

THIRD EYE

STRUGGLE FOR BLACK & THIRD WORLD CINEMA



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Published by the GLC Race Equality Unit © 1986

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October 31st-November 4th 1983

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Festival Opening (left to right): Prema Karanth, Parminder Vir (Festival Organiser) and Tony Banks MP

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Parminder Vir OBE BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE

Introduction

The last few years has seen the emergence of a broad based Black Independent Film sector comprising of the independent broadcast companies; franchised Black Film and Video workshops and independent film makers, all engaged in independent production. In London the development of this sector has been supported primarily by the Greater London Councils Ethnic Arts Sub Committee and more recently Channel 4. The Ethnic Arts Sub Committee through its policy of direct grant aid has helped to establish an infrastructure for black film production and training. The investment of large amounts of capital have enabled the Black Film and Video workshops to acquire major items of film equipment and in some cases premises. Through regular revenue grants the workshops have been able to appoint full-time workers, thus gaining franchised status, and to develop long term artistic programmes embracing education, training and production goals.

The regular organisation of exhibition programmes beginning with the first Black Film Festival in 1982 followed by, Third Eye '83 and Anti Racist Film Programme in 1984/1985 have provided important meeting places for Black and Third World Film-makers. The critical discussions generated at these events have helped to inform black film aesthetic.

This publication is a documentation of two very significant forums initiated and sponsored by the Greater London Council's Race Equality Unit. The first was the 5 day symposium held in October 1983 as part of Third Eye, Festival of Third World Cinema which provided a unique opportunity for the cross fertilization of ideas and laid the foundations for cooperation between Third World film-makers and those living in the metropolitan centres. The second forum focused on the issues concerning the emerging Black Film and Video Sector in Britain at a conference entitled Black Film Sector: Which Way Forward. The publication is a record of the ongoing debate on defining film aesthetic and practical solutions to problems of finance, training, distribution, exhibition and promotion of Black and Third World Cinema.

The idea for a festival of Third World Cinema grew largely out of the success of the first Black Film Festival held in February 1982 which feat-

ured films by Black American and Black British Independent Film-makers. One of the most notable achievements of that festival was the mass support it received from the black community, which had been starved of anti racist images of themselves on the screens.

Third Eye: London's Festival of Third World Cinema was the first festival of its kind to be held in London. The festival brought together a number of new elements which taken as a whole made it unique. To begin with, there have been festivals of Latin American, African, African or Asian films, but Third Eye provided the first occasion where a wide range of Third World films could be seen, together with films by black American and Third World immigrants in Europe. Third Eye also brought together film-makers from a range of Third World countries for discussion and analysis, of common concerns and issues. Furthermore, unlike other major festivals, Third Eye was not aimed exclusively at the traditional consumers of arts festivals. Films were screened in three venues, one centrally located and two community based, thus making the festival accessible to black people living in London. Finally, the whole festival was planned and executed by black people outside of the established film festival circuit.

The aim of Third Eye was to organise a showcase of Third World Cinema and to move towards the creation of a permanent forum for Third World Film-makers. The objectives of the Third Eye: London's Festival of Third World Cinema were as follows:-

- (a) To build on the audience so clearly established at the Black Film Festival by presenting the works of Black Independent Film-makers living in this country and Third World Film-makers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean in a festival context.
- (b) to inform and entertain as large an audience as possible about the emerging Third World Cinema;
- (c) to provide a platform for Third World Film-makers whose work reflects the cultural, political and economic struggles of those countries;
- (d) to provide a new stimulus and impetus to

Black Film-makers here struggling to establish an independent film industry and culture;

- (e) to provide an opportunity for a dialogue to emerge between Black Film-makers here from the Third World;
- (f) to move towards a more critical understanding of Third World Cinema.

Third Eye Symposium

The central and the most successful aspects of Third Eye was the 5 day symposium held in the presence of film-makers, film students, critics, buyers, distributors and film activists. The single most important objective of the symposium was to move towards a critical understanding of Third World Cinema as defined by Third World Film-makers. Papers presented by leading Third World Film-makers like Miguel Litten (Chile) Haile Gerima (Ethiopia) Josse Masship (Cuba) Shyam Benegal (India), Bill Gunn (USA), Monona Wali (USA) and Gaston Kabore (Africa) to focus discussion and debate on common issues such as politics of cinema, censorship, representation of women and the practical problems of production, distribution finance and training.

The discussion which caused the most controversy was around the representation and participation of Black and Third World Women in Cinema. It became apparent that while Third World Film-makers shared many concerns, they still had a long way to go in understanding the needs and struggles of women film-makers. Nevertheless, an important dialogue was started which demanded the acknowledgement of a cinema concerned with Third World feminist perspectives. Third World male film-makers were called upon to actively facilitate women to take control of the process of training, distribution and exhibition of films.

The papers presented during the symposium provided an important document of the thoughts and ideas of contemporary Third World Film-makers. One of the most interesting and central outcomes of the symposium was the declaration calling for the establishment of a permanent structure through which Third World film-makers could provide moral, financial, political and critical support. It was agreed that until such unity was achieved Third World films and film-makers will continue to be exploited and selectively exposed as chosen by the white opinion makers. Third World Film-makers must unite and form an organisation which will serve their interests throughout the year and not just at festivals. Third Eye: London's Festival of Third World Cinema provided the base from which work towards the establishment of permanent forum could take place.

As a follow-up to the Third Eye Film Festival, a major Anti-Racist Film programme was organised by the GLC with the objective of building a community audience. The programme was presented over five months with screenings at schools, libraries, youth and community centres and community cinemas.

Third Eye Film Festival was not only successful in generating a dialogue amongst Black and Third World Film-makers, but also helped to define policy for the development of an Independent Black Film Sector. It was immediately following this impressive showcase of Third World Cinema that the GLC's Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee adopted a policy paper entitled 'Black Film Policy' which set out priorities for funding film productions, establishing Black, Film and Video Workshops, initiating the feasibility of setting up a black film and video distribution network. Black Film and Video Workshops like Sankofa, Black Audio Collective, Ceddo, Star Productions, and Retake, have all emerged over the last few years. As the direct result of the GLC funding, they control resources in the form of cameras, video equipment, editing tables, projectors and are engaged in production in the context of broader training and education programmes.

The policy to fund film and video production has helped to ensure that a number of films have been made, many of which have achieved national broadcasting and international exhibition. Majdhar the first feature film to be made by a black workshop; Nelson Mandela, videogram by Lionel N'Gakane; film about internationally renowned Guyanese painter Aubrey Williams by Imruh Caesar; Third Eye, Film Festival, by Kuumba; On Duty by On Duty Productions; Different Desires by Black Audio Film Collective - are just some of the films which have been funded by the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee completely or jointly with Ch. 4 and other arts funding institutions.

A body of films produced and directed by Black film-makers has begun to emerge, reflecting the historical and contemporary Black Experience in Britain. It is now possible to begin a process of critical assessment and move towards defining a black film aesthetic. As work in this area progresses it is important to recognise and document the struggles and achievements in the creation of a vibrant black film culture. The proceeding of these two significant forums marks an important step in that direction.

Parminder Vir
Head of Race Equality Unit
Arts and Recreation Department
GLC March 1986

PART I

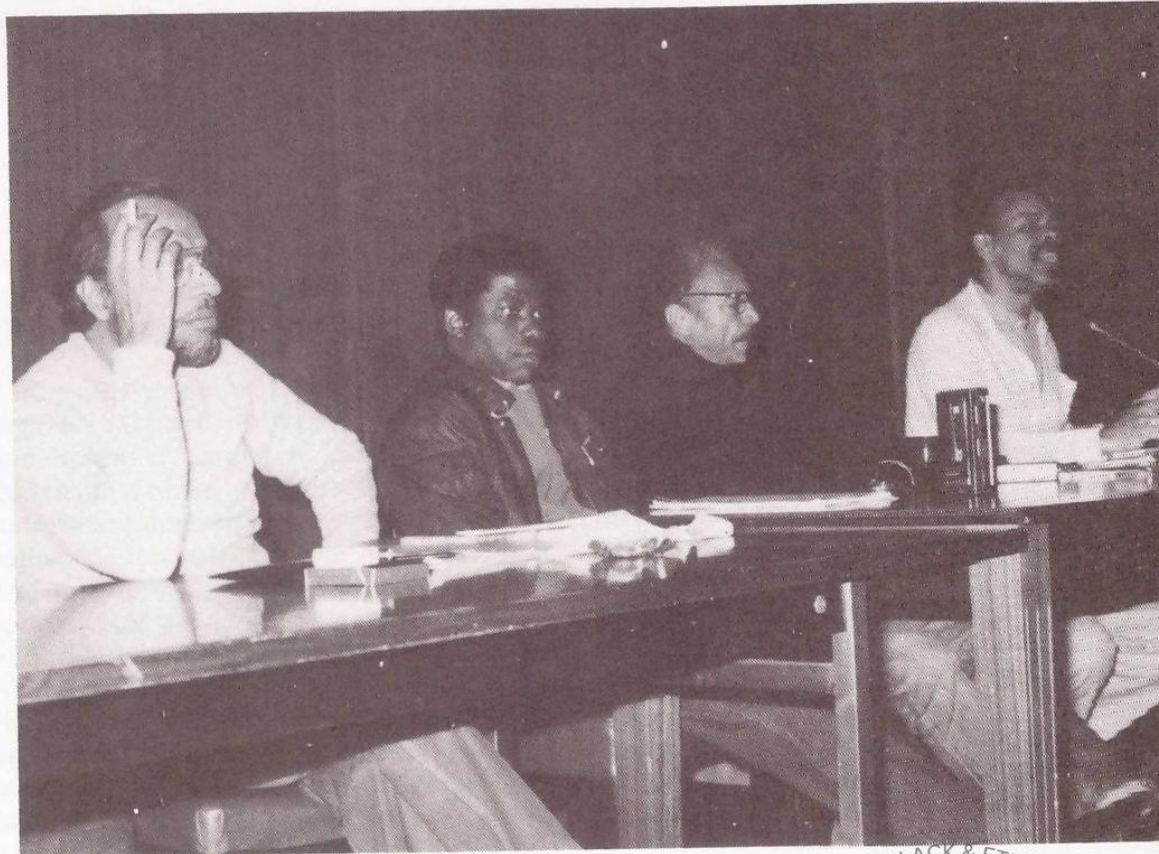
Third Eye Symposium

ON THIRD WORLD CINEMA

October 31st-November 4th 1983



Gaston Kabore and June Givanni (Festival Coordinator).



Third Eye Symposium Participants (left to right): Shyam Bengal (India), Olusegun Oyekunle (Nigeria), Bill Gunn (USA) and Clyde Taylor (USA).

Inaugural Address

Mike Phillips

When we started to organise this festival, it was in the context of the development of a vacuum culture in Britain and of the struggle for self-realisation of the black communities living here. This is meshed with our need to identify with the themes, interests and struggles of film-makers working in the countries where most of us have our origins. A lot of things have happened since that beginning, which have both exposed and confirmed the importance of our struggle, and warned us that we must pursue it with the utmost vigour.

When the US Army went into Grenada, it was simply continuing its tradition of imposing its imperialist will on peoples all over the world. It was not unusual to see television pictures of people crouching on the ground at the point of a US rifle. It is a very powerful and significant sign of the rising potential of images on film that the very medium which the US military's propaganda machine has stage-managed and forced on everyone should be the provider of this immediate and lasting image. The picture of an unarmed and lightly-clad Grenadan on the ground with US marines pointing rifles at his head is an image which tells you in spite of the secrecy, exactly what is going on and what is meant by liberation Reagan-style. That is some-

thing our keynote speaker, Miguel Littin, will describe in a way that only a close neighbour of the USA can, but it is also important to note that the invasion of Grenada is a dress rehearsal for Nicaragua, for Cuba, for any country in that region that dares to assert its own freedom. Subversion, invasion and imposition of a puppet government is the pattern that Reagan hopes will turn into a well-oiled machine to flatten democracy in the region.

That determination will be matched by the determination of people who are bent on keeping their freedom, on deciding their own futures. We can forward the struggle not just with verbal indignation and sympathy but as an organised force. In Britain as in the USA, force abroad is matched by repression at home, and we are involved in fighting the same forces which act upon our comrades in other countries. This fight entered a new stage yesterday when a task force was established to make sure that this festival becomes a springboard for exchange, co-operation and support between us and comrades in other countries. Our aim, our hope, our intention is that a lasting and concrete development will come out of this festival. That is a responsibility which, with the help of other comrades, we accept. ■



Keynote Speech: Carlos Carrasco and Miguel Littin (*Keynote speaker*).



Third Eye Symposium Participants (left to right): Lionel N'Gakane (South Africa), Jose Massip (Cuba) and Salman Peerzada (Pakistan).

Keynote Speech

Miguel Littin

I am very glad to be here and to be able to discuss some of the problems of film-making. I hope that this will lead to practical improvements in a very short time, because our need to express the truths of our cultures and the duty we owe our peoples and our history demand that there should be changes.

Some days ago in Madeira, Portugal, a hundred and sixty film-makers from all over the world passed the following resolution. They noted that world cinema – production, distribution and exhibition – is dominated by the multi-national companies, so that economic structures determine the cultural and artistic character of both international and indigenous cinema. The imposition of a single pattern on all cinematographies rots the communication code, vandalises the language, creates a bland uniformity, alienating the spectator. This domination is self-perpetuating and is further supported by the bureaucratic obstacles, censorship and indeed dictatorship that independent film-makers face from the governments of their own countries. The Conference therefore declared that all peoples have a right to their own cinematographic expression which will truly represent themselves and the world around them, to create their own achievements in cinema and to reach their audience without hindrance. They announced their support for measures to guarantee the right of expression to minorities. They called for international agreements to respect the identities of national cultures, to safeguard the right to freedom of speech and expression. This agreement is significant because it is the first time that such a resolution has been passed by an international assembly of film-makers.

We have to admit, I believe, that the under-developed countries have arrived too late on the contemporary scene. Too late for the industrial revolution, too late for technology; in the time that is coming, it seems as if we must always be dependent, and this situation must be recognised in our approach to our creative work. We are of backward societies, in which our expression is of a limited point of view. We are reminders of civilisations which were destroyed or semi-destroyed, stumps which remain to accuse that humanity which was unable to see and to understand all points of view. In destroying the great

civilisations of Africa and America, man amputated his capacity to see beyond himself, lost his opportunity to chart that beyond. When our civilisation was destroyed by blood and fire, man took away from himself the possibility of being different, of being other than he is. Today, the technological society which oppresses national cultural expression in Africa, Asia and Latin America not only commits cultural genocide, it takes away from human development one of the sources of knowledge and growth. The right belongs to both sides; to the film world to express itself and to the human race to know that expression.

The problem of film-makers in Latin America is that we discovered too late that cinema is an industrial art. We were filled with the need to express ourselves, but through a medium totally alienated and technologically dependent. How could we do this under the economic restrictions imposed by distributors and exhibitors who, day, day out, are trying to encompass the end of indigenous cinematic expression? Every film-maker needs the fundamental security of free access to his market, that is, the public; at present this is denied to our people because our markets are absolutely dominated by foreign films distributed by the multi-national companies. This situation frustrates the possibilities of national expression and development. There is no future in merely waiting to be allowed to reach the audience; the cinema itself is the best instrument of liberation. It can reveal our present reality, the search for our history and the unchanging values of our culture.

To record these things for our cinema screens does not mean that we are denying the possibility of exhibition to cinema of other cultures. On the contrary, we are trying to increase the opportunities for our people to see international cinema. Our audiences should see Indian cinema, should see African cinema; they have a right to see the cinema of the minorities and majorities of America, to see the independent cinema of Great Britain. But what we need to do, and are trying to do, is to establish an undeniable basis of freedom to ensure that all the film industries at present denied exhibition can be shown in cinema and on television. It is important to create a basis for alternative distribution. We

must unite all agencies which are willing to protect their cultural integrity, from states to universities, from producers to exhibitors.

It is impossible to understand the development of our cinema without understanding the conditions under which it operates. There is an urgent need to create an interchange between the film industries and the third world, to establish contacts based on very concrete agreements, to set up links through co-productions which will help us to confront the technical and artistic problems. It is true that this is a very difficult task that requires a great deal of time and effort and work, and I cannot deny that some of the problems are created by the policies of the national governments. Nonetheless, it is important that we should advance, leaving no possible way unexplored, taking advantage of every resource.

