

African Film Criticism in the Colonial Capital, 1957–1967

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Apart from a few films shot by African students in Europe in the mid- to late 1950s, sub-Saharan African cinema was born with political independence in the following decade, more than sixty years after the Lumière brothers' first moving images. A first generation of directors struggled to gain access to training and equipment; European funding came with strings attached, and new African nations manifested little interest in supporting their projects. Once a film was successfully completed, moreover, it was unlikely to be distributed or exhibited outside of European cultural centers in Africa and a few European festivals. As production gradually increased in a global media landscape without Africa-based film publications, only a small number of African films were reviewed or even mentioned in European magazines, be they prestigious, popular, or trade. Now as then, with production, distribution, and exhibition still a struggle sixty years after independence, a lack of magazines dedicated to African film and media leaves prospective African critics with a dearth of appropriate publication venues and African creators without a crucial link to potential spectators.

A return to the first years of Black African cinema, however, reveals the contemporaneous if comparably limited emergence of an accompanying film historical and critical framework. Within a span of ten years surrounding independence, Black African- and Black French-authored film history and criticism were born in the pages of three Paris-based and African owned and edited publications: *Présence Africaine*, *La Vie Africaine*, and *L'Afrique actuelle*.¹ In addition to members of a close-knit group of African students and filmmakers who wrote occasional articles, the first professional critics of African cinema made their mark in a series of calls for the promotion and development of a truly African cinema.

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, in *Présence Africaine* beginning in the late 1950s, and D'dée, in *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle* in the '60s, also accounted for and analyzed the rare African films that already existed.

Born in Dahomey in 1925, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra was sent by his family to attend school in France at the age of ten. While studying biology in Paris in 1947, he had his first contact with the French film industry when he was recruited to play the role of an African soldier in Claude Autant-Lara's *Le Diable au corps* (*Devil in the Flesh*). The same year, Alioune Diop established his now legendary journal *Présence Africaine*, with a Patronage Committee that featured white French intellectuals from the domains of literature and ethnography, including André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Michel Leiris, and an Editorial Committee made up mostly of Black West and Central African intellectuals and authors such as Bernard Dadié, Mamadou Dia, and Abdoulaye Sadj. "Paris Dakar" appeared underneath the title and logo on the cover of the journal's first five issues, and its inaugural issue was released in both cities simultaneously.² This duality was also mirrored in the first issue's two prefatory essays, which spoke to different audiences. Gide's foreword addressed white French readers to state that "as rich and beautiful as is our civilization, our culture, we have finally accepted that it is not alone (not the only one?)."³ Diop then presented the journal's primary *raison d'être*, to serve as a "window onto the world" for young Africans in need of "intellectual nourishment." The world they would see through this window, he clarified, was that of "the life of the mind in Europe."⁴

Présence Africaine was embedded in mainstream Parisian intellectual circles, then, while working to account for African and African diasporic cultural production in a mix of fiction, poetry, critical essays, and reviews by writers from France, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. Those writing for the journal about cinema, however, were for years only French; in 1948, Georges Bataille reflected on the growing presence of Black actors in European and North American fiction films, and in 1951, Jean Caillens discussed a film shot by Claude Vermorel and his wife Claire Maffei in French Equatorial Africa.⁵ Although Cameroonian journalist Iwiyé Kala-Lobe, a lifelong collaborator of Alioune Diop, attested to Diop's early interest in the creation of an African cinema, he recounted that an initiative undertaken in 1946 was eventually blocked by France's Ministry of the Colonies.⁶

Vieyra's experience as an extra convinced him of the potential importance of cinema to African independence; he changed the course of his studies and in 1953 became the first Black African student at the French Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies (IDHEC). After graduating, Vieyra and his friends and colleagues Jacques Mélo Kane, Mamadou Sarr, and Robert Caristan formed the African Cinema Group. Prevented from filming in French West Africa by the censorship that had been formalized by the 1934 Laval Decree, they instead shot *Afrique sur Seine* (1955), a black-and-white short depicting the lives of African students in Paris. When Diop's *Présence Africaine* entered its second series that same



FIGURE 10.1. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and the African Cinema Group. Image courtesy of Stéphane Vieyra and PSV-Films.

year, the prominent French “Africanists” were removed from the masthead and the prior committees replaced with a single *Présence Africaine* Committee.⁷ In the first issue of this new series, C. Ijdedem reviewed what was likely the first film shot by an African student in Europe, Mamadi Touré’s now lost *Mouramani* (1953).⁸ Vieyra had already authored several book reviews in *Présence Africaine*, and when he wrote his first article about the cinema, Black African film criticism was founded in the pages of a Paris publication.

