

“I myself am the sun”

AFRICAN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING FROM THE 1970s TO THE 2020s



Sembène Ousmane with Férid Boughedir on the shooting of CAMERA D'AFRIQUE in 1981 (@ collection F. Boughedir)

For decades, African films have been narrated by Western filmmakers who were given support and funding to go on the continent, make films about people, then go back to their original countries to screen their work. Direct cinema started with film actualities in 1896. This was followed by missionary cinema, used in order to christianize people, and propaganda cinema, which appeared to legitimize colonial campaigns led by various European countries. Eventually, ethnographic cinema took over, with slightly more humanity, but still with an external gaze on local people.

Among all these kinds of direct cinema, Western filmmakers didn't return to the location to present their films. Some didn't even pay their local teams and some used the chosen protagonists to tell another story than was announced. For all these reasons, having African filmmakers talking about African people was a tremendous opportunity to spread another narrative, to express different concerns, or to depict people differently.

Dignity, self-sufficiency, and equality have always been extolled by African filmmakers. To understand this mindset, let's refer to the Senegalese film pioneer Sembène Ousmane (1923-2007) in Férid Boughedir's CAMERA D'AFRIQUE: *“Let's be very clear, Europe is not my center, Europe is on the outskirts of the African continent. (...) Why be a sunflower and turn toward the sun? I myself am the sun”*. Of course, Sembène Ousmane was a narrative director. But the fight he

led, along with other pioneer directors on the continent was the same: to make African films for African audiences.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of DOK.network Africa at DOK.fest München, six African film professionals were invited to select important African documentaries: Judy Kibinge and Mudamba Mudamba (DOCUBOX, Film Fund, Nairobi / Kenya), Alex Moussa Sawadogo (FESPACO, Filmfestival, Ouagadougou / Burkina Faso), Mandisa Zitha (ENCOUNTERS, Filmfestival, Cape Town / South Africa), Mohamed Said Ouma (Documentary Africa, Network, Nairobi / Kenya) and myself, Claire Diao, film critic and author of this essay.

Following our recommendations, a final retrospective of six titles was assembled, representing a wide range of documentaries from the 1970s to the 2020s, from Western, Central or Eastern Africa. Making this selection proved to be a hard task, as tons of documentaries have been directed on the continent and numerous filmmakers have been recognized by the international film industry.

As you will see, one common point to the features selected for this 2023 retrospective, is the use of a personal narrator to recount the situation of his*her family, society, or country. Because personal is more than ever universal. Whatever skin color, religion or cultural origin the protagonist may have.
Claire Diao

RETROSPEKTIVE DOK.network AFRICA

To mark the 10th anniversary of DOK.network Africa, our retrospective is dedicated to documentary films from the African continent. Guest curators from east, west and south Africa present six outstanding films from the 1970s to the 2020s.



mit Mitteln des



Bayerische Staatskanzlei



African Encounters Panel Discussion: HONOURING THE PAST TO INSPIRE THE FUTURE

Sa 06.05. 7.30pm HFF – Kino 1

With the six documentary films in this year's retrospective we are not only celebrating African documentary filmmaking, but we also want to take a moment to reflect: on the fundament of ten years of DOK.network Africa, ten years of exchange with film professionals and films from and about Africa, we will discuss what the future should bring for filmmakers, audiences and festivals on the continent and abroad.

Free Entry. The event will be held in English.

In attendance of international guests



LETTER FROM MY VILLAGE Senegal 1975, Safi Faye, 90 min., OmeU

Su 07.05. 3.00pm Filmmuseum
Tue 09.05. 8.30pm Filmmuseum

The Senegalese ethnologist and filmmaker Safi Faye sends us a filmic letter from her village: "You will live with me for a moment." We meet Faye's extended family, peanut farmers who are suffering from the consequences of drought and monoculture. The harvests are meagre and food is getting scarce. A study of a milieu that is poetic and highly political at the same time. *B.O.*



CAMERA D'AFRIQUE – AFRICAN CINEMA: FILMING AGAINST ALL ODDS

Tunisia, France 1983,
Férid Boughedir, 98 min., OmeU

Thu 04.05. 8.30pm Filmmuseum
Su 07.05. 5.30pm Rio 2

"Filming against all odds" is how the Tunisian filmmaker Férid Boughedir characterises the work of the pioneers of African cinema. In interviews with Sembène Ousmane, Med Hondo and Safi Faye, along with clips from their film classics, he encapsulates the urgency, politics and aesthetics of the young African auteur cinema. A priceless document of film history. *B.O.*



AFRICA, I WILL FLEECE YOU France, Cameroon, Germany, 1992, Jean-Marie Teno, 88 min., OmeU

Fr 05.05. 6.00pm Filmmuseum
Fr 12.05. 7.30pm DT Silbersaal

Filmmaker Jean-Marie Teno wanders the streets of Yaoundé with his companion Marie in search of Cameroonian culture. With snarky humour, Teno guides us through the complexities of colonialism and its consequences. Archive material, fictional elements and interviews combine to create a piece of film art that represents a new decolonialised aesthetic and a cinema of resistance. *B.O.*



ESPOIR-VOYAGE France, Burkina Faso 2011, Michel K. Zongo, 81 min., OmeU

Sa 06.05. 9.00pm HFF - Kino 1
Sa 13.05. 6.00pm Filmmuseum

Joanny Zongo leaves his home country of Burkina Faso to find work in Côte d'Ivoire. Years later his family learns of his death. The filmmaker Michel K. Zongo sets out with his camera to find out about the life of the big brother he never knew. He finds answers on the cocoa plantations in the neighbouring country. A family quest that is more relevant today than ever. *B.O.*



THE LETTER Kenya 2019, Maia Lekow, Christopher King, 81 min., OmeU

Mo 08.05. 6.00pm HFF - Kino 2
Thu 11.05. 6.00pm Filmmuseum

Elderly people from Kenya's coastal region are regularly accused of witchcraft or become victims of familial violence. Traditional respect for one's elders seems to have been forgotten. Ultimately, is this about financial greed? Without rushing to judgement, the film takes the form of a personal journey to examine the phenomenon of witchcraft and paints a striking picture of a society in upheaval. *B.O.*



TALKING ABOUT TREES France, Chad, Germany, Qatar, Sudan 2019, Suhaib Gasmelbari, 93 min., OmeU

Sa 06.05. 6.00pm HFF - Kino 1
Wed 10.05. 6.00pm City 2

The Sudanese filmmakers Ibrahim, Manar, Suliman and Eltayeb want to re-open an outdoor cinema, the "Revolution Theatre" in Khartoum. With creativity, humour and a love of film the old men fight against power outages, the call of the Muezzin and the authorities. An unusual insight into forgotten Sudanese film history and a declaration of love for cinema and for friendship. *B.O.*