There are very few countries in the third world today which give any legal protection to independent cinema, but we should take advantage of those which are available and at the same time try to promote legislation elsewhere to allow a real existence to our cinema. We cannot take the easy way out and say that the problems of cinema will be solved by the revolution. It is the task of cinema to create the consciousness which precedes revolution. We should try every possible expedient to reach the audience, to liberate the art and nationalise the industry.

Artistic and thematic independence is bound up with economic independence. It is no secret that under-developed countries do not have the technology necessary; our equipment is limited and poor, often outdated. Our laboratories are deficient, and most of our materials, cameras and

recorders; it all means dollars. I know that situation in Latin America today is one of crisis; her economies are being destroyed. When there is no money to buy food, obviously there is no money to buy technology to make films. The only chance of redressing the balance in the future lies with the audience.

At the moment Latin America contributes a good deal to the financing of Hollywood. Multi-national film companies succeed in taking thousands of millions of dollars every year out of Latin America; if the indigenous film industry could have only 20% or 30% of those profits it could become one of the strongest and most influential film movements. That is why it is essential to liberate our screens, to create a common market for the Latin American cinema for Spanish and Portuguese-speaking cinema be able to offer the concrete certainty of exhibition, on the large screen and the television. There is no need to educate our film-makers as to what they should be saying; the political, artistic, cultural or social themes are all under their noses in the reality of our daily life. What that needs is cameras, recorders, laboratories and above all, access to the public, to the people whom our cinema must be developed.

The future of third world cinema has been seen as belonging to a new race of lonely young men who will go on filming, investing to their last penny, but without letting themselves be trapped in the material routine of their skill profession. This is a potent image in our countries; a camera in hand and an idea in the head. Unfortunately this vision is as yet unrealised, lack of access to the technology required. We must assume control of this technology, otherwise we run the risk of disappearing altogether.

The Changing Face of Indian Cinema

N. V. K. Murthy

Indian Cinema is as old as world cinema. Almost immediately after it was invented in Europe, representatives of the Lumiere brothers, among the pioneers in this field, showed the first film-strip in Bombay, in 1896. The moving picture on the screen was something entirely new to the experience of man, so it is no wonder that it cast a magical spell on the viewer. The father of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke, was fascinated by a film made on the life of Jesus. He planned to make a similar film on the most popular and most playful of the Indian Gods, Lord Krishna. The first film that he made, however, was on Raja Harishchandra. Mythology has always been the staple of all the performing arts, so it was no wonder that the early film-makers fell back on mythological stories for their subject matter.

One has to remember that this was a period of great social and political ferment in the country. With the emergence of Gandhi on the scene in the 1920s, the freedom movement took on a new dimension. It was a broad-based movement for social, political and economic change. Freedom fighters mounted a fight against the social evils that had crept into Indian society. The strict political censorship inhibited direct dealing with political problems in films, but there were many social abuses which could be openly criticised. This, indeed, was what many of the film-makers did.

The advent of sound in the 1930s added one more dimension to the potential of the film and film-makers took full advantage of this. Bombay and Calcutta became centres of the Indian cinema, as did Poona and Kolhapur. One can recall some notable films made on contemporary social problems by New Theatres in Calcutta, Bombay Talkies in Bombay and Prabhat Studios in Poona. In the early days, film-making was organised as an activity undertaken by the several studios that had sprung up. These studios were self-sufficient in all respects – studio space, equipment, laboratories, technicians and artists. The technicians and artists were on the pay-rolls of the studios.

The Second World War, however, brought in far-reaching changes in India. The railway and telegraph networks, built mainly to sustain the imperial system, brought many social and

economic changes in their wake. The war effort became the major pre-occupation of the Government. Vast resources, both human and material, were needed for the war machine. A new flourishing profession was born – that of the war contractors. These middlemen amassed great fortunes and were, naturally, looking for investments which would give them sizeable and quick profits. Let us see how this affected Indian cinema.

British rule in India, among other things, led to the ruin of the village economy. This in turn adversely affected the folk arts, since an impoverished people had neither the money nor the energy to sustain them. But the need for inexpensive entertainment was still there and cinema seemed to fill the bill. Many of the early films did provide entertainment, but it was not the same kind of entertainment that one associates with the present day formula film. In 1948, one of the pioneers of the South Indian film industry, the late S. S. Vasan, made a film called *Chandralekha*. It has a spectacular drum-dance sequence which took Indian cinema by storm. The spectacle in cinema had been born. While the earlier films were all made on modest budgets which were within the means of the studios, spectacles like *Chandralekha* needed vast sums of money to produce. A new entity, the film financier, entered the field and was soon in the driver's seat. The artistic workers were pushed to the background. The financier was naturally anxious to safeguard his investment and wanted the film-maker to evolve reliable techniques which would guarantee returns. This brought about the birth of the box-office formula film which depends on the lowest common denominator of public taste. The constant competition between the box-office film-makers led to a systematic lowering of this common denominator.

During this period, however, there were other developments also. The film society movement was started in cities like Bombay and Calcutta, which exposed sensitive minds to what was being done in the fields of cinema elsewhere in the world. These film-society enthusiasts were able to see a small number of foreign films which came to the country through the various embassies established after India became free. In 1955,

Satyajit Ray in Bengal made his first film *Pather Panchali*, which attracted world-wide interest. This was completely at variance with the box-office formula film. At first, the commercial film-makers did not take any notice of this new phenomenon, but soon other film-makers, like Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak emerged. Similar films were made in other states, such as Kerala.

The Film Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of S. K. Patil came up with some recommendations which had far-reaching implications. Two of the most significant recommendations were the setting up of the Film Finance Corporation to provide institutional finance for talented film-makers at reasonable rates of interest, and the establishment of the Film Institute of India, to provide systematic training for film-makers. Both these institutions were born in 1960. The National Film Archives of India were also established along with the Institute, though these have since then become a separate department under Administration and Broadcasting. Slowly but surely, all these made an impact on Indian cinema.

The Film Finance Corporation at first limited itself to financing films with modest budgets at reasonable rates of interest, some of which won awards both in India and abroad. But by and large these were not box-office successes; in fact, many of them could not even be released, as the Film Finance Corporation did not have any exhibition outlets of its own, and as a result the loans often could not be repaid. In the mid-seventies, therefore, some funds were devoted to the building of independent theatres for the exhibition of FFC-financed films, and in 1979 the National Film Development Corporation was formed by the amalgamation of the FFC with the Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation, which not only handled the export of Indian films but also had negotiated a foothold in the import and distribution of foreign films. A couple of years later, the directorate of film festivals, then a government department, was also made a part of this body.

It is hoped that an improvement in the quality of Indian cinema will result from these innovations, but it must be remembered that the vast majority of Indian cinema is privately financed. Film-making is not recognised as an industry and it is therefore very difficult to get finance from such bodies as banks. The production of films is a form of speculation rather than an industry. Only ten or fifteen per cent of films earn their money back; only about two per cent do outstandingly well at the box office. Over fifty per cent are complete flops. Moreover, there is a very high entertainment tax levied by the government which makes it essential that a film-maker should appeal to the maximum number of people and fill the theatre at every showing. This accounts for the poor taste and lack of artistic merit of the average film.

The Film and Television Institute of India, also set up by recommendation of the Film Enquiry Committee, had the task of providing trained personnel who would be suitable for the needs of Indian cinema. The curriculum at the Institute included exposure to the films, both foreign and Indian, being acquired by the National Film Archives, and reflected the changing attitudes to cinema in the world at large, with increasing emphasis on 16mm films, short films and low-budget productions. (A low-budget production might cost on average \$150,000, whereas the average commercial film in Hindi would cost about \$600,000.) The large number of alumni of the Institute associated with the making of low-budget films in the regional languages of India entitles the Institute to claim that it has made a significant contribution to the development of Indian cinema.

The new genre of film initiated by *Pather Panchali* got to be known as the 'regional film', for the simple reason that many of these films were made in the regional languages of India. But innovative cinema is no longer entirely to be identified with regional-language films, because film-makers like Shyam Benegal have invaded what is known as national cinema and introduced into it the characteristics of the 'regional film'. Nor are regional-language films always innovative, as opposed to commercial. In fact, of some 700 films made annually in India, only about 150 are in Hindi; as many, or even more, are in Telugu.

Let us briefly examine the characteristics which distinguish the average commercial Indian film from this new genre of film. The language of most commercial films is Hindi. The reason for this is obvious and understandable. Even during the freedom struggle, Gandhiji had stressed the need for developing a national language, and Hindusthani was the obvious choice. This gave commercial film-makers a national audience. But in their anxiety to expand this audience constantly, the film-makers have depended more and more on fantasy and moved away from reality. This has made average Hindi cinema culturally rootless. It is difficult to identify the characters with any homogenous cultural group in India; they have thus lost their relevance to life. The films tend to transport the viewer to a world of fantasy as an escape from the harsh realities of life. While some may justify this as legitimate relaxation for the people, it is not difficult to realise the implications of providing them with such an escape. It robs them of the ability to understand their environment and assess it critically, and this in turn inhibits any action on their part to change the existing system. Cinema fantasy thus becomes a powerful factor in the perpetuation of the status quo, and this role of commercial cinema has not escaped the attention of those whose interests are threatened by social change.

The real conflict is between those films that directly or indirectly support the status quo, and those that may help in bringing about a change in the social order. This conflict, of course expresses itself in various forms and is not always obvious. On the aesthetic level there is a school of thought which believes that cinema, since it is as much an art form as any other, should not be didactic. It should be a medium of expression for the artist and no more. There are yet others who feel that the medium of cinema is purely a form of entertainment and should be value-free. But one can legitimately question such attitudes. No form of art or entertainment can fail to be a medium of communication, and in so far as it communicates something, it cannot be value-free. As pointed out earlier, the so-called entertainment cinema is really a means of bolstering the value system of the establishment. This then acts as an inhibiting factor, preventing any change. At the other end of the spectrum, we have those who feel that a film-maker should be burning with a passion for social change and that films should carry this message of social change as directly as possible.

This brings us to a consideration of the place of art in life. Both myth and reality are integral parts of art; their role in art, and the place of art in society, have always been subjects for debate. On the one hand, there are those who believe in art for art's sake. To them it is anathema to speak of the social purpose of art. Such utilitarian art they would dismiss as propaganda. There are others who equally strongly hold that if art does not serve any social purpose, it is a waste and cannot truly claim to be considered art.

Whichever school one belongs to, one has to concede that art is a human activity. When we go back into the remote past and look at the origins of art, we find that all artistic skills had at first a very utilitarian context. This is understandable. Man had to give priority to the business of living, so work came before play. But what one has to appreciate is that while play may have come later, there is a close relationship between work and play, with one influencing the other.

While one associates the normal modes of social interaction with man's rational faculties, art is associated with emotion. In his book *What is Art*, the celebrated Russian author Leo Tolstoy writes, 'Art is one of the main means whereby men communicate with one another... and a special feature of this communication, which distinguishes it from communication by means of words, lies in the fact that by words one man conveys to another his thoughts, whereas by art men convey to each other their feelings.'

If art is thus associated with human emotions, the next question that arises is, how are emotions born in an individual? Here again those who would like to think of art as an instinctive activity would perhaps fall back on Darwin and his thesis on the nature of man. But even Darwin

concedes that the sense of beauty cannot be entirely explained in terms of instinct. In his book *The Descent of Man*, he says, 'With cultivated men such sensations are, however, intimately associated with complex ideas and trains of thought.' Now how do these complex ideas and trains of thought come in? The obvious answer seems to me to be because of social relations.

Art is also linked with philosophy and ethics. In Western as well as oriental thought, it is customary to speak of truth, beauty and goodness as closely related. We are all familiar with the Sanskrit expression *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*. In philosophy as well as aesthetics, the idealist school is usually juxtaposed with the school of historical materialism.

It is said that Marx found Hegel standing on his head and put him on his feet. To quote an example, Hegel raises the question, why did Greece fall? He goes on to give his explanation and says that the most important reason for the fall of Greece was the circumstance that Greece gave expression to only one stage in the development of the Absolute Idea. It was bound to fall when that stage was completed. According to Hegel, 'social relations and the whole question of historical development of mankind are determined, in the last analysis, by the laws of logic, by the course of development of thought.' Following the same thesis, Saint-Simon thought that the social relations of the Greeks were to be explained by their religious outlook. Those belonging to the Historical Materialist School, however, felt that the Greek Olympus was a reflection of their social structure.

To go back to Darwin, the well-known Marxist philosopher Plekhanov has shown that Darwinism is really not opposed to historical materialism. He says, 'It is on the whole extremely odd to oppose Darwinism to the concept of history I am defending. Darwin's sphere was a completely different one. He examined the descent of man as a zoological species. The supporters of the materialist view-point seek to explain the historical fate of this species. Their sphere of research begins precisely where the Darwinist's sphere of research ends.' In another place, he says, 'It directs us from biology to sociology, since it is obvious that, in Darwin's opinion, it is social causes which bring it about that the sensation of beauty in civilised man is associated with a great many complex ideas.'

It will thus be seen that all art has its genesis in society. It cannot therefore be isolated from contemporary society. In the introduction to his book *Art and Society*, Herbert Read, the distinguished English art teacher and critic, says, 'No kind of human activity is as permanent as the plastic arts, and nothing that survives from the past is so valuable as a clue to the history of civilisation. For many thousands of years, our knowledge of customs and beliefs of mankind is derived from surviving works of art, and it is

comparatively recently in the history of the world that the written record comes to our aid. Yet, though these remnants of feeling and expression have been much studied for the sake of the information they give us, the actual nature of the activity which we call aesthetic, and which gives rise to such objects, remains a psychological problem. Still less attention has been given to the social genesis of art, and to the nature of the relations which subsist between society and the individuals who are responsible for the creation of works of art.' To Herbert Read, art goes beyond the objective facts of the world and is only accessible to instinct and intuition. He looks upon all artistic activities as dialectic and based on a confrontation between reality and imagination. This may sound akin to the dialectical approach of the Marxist. But the Marxist, while recognising the dialectics of social development, looks upon the artist as one who faithfully reflects this conflict. Herbert Read insists that the artist is not merely holding up a mirror to life. He says, 'But art, I shall maintain, is an autonomous activity, influenced like all our activities by the

material conditions of existence, but as a mode of knowledge at once of its own reality and its own end. It has necessary relations with politics, with religion, and with all other modes of reacting to our human destiny. But as a mode of reaction, it is distinct and contributes in its own right to that process of integration which we call a civilisation or a culture.'

I would suggest therefore that whether one is a Hegelian idealist or a Marxist steeped in historical materialism, one has to concede the interaction of art and social relations. The study of this inter-relation is of crucial importance to any student of art. Without studying it in its social perspective, one is not able to realise the full import of a work of art.

Thus, from whatever point of view one looks at cinema, one becomes aware of its close links with life. It is only when we recognise that art stems from man's attempt to understand his environment that we begin to appreciate its place and significance in the history of mankind.

Afro-American Cinema

Haile Gerima

Though the colonialist conception among Europeans of the African race existed before the coming of motion pictures, the emergence of this powerful popular technology has intensified these negative conceptions as the everyday vocabularies of a racially polarised world. Most of the sensationalised, romanticised and condescendingly exotic accounts of African and other third world countries by western society have already created and established a dictionary of cultural grammar for a viciously and systematically racist world outlook. These racist social stereotypes, inherited by the motion picture industry, are maintained as a daily diet of deformity on gigantic silver screens across the world.

Throughout the history of western civilisation, European personalities in literature, art and theatre have helped create these stereotypes. Mythologies of the born servant, the born brute, the child-like and emotional, the beast, the brainless, etc., were graphically illustrated throughout the multifaceted cultural expressions of the western world. These social grammars in the conception of the African race and, of course, other third world peoples, were inherited by the principal pioneers of motion pictures.

Thomas Edison, Edwin Porter and W.D. Griffith are among the many film-makers that truly illustrate in their work the excessive interest in the Afro-American race as subject matter to be used to transmit the existing social and psychological philosophies of their period in film. These three individuals through their work symbolically exemplify the relay aspect of cultural misconception by effectively transmitting their own concepts as reality. Thomas Edison, the inventor and businessman, Edwin Porter, the technician and artist, and W.D. Griffith, the literary man, philosopher and artist, and numerous other film-makers of the period, brought with them a rich, though warped, cultural heritage that helped them to infuse the strongly held social values of the past into the future of motion pictures. These qualified cultural soldiers were able, through years of practice, to merge the shaping of the new technology with their world outlook of mass brainwashing, and disguise this under the banner of entertainment.