Vieyra’s “When French Cinema Speaks for Black Africa” appeared in 1957, with France’s colonies in sub-Saharan Africa still several years away from political independence.⁹ Only a few films had been made by sub-Saharan African directors, so Vieyra could not address the state of sub-Saharan African cinema; he instead critiqued a tradition of French filmic representations of sub-Saharan Africa and Africans. Although African artists and intellectuals had begun to respond to French characterizations of their continent during the interwar period, progress

that culminated a decade after World War II with *Présence Africaine*'s Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, Vieyra noted that "there are still domains in which Europe speaks and continues to speak exclusively in Africa's name, among others the cinematographic domain."¹⁰ He divided those European directors still speaking for Africa into four categories—colonialists, ideologues, paternalists, and realists—finding only in the last and smallest group "our true friends," René Vautier, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Jean Rouch. An African cinema must be born, Vieyra concluded, to allow Africans to tell their own stories, stories in which Africa would exist as more than just an exotic background. This would require the creation of scholarships in France to train future African directors and technicians, as well as cine clubs in Africa to train their future audience.¹¹

Vieyra returned to West Africa the year this article was published, and he would be based in Dakar, Senegal, for the rest of his life. He was one of the most important figures of early sub-Saharan African cinema, his career combining many roles: civil servant, heading up the Cinema Sections of the High Commissariat of French West Africa and then the Mali Federation, the Newsreel Section of the Senegalese Ministry of Information, and the Senegalese Office of Radio Broadcasting and Television; director of newsreels and documentary films; producer of the early films of Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene; and film historian and critic. Recording, analyzing, and supporting efforts by Black Africans to reject and supplant Europe's cinematic paternalism, Vieyra published dozens of articles in *Présence Africaine*, the last of which appeared in 1987, the year of his untimely death. In addition to short reviews of European and African films and global film festivals, he set out a concrete program for the development of African cinema in a sequence of lengthier scholarly essays that began with "Remarks on African Cinema" (1958) and "Cinema and the African Revolution" (1961).¹² The first three of Vieyra's books about sub-Saharan African cinema—*Cinema and Africa (Le cinéma et l'Afrique)*, 1969), *Sembene Ousmane, Filmmaker (Sembène Ousmane, cinéaste)*, 1972), and *African Cinema, from Its Origins to 1973 (Le Cinéma africain, des origines à 1973)*, 1975)—appeared through *Présence Africaine*'s publishing company, which Diop had established just two years after the creation of the journal.

Vieyra was joined in the pages of *Présence Africaine* in the mid- to late 1960s by a group of filmmaker-critics that included Blaise Senghor from Senegal, Timité Bassori from Côte d'Ivoire, and Urbain Dia-Moukori from Cameroon. Occasional pieces also began to appear in news magazines, notably those of Cameroonian Félix Ewandé in *France Eurafrique*, with *Jeune Afrique*, apart from occasional reviews authored by Tunisian Férid Boughedir, most often publishing French journalists. Within a decade of Vieyra's first piece, special issues dedicated to independent Black African cinema appeared in two newer publications that, like *Présence Africaine*, were based in Paris but owned and edited by Africans. Less academic than Alioune Diop's journal if no less activist, the magazines *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle* sought a wider audience, adding numerous photos and advertisements instead of footnotes to the words on the page.

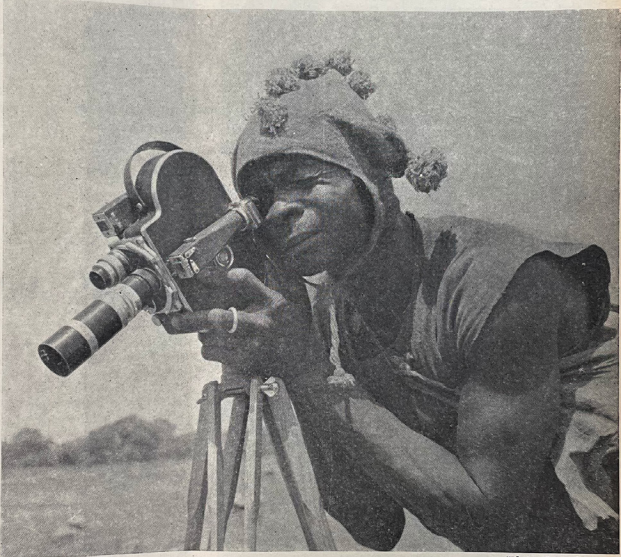
La Vie Africaine was founded in 1959 by A. Baye Fall, during what scholars of early West African publishing Ruth Bush and Claire Ducournau identify as a “boom in magazine culture” in the years surrounding independence.¹³ Produced and edited in Europe, it was distributed throughout West Africa—in Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, and Guinea—by the Agence de Diffusion de Presse in Dakar.¹⁴ Canadian-born journalist Georges Chaffard, who had reported on West Africa for *Le Monde*, took over the editorship from Baye Fall, then was himself succeeded by Dahomeyan writer Olympe Bhêly-Quenum. The last issue of *La Vie Africaine* appeared in 1965, and in the same year Bhêly-Quenum launched his own magazine, *L'Afrique actuelle*, which he described on the masthead as the first and only international African news magazine.¹⁵ Responding in print to a letter from an African reader who had described the magazine as “foreign (*étranger*),” Bhêly-Quenum retorted angrily, “Foreign to whom and to what? One hundred percent Negro, but nobody else’s Negro than my own and superbly Black, I more than many others have the right to found an African journal.”¹⁶

