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Beyond the entomological critique: re-thinking Rouch and African cinema

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ABSTRACT

Having worked in West Africa for over 60 years, Jean Rouch has long been a contentious figure in African film circles. Though his collaborative and participatory methods aimed to challenge the colonial and postcolonial status quo, they did so from within the very structures and systems of support that secured the French presence in West Africa. Taking the prickly relationship between Rouch and Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène as a starting point, this essay argues that, while understandable and instructive in many respects, the distance maintained between Rouch and post-independence African filmmakers has done a disservice to Rouch's collaborators hailing from West Africa, effectively effacing them from both French and African film histories. Given that African cinema is in a moment of profound transformation, the author contends that the time is ripe to open up a new kind of dialogue between Rouch and his African contemporaries.

KEYWORDS

New Wave; African cinema; Rouch; Sembène; ethnographic film; colonialism

In a discussion that took place in 1965, Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, widely seen as the 'father' of African cinema, famously reproached Jean Rouch for looking at Africans 'comme des insectes'¹ (Cervoni 1965, 17). As this critique moved forward through time and space, the context surrounding the conversation in which it was generated was lost. What persisted in the historical record was a powerful and evocative accusation, emanating from the foremost authority on African film. It was often echoed (Gabriel 1982, 77; Hennebelle 1970; Signaté 1994, 41).

Almost 20 years later it was decided that a special issue of the French journal *CinémAction* would be dedicated to Rouch and his work (Prédal 1982). For his contribution, the French film critic Pierre Haffner wanted to look at Rouch's relationship to African cinema, to talk to African directors about their sentiments towards Rouch and his film work. Much to his surprise, Haffner found that very few filmmakers would agree to speak to him. Indeed, only those individuals seeking to temper the debate on Rouch wanted to go on record (Haffner 1982a). Rouch was a divisive figure in African film circles, a man who elicited both enthusiasm and hatred (62). Sembène declined to be interviewed for the tribute issue of *CinémAction*, but the editors did reprint several excerpts from the Rouch–Sembène conversation dating back to 1965. These selections were re-grouped under the heading 'Une confrontation historique en 1965 entre Jean Rouch et Sembène Ousmane : Tu nous regardes comme des insectes'² (Prédal 1982, 77). By way of an introduction, readers were told that subsequent to that fateful interview, Sembène had refused further comment on the films of Jean Rouch (77).³ Ever since, the two men have generally been regarded as antagonists. If Rouch was

doing ethnography, Sembène was doing counter-ethnography, or so the thinking goes (Jonassaint 2009).

The critique of Rouch set forth by Sembène and his contemporaries offers some vital insights into the politically charged realm of postcolonial representational practices and paradigms.⁴ Rouch's work positioned him – a French man working for the French government – as something of an authority on African culture. According to Haffner (1982a), that was part of what made Rouch's ethnographic films so controversial amongst African filmmakers (62). Rouch was first sent to the French colony of Niger in 1941, as an engineer working for the Office of Public Works. When he returned as a filmmaker and a budding anthropologist several years later, he was still very much wrapped up in and a part of the institutional framework of French Empire. Given as much, it is hardly surprising that so many post-independence filmmakers felt suspicious of, even hostile towards, Rouch. Though his collaborative and participatory methods may have challenged the colonial and postcolonial status quo, they did so from within the very structures and systems of support that secured the French presence in West Africa.

And while Rouch was experimenting with film technologies and techniques throughout West Africa as early as the 1940s, Africans living under French colonial rule were prohibited by law from making films of their own until after independence (Diawara 1992). But in tandem with the political struggles for autonomy that were taking shape following World War II, new visions for the future of African cinema began to find their articulation in the fifties. It was obvious to many that films originating from Europe and the USA had worked as powerful allies to Western imperial ambition, perpetuating stereotypes and reducing complex histories and subjectivities to a series of pernicious clichés. Eager to participate in the political project of decolonisation, early film pioneers such as Sembène, Paulin S. Vieyra and Oumarou Ganda saw themselves as artist-activists, called upon to replace the exoticised and racist images of the Western film canon with a distinctly African film language. In this way, African cinema of the 1960s and 1970s emerged as a 'cinema of revolt' (Harrow 2007, 1), an oppositional cinema that sought to assert its own forms of political and aesthetic independence from the West. 'We have had enough of feathers and tom toms', Sembène once said (Pfaff 1984, 43). Given this context, the anger, even hatred that some filmmakers felt towards Rouch is both generative and illuminating; it compels us to look more attentively at his films, at the conditions in which they were produced and at their histories of circulation. But as films travel across borders and through time, different questions arise and new conversations are made possible.