They themselves clearly understood the immense power this new technology would have in moulding and convincing social and political opinions, while still making profits, which was their primary motive. To this day, the motion picture industry utilizes technology to this end. They exploited the capacity of film to capture and form the minds and opinions of the people that poured into the theatres daily. The supernatural and spectacular activities on the screen effectively robbed the people of their reasoning ability and produced, in response, an imitation of and adaptation to alien physiological, psychological and social worlds.

Thomas Edison expressed his awareness and motivation in the following manner: 'Whoever controls the film industry controls the most powerful medium of influence over the public.' Likewise Edwin Porter, Sigmund Lubin, W.D. Griffith and many other film-makers skilfully and effectively created and set in motion the originals of the stereotypes that Afro-Americans are still trying to combat in motion pictures of the present time. In the silent era of film, the most critical period of motion picture development, thousands of films were produced by these and other film-makers that depicted in a most negative light the African race, as well as other third world nations. As a result, this period is remarkable in the history of the motion picture for the full emergence of a whole spectrum of deformed social stereotypes that engulfed society and the world.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Octoroon, In Slavery Days, The Debt, The Dark Romance of a Tobacco Can, For Massa's Sake, The Nigger in the Woodpile, Wedding of a Coon, How Rastus Got His Turkey—these are but a few examples of films that created stereotypes. W.D. Griffith alone made at least seventeen films before he finally launched *The Birth of a Nation*. Also, we should never lose sight of the fact that these films and many others like them were responsible for building the very foundation of Hollywood as an industry. Racist films were widely popular and made huge profits for the industry.

A brief outline of some of these films can help one understand the various stereotypes whose images bombarded the public in the silent era of

film history. Between 1910 and 1914, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* alone was made and re-made several times by different film-makers. Edwin Porter (who also made *The Great Train Robbery*), made this film in 1903, with a white actor playing the part of Uncle Tom, who knew his proper place very well, to Little Eva, the daughter of his white master. Five years later, in 1918, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was remade, and again in 1927 by Universal Studios. It always dealt with the African race in the Americas as being for ever chased, harassed, flogged, insulted, and above all, happily enslaved. The slaves always keep the faith and never turn against their masters, remain hearty, submissive, generous, selfless and abnormally kind.

In another film, *For Massa's Sake*, a devoted slave gets himself sold in order to pay the beloved white boss's gambling debt. The Dark Romance of a Tobacco Can is about a young white man about to lose a fortune unless he can immediately produce a wife. He hastily proposes by letter to a girl whose name he finds in a can of tobacco. Later, he discovers to intense discomfort that she is a coloured girl. Naturally, he beats a hasty retreat. Another film, *The Masher* (1907), shows a white would-be lady-killer who is unsuccessful in wooing every lady wearing a veil, but when he makes further advances, he discovers to his surprise that the lady of his choice is coloured. This, of course, is unthinkable and horrifying. So embarrassed and shocked is the lady-killer that he runs away as fast as his legs can carry him.

In the mould of George Mill's 1902 version of *Off to Bloomingdale Asylum* is a film entitled *A Nigger in the Woodpile*. A coon deacon from the African church (this is the description of the film) steals wood from a woodpile owned by a white farmer. Annoyed, the white farmer puts sticks of dynamite among the wood. The African deacon comes and mistakenly steals the dynamite instead of the wood, takes it home, and puts it in his fireplace, where it explodes. This was advertised on the billboards: COME AND SEE - TERRIFIC SPECTACULAR EXPLOSION. In *Confederate Spy* (1910), Daniel, a negro spy for the south, dies before a northern firing squad, content that he did it for Massa's sake, and for lil' massa too.

These are a few examples of the many films of the silent era in which all sorts of social stereotypes were institutionalised and monumentalised. The Toms, the coons, the tragic mulatto, the born and devoted servant, the fat, loveless, sexless, lifeless Mammy, were transformed by the power of the motion picture into normal and natural household realities across the world. At best, these deformed conceptions were transformed, at times blatantly, at times subliminally, into bedtime stories for innocent growing children.

Finally, in 1915, a full-blown feature film exploded onto motion picture screens around the world. *Birth of a Nation*, when first produced, was so powerful that it finally transformed and consolidated the stereotyped western conception of the African race. Using the most advanced and effective cinematic techniques, this film harmonised the whole spectrum of stereotypical concepts which were being experimented with prior to 1915. The South and North were all one, all blood relatives, tied in a long history of western civilisation. The whites existed harmoniously until the African race came to the US. The film declared that the coming of the African race planted the seed of disunity between brothers and sisters of the white race, the KKK was formed to put the African race 'in their place' and restore western civilisation and social harmony.

This film is still closely studied and highly-regarded around the western world. As I got into Paris last year, *Birth of a Nation* was showing, and it is a film of very great importance that is constantly revived in the USA; the Klan continues to use it. Whoever the target, Chicanos, Afro-Americans, Indians, Asians, most organisations who are against any third world people use this film.

The release of *Birth of a Nation* further polarised US society on distinct racial lines. The children of Africa were subjected to brutal violence intensified by the appearance of the film. In theatres across the country, white audiences responded to the film by crying, booking, shouting, hissing and cursing the charcoal-covered white actors, ironically victims of their own demented imaginations. At the same time, they screamed with delight and cheered the white heroes as they rose to restore western "civilisation". As a result, there were documented instances of white audiences coming out of theatres who shot, beat and killed Afro-American people who happened to be passing by. In the same period, lynching reached its peak, intensified by the judicial "lynching" of the Afro-Americans, and the membership of the KKK rose to five million. It is important to note these facts, as we are often told that cinema should only entertain and should not meddle with political issues, whereas in fact the cinema of the establishment has often had a clearly identifiable political role, as in this case, as well as subtly reinforcing stereotypes.

For Afro-Americans, the struggle against political, social and economic inequality continued. In spite of the Hollywood picture of Afro-Americans as docile, brainless, and lacking in vision, it is documented that there were numerous risings, more or less violent, against white oppression.

On the cultural front, since the coming of silent motion pictures, African-Americans had been organised across the country to try to combat

motion picture racism. Church leaders, civil rights organisers, workers, intellectuals, artists and newspapers vigorously protested against the picture industry. Simultaneously, they instigated the necessary formation of Afro-American film productions and institutions. As a result, the 1930s, 30s and 40s became the most active period in Afro-American cultural history, not only in motion pictures but in other fields of art and literature as well. Organised battles were waged on many fronts. On the one hand there was the daily vigilant opposition against all forms of racist expression, while on the other hand there was the creation of the conditions needed for an entirely independent cultural and national expression. The financial participation of the Afro-American community was mobilised by means of the low-budget approach to film production, with very meticulous pre-planning cutting the costs.

In 1910 in Chicago, William Foster, a businessman and part-time newspaperman, announced the formation of the first independent Afro-American film company, named Foster Fotoplay Motion Picture Company. Lincoln Motion Picture Company was formed in 1916 in California, followed by the Unique Film Company (1916), The Coloured and Indian Film Company (1917), Micheaux Film Company (1918) and the Frederick Douglas Film Company (1919). These are a few examples of the independent Afro-American film companies that arose to take their places in motion picture history.

During the period between 1912 and 1959, Afro-Americans organised and put into operation at least forty independent film companies for the specific purpose of producing motion pictures that would respond to the needs of the Afro-American community. By 1921, there were at least 3,909 theatres across the US catering primarily for Afro-American audiences. Afro-American newspapers, individuals and intellectual writers vigorously encouraged the public to support and be part of the independent film movement in order to encourage the growth of independent Afro-American film and cultural expression.

Though many independent film companies produced and distributed film, the most successful and prolific were the Lincoln Motion Picture Company (LMPC) and the Micheaux Film Company. Lincoln Motion Pictures was formed and incorporated in 1916 in California by Noble M. Johnson, George P. Johnson and Clarence Brooks. Afro-Americans made several historic and remarkable films during this period; for example, LMPC produced *The Realisation of a Negro Ambition*, *Trouper of Company K* and *The Law of Nature*. LMPC handled the booking and distribution of their films themselves, especially to theatres catering for Afro-Americans and to churches, schools and social and political institutions throughout the country. The company opened sub-distribution branches in Omaha,

Philadelphia, Washington DC, Atlanta, St Louis and New Orleans. The operations of LMPC finally ceased in 1923.

The Micheaux Film Company was founded by Oscar Micheaux in Chicago in 1918. A pullman porter by profession, a part-time writer and self-taught film-maker, he alone produced and distributed over thirty films, approximately ten per cent of all the Afro-American films made between the years 1915 and 1950. In 1921, Micheaux established an office in New York as its main headquarters for distribution and production. Oscar Micheaux transformed most of his own literary material into film. He financed his projects by travelling around the country and personally distributing his films, exhibiting them himself in ordinary theatres. This was the most original, innovative approach to the distribution problem of independently produced films that has yet been seen. His film work includes *The Homesteader*, *Within Our Gates*, *The Dungeon*, *God's Step-children*, *The Exile* and *The Betrayal*, to name but a few. All are full-length feature films. The Oscar Micheaux Film Company was in business until 1948.

What contributed to the decline and disintegration of the independent Afro-American film companies of the first phase? One factor was the powerlessness of the Afro-American in the overall distribution of wealth in the capitalist system. Afro-American and other third world peoples are, by and large, in the lowest economic strata. In general, their class standing has kept them dependent in all spheres of economic endeavour. After all, capital plays a most decisive role in the production of motion pictures. Another important point is the ownership of the theatres. 99% of theatres in the US are owned directly or indirectly by the major studios which are in turn owned by members of the dominant ethnic groups. It is a well-known fact that white theatre owners refuse to book Afro-American and third world films. It is the most difficult problem which still faces independent third world film-makers. Lack of economically viable organisation in production, distribution and exhibition of these films inhibits the investment of capital in them.

It is also true that the lack of fresh energy and vision in the treatment of the material made the process of audience-building static or regressive. The influence of western values and mentality is apparent at this period, propagating the notion that the lighter-skinned and richer the Afro-American becomes, the more acceptable he is as a member of the human race.

Most of the independent Afro-American film-makers picked up their cameras out of anger triggered by the way the existing motion picture companies portrayed the Afro-American race. They all vowed that they would place their people in the proper context of human history,

but ironically, most of the films of this period ended up re-inforcing the Anglo-Saxon dominated view of human value. They were made by aspirants to the bourgeoisie who were determined to be recognised as human beings by the dominant white power structure. They were obsessively preoccupied with the issue of "refined negritude". This preoccupation with the need to prove one's own worth betrayed the class origin of the majority of those involved in the Afro-American independent movement of the time. In general, they were not able to live up to their own pronouncements. Political, social and cultural issues were superficially treated and at best created more confusion than harmony.

Afro-American literary work delved deep in exposing the ills of the capitalist system, but the films failed to recognise the inherently contradictory nature of their place in the system. Most were naively entangled in social contradictions and ended up becoming part of the endemic and systemic ills of society. This lack of critical perception of the underlying causes of their symptoms turned them into collaborators who merely reinforced the table manners of the Anglo-Saxon American. Inappropriate criteria, such as western standards of beauty, were imposed by these petty-bourgeois film-makers, magnifying the distortion of the Afro-American image. Pre-occupation with false values made them neglect that cultural and historical experience which is the Afro-American contribution to world culture as a whole. In viewing films of this period today, one finds that with a very few exceptions they fail, both in form and content, to energise and activate audiences, and they therefore did nothing to advance the development of the aesthetics of Afro-American cinema.

Though the independent Afro-American film movement was very strong at first, it failed as time went on to create and keep the interest and commitment of the audience. The production companies, having no real power, were smashed out of business by the large and fast-growing monopolistic Hollywood studios. These studios, in gangster fashion, control, directly and indirectly, both the production and the distribution of films to this day. Although Afro-Americans continued to flock to motion picture theatres, independent Afro-American motion pictures were finally vanquished by 1940.

In the 1960s society experienced another political climate; this was a formative period in the history of the US. Afro-Americans entered another phase of active resistance in all fields of society, which saw the birth of many political and social organisations which took US racism to task both nationally and internationally. Conditions were now right for the second upsurge in the development of Afro-American film activities. Films of active militance were made which corresponded to the overall social and political mood. Under the most adverse production conditions in the

history of film-making, a diversity of socially relevant and progressive films were made. Despite the essentially unorganised and spontaneous nature of the movement, short-lived co-operative initiatives were formed sporadically with the outside world, especially with other third world countries.

Through seminars, festivals and workshops, independent film-makers and their audiences began the necessary process of placing themselves in context in the eyes of the rest of the world, which I consider to be the most important aspect of films in the sixties. A historic relationship which was correct, though as yet undefined, began to take shape in this period, especially with Africa. The process of demystifying the mystified origins, especially the Pan African point of view, became the dominant theme in these films. Film-makers of this period felt themselves more or less obliged to deal with Pan Africanism as a theme or premise and to explore its physical, social and psychological implications in the medium of film. In a few cases, we witness the breaking of new ground in Afro-American experiment with sight and sound.

In this second phase of Afro-American film history, film-making that featured the temperament and accent of Afro-Americans exploded, though in a disorganised fashion, across the country. The same movement of popular experience that transformed African music into the most advanced form of jazz now began to create an equally innovative artistic trend in the cinema. Some films succeeded and others failed in this endeavour, but Afro-Americans confidently asserted their hard-earned right to express the essence of their experience in motion pictures.

However, the systemic disadvantages which victimised and viciously censored the first phase of the Afro-American film movement remain unchanged to this day. In fact, with continued development on the technological front, Anglo-Saxon cultural domination grows stronger and more powerful. By and large, Afro-Americans still remain in the lower economic strata. Afro-Americans, like all other third world peoples in America, are relegated to the outskirts of American economic prosperity. In fact, they have lost most of the economic, political and social gains of their past struggles.

Today's Afro-American film-makers are also less well organised in their process of production and distribution than the companies of the first phase. Individual film-makers announce the formation of new companies, but most fail to turn their visions into motion pictures. There is not a single independent Afro-American film-maker who controls the means of production or has access to capital. The truth of the matter is that the independent film-makers of this era are at the mercy of the very system that has an interest in censoring them. Film-makers wander about the

mic and inseparable from the political, social and economic structure of US society as a whole. Throughout their work and discussions they propose the necessity of changing the motion picture industry along with the rest of the economic base. This group of independent film-makers proclaim that the system as it is presently organised cannot and will not respond to their needs and that they are out to change this undemocratic situation. Their motivation is a total commitment to changing this inequality of the right to cultural expression, physically, sociologically and psychologically.

In the eighties, independent Afro-American and other third world film-makers urgently need to discuss extensively and debate constructively and democratically the true concept of Independent Cinema. Hand in hand with this movement must go the creation of the necessary institutions that will help strengthen the continual development of independent film production so that it can live up to the justifiable expectations of our people.

Equally important is the need for diverse innovative approaches to the search for independent financial resources; to mobilise and organise and involve the potential contributors to this process of liberation. We need to search out and make concrete links with those both nationally and internationally whose ideological vision is in harmony with our own.

It is also essential that we devise innovative production approaches which will be more appropriate to our aims. In independent film production one must encourage cooperative and not competitive relationships. In each film completed we should increase our involvement by inviting and

encouraging the community to participate. Every production opportunity can be turned into a field school for creative educational relationships with the rest of the community. The unskilled, as long as they have sufficient motivation, can be mixed with those who are skilled in the know-how of motion picture production. If the mechanisms of production, distribution and exhibition were organised in a more pragmatic manner, and there were no form of intimidation by the existing establishment, demand for our cultural expressions would be unlimited. Without any hindrance we should pursue the right to explore and develop our creative potential to the fullest.

Our accent and temperament must be perfected and must be visible throughout our work as we organise the content and form of both sight and sound. It is this stamp, this footprint, that testifies to our having lived on this planet. We need to respect our audiences, for they deserve the best quality in our creative endeavours in motion pictures. If we are to live up to these responsibilities, we must cease to be imitators. We need to innovate in order to fulfil our historical and cultural responsibilities.

The convention of western cinema is the problem facing the emerging third world cinema. Infusing our films with our new vision is what is expected of us. Every frame, every shot and every scene in our cinema, no matter what length or size, must contribute actively to the changing of the system that oppresses the world economically and culturally. This historical and cultural responsibility devolves upon cinema, whether it is projected in a theatre, church, basement or prison, in an alley or under a tree. This cinema must initiate the dialogue of change. ■

The Stranglehold of Foreign Films on African Cinema

Segun Oyekunle

African cinema does not exist, for an African film industry which will be capable of producing African cinema has yet to emerge. Because of the lucrative nature of the film business in Africa, those who introduced film distribution into the continent have maintained their stranglehold, and it is this that has continued to block the emergence of African cinema.