The special sections of both *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle* were put together by the fascinating and multitalented D'dée, whose pioneering contributions to Black African cinema and criticism have been forgotten even as those of Vieyra are at long last gaining wider recognition.¹⁷ Almost exactly Vieyra’s contemporary, D'dée was born André Trisot to Martinican parents in Paris in 1928. In the postwar years, he studied at France’s national School of Fine Arts (Beaux-Arts) while working as a bebop dancer and choreographer in the Left Bank Paris nightclubs Tabou, Caveau des Lorientais, and Club Saint-Germain. It was in these clubs, where he was known as Hot D'dée, that he met French writer, singer, jazz musician, and inventor Boris Vian, who would become his close friend and collaborator. D'dée curated the illustrations for Vian’s *Handbook to St-Germain-des-Près*, which includes an entry in his name. Together with Vian’s widow Ursula, D'dée established the Boris Vian Foundation in 1981. Just a few years before his own death in 2016 at the age of eighty-seven, he authored a lengthy preface to an edition of two of Vian’s previously unpublished works, here credited as Mr. D'dée.¹⁸

D'dée’s first special issue, entitled “Cinema and Africa,” was published in *La Vie Africaine* in June 1961, two years after Vian’s death. It opens with a large photograph of an unidentified African man wearing a woolen Dogon hunter’s bonnet and peering into the viewfinder of a movie camera that is mounted on a tripod. The photo is credited to Jean Suyeux, who along with Vian and D'dée had chronicled postwar Saint-Germain-des-Près, and a lengthy quote attributed to Paulin Vieyra and *Présence Africaine* appears below. In this excerpt from the opening paragraph of his “Cinema and the African Revolution,” Vieyra maintained the centrality of the cinema and television to modern life and culture. Following this claim of affiliation to both Vieyra and Diop, an editorial introduction extends Vieyra’s assertion to the crucial role of the cinema in “the construction of a new Africa” while noting that not a single national African cinema had yet come into existence.¹⁹

LE CINEMA ET L'AFRIQUE

SPÉCIAL



(Photo Jean Suyeux.)

LE Cinéma est devenu un fait social. Il n'est pas loin, le moment où le monde étonné se demandera comment il a pu vivre sans cinéma et sans télévision, comme dans certains coins du monde on se demande actuellement comment dans le passé on a pu vivre sans chemin de fer, sans voitures automobiles, sans avions. Associé à la télévision, le rayonnement du cinéma est grand, le phénomène n'est plus contesté, et inquiète même. Déjà, le cinéma et la télévision nous ont forcés à regarder ce que nous ne faisons que voir, à voir pleinement ce que nous ne faisons qu'apercevoir : il a créé en définitive une éthique propre qui bouleverse les normes de l'humanisme moderne. En cela, le cinéma a pris date parmi les découvertes qui ont fécondé un nouveau style de vie, tout en témoignant des temps modernes.

Paulin VIEYRA,
(« Présence africaine. »)

FIGURE 10.2. *La Vie Africaine* special issue, "Cinema and Africa," June 1961.

With virtually no films yet available to account for or analyze, the almost thirty-page special section of *La Vie Africaine* instead shared practical information on filmmaking for would-be African directors, relying on both African and French film historians and critics. D'dée, who was not African, was nonetheless strongly committed to an African cinema yet to come. A month earlier in the

same magazine, he had argued that “too long deprived of the freedom to express themselves,” it was time for Africans to “speak cinematographically in order to denounce real African problems.”²⁰ D'dée now began his special issue with an article spread out over six pages, “The Cinema Is First an Industry and Technique: How Does One Make a Film?”²¹ Detailing the steps of a filmmaking project from script to budget to fundraising to shooting to editing, he explained the roles of producer, director, and the various members of the technical crew. The instructional tone of D'dée's essay continued in a series of interspersed box texts reviewing “A Few Great Works of World Cinema” and “The Important Stages of the Invention of the Cinema,” with additional information provided about advertising and about ticket sales in African movie theaters.²²