In recent years, it has become increasingly commonplace to refer to the once 'seemingly straightforward category' of African cinema in the plural form (Bikales 1997, 99), as African cinemas (Barlet 2000; Lelièvre 2003; Tcheuyap 2011a, 2011b). And many critics and historians have started to consider how the oppositional logic that came to define African cinema, particularly in the years following independence, has worked to circumscribe and limit discussions about films hailing from the continent (Harrow 2007; Murphy 2000; Niang 2014). Furthermore, many artists and filmmakers have acknowledged discomfort with the term 'African cinema', which positions them and their film work as part of a deceptively homogeneous entity (Tcheuyap 2011a, 2011b; Thackway 2003; Ukadike 2002). But the biggest challenge to the apparent stability of the term has come from the explosion of new forms of media-making all across the continent. Indeed, the rise and popularity of the Nigerian film and video industry – known, for better or worse, as 'Nollywood' – has revolutionised film

production and consumption in the African context, ushering in new historical, theoretical, financial and aesthetic paradigms for understanding contemporary practices of visual culture and media-making in Nigeria, of course, but also well beyond (Barrot 2009; Diawara 2010; Haynes 2000; Larkin 2008; Tsika 2015; Udé 2016).

In this paper, I argue that as the very category of African cinema is increasingly called into question, critiqued and remapped, and as we enter into what some have called a 'post-Sembène' era of African film production (Diawara 2010, 45), the time is ripe to re-think Rouch's relationship to practices of representation on the continent. This move puts me in the awkward position of having to acknowledge the instability and insufficiency of the term 'African cinema', while simultaneously consolidating its descriptive power in many respects. But I believe that the term remains relevant to my argument in its capacity to evoke a particular historical paradigm. Post-independence African filmmakers tended to see themselves as part of a cohort of like-minded individuals who shared fundamental ideas and aspirations and who faced similar obstacles (Pfaff 2004). It was in part through their identification with this community that many of these filmmakers felt compelled to reject and condemn Rouch's work. The fact that this 'desire for a unity of voices' (Diawara 2010, 97) has come under increasing scrutiny (Harrow 2007, 2011; Tcheuyap 2011a), and that filmmakers from the continent are now seen as less resolutely oppositional to Euro-American film traditions (Diawara 2010; Niang 2014; Tcheuyap 2011a; Ukadike 2002), appears to make a new kind of conversation between Rouch and his African contemporaries not only possible, but necessary. As a preliminary gesture in this direction, it is helpful, I think, to return to 1965.

Few realise that when it originally came out in *France nouvelle*, the 'historic confrontation' that came to define the rapport between Rouch and Sembène was published under the significantly less dramatic title 'Le cinéma et l'Afrique'⁵ (Cervoni 1965). The meeting was set up and facilitated by the French film critic Albert Cervoni, who offered some introductory comments to help frame the conversation for his readers: 'Entres ces deux hommes existent une estime réelle et meme une amitié',⁶ he explained (17). As a way to help make sense of this complicated sympathy, Cervoni noted that both Rouch's and Sembène's lives had been shaped, though certainly in different ways, by their various entanglements with imperial culture. He then closed his introduction with the following remarks: 'Face à cette situation difficile et complexe, cette conversation franche revêt, nous semble-t-il, une valeur exemplaire, elle illustre les mérites de l'échange nécessaire, indispensable dans un plein esprit d'égalité'⁷ (17).

Cervoni's comments and tone provided some useful context for the more nuanced moments of the dialogue that was to follow. For example, at one point Sembène told Rouch: 'Il y a un film de toi que j'aime, que j'ai défendu et que je continuerai à défendre, c'est *Moi, un Noir*'⁸ (17). Shot in Ivory Coast in 1957 – just three years prior to independence – *Moi, un Noir/Me, A Black Man* (1958) was a radical, collaborative experiment in Rouch's unique brand of ethnographic fiction film, or ethno-fiction, as it is sometimes called. The story follows two migrant labourers who go by the names of Edward G. Robinson (Oumarou Ganda) and Eddie Constantine (Petit Touré). Though the men spend their days struggling to get by, they also dream of staking out better lives for themselves; of finding love and financial comfort; of leading exciting and glamorous lives like their favourite (Western) movie stars and sports heroes. The film is at once an analysis, a critique and a fantasy, showcasing both the harsh realities and the rich interior lives of the exploited working class living under colonial rule. Sembène went on to say: 'Dans le principe, un Africain aurait pu le faire mais aucun d'entre

nous à l'époque ne se trouvait dans les conditions nécessaires pour le faire⁹ (17). This is a complicated statement to be sure, but no small tribute coming from the most respected name in African cinema. In another compelling moment, Rouch responded to Sembène's well-known provocation in a somewhat surprising manner. Indeed, rather than resist Sembène's charge, Rouch went along with him:

- JR: Je voudrais que tu me dises pourquoi tu n'aimes pas mes films purement ethnographiques, ceux dans lesquels on montre, par exemple, la vie traditionnelle ?
- SO: Parce qu'on y montre, on y campe une réalité mais sans en voir l'évolution. Ce que je leur reproche, comme je le reproche aux africanistes, c'est de nous regarder comme des insectes...
- JR: Comme l'aurait fait Fabre... Je vais prendre la défense des africanistes. Ce sont des hommes qu'on peut, bien entendu, accuser de regarder les hommes noirs comme des insectes. Mais, alors, ils seraient, si tu veux, des Fabre qui découvriraient chez les fourmis une culture équivalente, d'autant de portée que la leur.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that Sembène used Rouch's film work as a means to offer up a more generalised critique of the anthropological gaze, that he never actually said 'tu nous regardes comme des insectes', even if Rouch and his films are certainly implicated and called to task by the statement. And Rouch, for his part, was willing to consider the validity of Sembène's critique, to entertain the allegation as wholly legitimate. Almost two decades later, in the Rouch tribute issue of *CinémaAction*, Cervoni (1982) recalled some additional details from the 1965 exchange:

On connaît l'accusation de Sembène Ousmane : « Tu nous regardes comme des insectes ! » Il y a là de la boutade affectueuse mais aussi une part de reproche sérieux. Rouch se défendit sur le moment en jouant les Africains, en surajoutant ! Comme nous prenions un verre, il trempa son doigt dans l'alcool, secoua le doigt et fit tomber une goutte par terre : « –Pour nos ancêtres ! » Et Sembène, qui continuait le jeu, cette comédie qu'ils se jouent l'un à l'autre dans l'amitié et l'affection, d'enchaîner : « Moi, mes ancêtres, je les mange !!! »¹¹ (108)

By and large, critics and historians have ignored these details regarding the exchange between Rouch and Sembène. And in most of the literature exploring Rouch's legacy, the relationship between these two men has been underdeveloped and oversimplified. By teasing out some of these tensions in the historical record, I am not trying to argue that Rouch and Sembène were, in fact, closely allied. Instead, I want merely to suggest that their rapport was more complicated than most of the secondary literature would lead us to believe.¹² In some ways, it can be argued that the history of Rouch's relationship to African cinema has suffered a similar fate. In both cases, much of the narrative seems to have been composed with a few incendiary remarks, despite a great deal of evidence suggesting complexly woven relationships. While certain individuals have tried to point towards Rouch's role in the development of post-independence African cinema (Andrade-Watkins 1989; Bikales 1997; Diawara 1992, 1994; De Groof 2013; Haffner 1982a, 1982b; Hennebelle 1970; Rouch and Haffner 1985; Ungar 2007), their work, for whatever reason, does not seem to have led to a significant re-evaluation of the filmmaker's place within the scholarship. And so, by and large, Rouch continues to be located in opposition to his African contemporaries. And that, only when he is considered at all.¹³ But the story was and remains much more complicated.

Anyone familiar with Rouch's work knows that he was committed to a collaborative practice of filmmaking, to what he called *anthropologie partagée*. As a French anthropologist working predominantly in Niger both before and after independence, Rouch gravitated

towards film because it offered him the chance to engage in what he called a 'ciné-dialogue', whereby 'knowledge [was] no longer a stolen secret, later to be consumed in the Western temples of knowledge' (Fulchignoni 1989, 299), but rather, something that arose out of a creative and collective process, as part of an ongoing conversation that could be shared across cultures and over time. Along with figures such as Georges Balandier and Michel Leiris, Rouch was part of a generation of French anthropologists who struggled to find ways to live with the ambivalence engendered by their positions: being part of an imperial apparatus, even while one's sympathies and allegiances were with those living under colonial rule. Rouch dealt with the ambiguity of this situation, of being an 'ethnologue devant le colonialisme'¹⁴ (Leiris 1950), by trying to reform the discipline of anthropology from within. He wanted to mobilise the discipline's tools in order to make them useful for those who had traditionally been seen as little more than subjects of study. As he once told an interviewer: 'I contest anthropology in my emphasis on the need to share to produce in a medium that allows dialogue and dissent across societal lines' (Taylor 1991, 97).