What is the nature of foreign films in Africa? Who are the major suppliers of foreign films to Africa? And in what ways do they continue to prevent the growth of indigenous African cinema? In what ways do we ourselves contribute to the still-birth of the African cinema? What are the ways out, the way ahead?

In the early days, the foreign films in Africa were a range of French, Italian and Hollywood films. Today, Indian and Kung Fu films have been added. What they all have in common is:

They are either old films which have outlived their box-office relevance in their country of origin, or new films made purposely for consumption in Africa alone.

They are all cheap adventure and escapist films, either so dated that they would never surface in any film archives in the world, except the vaults of the distributors, or, in the case of the new ones, so poorly and so cheaply made, both in aesthetic and monetary terms, that it would take a trip to Africa to see such films.

They all perpetuate the dominant cultures from which they originate, and their intention is to continue the colonial domination of the African peoples by presenting the "superiority" of those cultures, to awe us, and for us to ape. Thus they make huge profits at the same time as they destroy our lifeline, the core cultural perception of the African. However, it is the profits which account for the stranglehold on African cinema by foreign films. The cultural effects are, from the viewpoint of the distributors, merely incidental or even unregarded, though from our point of view they are equally important.

The first companies responsible for distribution of foreign films in Africa were:

Union General Cinematograph (UGC) which owned:

(i) Societe d'Exploitation Cinematographique Africaine (SECMA)

and (ii) Compagnie Africaine Cinematographique Industrielle et Commerciale (COMACICO).

SECMA and COMACICO became the Societe de Participation Cinematographique Africaine (SOPACIC) in 1970 when SECMA embarrassed the French government by tax-evasion, which forced the government of Upper Volta to nationalise the French consortium and all foreign participation in cinema in Upper Volta.

In the Anglophone areas of Africa, the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) which dominates the distribution of Hollywood films to the whole world had its AMPECA, the Association of the Motion Picture Export Companies of America. AMPECA was to MPEAA what SOPACIA was to the French parent body UGC. However, AMPECA was specifically formed in Lagos in 1961, to join in the battle against the vicious French monopoly of film distribution in Africa. Before then, Hollywood ethnocentrism and profitability had not seen the need to reach directly into the African market. So SECMA and COMACICO would buy outright the outdated Hollywood films which had become financial dead wood in Europe and America. It was not until the MPEAA found out that it was the African market that was sustaining its rival UGC in France (and that by means of American films) that AMPECA was formed, as a result of UGC's refusal to share with AMPEAA the lucrative market which it controlled through SECMA and COMACICO.

In all this scheming and fighting to get a share of the profits obtained from Africa, the development of African cinema was of course a non-issue. It would be wishful thinking to imagine that those who viciously deny each other a slice of the bread would allow even a crumb to fall off it.

The effort to combat foreign domination had to start, therefore, with the earliest crop of African film-makers. Who were these pioneers, and in what ways did they try to create the African cinema?

The pioneers were:

(1) Pauline Vierya of Senegal, whose first student film, *Afrique Sur Seine*, made at the French film school, Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographique (IDHEC), could be said to be the first ever African film, made by an African from the continent – and this was in 1955.

(2) Ababacar Samb and Mahama Traore, who were also at IDHEC with Vierya.

(3) Ousmane Sembene, a fourth Senegalese, who was in training in Moscow while these three were in France. He was a trade union leader of dockworkers. His experience as a dockworker and leader, as he saw the resources which passed through his hands and into the ships, provided him with a strong base for his political consciousness about the exploitation of Africans and fired him to fight to stop that exploitation.

(4) The Mauritanian Mohammed Abu Hondo, now known as Med Hondo, who, like Sembene, was an immigrant worker in France. He moved from there to theatre acting and production before he taught himself film-making.

It should be noted that at least three of the first four or five pioneering African film-makers were Senegalese. This did of course make Senegal the base for the pioneering effort to create an African Cinema. However, as time has worn on and others have come to participate, sad to say, the "Senegalese factor" has over the past ten years become a major obstacle to the formation of a concerted and effective machinery to evolve and safeguard a sound African film industry. One or two of the pioneers have been able to steer clear of the in-fighting, which has now abated in the interests of regenerating The Pan-African Association of Film-makers (FEPACI) which was the earliest continental effort to unite all African film-makers in the common cause of creating an African cinema. Lionel Ngakane of South Africa (ANC) was part of the embryonic idea which grew up into FEPACI, founded in Carthage in 1970. A year before FEPACI, there had been the formation of the Association of Senegalese Film-makers – Association des Cineastes Senegalese (ACS) – with Ousmane Sembene as its first President. Together, ACS and FEPACI had a common goal – to break the monopoly of foreign films and distributors in Africa.

Film-making in the anglophone areas of Africa was late in coming, for two reasons.

Firstly, Britain, the colonial overlord, had very little feature film experience to share. It is ironic that, then and now, Britain the coloniser should be colonised by Hollywood feature films. Only those who have access to the information on the number of films shown in Britain will be able to determine accurately how far Hollywood has colonised Britain, but

a check on London theatres will surely confirm this impression.

Secondly, Britain had considerable experience in making documentary films, and therefore established Her Majesty's Film Units in all the colonies to train in the rudimentary skills of documentary film-making, in order to advance British colonial policy in Africa. The Colonial Film Unit in Accra was the first and only film school in Africa south of the Sahara.

Egyptian cinema of course stands by itself in a different category. It started in the 1930s and has grown in strength to such an extent that after 50 years it could claim to be an industry, in the sense that professionalism and stardom exist, and people of different skills are able to live by their trade within the Egyptian cinema. In the light of this, and for this reason only, I would rather concentrate on the other parts of Africa where the domination of foreign films exists and where efforts are still being exerted to combat it.

We are familiar also with the special situation of South Africa under apartheid. Like her peoples, her creative art is in bondage of a particular kind, and like theatre, African film once in a while surfaces from underground with films which are a part of the resistance struggle.

It has been mentioned that FEPACI and ACS together sought to break the foreign monopoly of SECMA and COMACICO.

FEPACI's major goal was to effect the recycling of profits from film distribution into the development of the indigenous African film industry. There was some seemingly positive reaction from SECMA when they participated in 1970 in the distribution of Traore's film *Diegnébi*. However there was no sharing of profits with Traore, neither was there any recycling of profits. In fact, there was no way in which Traore could have known the financial possibilities of his film – it was shown in SECMA-COMACICO theatres, owned, controlled and staffed by the French.

A positive result of Traore's experience was the formation of the Societe Nationale de Cinematographie, the Society for National Cinema (SONACI). This was set up in Senegal to pool resources together to aid African film production. The most well-known film funded by SONACI is Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*.

There have been other efforts to break the monopoly of the foreign film and distribution companies. Most of these stem from a series of nationalisations which followed the Volta's action in 1970. Algeria was next in 1971, Nigeria in 1972, Senegal in 1974, Benin Republic in 1975, Kenya in 1976 and the Congo in 1979.

Two of these are unique. Algeria was the only country which had a national indigenous

own production experience before the act of nationalisation. She could therefore call the bluff of the foreign distributors when they decided to boycott and to try to squeeze Algerian cinema into submission. In Nigeria, nationalisation was not the result of a direct governmental policy towards the film industry. Rather, it was part of an exercise to indigenise certain sections of the Nigerian economy, through the Indigenisation Decree of 1972.

Under this decree it was in fact the dishonesty of the foreign distributors which caught up with them. The Decree classified the Nigerian economy sectors according to their capital intensiveness. Businesses with low capital intensiveness were to be owned only by Nigerians. The foreign film distributors, for purposes of tax evasion, had for years doctored their accounts to reveal only minimal turnover, so that a film business capable of sustaining a whole multinational company could show as little return as a petty trader. As a result, these companies trapped themselves in the category of businesses which had to be transferred to indigenous Nigerians.

Attempts were made to render the Decree ineffective. Many foreign nationals who had lived many years, or even been born, in the country, but had always refused to identify with Nigeria, suddenly became cap-donning and agbada-wearing Nigerian aspirants. Most of them filed nationalisation papers; some succeeded, others failed. Those who failed used Nigerian fronts for their businesses. Some double-crossed, some were double-crossed, and the story of the schemings and manipulations arising from the Decree would be a sure-fire box office success.

The general reaction of the foreign distributors to the spate of nationalisations was to empty the theatres by blocking the import of films to the new national companies. It did not succeed in Algeria and Nigeria – in the case of Nigeria, not because of any indigenous production (the first feature film made was *Kongi's Harvest* in 1973), but because the Kung Fu film-makers of Hong Kong were only too ready to fill the gap.

The blockade succeeded in all the other countries to the extent that it forced some kind of dialogue between the distributors and the African nations. Unfortunately, this turned out to benefit the distributors, since it allowed them to make even vaster profits than before, and gave the nations a false sense of being in control and having a better source of revenue. All this was at the expense of the development of African film production – to the extent that it actually declined (except in Nigeria) in the period immediately following nationalisation. This argument has been used in some neo-colonial quarters against nationalisation (that is, indigenisation) in the African economy in general as a means to ensure national control and profit. However, such arguments do not take account of the facts that

(1) the foreign bodies actually connived to render the measures ineffective, and

(2) the Africans who took their place did not give the measures a chance of succeeding. They were even worse exploiters of their own people. Some heads of film bodies, rather than encourage the production of African films, are content to buy cheap foreign films to distribute. In some cases, they own companies abroad which acquire such films and sell them to the governments or the private indigenous distributors of their home countries. They thus have little expenditure and large profits to show, which pleases their political masters, and they do not count the cost of the strangulation of the economic and cultural growth of Africa.

(3) Lastly, these arguments ignore the fact that Hollywood itself experienced a kind of "indigenisation" of its own, as a result of the era of McCarthyism which removed all foreign "threats" to the development of what is now the Hollywood film industry. Not only do immigration laws (or work permit requirements) make it difficult for any foreign intruder into Hollywood, but also unionisation, which determines the professional requirements for entry into the business, makes it a near impossibility for young film-makers to be absorbed into the Hollywood system. This exclusivity, however, is part of the reason for the rise of Independent Cinema in the USA.

There were, of course, positive results deriving from these governmental actions of nationalisation in Africa.

FESPACO – the Pan African Film Festival of Ouagadougou.

FESPACO was established in 1970 simultaneously with the nationalisation of the film theatres in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). It is a biennial film festival which since then has not only grown to be an international event, but has also contributed enormously to the development of the African film industry, especially in Francophone Africa.

CIDC – the Pan African Film Distribution Company

The CIDC was formed in 1980 by several OCAM (French-speaking) countries which bought the distribution networks of the UAC, another subsidiary of UGC which had until this point monopolised film distribution in francophone Africa.

JCC – the biennial Carthage Film Festival

This was formed in 1966 by Tahar Cheria, who was then the Minister of Cultural Affairs in Tunisia. The JCC is set to become a major centre of exhibition and therefore of encour-

agement for the development of African Cinema.

MOGPAFIS – the Mogadishu Pan African Film Symposium

This was formed as a biennial film symposium to address the “nuts and bolts” issues of the African Film Industry.

The question arises why do the African governments fail to see the possibilities of the film industry, even if only its financial possibilities, which the foreign multinationals have recognised and exploited for so long? Do the financial possibilities still exist today?

It is not that the governments and the rich segment of the African private sector are not aware of the financial possibilities of film. However, the private sector, whose motivation is quick returns, is not ready for long-term investment in film production, and governments are too short-sighted to see the value to them of such a long-term investment. But the possibilities are there now more than ever before.

Perhaps some statistics will help illustrate this. It should be noted that this is not a scientific survey. However, if these speculations can help to create the picture in our minds of the financial viability of the African film industry, and thus lead to more accurate statistics which would be convincing enough to encourage public and private investment in Africa, the exercise will have been worth the effort.

Take Nigeria as the basis for analysis.

Out of the African population (on the continent) of over 476 million, Nigeria has over 100 million people. 20% of these live in urban centres. Therefore at least this 20% are a potential film audience. There are over 1,000 registered film theatres in Nigeria and as many unregistered ones scattered in smaller towns and village. Gate fees in Nigeria range from 2.50 (ie US\$3.00) to 10.00 (\$14.00). (The highest gate fees are paid for the Nigerian-made films, such is the readiness to see indigenous films in Nigeria. However, indigenous cinema does not account for even 0.01% of total film showings today. Its impact and its share of the profits are infinitesimal.)

Let us assume that 10% of the urban Nigerian population are potentially regular cinema-goers. (This assumption becomes even more likely if we take into account all the theatres and halls scattered over rural areas which are used for screenings.) Therefore we can say that out of over 100 million Nigerians, some 2 million attend the cinema regularly. (The regularity of the 2 million is ensured by the occasionality of the 20 million urban individuals who make up the potential audience.) Because of certain natural phenomena such as rain, let us say that the theatres are open

for 300 days in a year. Therefore, if 2 million Nigerians attend the cinema for 300 days in the year, paying \$3.00 each, by the end of the year they will have spent $2,000,000 \times 300 \times 3 = \$1,800,000,000$, ie, \$1,800 million. Even if on half this number (1 million) attend the cinema for half that period (six months in a year), they will spend \$450 million each year on watching film

How much of the \$450 million goes to the Nigerian government and how much to foreign distributors? How much actually gets ploughed back into the Nigerian film industry? Consider, on top of this, that public funds are spent on films and programmes for Nigerian television, 80% of which are of foreign origin.

The proportion of cinema-goers over the continent as a whole is probably lower than in Nigeria but if nothing else, this analysis does at least show that the Africa film industry is potentially capable of sustaining itself if given a chance.

What are the measures being taken on the continental level today to get that chance?

I have mentioned such efforts as FESPACO, Carthage, CIDC, FEPACI and MOGPAFIS. FEPACI has obtained observer status at the OAU and therefore the opportunity to have lobbyists present at the OAU conference to advance the cause of the African film industry. However, internal wranglings and constitutional crises within FEPACI have crippled its effectiveness for the past ten years.

Perhaps the most positive steps to date were taken in October 1983 in Mogadishu, Somalia, and these could yield some concrete and more profound results in a firmer hold on the Africa market by African cinema.

FEPACI's quarrels were settled and so there is now a plan for its caucus soon, either in Upper Volta or in Nigeria, with the hope that a constitutional obstacles to its effective functioning will be removed.

A number of resolutions were passed, which included the formation of a task force, to comprise the Presidents of FEPACI, JCC and MOGPAFIS and the Secretary-General of FESPACO (and the President of the national association of FEPACI of whichever country the task force is visiting) to travel round Africa to present certain recommendations to the heads of state, the implementation of which would promote a firm establishment of African cinema.

The core of these recommendations was the Niamey Manifesto, drawn up in Niamey in the Niger Republic in 1982, by concerned African film-makers. The main recommendations refer to production and co-production, distribution and exhibition, training and infrastructure, and governmental and administrative measures such as heavy taxation on foreign films, which could then be ploughed back into the indigenous industry.

try, and tax relief for investment in the industry, either in production and equipment, or in distribution and theatre-building. Common markets are also recommended on a regional basis and it is pleasing to note that Kenya, Sudan, Malawi and Somalia have taken immediate steps at the MOGPAFIS conference to effect a common market in eastern Africa which will seek to control distribution in that area.

It should be pointed out that with the strong interest of the foreign film distribution companies in the status quo, it is going to need governmental action and incentive to divert private interest to indigenous production. Unlike the West, where private capital abounds and can sustain film production, in Africa it is the governments which are the sole or major suppliers of funds in their countries, and most investment capital therefore originates from government sources. The investment capital for the infrastructure and development of the highly capital-intensive film industry will have to flow from the benevolence of African governments, even in Nigeria, where private capital has so far sustained the sketchy indigenous production companies. (This the newly created Nigerian Film Corporation hopes to achieve.)

Government participation of course has its dangers, and paramount is political censorship and the danger of the industry becoming the megaphone of government policy, glorified Film Units for the production of propaganda docudramas. However, if the industry has struggled for over twenty years without tangible results, it has to be considered whether this is not, despite its inherent dangers, the only alternative, the last hope. On the initial foundation laid by the government, the industry could, conceivably, build its independence and self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, it is the governments who can legislate, even now, for a specific percentage of African films to be screened, using the many films by film-makers of African descent in the diaspora. Cheap Indian and Kung Fu films appear on Africa screens, but no good foreign films with the same aspirations as African cinema get the chance. Government-to-government talks can ensure that films appear as quickly as the latest Japanese calculators and pen-watches appear in African markets. I say as quickly, because I believe that, profit being the only motive of the foreign distributors, and the attraction of the African market being so strong, when and the only alternative for foreign investment is in the production and distribution of indigenous films, they will join the new deal. African films buried in vaults and archives in the West will even resurface and reach the African screen.