Bhêly-Quenum's introduction had concluded by thanking the leadership of the French National Center for Cinema as well as Minister of Cultural Affairs André Malraux for unspecified support. His and D'dée's special issue was also concretely supported by preeminent French film historian and critic Georges Sadoul, with whom Vieyra had studied at the IDHEC, and renowned filmmaker and critic Jean Rouch, both of whom contributed short essays. Sadoul's “Africa Has Until Now Been the Country of ‘Cinematographic Scarcity’” addressed Black characters in Hollywood films before moving on to French expedition and exotic films and the French documentarists Vieyra had earlier called “our true friends.”²³ Rouch began with an American film about the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, Richard Brooks's *Carnival of the Gods* (1953), which Vieyra had reviewed for *Présence Africaine* three years prior. Affirming as had Sadoul that “since the invention of the Lumière brothers, we can say that no African has yet expressed himself via the intermediary of the camera,” Rouch chose to retrace French ethnographic filmmaking in Africa from Jacques Dupont to Luc de Heusch.²⁴ In a third piece, French ethnographer Georges Bourdelon joined Rouch in notes from an interview likely conducted by D'dée, recounting his experience shooting educational films for the newly independent Central African Republic.²⁵

We can see in D'dée's inclusion of Sadoul, Rouch, and Bourdelon a parallel to Alioune's Diop's “Patronage Committee” in the first series of *Présence Africaine*. And although all three supported the creation of an independent African cinema, none here acknowledged that its first steps had been taken—not even Rouch, who was undoubtedly aware of Vieyra's *Afrique sur Seine*.²⁶ It is perhaps for this reason that D'dée placed just after Sadoul's and Rouch's pieces two additional excerpts from Vieyra's “Cinema and the African Revolution,” a couple of paragraphs praising Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1958) and then a page about four additional films read as witnesses to African liberation. With Vieyra already an established figure—so much so, in fact, that he had not had time to write something new for the special issue—D'dée chose to conclude with a series of short pieces featuring African students from a variety of countries who were studying at the IDHEC. Ratovondrahona from Madagascar argued the importance of training African spectators to

appreciate something other than foreign Westerns, and Honoré Dol from Mali the possibility of creating an African cinema that could prove its value to new independent governments by bringing in foreign currency.²⁷ A print debate brought these two together with Bassori, Ben Salem from Tunisia, Thomas Coulibaly from Upper Volta, and Jean-Paul Ngassa from Cameroon. And an inset set of quotes from recent IDHEC graduate Blaise Senghor, who was setting up his own production company in Senegal, then reinforced D'dée and Bhêly-Quenum's message about the cinema as an instrument of liberation, warning future filmmakers to "make Africa better known to Africans" and avoid "the flights of fancy of the 'New Wave.'"²⁸

Toward the end of the section, writing as *La Vie Africaine's* "special envoy" to the 1961 Cannes Film Festival, D'dée reported that "not a single African nation was represented."²⁹ He was therefore free to share information about less weighty matters, both the *folie* of the Croisette, particularly the arrival of Sophia Loren, and an interview he had conducted with the "ravishing" Miss America, whom he noted was Black. This piece made evident the difference between the magazine, which mixed accessible film history and criticism with chatty fan material, and its predecessor, scholarly journal *Présence Africaine*, a distinction accentuated by an interview with actress Juliette Greco about her impressions of shooting in Africa.³⁰ In its thirty pages, D'dée's section of *La Vie Africaine* included a total of twenty-three film stills and photos, some of which were added to the reprinted sections of Vieyra's article, unillustrated in the original. Pages of advertising images and text introduced prospective filmmakers to Brockliss-Simplex, producer of a range of production and projection equipment; I.C.A.M., manufacturer of flame-resistant fabric for theaters; and CAMECA, creator of the jukebox-like Scopitone projector, described as appropriate for both showing educational films to the African masses and enhancing the electoral campaigns of African politicians. The section's very last photo highlighted African interest in the cinema, showing three African teachers at Cannes wearing elegant boubous and being filmed by a French cameraman. If sub-Saharan Africa was arriving late to the cinema, it was doing so in style.

D'dée continued to write about cinema for *La Vie Africaine*, a year later setting Nigerien Mustapha Alassane's *Aouré* (*Marriage*, 1962) and Blaise Senghor's *Le grand Magal à Touba* (*Grand Magal in Touba*, 1962) against "films by 'Africanists'" to declare that "finally, True African Cinema" had arrived.³¹ And, in February of 1967, Bhêly-Quenum's new journal *LAfrique actuelle* published a special issue dedicated to "Young Black African Cinema," which, although it used the same opening photo as D'dée's first, bore a meaningfully different title. The progress made during the intervening six years had allowed for the transition from "cinema and Africa" to "African cinema," a shift that Vieyra himself would express in the same terms two years later.³² And as had Diop for the second series of *Présence Africaine*, Bhêly-Quenum and D'dée removed their prior European collaborators, at least from print. D'dée alone was credited with the extraordinary effort of providing an



FIGURE 10.3. "Cinema Brings People Together; It Is Universal," *La Vie Africaine*, June 1961.