An important part of Rouch's practice of shared anthropology included his efforts to train the people he worked with in the technologies of film production. This was something that Rouch undertook very early on, even in his earliest collaborations with his lifelong friend and creative partner, Damouré Zika (Rouch 1957, 74). This drive to share his resources and open up the discipline had real implications. It is no secret that some of the most prolific and admired filmmakers of the post-independence era – Moustapha Alassane, Oumarou Ganda and Safi Faye, for instance – were ushered into the world of cinema through their contact and experience with Rouch. Whether through his drive to share film technologies and techniques with his African contemporaries, his encouragement and support for aspiring African filmmakers, his various publications on cinematic practice in Africa, or his efforts to obtain funding for film projects on behalf of African directors (Andrade-Watkins 1989), Rouch showed a resolute commitment to the promotion and development of post-independence African cinema. It is in this sense that Manthia Diawara has suggested that 'Rouch [was] to African cinema what Jean-Paul Sartre was to *négritude*' (1992, 24).

And while Rouch's work was certainly shaped by his own concerns, ideas and predilections, he always insisted on reminding critics and viewers that his films were the product of a shared creative process. Some have suggested that this participatory mode of engagement be held up as a counter to the critiques (like Sembène's) that arose following independence (Bickerton 2004). But instead of using Rouch's focus on collaboration to defend the filmmaker, I believe it can be mobilised to open up new, potentially uncomfortable conversations (or ciné-dialogues) about the intermingled fates and fortunes of French and African cinema in the postwar years. Because it seems to me that it is not just Rouch's contribution to African film history that has been distorted by the distance maintained between his work and the body of films associated with African cinema.

Consider, for example, what Rouch's archive would look like if he had never met his creative partners from Niger, Damouré Zika and Lam Ibrahima Dia. Having worked alongside Rouch for over six decades, the talent, insights and humour of these men radically impacted both the filmmaker's artistic evolution and his cinematic archive. And how could *Moi, un Noir* have struck such a powerful chord without the voice and vision of its protagonist, crafted, so deftly, by Oumarou Ganda? Rouch may never have claimed his films as wholly his own creations, but the collective nature of his undertaking has never been taken particularly seriously in the literature on French or African cinema. Of course, I do not mean to

suggest that the power dynamics and asymmetries that structured Rouch's collaborative endeavours should be overlooked or ignored; on the contrary, it is crucial to recognise that even while crafting a dialogic, participatory approach to film, Rouch was bound up with and navigating profoundly troubling imperial legacies and postcolonial realities. But if his films continue to be situated in opposition to the work of his African contemporaries, or thought of as part of a Western (at best) or imperialist (at worst) tradition, it seems to me that the wholly unique and very important contributions that his African collaborators have made to film history are being effectively nullified.

For instance, it is now recognised that *Moi, un Noir* had a tremendous impact on Jean-Luc Godard (see Astourian in this issue and Henley 2010). But those who have noted this fact have tended to frame it as a narrative about Rouch's influence on Godard. In contrast, a very different kind of story can be told if Ganda is taken at his word that he was, in fact, 'co-director' of the film (Haffner 1982a, 70). Rouch never made another film quite like *Moi, un Noir*; he made other good films (I would argue), but there was never the same kind of energy or the unique dynamic that manifests in that film. In this respect, it is clear that Ganda brought something very distinctive to the table in that collaboration. Why then, where Godard is concerned, should influence only be ascribed to Rouch?¹⁵

Similar questions could be asked in relation to Rouch's collaborative ventures with Zika and Dia. Jacques Rivette once asserted that Rouch's first cut of *Petit à petit/Little by Little* (1969), which apparently ran for eight hours, served as a stimulus for his epic masterpiece, *Out 1: Noli me tangere/Out 1* (Jacques Rivette, 1971).¹⁶ 'The main impulse behind *Out 1* was provided by a screening of a similar kind of montage that Jean Rouch made for his film *Petit à petit*', Rivette told interviewers. 'I was so impressed by the original that I refused to see the shorter versions' (Clarens and Cozarinsky 1974, 196). Given the fact that Zika and Dia shouldered so much of the creative responsibility for *Petit à petit*, what, then, can be said about their contributions to French cinema? If, as Rivette claimed, Rouch was the driving force behind French cinema of the sixties (Aumont et al. 1968, 20), what does it mean that this force was brought into being and gained its specificity through Franco-African creative collaborations? Rouch could not have made his 'African' films without his African filmmaking partners. Given Godard's and Rivette's acknowledged debt to Rouch's work in West Africa, one could argue, in fact, that the French New Wave had its roots in African cinema.¹⁷