While efforts are being made to tilt the cinema balance in favour of African productions, should the country of origin be the only criterion in seeking to establish a wholly indigenous industry? Should not the type of films that we make be part

of the change? It is said that lack of funds and technical facilities are responsible for most of the low quality of African films and this is quite true. But what about other aspects of film-making, which do not depend, at least not totally, on funds and technology—for example, the issues we address, and how we address them? Do we consciously work on our films with the aim of helping to cause change in our society? What are the African film-makers' cultural perceptions, and how much are they prepared to direct them towards developing the film medium to reflect the African way of looking at things? How much are we prepared to break with the so-called rules?

Haile Gerima has said during this festival that the only rules of film-making are the rules the film-maker sets for himself or herself. This is because the so-called rules were set not in a day but by trial and error, the trials and errors which derive, consciously or unconsciously, from the cultural perception of the pioneer film-maker. For those of us who have different basic cultural roots, with established forms of art in our cultures, are all the rules of film-making today adequate to enable us to effect the change from foreign to African control of the film industry?

It is an effort that we have to make consciously, because we have been culturally, and worse still, psychologically warped.

We cannot make a film with African villagers, who are the perpetual keepers of African traditional culture, with them speaking their own African languages. An old villager who never knew where the door to the classroom was must speak, and carry the African culture, in Queen's English. Nobody denies today's realities, but must today's realities be permanent realities? Are we using the medium in such a way as to use visual images and symbols to break the language barriers in Africa, the barriers which have entrapped the African culture and sensibilities within the unsuitable and most limited foreign languages that are now the medium of interpersonal communication in art and life? Are sub-titles the answer, when they so detract from the effectiveness of the images, and most of the African film audience cannot read or write? If change is the only permanence there is, how much are we prepared for profound changes in the coming phase of African film?

How do we relate our shots, compositions, symbols, images, colours, editing strategy, to elements which still hold the remaining indestructible African culture values? A profile, for example, is negative in Yoruba culture. Directness, face to face, means honesty and truth. The same is true of part of the Ethiopian culture, to the extent that some early Ethiopian paintings would show the subjects' faces turned towards the observer, even though the figures were depicted as looking at each other. What is the relevance of such elements in the African film aesthetics of today? How do we apply them to

satisfy even unconsciously the sense of loss in African society in the films and messages we present? Do we have a message?

In his eagerness to present the African image on the screen, the African film-maker has been trapped in the contradictions of film-making. Such contradictions include the lack of time to acquire the basic skills, such as good scripting, directing and editing. We write out dialogues in English and they are stale and artificial in cultural situations where indigenous languages would have made our characters live. We don't involve our established African writers in our scripting; even in cases where their works are adapted, they don't participate. That is why African cinema ends up with epic flops such as *Things Fall Apart* (financed and produced by Hollywood through Niveria's Calpenny). We have no eagerness or incentive to create.

Japan, small as it is, has been able to dominate certain sectors of the American and world economy. This is because they possess the ingenuity to identify positive elements in other economic cultures and products of the world and remould these to produce essentially Japanese goods. The Japanese technological evolution did not hap-

pen overnight, nor did it happen as a result of Japan blindly aping the mainstream of world technology. Japanese technological and industrial wizardry is embedded in Japanese culture – in the willingness to work, to question, to research, to create. Are African film-makers developing the right attitude towards film-making? Are we questioning, are we researching into African artistic culture? Are we actually creating?

There are no ready answers to these thoughts, not when one is struggling on all fronts to establish oneself as a film-maker and to contribute to the development of the African film industry in place of the foreign films which exploit us and destroy the fabric of our society at the same time.

While we are struggling, we should not forget that Africa has gone through several changes over the years. Africa has already changed a foreign political oppressor for an internal tyrant. We have swapped foreign exploiters for thieves of African descent. In the changes we envisage for African cinema, are we going to replace the producer of Hollywood trash with the African filmic ape? ■

The Screen and the Sword

Censorship in Indian Cinema

Tapan K. Bose

The editorial column of the *Indian Express* of October 19th 1983 had an interesting comment on media censorship. On October 2nd, the birthday of Gandhi, the Jaipur station of All India Radio (AIR) had refused to broadcast a talk on "The relevance of Gandhi" which was to be delivered by an eminent Gandhian, Mr. Siddhraj Dhadha. Earlier, Mr. Dhadha had been requested by the Station Director of AIR Jaipur to deliver the talk on 2nd October. But when he arrived at the radio station with his script, the Station Director wanted Mr. Dhadha to remove some portions from his paper as they did not wish to broadcast "controversial matter". The *Indian Express* editorial comments "the impugned passages were innocuous... some of them a historical narration of recorded facts pertaining to differences between Gandhi and Nehru, and others critical of Nehru's development strategy."

I recall a similar story of All India Radio's attempt to censor history. It appeared in *The Statesman*, New Delhi edition, on May 13th 1983. A well-known historian, Prof. R. S. Sharma, was invited by the Delhi station of AIR to give a talk on "socio-cultural development in ancient India". However, when Prof. Sharma arrived at the radio station to record his talk, his script was read by a Senior Producer and an Assistant Director. After reading the paper, they asked Prof. Sharma to drop the first paragraph as they considered it "irrelevant".

Prof. Sharma is reported to have said that while he was willing to be corrected on facts or language, he would not submit to censorship of views. *The Statesman* reporter said that one of the AIR officials had also objected to Prof. Sharma's use of the word *Sudra* to describe the fourth and lowest caste in the Hindu caste system. He was told to use the word *Harijan*, meaning "the people of God", as coined by Gandhi and adopted by the government of India. The fact that, in the context of ancient India, *Sudra* was the proper word to be used, as the word *Harijan* was created only in the 1930s, did not seem to matter with the AIR officials.

In India, radio and television are under the monopolistic control of the Central Government. Even the State Governments have no say on what is to be broadcast through these two forms of

mass media. In the mid-sixties, in some of the states, opposition parties had come to power. On several occasions, AIR stations situated in the capitals of those states refused to broadcast speeches of Ministers of the State Governments. One of the most controversial of these incidents was the refusal by the Calcutta Station to broadcast the May Day speech of Mr Subodh Mukherjee, then Labour Minister in West Bengal's United Front Government. On July 18th 1983, Mr. N. T. Rama Rao, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, was denied the opportunity to broadcast by the Assistant Station Director of All India Radio's Hyderabad Station.

All films produced in India or imported for public exhibition have to be certified by the Central Board of Film Censors. Without this certificate, no film can be screened. The Censor Board is controlled by the Central Government under the Cinematograph Act. In India, documentary films of short films are produced mostly by the Government of India through the Films Division or by the Information and Publicity Departments of the State Governments. These are exhibited in every theatre in the country before the main feature film. This compulsory exhibition of Government-sponsored documentary films was first introduced under the Defence of India Rules of 1942, as part of the war efforts by the then British Colonial Government. The same provision was later incorporated in the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1952.

DOCUMENTARIES ON WAR EFFORTS

The first Indian documentary or record film was made in 1897. The film was entitled *Coconut Fair*. It was a film on Narieli Purnima, a religious festival of the Marathi Hindu. For obvious reasons, documentary film had not flourished in India by itself. The industry had developed from the beginning essentially as a commercial venture. It was, therefore, the Second World War that brought documentary films to the fore in India.

In the forties, the people of India were burning with nationalistic fervour. Gandhi and the Indian National Congress had already given the

call for non-co-operation with the British in their war efforts. At home, the British had realised the importance of documentary films. The resources of Canada and England were pooled together to produce monthly newsreels like *The World In Action*, written by John Legg under the general direction of John Grierson. So the colonial rulers of India decided to introduce Government-sponsored documentaries to persuade the people to join the war effort.

In 1940, the Film Advisory Board was set up by the Government. The Board later came to be known as Information Films of India, and began the production of documentaries and newsreels designed to motivate the people to support the war. In 1942, the Defence of India Rules made the showing of these films compulsory.

In 1947, when the National Government came to power, like many other colonial institutions and practices, production of Government-sponsored documentaries and their compulsory screening in every theatre was continued. A new organisation, 'Films Division', was created under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Film Advisory Board was reconstituted. This board had become a very important institution for documentary film makers in India. All documentaries produced in India for compulsory exhibition have to obtain the approval of this Board over and above the Censor Certificate issued by the Central Board of Film Censors which means a process of dual censorship.

RESPECT THE CROWN

Let us now go back a little in history to examine the growth of film censorship in India till we catch up with the formation of the Films Division. In 1917, under the Chairmanship of T.P. O'Connor, the British Board of Film Censors had codified the norms of film censorship. These were embodied in a document with forty-three sections. Film censorship was introduced for the first time in India through the enactment of the 1918 Cinematograph Act. In 1920, under this act, Film Censor Boards were set up in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rangoon. As many as forty-two sections of the British Censor Code were incorporated as 'general principles' under the Indian Cinematograph Act. In addition to these forty-two general principles, a few more sections were added. According to these, no film was to contain anything that would show disrespect to 'the soldiers of the British Crown, religious preachers, King's Ministers, ambassadors of other countries, judges of courts, members of the police force and government servants'. The censor boards were also empowered to ban all such films which in their opinion were liable to create social discontentment through the depiction of poverty and spread 'the message of class struggle between the rich and the poor', as well as create dissatisfaction among the people and

strengthen their movement against British rule in India.

The apparent objective of film censorship initially was to protect the audience from exposure to obscenity and sexual excitement. This is how the 'National Council of Public Morals' had justified film censorship in England before the formation of the British Board of Film Censors. The forty-three rules that T.P. O'Connor had framed in 1917 are very interesting. Only nineteen of these dealt with questions of sexuality, obscenity and public morals, the remaining twenty-four had much wider social and political implications.

In the twenties, western capitalism was reeling under the dual impact of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Working people all over Western Europe and America had seen the horrors and futility of war. They were also becoming aware that war was waged by the ruling classes for profit, while it brought untold misery to the poor. The success of the Russian Revolution had generated tremendous hope among oppressed people. Socialist and Marxist ideology was making deep inroads into the working class movement. A section of the intelligentsia which was already dissatisfied with the system had started coming out in open support of communism and socialism. Anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements were becoming stronger. In addition, the newly established Soviet regime had realised the importance of film and had started a new film movement.

The ruling classes could neither afford the growth of the Socialist-Marxist movement, nor allow the growth of an anti-colonial attitude on a global scale. The crucial economic importance of the colonies in the survival of world capitalism had already become apparent to them. It was this awareness that had necessitated the creation of those additional twenty-four rules by T.P. O'Connor in England. These rules had very categorically laid down that films should not contain controversial political issues' or show anything that would promote class struggle. No film could criticise or say anything derogatory about political leaders. Film makers were warned against realistic representation of the horrors of war. Clear instructions were issued to delete all such materials, which would reduce the prestige of the Empire in the colonies.

In the USA, several court cases were fought against film censorship on the basis that censorship violated the freedom of speech and of publication and the right to property which were incorporated in the American Constitution through the first, fifth and fourteenth amendments. Yet the courts were able to justify censorship on the ground that a film was 'business pure and simple', it could not take the protection of the fundamental right of freedom of speech. In order to prevent importation of 'undesirable' films, the US Congress had also incorporated

call for non-co-operation with the British in their war efforts. At home, the British had realised the importance of documentary films. The resources of Canada and England were pooled together to produce monthly newsreels like *The World In Action*, written by John Legg under the general direction of John Grierson. So the colonial rulers of India decided to introduce Government-sponsored documentaries to persuade the people to join the war effort.

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several restrictions in the Tariff Act of 1909. The Russian Revolution had unleashed new forces in the American society. Magazines like *the New Republic* were becoming popular. In 1918, John Reed was put in prison for praising the Russian Revolution in an open public meeting. In 1919, the Congress approved imposition of 'reasonable restrictions on the freedom of speech', and thus provided the legal sanction behind film censorship in the USA.

THE MYTH OF DEMOCRACY

In England, in order to maintain the myth of democracy and freedom of the individual, the government had all along claimed that it had no direct link with film censorship. Through a legal fiction, the British Board of Film Censors was created as a body of the film trade. A similar fiction was created in the USA. From the very beginning, it was apparent that the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the censor Board were working in close collaboration with each other. In England, new Soviet films like *Battleship Potemkin*, *The End of St Petersburg*, *Mother*, *October*, and *The New Babylon* were banned on the ground that these were 'mere propaganda, not for screening in theatres meant for entertainment and relaxation'. In Denmark, screening of Podovkin's *Mother* was not allowed. The French had banned *Battleship Potemkin*, *Mother* and *The General Lines*. We can see how impartial and independent the Censor Boards were.

In India, the British colonial regime had not felt the necessity of maintaining the fiction of non-governmental censorship. It was directly administered by the government. Throughout the colonial period, the Indian film industry had behaved like a good boy. No attempt was made to produce films on anti-colonial or revolutionary themes. The early Indian films were mostly based on mythological stories. In the thirties quite a few films were produced on so-called 'social' themes, but most of these films were primarily love stories or emotional drama portraying men and women of the upper castes and the landed gentry who lived on unearned income.

ECHO OF HOLLYWOOD

As I have already said, in India, from the very beginning, cinema was a commercial proposition. Production companies were set up in Hollywood style with big studios. Film directors and artistes were engaged on exclusive contracts. These production companies themselves were engaged in distribution and exhibition. Slowly but steadily, big companies like RCA Bauer, Westrex, MGM, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, all came to India for a slice of this lucrative pie. Naturally, the people who were involved in this industry were not going to annoy their colonial masters. Nor were they interested in disturbing

the feudal relationship in rural India or the new emerging capitalist class in urban centres. They were very much a part of this new elite. These highly westernised urban businessmen had realised that 'dreams' were a good marketable proposition through the silver screen. Even during the thirties and forties, when the whole nation was out on the streets under Gandhi's leadership to overthrow the British, the Indian film industry failed to reflect the mood of the people. It carried on with its love stories, emotional drama of personal tragedy and Hindu mythology until the fifties, when the so-called 'social' themes and mythology were replaced by what is now called the 'formula' films.

Indian leftist intellectuals of the thirties remained aloof from Indian Cinema. The Communists started their own people's theatre movement. The socialists, both outside and inside the congress party were too busy with their own politics and in-fights. The Congress, under Gandhi, did not care. In fact, a section of them looked down on Cinema as a sinful activity. Women artistes were considered prostitutes and the men a bunch of debauchees.

However, not all films were emotional gibberish and mythological mumbo-jumbo. A few films were made on some Indian classics. This was the closest point of contact between Indian Cinema and the nationalist movement – the recreation of the glorious past.

The Dream Merchants

Meanwhile, the commercial film industry of India, a corrupt version of Hollywood, was creating its own star system. Its only contact with the outside world was through the box office that brought in the money. Soon, those who controlled the box office started controlling the 'creative' aspects of film-making. As reality became harsher, life more difficult, the films became more unrealistic, the dreams even more unattainable. The outstanding achievement of Indian Cinema is its technique of packing sex in almost everything. The 'formula film' had arrived – a happy-go-lucky hero in fancy costumes going through life singing songs, becoming rich by winning lotteries, always torn between two women – the good and the 'vamp' – indulging in all the 'bad vices' of wine, women and wealth and finally chucking up the bad and joining the ranks of the good.

Freedom or control?

Let us get back to film censorship. In 1947 when the national government came to power, what did it do?

Did the Government consider evolving a system of voluntary censorship as in the USA, England and some other European countries? No, on the contrary, it did everything to strengthen

statutory pre-censorship of films. Between 1947 and 1950, the period in which the Indian Constitution was finalised, there seems to have been no debate on the future of mass communications. Broadcasting and film censorship were placed on the Union (Central) List under Article 246 of the Constitution.

Broadcasting had come to India in 1923 with the establishment of the first Radio Club in Calcutta. Indian Broadcasting Company Limited, a private concern, had initiated the first regular broadcasting in this country in 1927. This company went bankrupt in 1930 and was taken over by the British Government. In 1936, All India Radio was created. At first under the Ministry of Industry and Labour, it was subsequently transferred to the Department of Communications in 1937 and finally in 1941 to the Department of Information and Broadcasting, which was created essentially for war propaganda.