almost forty-page overview and assessment of the first seven years of sub-Saharan African cinema. With the support of the Cinémathèque française and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an accompanying "Week of Young Black African Cinema" was programmed in Paris for mid-April, with screenings at the Palais de Chaillot and the Rue d'Ulm.³³

In Dédé's second special issue, the paragraph of Vieyra's article about cinema and revolution that had appeared underneath Suyeux's photograph in the first was replaced by Lenin's much earlier and more famous declaration that "of all the arts, the cinema is the most important for the revolution." In historical and critical work that was now almost exclusively his own, Dédé began by turning the tables on a history of European expedition films shot in Africa. Africans who had learned filmmaking while traveling in Europe, he claimed, could save a Western



FIGURE 10.4. “Africa to the Rescue of Western Cinema?,” *L'Afrique Actuelle*, February 1967.

cinema that was no longer able to innovate.³⁴ In a second introductory essay, Dédé summarized the struggles of young African filmmakers who, returning home after official or unofficial training in Europe, discovered independent governments unwilling to support anything other than newsreel production. They could shoot footage only with funding from agencies in Europe, where they also had to return for editing and to show the resulting films in festivals. Only a dozen or so such heroic individuals existed, according to Dédé, constituting a generation after that of *Afrique sur Seine* and the first to create “a purely African cinematographic art.”³⁵ Their work was presented in alphabetical order by *auteur* in the “*cahier technique*” that followed.

Dédé began his user manual to young African cinema, then, with its directors, from Alassane to Vieyra via the Brazzaville Camera Club, whose work he divided into three trends: social cinema, poetic fiction, and documentary. For each director, he provided a brief biography, a characterization of content and style, contact information, and a detailed filmography in which each film's funding, technical information, and cast were followed by a subjective critical evaluation of between a sentence and a few paragraphs. As in his first special issue, Dédé was highly aware that films were made not only by directors; a new cinema needed producers, screenwriters, actors, and technicians. His pages on directors were, therefore, followed by a list of African writers, along with their plays or novels that were apt for cinematic adaptation; a list of African technicians, including cameramen, sound technicians, and musicians, along with their basic qualifications and contact information; and a list of both African and Black Caribbean actors and actresses, along with their previous experience. A summary of funding agencies, both public and private, in Africa and in Europe, with their previously funded films, was followed by information on commercial and noncommercial distribution and exhibition in Africa, as well as festivals in Africa and Europe

and film schools, including but not limited to the IDHEC. Prospective African filmmakers could find everything necessary to move forward in their careers, whether applying to film schools or looking for production funding, distributors, scripts, actors, or editors.

In a concluding essay entitled "For a Cinema of Quality," D'dée proposed a program for the development of African cinema, but also for cinema in Africa. Restating his conviction that the cinema was both art and industry, he urged African governments to support the training of both African creators and African spectators. More specifically, D'dée encouraged these governments to fund not the European productions shot in Africa that he called "Negro-and-white" films but African-authored productions to be distributed within Africa. Only then, he concluded, would the new African cinema "take the place in universal culture that the world has been awaiting."³⁶ The success of D'dée's boldly conceived practical handbook, his second initiative with regard to African filmmaking, was made clear just four months later in *L'Afrique actuelle's* June 1967 issue. Editor Bhély-Quenum published a lengthy interview with director and producer Blaise Senghor, which he prefaced by reminding readers of the special issue in which Senghor's first film had recently been catalogued. The subject of African cinema had never before been "seriously addressed by the African press, and even less so by the European or American newspapers," Bhély-Quenum asserted. Of forty-five thousand copies printed, fewer than fifteen hundred remained unsold. A multitude of requests had arrived by mail at the magazine's offices where, for the previous several months, "crowds, both Black and White, had come to buy issue number 15."³⁷

Like the special issue of *La Vie Africaine*, that of *L'Afrique actuelle* appealed to a readership wider than just Africans in Europe or current and future cineastes. And its ample illustrations, both film stills and photographs, now represented a cadre of African directors and their films. Still an important source of information about films, many of which have been lost, and filmmakers, many of whom have been forgotten, this special issue nonetheless reflects the research of one man with no access to print or film archives or reference books. A closing note repeated that it was "the first work of its kind in the global press," continuing that "as we wish to do better, we ask our readers to be kind enough to share with us any errors and omissions they notice."³⁸ *L'Afrique actuelle*, however, was even shorter lived than its predecessor, with only a thirty-seven-issue print run from 1965 to 1969, and D'dée never published a corrected and updated version. Interested readers had to wait almost a decade for Paulin Vieyra's *Le Cinéma Africain, des origines à 1973*, with its comprehensive and much lengthier handbook of filmmakers and films from around the entire continent, organized by country.³⁹