Rouch gravitated towards film because it was a medium that allowed for dialogue. He did not expect everyone to like or agree with the films that resulted from his collaborations. Take, for instance, the story recounted by Canadian filmmaker Claude Jutra (1961) in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Jutra was present when Rouch was confronted with a blistering critique; a young African man told Rouch: 'Quand je vois *Moi, un Noir*, j'ai l'impression une fois de plus que voilà un blanc qui m'enfoncé la tête dans l'eau pour me noyer'¹⁸ (44). According to Jutra, Rouch did not defend himself or his film: 'Si aucun film traitant l'Afrique ne vous convient, c'est à vous de les faire'¹⁹ he is said to have responded (44). He then offered to be of assistance towards this goal. Of course, the fact that Rouch was in a position to make such an offer is, in itself, problematic. But the fraught nature of Rouch's undertaking makes dealing with the tensions elicited by his film work all the more important. For in a way, that young man's critique was the whole point of shared anthropology: to provoke conversations that would allow for an exchange of ideas and visions, across cultures and over time. Rouch never argued that such exchanges had to be amiable, or even comfortable – quite the contrary, in fact.

'Un film doit être avant tout un objet inquiétant que l'on met en circulation,'²⁰ Rouch once wrote (1999, 143). To do justice to the truly interruptive potential of his film work, it is imperative to create a critical space for a dialogue between Rouch and other directors working in post-independence Africa, not because it is an obvious or easy conversation, but because it is a constitutive and crucial part of what makes his legacy worth interrogating. Furthermore, if one accepts that Rouch was not the sole creative force behind his films, it seems to me that there remains much work to be done in his archive, particularly (but not solely) with regard to the contribution that his Nigerien collaborators and colleagues have made to film history. Amongst other things, such an undertaking could have important implications for contemporary media and filmmakers in Niger, as it would serve to link their current context of production to an utterly unique experiment in global film history.²¹

Rouch and his films were bound up with the French colonial project; they emerged as part of and in conversation with it, even as they worked to undo some of its logic. But the filmmaker's position within the French imperial apparatus does not need to be disavowed or defended in order to find something of worth in his project. 'Colonial legacies are not univocal but contradictory, reflecting the complex and contradictory character of colonial relations themselves,' writes the French anthropologist and historian Benoît De L'Estoile (2008, 277). The critique of Rouch that arose in African filmmaking circles following independence is important and instructive, but it is not the only story that can be told with regards to Rouch and African cinema. Beyond the rather stifling logic of opposition, beyond the entomological critique, critics and historians should be working to recast Rouch and his African contemporaries as productive interlocutors – however critical of one another – engaged in a thorny debate about the history, politics and future of postcolonial visual culture. I like to think that provoking such a complicated, messy conversation was in large part what motivated Rouch's film practice. As Sembène himself once said, 'a film is only useful if it allows debates between spectators after it' (Busch and Annas 2008, 43).

Notes

1. 'You look at us like insects.' Translations from the French are my own, unless otherwise noted.
2. 'A Historic Confrontation Between Jean Rouch and Ousmane Sembène: You Look at Us Like Insects.'
3. I am unsure as to why this claim continues to be repeated (see, for example, Henley 2010, 332). Sembène spoke about Rouch on multiple occasions following the 1965 interview. See the film *Sembène: The Making of African Cinema* (Manthia Diawara, 1994) and Busch and Annas (2008).
4. My engagement with the term 'postcolonial' in this paper takes its cues from the historian Fredrick Cooper, who uses the label strictly as a historical demarcation, rather than as an abstract or analytic concept. As a temporal marker, Cooper (2005) argues that the 'post' in postcolonial does not signify the end of an era and the dawn of a new, but rather the term finds its utility in its capacity to underscore 'the importance of the colonial past', particularly as it shapes 'the possibilities and constraints' of any postcolonial present (19).
5. 'Africa and the Cinema.'
6. 'There exists genuine esteem, even friendship between these two men.'
7. 'It seems that when faced with the difficult and complex situation [engendered by neocolonialism], a frank conversation like this takes on exemplary significance; it illustrates the virtue and necessity of exchange, which is so crucial to the spirit of equality.'
8. 'There is one film that you have made, that I love, and that I will continue to defend. It is *Moi, un Noir*.'