One wonders why the fathers of this 'largest democracy' in its formative days decided to give the Central Government absolute control over broadcasting and film censorship. They had decided to give India a federal Constitution. In a multi-lingual and culturally diverse country like India, broadcasting and film censorship should have been put under the purview of the state governments rather than being centrally controlled. It becomes even more interesting when we find that in the 1935 Government of India Act, on which the 1950 Constitution was modelled, censorship was included on the 'concurrent list', which would have meant that both the state governments and the Central Government could legislate on this issue. Even during the British period, the three Censor Boards of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras had enjoyed a lot of autonomy. Each of these boards had framed their own rules under the 1918 Act.

In 1952, a new Indian Cinematograph Act was passed by the Indian Parliament. This provided for the setting up of a Central Board of Film Censors directly under the Central Government and converted the Calcutta and Madras boards into regional boards. Pre-censorship of film became even more strict and highly government-controlled. We will go into the new Act and rules shortly, but before that, let us understand the motivation behind this centralisation of control over the media.

I think I would not be far wrong if I said that the Indian elite which had led the struggle against the British dominion and came to power in 1947 had already lost their revolutionary pretences upon assumption of power. The primary objective was the consolidation of the gains of independence. Let us examine the chapter on fundamental human rights in the Indian Constitution.

- Under Article 19 of the Constitution, entitled 'Right to Freedom', seven fundamental rights

were listed, viz. the rights: to enjoy freedom of speech and expression, to assemble peaceably, to form associations and unions, etc. What is interesting is that while clause 1 of Article 19 listed the rights, the five subsequent clauses imposed all manner of restrictions on the operation of these rights. All these restrictions begin with 'nothing in the sub-clause... shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law in so far as it imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause...' and so on and so forth.

As far as the right to freedom of speech and expression is concerned, the so-called reasonable restrictions imposed in the first draft were felt to be inadequate and this was rectified in 1951 by the Constitution First Amendment Act. This amendment empowered the state to enact laws restraining the operation of this right 'in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign countries, public order, decency and morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence.' It is this amendment which became the basis of the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1952.

Mass Upsurge

Independence in 1947 had unleashed widespread anti-feudal mass upsurges in the country. In the Nizam-ruled Hyderabad State and in Bengal under the leadership of the Communist Party of India these movements under the leadership of the Socialist Party and the Kisan Sabha were becoming more and more powerful.

The Indian National Congress, which had come into existence in the nineteenth century, was essentially a party of the landowners and the emergent urban industrialists. With the arrival of Gandhi on the Indian political scene, the Congress had experienced a metamorphosis. Its sphere of influence was extended and it had assumed a mass character. In 1917 and 1918, under Gandhi's leadership, the Congress had for the first time led two significant peasant struggles in the country: the struggle of the peasants of Champaran in Bihar against the indigo planters, who were mostly Europeans, and the *Satyagraha* movement of the peasants of Kaira against collection of land revenues.

In the initial years, the Congress laid exclusive stress on the needs of the Indian industrial class, ignoring the agrarian problems. Under Gandhi, Congress had formed peasant committees in rural areas, but this movement was invariably restricted to seeking relief against the excessive rates of land revenue. In spite of having attained a mass character under Gandhi, the Congress leadership had remained in the hands of the landlord and industrial classes.¹ The Congress policy of safeguarding the interests of the

dar and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organisations of peasants in rural India. Radical elements within the Congress had realised that to protect the interest of the poor peasants, their own class organisations and leadership must be evolved. Consequently, the Kisan organisations had come into existence in different parts of the country.

This process had split the Congress leadership on class lines and what followed was a brief period of struggle for hegemony between the landed and industrial interests and the radical pro-peasant elements. The anti-feudal elements were soon pushed out. In 1935, the first All India Kisan Congress was held in Lucknow, which led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha was basically composed of radical petty-bourgeois individuals from within and outside the Indian National Congress. This movement was supported by the Congress Socialists, the Socialist Party and, later, the Communist Party. The official Congress leadership moved away from this movement.

In 1942, the Kisan Sabha movement responded to the Congress's call for 'civil disobedience' most heroically. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu they formed parallel governments. The most outstanding achievement was perhaps in Midnapore in Bengal where for years the British were unable to regain their control. Unfortunately, the radical petty-bourgeois leadership of the Kisan Sabha, the Socialist party and the Communist party were not mature enough to understand the real potential of these struggles. Had they been so perhaps the history of India would be written in a different way today.

The Congress-Zamindar agreement had all through prevented the Congress from adopting any radical measures in the interest of the peasantry. It was this alliance which came to power in this part of the truncated sub-continent in 1947. The Indian agrarian society was seething with discontent. The first task of the new rulers was to contain this movement without allowing it to grow into a civil war. What helped them most was the immaturity of the petty-bourgeois leadership of the peasant struggle.

New Laws, Old Rules

It is in this light that we should study the policies of the first independent government of India. Even the constitution was framed by an assembly which, strictly speaking, did not have the legal authority to do so. They framed new laws and rules, used the police and the army against their own people, took advantage of all the existing colonial laws and followed the same expedient of a 'divide and rule' policy. In this they were ably supported by the well-entrenched Indian bureaucracy.

An examination of the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1952 will substantiate my argument. Under Section 3 of the Act, the Central Government was empowered to appoint a Chairman and Members of the Censor Board. No specific qualifications for such appointments were laid down in the Act. The Government was completely free to appoint any person it liked. Career bureaucrats and retired politicians belonging to the ruling party were mostly chosen as Chairmen and Members of the Board. Sometimes a few 'representatives' of the film industry and other 'learned professions' were included.

Under Section 5(B) 2 of the same Act, the Central Government was empowered to issue 'such directions as they may deem fit, which shall guide the authority competent to grant censorship certificates for sanctioning films for public exhibition'. In exercise of this provision, the Central Government has been issuing detailed guidelines to the Censor Board.

In 1969, the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship, popularly known as the Khosla Committee, submitted its report to the Government. Commenting on this practice of issuing detailed guidelines to the Censor Board, the Khosla Committee said, 'Any law dealing with film censorship should merely state that films should not be repugnant to the constitutional provision stated in Clause 2 of Article 19. There is no need to have a long catalogue of general principles or their applications.' Khosla's recommendation was based on the fact that the power of the Central Government to give detailed guidelines had seriously eroded the authority and independence of the Censor Board. The Board had been functioning on the basis of anticipating the intentions of the Central Government.

It seems that Justice Khosla was under the impression that the Central Government was interested in giving some real autonomy to the Censor Board. My point is that this was never the intention of the Government. The 1952 Act was designed to give supreme authority into the hands of the Central Government. Section 6 (1) of the Cinematograph Act will support my contention. It says, 'The Central Government may at any stage call for the records of any proceedings in relation to any film which is pending before or which has been decided by the Board, and after making such enquiry into the matter as it considers necessary, make such order in relation thereto as it thinks fit.' The Central Government is also the final authority for appeals against the decisions of the Censor Board.

In the court case of *K.A. Abbas v. the Government of India*, concerning a short film, *A Tale of Four Cities*, the Central Government had assured the Supreme Court of India that it would set up an 'Appellate Tribunal' for hearing

appeals against the decisions of the Censor Board instead of the Central Government. In 1974, the year of the Railway Strike, the Indian Parliament passed The Cinematograph Amendment Act 1974. This Act provided that twelve persons will be appointed as full-time members by the Central Government from amongst persons who are familiar with the social, cultural and political institutions of India, or have special knowledge of various regions of India, or have special knowledge of films and their impact on society, or have for at least ten years held civil judicial posts, or have been practising law for at least three years. The 1974 Act also provided for the setting up of Appellate Tribunals. Every Tribunal was to consist of three members, to be nominated by the Central Government out of the panel of members mentioned above.

On the face of it, the 1974 Act does look very democratic. For the first time qualifications for appointment of members were laid down and provisions were made for constitution of an Appellate Tribunal. One would feel that the Khosla Committee's warning that unlimited power in the hands of the Central Government affects with working of the Censor Board was taken seriously by the Government. But alas! That was not to be. Section 6(1) of the 1952 Act was retained as it is, empowering the Central Government to intervene in any case decided by or pending before the Censor Board, and to issue specific directions.

Enter the Emergency

Let us see what happened to this 1974 Act. A few days after the proclamation of the Emergency on June 30th 1975, according to a Government notification, eleven new members were appointed. The very next day, July 1st 1975, the Government issued another notification, repealing the 1974 Cinematograph Amendment Act and re-inforcing the 1952 Act. Most of the eleven members who supported the 'Emergency' were retained. Throughout the period of emergency, no meeting of the Censor Board was held. The Government continued to ban, withdraw or suspend films they did not like.

These included films such as *Andhi*, *Andolan*, *Kissa Kursi Kaa* and also short films like *Sikkim*, directed by Satyajit Ray, and *Coolie Se Mazdoor*. Ray's film *Sikkim* was banned because it highlighted the distinctive cultural heritage of Sikkim. It was felt that the film would go against the interest of national integrity and the sovereignty of the state. Sikkim was unilaterally annexed by India. The Government could not afford to remind the people of Sikkim of their cultural heritage, and hence Ray's film was a threat to the integrity of the nation. *Coolie Se Mazdoor* was banned because it had criticised the owners of the tea gardens.

The late S. Sukhdev, who had made films against the Railway Strike in 1974, also got into

trouble with the Censor during the emergency. His film *After The Silence*, a sponsored film on the twenty-point programme, had irked some of the local party bigwigs in Bihar. They had approached the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting. The Ministry had called for the film from the Board and after previewing it had asked Sukhdev to remove references to the party men who, as landlords, were keeping bonded labourers on their farms. Sukhdev appealed to Mrs. Indira Gandhi for intervention in the interest of 'credibility'. The intervention never came and he had to remove those portions. The film was then approved by the Censor Board. It now lies in the warehouse of the Films Division, gathering dust along with many other such films which are on the confidential banned list of the Ministry.

Anti-National Criminals

The Janata Government did not repeal the 1952 Act, so the 'Amendment Act of 1974' never became operative. In 1978 the Morarji Ministry, like its predecessors, issued another notification to the Censor Board giving detailed directives regarding norms of censorship. In spirit and substance, this was not different from the ones issued earlier, but it laid special emphasis on sovereignty, integrity and security of the state. It also cautioned the Censor Board to ensure that 'anti-social activities such as violence are not glorified and justified'. It went further to add that 'the modus operandi of criminals or other visuals or words likely to incite the commission of any offence should not be shown'.

One could not possibly take exception to these directives. By themselves they are pretty harmless and at times desirable. But one must see this in the political context. The government's power to issue such directives makes the Censor Board completely subservient to the whims and fancies of those in office. Crime, violence, anti-social activities and public order are terms that change their definition very frequently.

To give an example, during the emergency it was claimed that all the opposition parties were indulging in 'anti-social activities' and thus 'endangering public order'. Most of the activists of these parties were therefore arrested and put in jail. A short film was made by a private producer, at the instance of the government, depicting the late Jaiprakash Narain as a fascist. When the Morarji government came to power, it released most of these activists, but political workers belonging to Marxist-Leninist groups were not released. When this matter was taken up with Morarji by a delegation of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCF), Morarji said that these people were not political prisoners but criminals, as they believed in violence. It was pointed out to Morarji that George Fernandes, who was a minister in the Morarji cabinet, and several others had indulged in similar violence.

during the emergency by blowing up bridges, public buildings and railways with dynamite, and yet the case against them was withdrawn. For Morarji, George's dynamite was 'political', while the locally-made guns of the Marxist-Leninists were 'criminal'.

Bare Skin Liberalism

One of the interesting developments of film censorship is that of late it has become quite liberal about sexuality, obscenity and nudity. The Indian screen sees a lot more of uncovered female skin than it did ten years ago. Even the government-owned film corporation has been reaping the benefit of this liberalism by importing and distributing a whole hoard of spaghetti westerns and overtly sexy films.

This is not liberalisation, this is merely expediency. The attitude of the Central Government seems to be, 'As sex in films is less damaging to our position than politics in films, let there be more sex if this will enable us to keep political issues out of the cinema.' Such 'liberalisation' serves only to obscure the real issue, which is the Government's continued betrayal of the assurance it gave to the Supreme Court through the Solicitor-General more than a decade ago.

The Broken Promise

In 1973, Justice P. N. Mukhi of Bombay High Court said in his judgement that if an Act 'does not provide for a built-in safeguard in the form of an appeal to a Court or a suitably qualified and independent tribunal from an order that may be passed by the Central Government, then the very absence of such a provision clearly makes the procedural provision... unreasonable'.

The Supreme Court upheld the Censorship Code and the Act only because the Solicitor-General had assured the Court that soon the Government would set afoot legislation to create provisions within the Act for independent tribunals.

The 1974 Indian Cinematography (Amendment) Act was the result of this assurance. As I have already said, on July 1st 1975, when it was to come into force, it was repealed. This act of betrayal by the government of Mrs. Gandhi was not rectified by the Janata government of Morarji Desai. Mr. L. K. Advani, the Information and Broadcasting Minister of the Janata Government, made a lot of promises, held a few conference and conducted witch-hunts to punish film-makers who supported the Emergency, but he did nothing to redeem the promise made to the Supreme Court. The 1974 Amendment remained in suspension and was finally killed in 1981 by Mrs Gandhi's government.

Two Case Histories

In November 1981, we completed a documentary film entitled *An Indian Story*. It was an enquiry into the suppression of civil rights in the country. Until the end of January 1982, the Censor Board could not take any decision of this film. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, the well-known Indian film-maker, was then the Chairman of the Censor Board. The film had exposed the aggressive attitude of the police force and the inhuman torture they inflict on the people. The case of the blinding of prisoners on remand by the police officers of the Bhagalpur district of Bihar was discussed at length in the film. Several points of view were presented, through interviews and commentary.

Officially, the Censor Board refused to give us any reason for this delay. But unofficially, Mr Mukherjee explained that his major problem was to keep the film out of the hands of the Central Government who could have called for it at any time and banned it. A few other officials, who did not want to be quoted, told us that the legal adviser had said in his note that the film could not be certified as it had a bias against the police and administration.

As we were not allowed to examine the objections raised by the legal adviser and other members of the Board, we have no idea of what exactly happened. But this case demonstrates one very interesting fact, and that is that the Chairman of the Board, who was not a bureaucrat, was not able, in spite of his best efforts, to give a certificate to the film. For almost a hundred days we pursued the matter with him, and then took it to the Bombay High Court. In the Court, the Censor Board was not able to explain the reasons behind this delay and we finally got the certificate with a few minor cuts.

I will give another case. The producers of a Telugu film *Veera Brahmendra Swami Charitrahim* were asked by the Censor Board to make ten cuts in the film if it was to get a certificate for universal exhibition. The producers found these cuts unreasonable. They wanted to explain their position and therefore asked the Censor Board to give them the opinions of the members who had asked for those cuts. The Board refused to oblige on the ground that these were part of confidential records.

A writ petition was filed in the Madras High Court. The court held that the producers were entitled to a copy of the entire proceedings of all the committees of the Censor Board which had examined the film, including the opinions of individual members. The reason given by the court was that without this information, the producers could not exercise their right to make representations against the proposed cuts. Well, the High Court may have felt that the producers had this right in law, but the Censor Board knew better. They just refused to part with the records.

To Create Reality

Before I conclude, I want to say something about my experience as a documentary film-maker. In India, the Government is the only sponsor and buyer of documentary films. These films are distributed through the Films Division and the Information Directorates of the State Governments in the cinema houses. The documentary film in India has therefore remained very much a cinema-house oriented medium. As the departments have not bothered about the audience beyond the cinema-house, the 16mm documentary movement did not receive any sustained financial or administrative encouragement. Films are shown in the villages and small towns by mobile vans of the Field Publicity Directorate. This circuit has always been treated as the poor relation, and is normally supplied with 16mm copies of the films meant for theatrical release. Very few films have been made to date primarily for the rural audience.

Our documentary films are made not with a view to presenting real information or to educating the people, but primarily in pursuance of the government's policy of 'motivating' the people. In reality they are not documentaries but promotional films, because they promote a particular government policy or programme, or at times a leader. The sponsors are not bothered about the credibility gap between the reality which the people experience and the 'reality' that the film-makers are asked to create in these films. Very often I have been told, and I am sure most documentary film makers would bear me out, that the films must end on a 'positive note'. And this 'positive note' means 'paint a rosy picture'. If it is a film on minor irrigation, show that it has been a success. If it is on the abolition of bonded labour, or the rehabilitation of the scheduled

caste landless, then the film-maker must show that these targets have been achieved.