It is not surprising that West and Central African film criticism began in French, although both *Présence Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle* gestured toward bilingualism with English, and in the pages of journals and magazines based in France. The same was true of filmmaking, with no training programs or facilities

in sub-Saharan Africa during the decade before or two decades after independence from France and Great Britain, and with North America less accessible than Europe both linguistically and financially. And as both Vieyra and D'dée made sure to point out, those few early directors who obtained training and funding to shoot in Africa were obliged to return to Europe to complete and arrange to distribute their films. More noteworthy, in fact, than the origin of Black African film criticism in France is its origin in Black-owned and -edited publications. Only as the end of the first decade of independence approached did the most prestigious French film magazines such as *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* slowly begin to recognize new African cinema, particularly after Ousmane Sembene won the Prix Jean Vigo for *La Noire de . . .* (*Black Girl*, 1966). The rare reviews and interviews in these publications were written only by white French critics, however, and Africa appeared in their pages for the most part via the films of Jean Rouch.

More surprising than this history, perhaps, is the continued scarcity of publications devoted to African film and media, even and especially in Africa. Only in the 1970s would a film magazine dedicated to African cinema be created, one that was based in West Africa but, in a paradoxical reversal from *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle*, established and edited by a white Frenchman. Catholic priest and cinephile Father Jean Vast had come to Saint-Louis, Senegal, in 1950; in 1968 he created the Catholic Cinema Office of Senegal, and in 1973 he launched the decidedly not glossy *Unir Cinéma*, whose more than 150 typewritten issues appeared almost every other month through the 1990s.⁴⁰ Vast set up a cinema resource center, which served as a research library for the young African collaborators who joined him to write the publication's reviews, interviews, and short articles. Numerous additional pieces were reprinted from other sources, including French and Senegalese magazines *La Revue du cinéma*, *Afrique-Asie*, and *Waraango*, perhaps with or perhaps without permission, and Vieyra was a frequent partner, with much of his book *Le cinéma au Sénégal* (*Cinema in Senegal*) appearing in bits and pieces over the years.⁴¹

The short-lived *Écrans d'Afrique* (*African Screen*), founded in 1991 and discontinued in 1998, perhaps best exemplified D'dée's legacy. More consistently bilingual in French and English than *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle*, *Écrans d'Afrique* was, unlike Alioune Diop's and Olympe Bhély-Quenum's earlier publications, uniquely devoted to African film and media. Vibrantly designed and illustrated to reach a wide, global audience, it was a coproduction of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) and Italian nongovernmental organization the Educational Orientation Center (COE), receiving financial support from Burkina Faso and the European Union. The magazine's editorial team was solely African, however; Burkinabé director Gaston Kaboré served as editor and Burkinabé journalist and film critic Clément Tapsoba as editor-in-chief. Both were a generation younger than Vieyra and D'dée; Kaboré had trained in France, whereas Tapsoba received his first of several diplomas from the African Institute of Cinematographic



FIGURE 10.5. Écrans d'Afrique/African Screen, 1994.

Education (INAFEC), a film school that had opened in Burkina Faso in 1976 only to close its doors a decade later.

In France and its former colonies in West and Central Africa, a single print magazine devoted to African cinema and media circulates today. The Paris-based *Awotele*, created in 2015, times its triannual issues to coincide with pan-African film festivals held in Carthage, Tunisia; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and Durban,

South Africa. *Awotele* launched a year after *Le Film Africain* (*African Film*), an industry publication created in 1993 by the Amiens International Film Festival, ceased publication. For African filmmakers based in France, *Le Film Africain* had furthered many of the goals of D'dée's earlier *cahier technique*, with additional funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2001 allowing for higher-quality paper and color photographs. On the African continent, the Senegalese Ministry of Culture and Communication released only a few issues of *Senciné*, a magazine promoting the Senegalese film industry, between 2014 and 2018. It is still possible to read African critics writing about African cinema in Africa, however, and not just in the academic *Journal of African Cinemas*, based at South Africa's University of Johannesburg.

Continuing in the model of *La Vie Africaine* and *L'Afrique actuelle*, a committed and eclectic film criticism has persisted in newspapers and in news, arts, and culture magazines. Senegal's Baba Diop, who has published in daily *Le Soleil* and biannual *Waraango* among other venues, recently stressed the importance of the role of African journalists as film critics, particularly at a time when African films may premiere in Africa instead of Europe or North America. "Before," Diop began in an interview with Bassirou Niang, "journalists and directors said there was no film criticism in Africa. I answered that this was because they didn't read the press."⁴² Diop, who like Tapsoba served as president of the African Federation of Cinematographic Criticism (FACC), now teaches journalism to filmmaking students at the Université Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis. Working with Thierno Ibrahima Dia, he is the editor of *Africiné Magazine* at Africiné.org, which, with the stated goal of upholding African critical writing, has revived the Paulin Vieyra Film Prize, awarded by FACC critics at the biennial Pan-African Film Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In what is likely the future of most film journalism, *Africiné* and the France-based online arts and culture review *Africultures*, both now almost exclusively online entities, more than any print publications serve as consistent guarantors of information about and analysis of sub-Saharan African film and media. French critic Olivier Barlet founded *Africultures* in 1997 and has since made Herculean efforts to maintain it; in addition to numerous reviews of films and festivals and interviews with filmmakers, partially digitized issues of *Écrans d'Afrique* are now available through the site.