9. 'In principle, an African could have made the film, but none of us were in a position to do so at the time.'
10. JR: 'I'd like you to tell me why you don't like my purely ethnographic films, where I show traditional life, for example?'

OS: 'Because something is shown, a certain kind of reality is constructed, but we don't see any kind of evolution. What I have against these films, and what I reproach Africanists for, is that they look at us like insects.'

JR: 'As Fabre would have... I'm going to come to the defence of Africanists here. Of course they can be accused of looking at black men as if they were insects. But, in a way, they would be like Fabre, who discovered that ants had a culture just as significant and with just as much depth as his own.'
11. 'We all know Ousmane Sembène's accusation [...] It was part affectionate joke, and part serious reproach. Rouch defended himself in the moment by playing the game, by adding to the stakes! Since we were all having a drink, he dipped his finger in the alcohol, and flicked a drop onto the ground: "–For our ancestors!" And Sembène, who kept up the game, this friendly and affectionate humour they had with each other, responded: "Me, my ancestors, I eat them!!!"'
12. To get a better sense of their relationship in Rouch's own words, see Rouch and Haffner (1985).
13. Recent publications – Genova (2013) and Niang (2014) – bear witness to this tendency. While both authors discuss the evolution of African cinema in the years immediately following decolonisation, they give Rouch only quick, cursory treatment. Indeed, in one of the few instances that James Genova mentions Rouch at all, he quotes from a 1948 article that Rouch wrote about African literature. With scant evidence and an underdeveloped argument, Genova problematically asserts, 'Rouch's perspective faithfully reproduced the prevailing colonialist ethos' (80). Curiously, Genova cites neither Rouch's film work nor his multiple publications on African cinema, not even in his bibliography.
14. 'An ethnographer facing colonialism.'
15. Other thinkers have also pointed towards the complex and intriguing notion of cinematic authorship in relation to *Moi, un Noir*. Ungar (2007) offers a wealth of compelling insights into this matter and I have heard Manthia Diawara discuss the same topic on multiple occasions, see for instance, the film *Sembène: The Making of African Cinema* (Manthia Diawara, 1994). Filmmaker Arthur Jafa has also referenced Diawara's ideas, pointing out: 'With specific respect to *Moi, un Noir* [...] the very nature of the film suggests a very different sort of relationship between the artist and his subject. One in which the artist isn't the sole, and perhaps not even the primary, author of the created artefact but is in fact a co-author with the activating subject matter' (Jafa 2001, 15).
16. For an interesting historical account of the various versions of this film, see Papanicolaou (2009).
17. Wes Felton (2010) made a similar point, asserting that Francophone African directors who were working in France during the 1950s and 1960s (specifically, Paulin S. Vieyra, Ousmane Sembène and Med Hondo) have been wrongly overlooked by French film historians. Felton argues these films should be considered as both 'African films and as films that form part of that "wave" we call the Nouvelle Vague'. Felton's only mention of Rouch, however, is to say that Paulin S. Vieyra's film *Afrique-sur-Seine* (Jacques Mélo Kane, Mamadou Sarr, and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, 1955) was 'a serious critique of the ethnographic films that so often positioned Africans as the exotic and strange "other", as in the films of Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch'. So once again, where Rouch and his film work might have served as a compelling bridge to link French and African film traditions, he is evoked as an oppositional figure.
18. 'When I see *Moi, un Noir*, I have the feeling that a white man is holding my head under water, in order to drown me, yet again.'
19. 'If you don't like the films that have been made on Africa, it's up to you to make others.'
20. 'Before everything else, a film should be an unsettling object that gets put into circulation.'
21. Thanks to initiatives like the *Forum africain du film documentaire de Niamey* – which was launched in 2006 by the Nigerien filmmaker and cultural activist Inoussa Ousseini – there has been a renaissance of documentary work coming out of Niger in recent years, see Barlet (2012) and Manzo (2009).

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Notes on contributor

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Filmography

Afrique-sur-Seine, 1955, Jacques Mélo Kane, Mamadou Sarr, and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, France.

Moi, un Noir, 1958, Jean Rouch, France.

Out 1: Noli mi tangere, 1971, Jacques Rivette, France.

Petit à petit, 1969, Jean Rouch, France.

Sembène: The Making of African Cinema, 1994, Manthia Diawara, USA.

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