As the sponsor pays for the film, the film-maker can do little about this credibility gap. If anybody made a film which did not conform to this 'official reality', then the film would not be approved and would have to be re-made at the film-maker's cost. I must add here that the government agencies give out these films to film-makers on the basis of the lowest tender, most of the time. The film-makers are actually film-contractors as far as these sponsoring agencies are concerned. Naturally, the question of their integrity and creative freedom have no place in the contracts they sign. The Censor Board, and more than the Censor Board, the Film Advisory Board, also contribute their share. Even if a film-maker was able to get a film with a critical point of view passed by the Censors, the Film Advisory Board would get him. But the control does not end there. The Films Division has many films in its 'morgue' which have been passed by both the Censor Board and the Film Advisory Board but were later found 'unsuitable' by the minister or bureaucrats. To name a few: Partap Sharma's *Framework of a Famine*, S. Sukhdev's *Behind the Breadline* and *After the Silence*, Lalvani's *They Call Me Chamar* and *Burning Stone*.

Satyameva Jayate

'Films must depict reality', said Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

'Yes, Madam Prime Minister, our films are realistic, thanks to Censorship.'

Satyameva Jayate - Truth Will Triumph - says the motto of the Government. ■

The Role of Cinema in Imperialist Culture Domination

Jose Massip

Every model of imperialist domination, to achieve its ends, employs two interdependent kinds of violence simultaneously: the first aims to control the economic infrastructure by force of arms, and the second which is quieter and less visible, but no less vicious, aims to control culture and ideology, which determine superstructure.

Historically, imperialism would not be possible without these two complementary kinds of domination, and the example of Cuba shows this.

At the close of the first imperialist war in Latin America's modern history, in which Spain lost its colonial possessions to the young imperialism of the US, Cuba acquired a constitution, though this was amended by Washington, and it also acquired independence, though conditioned by Washington. What might be called concessions on the part of the young imperialism were from the beginning part of deliberate measures to disarm wishes for true freedom and development. The main aim was to set in motion new mechanisms of large-scale exploitation. These had to avoid an unjustifiable and hardly prestigious war with a people whose country was dwarfed, but who still retained the experience of a thirty-year liberation war.

It was clear that, like the colonies of Puerto Rico and the Philippines – nations where all attempts at self-determination were suppressed – Cuba was not profitable, neither economically nor politically; it was time to try what Theodore Roosevelt called 'an independent country with a native administration which faithfully followed US opinions'. So Cuba became a neo-colonial country and, for a little over half an century, a pseudo-republic. As a result, there began in Cuba a gradual development of a market for consumer goods and capital investment, mostly imported from the US.

Amongst many others there were two main consequences: the emergence of a new national bourgeoisie, subordinated economically and ideologically to North American imperialism, and for the most part restricted to the less dynamic sector of the economy. The state apparatus was controlled by the bourgeoisie, and

the bourgeoisie itself fed parasitically on the bureaucracy. As you would expect, this state apparatus was used to repress savagely all those who opposed the new framework of political, economic and cultural dependence, whether they were workers, peasants, students or revolutionary intellectuals.

On the other hand, just two decades ago, John F. Kennedy, a more elegant representative of imperialism than Theodore Roosevelt, declared...

The great battlefield for defending and extending freedom today is the other half of the globe: Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East... It is a battle for the conquest of hearts and minds, much more than for the conquest of lives and lands.

The achievement of cultural colonisation is precisely this conquest of hearts and minds of the subjected peoples, and this means achieving simultaneously the greatest possible consolidation of imperialism's domination over those lives and lands.

Imperialism's strategy for cultural domination entails a vast arsenal of means and tactics. It is achieved seemingly quite independently of any economic strategy, but this is a false impression. The connection between the two is clear from the fact that any cultural manifestation requires the existence of a material infrastructure, just as much as the most prosaic of consumer goods. This is an inevitable norm which even the most refined products of artistic culture cannot escape, even those, like poetry, which by their aesthetic nature must conceal their links with industrial production. For in fact, poetry, to go beyond the world of the poet and his or her followers – beyond what Bernadetto Croce referred to as 'mute Milton' – has to set in motion type setters, printing presses, paper, ink and so on, not to mention technicians, craftspeople and skilled workers.

The study of these links between culture and industry – which remains one of the subtlest relationship between the superstructure and the base – has been developed by, amongst others, Theodore W. Adorno and Edgar Morin. Adorno has evolved from his studies the designation

'culture industry' whose praxis he explains 'deliberately applies the profit-motive to the autonomous products of the mind'. Morin, for his part, points out the industrial character of culture when he writes:

The press, radio and television are super-light industries. Light because of their means of production, ultra-light because of the goods they produce. Yet the organisation of this super-light industry follows the model of the most technically and economically concentrated industries.

Significantly, Adorno regards the cinema as 'the key sector of the cultural industry', amongst other reasons because its technique involves a highly developed division of labour. So we can note that whilst everywhere the industrial connection is omitted when talking of poetry, in the US, which possesses capitalism's biggest cultural industry, cinema is referred to 'The Movie Industry', a branch of 'Show Business'.

If we use the categories 'developed countries'/'developing countries', it is obvious that, for the latter, consumption of the cultural industry is for the most part the result of imports and cannot be otherwise because modern technology cannot be re-invented. Thus, where a developing country has its own cultural industry, this involves a transfer of technology, in other words, once again, the result of imports. The financial scale of the cultural industry of the US, the most developed imperialist country and the greatest exporter of cultural products, is enormous. According to E C Manet...

The information industry already takes third place in the US economy with a turnover greater than General Motors and Fords combined. *Fortune* magazine predicts that by 1985, it will have taken first place in terms of sales.

In capitalist societies, cinema was seen from its very birth as a means of obtaining profits, in other words, as a commodity. Since the moment of that war in which Spain was defeated by the young American imperialism, cinema has consistently been defined as a commodity, obeying, like any other object of consumption, the economic laws of capitalist societies. (We might mention in passing that it was then that the first 'Western' emerged.) That is why, as a vehicle for transmitting ideology, cinema could not escape the alienated character inherent in the classical commodity. On the contrary, for the most part the ideology transmitted by the cinema was, and still is, an alienated ideology produced within capitalism.

Larry Gross suggests that the symbolic function of most American television (and we might say the same of the cinema) is

to re-inforce the conviction that the US is a democracy, that it is based on a system of economic competition, and above all, that God exists, is white and pro-American.

We can see how the Vietnamese have described the transfer of alienated ideology (which some neo-sociologists euphemistically refer to as 'transculturation'):

The North American planes and ships did not only unload on Vietnam divisions of the American Expeditionary Force and war materials of mass destruction, but also anti-communist books and magazines, as well as pornographic and gangster films, whilst their radio and television slandered the Vietcong and their culture, which smells decidedly of colonialism and helps to cloud the minds of the young, preparing them for recruitment into the puppet army.

All this means that when imperialism exports information (culture) it is carrying out a two-pronged operation giving a double dividend: the return which culture represents in purely economic terms as one more commodity, and the return in purely ideological terms which is the most fruitful because it guarantees the security of all other exports including, above all, capital exports.

Incidentally, this transfer of ideology has also been referred to as 'the colonisation of taste'. It has been said that the main purpose for the consumption of cinema as a commodity is to satisfy the need for escape, which in this case should be understood as the result of inability to resolve the contradictions of social life. However, the aesthetic nature of cinema means that the images are inseparable from the ideas, just as language is in literature. Thus, even when it is satisfying the need for escape (or the demand, to use the economic term), the cinema never ceases to transmit ideas. In the cinema produced by the imperialist cultural industry, these ideas are alienated because they reflect the relics of 'class' perception of history and social reality.

This perception is based on two monumental fallacies. Firstly, that the interest of the ruling class coincides with those of the other social classes; secondly, that the capitalist system is not only the most perfect social system possible, but is also immanent and eternal.

The struggle against cultural colonisation is just a part of the struggle against subjection and alienation enforced by capitalist control. But in the process of liberation, it is always the chains which bind economic and political development that are broken first. The cultural bondage on the other hand is ruptured with the process of liberation but preserves many of its old links even after this liberation has been achieved. It shouldn't be surprising therefore that the struggle against cultural colonisation is more prolonged and continues far beyond the moment of victory. The disalienation of cinema is just one of its more complex and difficult episodes. In any case, the people of the world have the historic mission of reconquering their territories but hearts and minds. ■ archive.parmindervir.com

Discussion

QUESTION: What is the situation of cinema under the fascist regimes of Latin America?

ANSWER (Miguel Littin): As far as Chile is concerned, the distribution of American commercial film goes on as normal; there is very little European cinema and virtually none from other third world countries. Many of the independent film-makers went into exile when Allende fell, and a large and increasing number of video films are made by Chileans in exile and sent back for secret distribution, though it is difficult to assess how widely they are seen. Films are constantly being presented to the censors and rejected, and then re-presented and rejected again, time after time, and even if they are never passed, copies of them exist which are shown in school, churches, union, and so on.

QUESTION: How can a parallel system of distribution be created in Latin America or the United States? Has any progress been made towards this?

ANSWER (Haile Gerima): This is very difficult because distribution is by nature an industry at present. The way it is conducted is entirely uncongenial to a film-maker who is working for social change; anyone capable of beating the commercial distributors at their own game is not going to be making that sort of film. So you get alternative distribution companies being set up and folding almost at once. Something completely different is needed. National minorities need to organise, first amongst themselves, and then making links with other national minorities or progressive groups.

QUESTION: You used a term 'technical oppression' of various minorities by the majority.

ANSWER (Haile Gerima): I mean that, for the non-Anglo Saxon, just to walk out of the door or to switch on the television is to engage in a constant psychological battle. This doesn't have to rise to the level of physical violence, but there is a continual wearying assault by the images that are presented of what is to be desired and aimed at (always 'white' images unattainable by third

world people) and images of what black people can be permitted to be (musical, good at sport, sex-objects). For example, the jazz band in a romantic advert can be black; the loving couple will always be white. It's not a conspiracy by the white population, it is just the deadening weight of unthinking 'normal' expectation. A very strong, coherent opposition to this is needed, especially from film-makers, because they are so powerful where the creation of unthinking assumptions is concerned.

The independent film-makers need a base in the community to work from, work with and work for. For one thing the community can provide a 'landing strip' for the independent films that somehow, against all the odds, get made. Neighbourhood groups, schools, professional societies, youth groups, churches etc. can arrange film weeks of single showings and give these films the exposure they need and deserve. It is all very well securing showings at institutions or festivals in the west, even winning prizes, but the purpose of these films is really that they should be shown to the public, and the community will have to support and nurture the cinema it needs.

The second role of the community is to actually initiate films. If you are working with the people, they will tell you what is the most important issue for them at the moment; they will say what they need a film about. If you haven't the money to make it, they will somehow find it and raise it for you. Most of the black films that have been made have been co-operative efforts; certainly mine have.

Look at the whites when they start a film; they collect a group of people who all know each other and have worked together, they are all aiming at the same thing. Look at the *Birth of a Nation* gang; Dixon, Griffith and even President Wilson were classmates or colleagues. One becomes a writer, one a film-maker, one a politician. They move into power together.

Now we need co-operation also. The great self-confidence of the civil rights movement of the sixties is beginning to evaporate. Black film-makers have to contend with doing really degrading jobs between films to keep themselves; they have to face continual rejection by

grant juries composed mainly of whites. They desperately need the support of co-operative effort.

QUESTION: Is there not a danger to the independence of Indian film-makers, in that the only funding for 'non-commercial' films comes from the government body, the National Film Development Corporation?

ANSWER (N V K Murthy): Well, there is a problem here, because the film industry in India is entirely a speculative business proposition, and films are judged purely on whether they can make money. This industry has virtually captured the market, and anything produced with NFDC funding is not really able to compete in the market place. So you do get the situation where young film-makers produce a film with NFDC money, which is perhaps good, but doesn't cover its costs, and then the next year they are back again asking for another grant to do another film, not caring that the first one didn't reach any audience. So the NFDC has realised the importance of distribution outlets now. The way you make people independent is not by repeatedly funding their films but by putting them in touch with their audience, so that a recycling of funds can be set up, with the success of each film funding the next. I think it would be both impossible and undesirable for the government to be entirely responsible for funding quality cinema, and I don't think they have any such intention. The important thing is to increase the number of outlets available, so that these films can get their money back, and then funds will be forthcoming from a number of sources.

QUESTION: Do film festivals help to promote Third World Cinema?

ANSWER (Haile Gerima): The cultural exchange involved in showing our films in the west is totally exploitative at the moment. When good cinema emerges in the third world, we have sympathetic westerners offering to 'introduce' our culture to their home countries, assuming that our films are going to be difficult to understand, that they must be approached in a different way from the quality cinema of the west, that they are to be studied for their significance rather than appreciated as works of art. (In fact there should be no need to 'introduce' our cultures to Europe; there is more fourteenth century African art in the British Museum than in Africa, and when I was looking for a string of the sort of beads my grandmother wore, to use in a film, I found them not in my own country but in a museum in Berlin.) There is no excuse for treating our films as purely educational, showing them free of charge to audiences in the west. The success of *Blood of the Condor* has been of no use to Miguel. He cannot afford to make any more films, because well-meaning people in the

United States are still showing his work free of charge, so there is no money coming in to be ploughed back into more films. It is essential that people in the west who choose to take up third cinema are in fact fully accountable to the film-makers and do actually contribute to continuing the production and distribution of their films. It may be rather different for Cuban cinema because there is an institution there, but for the rest of us, who work individually, some organisation is needed to prevent those who want to use and show our films from exploiting us at the same time. Even the best-known and established film-makers of the third world still have to beg for funds for each film. There is never enough money re-cycled from one film to pay for the next.

The other point is that many people of the third world also still need educating. Put on any film you respect in Lagos next to a theatre showing of *Tarzan* and I will bet my bottom dollar all our people will go to *Tarzan*. This is the fundamental measurement. Some African film-makers produce work as deformed as anything that comes out of Hollywood. We are all equally colonised and we all have to work at liberating ourselves. Too often we have the sick diagnosing the sick, people advocating change when their own perspectives are hopelessly warped.

QUESTION: What structures or institutions are the independent film-makers of India setting up apart from the National Film Development Corporation?

ANSWER: There is no organisation as yet, only individual film-makers working in various areas. The speculative nature of Indian film-making is not likely to change soon; it will remain a risky commercial venture. Films made outside the mainstream are still relatively few, and the trend is recent, it hasn't become organised yet.

It is just as important to organise the audiences as the film-makers. The film societies are very important because they are the link between the film-maker and the film viewer, and it is through such means that we break cultural imperialism. Even in small rural centres we can show a week or two of quality films, some of them foreign, and people will come in large numbers to see them. Eventually it may dawn on everyone that even in the larger centres it would be better to have seasons of films from various countries, rather than this great competitive festival once every two years.

A film-maker should not be thinking as he is working that this is a film that should win at a festival, he should be thinking about how he is going to reach his audience, his people, with what he has to say.

Seminar on the Representation of Women in Third World Cinema

The panel was introduced and the discussion chaired by Behroze Gandhi
Member, British Board of Film Classification

I would just like to define the issues that we may try to cover. The whole subject of the representation of women is a very complex area which is receiving a lot of attention at the moment amongst the women's movements in general, not just in small circles that talk about film, and much of the debate centres around issues of violence and pornography. To look at the representation of women in third world films may seem narrower, but it raises a host of questions.

To start with, there is the distinction between black women as shown in films made by the white industry, and as shown by indigenous film-makers. Then it depends whether the film is Latin American, African, Asian, Indian or Chinese, because the issues will be culturally specific; and in the case of India there are considerable differences within one national cinema. Thirdly there is the question of visibility, because although two-thirds of the female population may be black, you only see them in a handful of movies – except the Indian popular movies which are shown so widely over the world – and when they do appear, it causes a lot of unease, because they are represented so often as sex objects or as alien creatures.

In discussing this subject, there is the danger that we may restrict ourselves to the question of positive and negative images, but we have to go beyond that. Positive images are not enough, as Hollywood demonstrated by the era of women's cinema that appeared during the seventies. We have got to look at how the images are constructed.

Black women are in a very difficult situation, doubly oppressed in being both black and women. They don't believe that if black men were to suddenly take over cinema the black women would be fairly represented. This seminar has a different aim from the previous sessions of this symposium. The members of the panel do not claim to be experts on third world women's cinema; we are merely black film-makers with the added perspective of being women.