Decrying the absence of "enlightening and provocative" African film criticism as the number of African films was finally increasing, Manthia Diawara in the late 1980s argued that European and North American film critics could only assess African films "through the prism of Western film language."⁴³ Highlighting this disconnect, Tapsoba recounted, soon after, a critical disagreement at FESPACO that nearly brought African and non-African critics to blows. At stake, according to Tapsoba, was an intimate connection between African filmmakers and their African spectators, who would reject any films that sought to satisfy a Western desire for exoticism.⁴⁴ Vieyra had been acutely aware of this problem and, remembering his beginnings at *Présence Africaine*, worked to match his interest in rigorous film

criticism with his understanding of its relevance to and impact on African cinema. Directors must be critiqued by those “who know what they are talking about” but also have “a certain distance from the creator,” Vieyra argued, and for this reason he had been working to train African journalists not just in the practical details of film production, but also in “the semiology and semantics of African cinema.”⁴⁵ In Dédé’s work for *La Vie Africaine* and *L’Afrique actuelle*, which built on Vieyra’s more scholarly analyses, we find the beginnings of a popular Black African film criticism that has been constant work in creative progress. Global audiences rely on its attention not just to the political and cultural need for African cinema, not just to the European and North American cartels that have monopolized African movie theaters, but above all to the technique and signification of African media creations.

NOTES

1. These titles can be translated as “African Presence,” “African Life,” and “Contemporary Africa.”
2. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, “Conjugating Cultural Realities: *Présence Africaine*,” in *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947–1987*, ed. V. Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 17. Mudimbe’s edited volume is an invaluable resource with respect to *Présence Africaine*, yet cinema is mentioned not once in its more than four hundred pages, with Paulin Vieyra making just a single appearance.
3. André Gide, “Avant-propos,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 1 (1947): 3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
4. Alioune Diop, “Niam n’goura, ou les raisons d’être de *Présence Africaine*,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 1 (1947): 8.
5. Georges Bataille, “Cinéma et acteurs noirs,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 4 (1948): 690–96. Jean Caillens, “Sur le cinéma: la caméra se propose, mais l’Afrique dispose,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 12 (1951): 233–34.
6. Iwiyé Kala-Lobe, “Alioune Diop et le cinéma africain,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 125 (1983): 329.
7. For a history of the early years of *Présence Africaine* that includes a detailed discussion of the journal’s more radical turn in the mid-1950s, see Salah Hassan, “Inaugural Issues: The Cultural Politics of the Early *Présence Africaine*, 1947–1955,” *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 2 (1999): 194–221. For an illustrated prehistory and early history, see Sarah Frioux-Salgas, “*Présence Africaine*. Une tribune, un mouvement, un réseau,” *Gradhiva*, no. 10 (2009): 4–21. *Gradhiva*’s special issue devoted to *Présence Africaine* also features an excellent essay by Pap Ndiaye contextualizing the journal’s intellectual origins in interwar Paris.
8. C. Ijdedem, “Mouramouni,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 1/2 (1955): 159–60.
9. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Quand le cinéma français parle au nom de l’Afrique noire,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 11 (1956–1957): 142–45.
10. Vieyra, “Quand le cinéma français parle au nom de l’Afrique noire,” 143.
11. Vieyra, “Quand le cinéma français parle au nom de l’Afrique noire,” 143, 145.
12. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Propos sur le cinéma africain,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 22 (1958): 106–17; Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Le cinéma et la Révolution Africain,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 34/35 (1961): 92–103.
13. Ruth Bush and Claire Ducournau, “‘Small Readers’ and Big Magazines: Reading Publics in *Bingo*, *La Vie Africaine*, and *Awa: la revue de la femme noire*,” *Research in African Literatures* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 48, 49. This boom does not appear to have included a single movie magazine.

