Conversion in Colonialist African Cinema," *CineAction*, No.37 (June):51-67.
- (1995) "Vichy Dakar and the Other Story of French Colonial Stewardship in Africa," *Research in Africa Literatures* Vol.26, No.3 (Fall): 67-77
- (1994) "Colonial and Post-colonial Africa Cinema: A Theoretical and Critical Analysis of Discursive Practices," Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Film & TV Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, England.

- Smyth, Rosaleen. (1979) "The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1939, with Special Reference to East and Central Africa," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 20 (3): 437-450.
- (1983) "Movies and Mandarin-"The Official Film and British Colonial Africa," in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds) (1983) *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Vaughan, Kehinde J. (1966) "Africa and the Cinema," *African Statesman*, No.2 (April -June): 29-31.
- Ukadike, Frank (1994) Black African Cinema. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Government Reports.

- The Film in Colonial Development: *A Report of a Conference*, London: The British Film Institute, 1948.
- The Instructional Film in the United Kingdom Dependencies*, Central Office of Information (COI), No.R. 3161, October, 1955.