14. Bush and Ducournau, “‘Small Readers’ and Big Magazines,” 65 n7.
15. Bhèly-Quenum also claimed that *L’Afrique actuelle* was “the only magazine of its kind owned and personally directed by an African.” Reuben Musiker et al., “News and Notes,” *African Studies Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (1967): 100.
16. O. B.-G. “Réponse à nos lecteurs,” *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (1967): 3.
17. See my “Complex Realism: Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and the Emergence of West African Documentary Film,” *Black Camera* 11, no. 2 (2020): 32–59; as well as Vincent Bouchard and Amadou Ouedraogo’s coedited “Close-Up” section of *Black Camera* 13, no. 2 (2022): 295–499.
18. Boris Vian, *Manuel de St. Germain des Prés* (Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 1974); Boris Vian, *Mademoiselle Bonsoir, suivi de La Reine des garces* (Paris: Librairie Général Française, 2009).
19. La Vie Africaine, “Pourquoi un numéro spécial sur le cinéma,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 14.
20. D’dée, “Propositions pour une production cinématographique africaine,” *La Vie Africaine* (May 1961): 25.
21. D’dée, “Le cinéma est d’abord une industrie et une technique: comment fabrique-t-on un film?,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 14–19, 49.
22. “Quelques grandes oeuvres du cinéma mondiale,” “Les grandes étapes de l’invention du cinéma,” “La publicité et le cinéma,” “Quelques statistiques sur la fréquentation des salles en Afrique,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 17, 19, 24.
23. Georges Sadoul, “L’Afrique a été jusqu’à présent le pays de la ‘disette cinématographique,’” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 23, 25.
24. Jean Rouch, “A propos d’un débat sur le ‘Carnaval des Dieux,’” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 26. Rouch mistakenly referred to the director as Peter instead of Richard. See Paulin Vieyra’s earlier review, “Le Carnaval des dieux,” *Présence Africaine*, no 18/19 (1958): 244–46.
25. Georges Bourdelon, “Le cinéma au service du développement: une expérience de films éducatifs en République Centrafricaine,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 31–32.
26. See Rouch’s “Situation et tendances actuelles du cinéma africain,” presented as a report to UNESCO in 1961, the same year as D’dée’s special issue for *La Vie Africaine*, and republished as an appendix to UNESCO’s 1967 *Premier catalogue sélectif international des films ethnographique sur l’Afrique noire*. In the new edition of his history of world cinema published two years after his article for *La Vie Africaine*, Sadoul added several pages addressing cinema in Africa while still proclaiming the lack of a single “truly African” film. Georges Sadoul, *Histoire du cinéma mondial, des origines à nos jours, 7e édition, revue et augmentée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), 499.
27. Ratovondrahona, “Cinéma commercial et loisirs populaires: voir quoi?,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 33; Honoré Dol, “Construire le cinéma africain,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 41.
28. “L’avenir du cinéma africain: un débat avec nos futurs cinéastes,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 37–39; “Le point de vue d’un futur producteur africain: Blaise Senghor,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 39.
29. D’dée, “Au festival de Cannes 1961: aucune nation Africaine n’était représentée,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 36.
30. Colette Lacroix, “L’Actrice française qui a le plus tourné en Afrique: Juliette Graco,” *La Vie Africaine* (June 1961): 34–35.
31. D’dée, “Enfin du vrai cinéma africain,” *La Vie Africaine* (October 1962): 47.
32. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Du Cinéma et l’Afrique au cinéma africain,” in *Le Cinéma et l’Afrique* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), 175–87.
33. Anonymous, “Semaine du jeune cinéma d’Afrique noire,” *Combat* (April 18, 1967).
34. D’dée, “L’Afrique au secours du cinéma occidental?,” *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (February 1967): 4.
35. D’dée, “Les jeunes réalisateurs africains,” *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (February 1967): 5–6.
36. D’dée, “Pour un cinéma de qualité,” *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (February 1967): 39–40.
37. Olympe Bhèly-Quenum, “Jeune cinéma d’Afrique noire, une chimère: interview exclusive de Blaise Senghor,” *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 19 (June 1967): 8.
38. *L’Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (February 1967): 40.

39. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma Africain, des origines à 1973* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975), 21–225.
40. Olivier Barlet, “Au début des cinémas d’Afrique, la revue *Unir Cinéma* et le centre de documentation du Père Jean Vast,” *Africultures* (2017), <http://africultures.com/debut-cinemas-dafrique-revue-unir-cinema-centre-de-documentation-pere-jean-vast-14360/>.
41. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma au Sénégal* (Paris: OCIC/L’Harmattan, 1983).
42. Bassirou Niang, “JCC 2021–Entretien avec M. Baba Diop, Critique de cinéma,” *Africiné* (2021), <http://africine.org/entretien/jcc-2021-entretien-avec-m-baba-diop-critique-de-cinema/15237>. Critic Jean Servais Bakayoko published regularly in Abidjan daily *Le Jour* and other Ivorian newspapers and magazines from the 1980s until his death in 2006. Olivier Barlet, *Les Cinémas d’Afrique noire, le regard en question* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 237.
43. Manthia Diawara, “Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African Film,” *Film Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1988): 6.
44. Clément Tapsoba, “De l’orientation de la critique du cinéma africain,” in *L’Afrique et le Centenaire du Cinéma*, ed. FEPACI (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1995), 161–62.
45. Françoise Pfaff, “Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, pionnier de la critique et de la théorie du cinéma africain,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 31, 34.

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