Suleka Nanth

I don't want to give a formal paper, I just want to

raise a few points for discussion later. I can only speak of my experiences as a student film-maker, but I think the attitudes I encountered in school reflect the attitudes I shall find in the industry. I feel that more women should be involved in film-making as in all spheres of the media, because after all women do make up fifty per cent of the population, and film is supposed to reflect the society we live in. Since there are very few women in film-making, the films that are made are produced from a very biased standpoint. For example, if you look at the films made about Asian women on British television, they are usually made by white males, consulting black males. Women should be supported and encouraged to get involved in film and formal training should be made accessible to them.

However, once one does go in for formal training there are a lot of obstacles involved. In my class of twenty-four there were only four women and we were taught all the technical aspects of film-making, but I found that the women were always being pushed into the roles that were thought more acceptable, such as production and editing; jobs like camera operation or lighting, or even direction, the men felt were out of bounds for the women. They thought the women couldn't carry the camera equipment, lights, etc., which was completely untrue. There was a strong attitude within the school that women could not direct and many of the men there said openly that I couldn't direct because I was a woman. If they had said that I couldn't direct because of my own capabilities I would have found that more acceptable, but to put it down to fact that I was a woman I found very degrading and insulting.

These attitudes were common throughout the whole school and they reflect the attitudes of the industry as a whole, because these are the people that go out into the world and become film-makers of tomorrow. It was in fact an international school, with students from all over the world, including third world countries, so these attitudes are common throughout the world.

To return to the first point that was made about the representation of women in films, that we are shown as the victims of our own circumstances: I know this to be true in commercial cinema. We are looked on as objects, as play-fellows or bed-

Suleka Nanth has just completed training as a film-maker at the London Film School, and has made a short student film entitled Our Right To Choose, which deals with the question of arranged marriages. This has become a trendy media

subject often treated by non-Asians and by men, but Suleka brings to it the experience of being an Asian woman living in London.

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fellows with very little feeling of our own, merely as extensions of men and not as individuals in our own right. This is because it is the men and not the women who make the films, and the only way it will change is if women go behind the camera and put their own point of view forward. The media in Britain has been a closed shop as far as women, particularly black women, are concerned, and a lot of support will be needed to change that. ■

Maureen Blackwood is
a member of the Sankofa
Film Workshop.

Maureen Blackwood:

Like Selekha, I have recently come out of college. I was involved in learning video film techniques and most of the things we were doing were studio-based (that is to say, everything was done from the studio point of view, writing plays, putting plays on). I found that the roles the women got were production assistant, boom operator, and so on. The cameras were more or less completely controlled by men.

As the only black woman on the course I frequently had to question my position amongst all this, because on the one hand we were being told that we were there to learn to create new ways of seeing, but on the other I found it virtually impossible to sell my ideas and involved other people in my projects. You can't work alone in the college situation, you have to get five or six people working together, and I often found myself helping other people and doing no work of my own, because no one was really interested in the things I wanted to do.

The position of black women in third world films cannot be separated from the question of our position in society. We have to take account of the fact that this is an era of feminism, and this has had a great impact, but black women organise separately from the white women's movement and we should consider why, and what our needs are. We should pay particular attention to what is said in white feminist circles and how it affects us, whether it is adequate for our needs as black or third world women.

I will outline a few areas which I think are of importance, and I shall limit myself to the western context, namely England, because that is where I was born and brought up and where I work. In this country the black woman has been entirely absent from the media. There are many trades in Britain of which black and third world women form the backbone, but this doesn't matter in the media – we are just not there. Take *Angels*, for example; I think there were perhaps two black nurses in that series, whereas if you walk into any hospital you'll see the actual number of black women working in the nursing profession. Basically we have to say that we are made invisible by the media.

Various white feminist writings over the years have discussed at length the way in which

women's experiences and actions have been invisible historically, that is to say, anything we have done has not been worthy of note, and the range of feminist writing has tried to change that situation. Now as far as I'm concerned that is the right thing to do, to try to redress that kind of imbalance, but what black women found was that even though whole sets of criteria were being changed by feminist writings, it just didn't affect us at all, in terms of making the invisible visible. We found that men who were involved in film, whether white or black men, were portraying us in a derogatory or sexist manner – or we were absent from their films altogether.

When we looked at the women's movement and the debates that were going on in those circles, we were still absent in a way, because a lot of white women felt that we were blind victims of our various cultures and thought of us as 'those poor black women, who get circumcised, pushed into arranged marriages, forced to bear so many children, etc.' It was the missionary attitude that a lot of white women adopted to us, and a lot of the women's movement felt that we were to be enlightened by the whole process. I think this came about through the inability or refusal to understand the triple oppression that affects black and third world women, the inter-connection of class, race and gender. So our task as filmmakers is not just making the invisible visible, it is also a task of challenging the common categorisations and assumptions used by black and white men and by white women to some extent.

For example, we can't just talk about the sheer power that men have over us without remembering that racism puts black men in a somewhat different relation to the power structure. Among black and third world people, women often have to fight alongside the men on the issues of race and class, and I feel it is our commitment to the struggle on those two fronts that has often in the past caused us to brush aside the need to organise around the issue of gender. The majority of sisters, I know, are sure by now that this problem will not vanish from our midst 'when the revolution cometh', because sexism can only be fought if women actively decide to struggle against it.

In the area of film we have to consider how ideas about gender, femininity and womanhood are race-specific; our stereotypes are not the same as white women stereotypes. In the dominant cinema, there are certain well-defined roles for the black or third world woman, for example, the sexual temptress, the Mammy, the Aunt Jemima figure, the Amazon, the Black Matriarch and so on; those images are found in both the blatant and the subtle form. The need to know how images operate in the context of a wider society must not be underestimated. We have got to think about what it means, for instance, to prefer white-skinned women with straight hair and aquiline features to dark-skinned women. Why

is it that despite the positive moves that have been made within the black women's movement, some black women still bleach their skin?

We have to consider how black film-makers portray us. We all know that in the third world context equipment and training facilities are scarce enough, and it is more likely that the men will have access to them first. They will bear witness to the fact that some black film-makers cannot even be bothered to think about their sexist attitudes. We are portrayed literally in the same terms as in mainstream cinema, and the same myths and stereotypes are perpetuated. I would prefer not to see my image at all than to see it presented in that way. An image has to be consciously challenged. You can't just say 'Well, I am a woman, so I am going to make a film' You have to think about the images you are using.

As women we need to meet and to try to understand our similarities and respect our differences. During this festival I have heard talk about co-productions as one area where we as women could make an active intervention. We need to consider the development of certain images and themes, the ways in which stereotypes are rooted in society, and to ask ourselves questions about what kind of films we want to make, who we want to reach and what we are going to say when we have reached them. We need also to ask the men who are our fellow film-makers what they are going to do for us in terms of training and so on. Questions about audience, style and content have got to be tackled in the preliminary stages and not at the editing stage. We have to think about how we can get our work to other women.

Change is difficult, no one is denying that, but it isn't impossible; we have to work together, teach each other and share what limited resources we have. We also have to converse with our brothers who make films. We have to continue to make an active intervention within society and within cinema in an effort to control our own images and experiences. We as black or third world women must be the ones who define the areas of importance and I believe that all this points towards our need to control the actual production of our image. We have to bear witness ourselves, we have to be the ones who take up the hammer and do it for ourselves, we can't rely on anyone else to document our experience, because only we know what it is like to be black third world women. ■

Prema Karanth:

I am just here as a beginner with my first film; I don't have the authority to talk about film-making and the industry in general. Film-making presented itself to me as a challenge and I just took it. I learned film-making more or less by chance, as the art director on one production and then associate director on another. Then I just jumped into film-making from there. There

were a lot of difficulties in the making of this film, but I am happy to say that it is running well now.

It is not just women directors and producers that are rare. We intended in the beginning to make *Phaniyamma* with an all-woman team, that is, with all women technicians. We found almost all we needed, except a camera-woman. We just couldn't find one. There was no point in trying to make an all-woman movie when we couldn't find a camera-woman, so we left it. ■

Manona Wali:

What I would like to do, as a film-maker from the USA, is to outline two problem areas that I see: the making of films by women in the USA, and the representation of women in third world cinema, which is the general question or topic of this panel.

Now you have a situation in the USA today where I can only think of one feature film made by a black woman, and even in India you have at least four, so I think this is a critical situation that has to be addressed immediately. I think there are certain historic reasons for it, that I would like to go into briefly.

The first is that the feminist movement in America was largely a white middle-class movement that completely ignored the needs of third world women in the USA, so while the feminist movement concentrated on becoming executives in the top ranks of male-dominated industries, third world women were worried about making it just on the very fundamental level of survival, and these issues were not dealt with at all in the feminist movement. The movement had a positive impact in encouraging the women in it to get out there and express themselves, but there were many women who were not really a part of it.

The second reason is that in the USA you have an extreme polarisation of the sexes and this inhibits co-operation between the sexes. Moreover amongst black families there are many which have been physically split up by the welfare system and the family structure destroyed.

All these factors have contributed to the lack of involvement in cinema by women, and that is one area which I would like to discuss further.

The other is the representation of women in third world films, and I think the problems have been very well stated already. In third world cinema you have a male-dominated industry and the images of women are adapted from the mainstream view of women and put into the films without thought. If we are talking about the humanisation of cinema then it is something that we must demand of male film-makers in the third world that they should not take their psychological perceptions of women for granted but

Manona Wali is an Asian film-maker living in the USA, and her film *Grey Area* is showing at the Third Eye Festival.

Prema Karanth! is from India. She works outside the commercial film industry there, and her film *Phaniyamma* was financed by the National Film Development Corporation and made in Kannada, the regional language of Karnataka. She is one of only three women in India making feature films, although there are many making documentaries. Her film was released in September and is running to full houses in Bangalore, the state capital.

Stella Diego is originally from Cyprus but has lived and worked in Mexico, which is the subject of her short film *Eruption*, now showing here at the Third Eye Festival.

should examine themselves to see whether they have not been brainwashed. They should think about women and the images of them they put into their films, and question the nature of them. ■

Stella Diego:

I have just finished a film course in London where I made a short film which is relevant to this third world film festival because of its social and economic statements. I am no authority on the representation of women in third world cinema, but I would just like to give you my idea of what film-making is a commitment to fighting for a free society. I want to see cinema used to create political awareness and to struggle against a reactionary system which already controls both finance and films, and which feeds us lies about our society, our culture, our history and our race. The whole of our history has been filtered through the bourgeois lens and we have been compelled to live with terrible distortions. I don't think it is relevant to go through the history of where women have been unrepresented or misrepresented in cinema; what concerns me is how women can become responsible for their own representation in film-making and fight against the oppressive system. ■

Discussion

(The following are some of the contributions made by panellists and syposium participants during this session)

“The subject of this session is the representation of women in third world cinema. While we have concentrated, and rightly so, on imperialist cinema, capitalist cinema, we have to remember that in many third world countries we still have to fight against our own inherited values. Certainly in India, although we are industrialised, society is not yet free from feudalism. If you look on cinema as something that reflects your cultural way of thinking, then you have to take such elements into consideration, as they are still very much in evidence.

During the freedom struggle in India, we were fighting not just a political battle but also for a new way of life, and perhaps for that reason a large number of women became involved and even became leaders in the struggle. It was for the entire population, women included, anyone who came in as an equal soldier, and this concept of equality between the sexes did make a dent even at that time. This perhaps explains why we have got three or four women film-makers working at the moment. But we still have the problem of the representation of women in our cinema, because of the colonial and feudal hangover. You have to see this in proper perspective, to understand feudalism in the context of our own culture, instead of meeting it only with

emotional outbursts. We have to fight both feudalism and imperialism with reason as well as passion, or we cannot support our sisters.”

“After I had finished my film, having learned everything in film-making step by step, the stage of distribution I was very nervous, because I think that this is the really important thing in film-making. I was really frightened to invite the distributors of the industry in Karnataka to come and see my film; I was just waiting for somebody to get interested to come and see for themselves. Then I found that nothing happened, and that I must make an effort to get my film released, and I had to contact so many people. The distributors said it was ‘very nice’, but then they are businessmen and they are always afraid they will not get their money back. I was one hundred per cent sure about my film; it was based on a popular novel and I was sure it would run, but I was worried it would not get distributed.”

“The concept of women as film-makers is relatively new and I think one of the problems we may face is that we have no standard yet to judge our work by. On the one hand it is rather exciting because it is totally creative and there has been nothing like it before, but at the same time this means that it is really hard to judge ourselves or look at the work objectively.”

“It is not a relevant concept to me because I don't want to distinguish a specifically ‘women's’ third world cinema. The idea of a third world cinema that does not contain positive images of women is a contradictory notion to me. I feel it is much stronger not to polarise the sexes but to unify them.”

“If you want to make judgements on what images we want to use, what modes of representation, how we are going to get things across visually, what works for our particular experience—these are problems every film-maker faces and the only way you can sort those out is to get together as black women and discuss things.”

“I agree that it is very dangerous to start talking as though black women's films should be entirely for and by and about black women, cut off from the rest of the world. I want to bring up the point of technological resources and training. Facilities for third world women to train for anything, let alone film-making, are extremely limited. It seems to be the general feeling that what is available should go to the men, just as it always has with medicine and engineering, and I feel that if, in order to see films which portray women as we want to see them portrayed, we have to wait until women are making the films, then we are going to have to wait too long.”

“I work with a group of women, none with any training in film, in a co-operative in the West

Indies, and when we wanted to make a film of what we were doing, we were pushed into a kind of compromise. We had to make the film ourselves, but we had no expertise whatever, so it meant working with men who could use the language of film to communicate what we had to say. I know some people feel strongly about a feminist co-op working in this way, but I wonder if it is an acceptable compromise for those women of the third world who cannot wait for change, as we could not.

On the question of the representation of black women in commercial films or documentaries; if you are lucky the director of a documentary is more interested in showing women as they are, though as has been pointed out, even third world film-makers can be quite unaware that they are not helping the situation with their representations. In fact it can be very difficult to get access to the women you want to portray. I have seen several films about prostitutes at this festival, and it is easy enough to film them since their whole lifestyle is one of exhibition, but the majority of women in the third world are hidden away behind kitchen doors and in backyards. How can you give a fair representation of these women when you cannot reach them?

A friend of mine came up against this while doing some filming in rural Jamaica using virtually no dialogue because he didn't want subtitles and the Jamaican dialect is so hard to understand. When I saw the film, I asked him if he saw Jamaica as a womanless society, for there were none in his film. He replied that he simply could not get the women to take part in the enterprise, and I know why. The women do not want to be portrayed doing the sort of work that they in fact do, because the values of society tell us that cooking and washing, sweeping and cleaning are completely unskilled activities and therefore we are not interested in exposing ourselves on film doing these things."

"I greatly admire the things that have come out of women's co-operatives and I would like to say that in your situation, to have men working in co-operation with you seems to me an acceptable compromise. I think at times we confuse feminism with separatism, when the two need not be the same. If you could find a cameraman to shoot the material the way you wanted it then that is great for you. It would be good if you could also find someone who would co-direct in the way you want, but the problem is finding someone who has the same vision as you or is prepared to meet you halfway. A lot of women go into co-production in the hope that they will be able to communicate their experiences and at least give their brothers some insight into what they want on the screen, but when it comes to shooting, you find that your original ideas have gone out of the window and this guy is off on his own little journey. But the kind of co-production you are

talking about may be the best compromise available for third world women to overcome this problem of lack of training and resources."

"I think this whole question of technical expertise has been allowed to become too intimidating. I don't think when they started in Cuba they went to white men to ask them how to make films. They picked up the cameras and got on with it, and what we got was a very original vision. We still study those films today for that vision, and it is very important that women pick up the camera also. It is not really difficult and there is no mystery about it, and it is very important to offer that fresh vision. If you have never composed an image before you will get something entirely new, and you won't get the same thing as someone who has been trained to set up the camera in a certain way and look at the world in a certain way. I think it is very important to fight the whole notion of expertise."

"I think that to talk about the representation or images of women in third world film steers us away from the basic issue of how men relate to women in normal social practice. You cannot isolate film production from social relations as a whole. The way we film each other is determined by the way we relate to each other; that has to change before the change can be reflected in film. It is no good agreeing that we need to control our technological resources and our access to our audience, if that just means the audience getting more of the same stuff."

"I would like to say that in Chile our sisters have been working from the very beginning in films, as scriptwriters, producers and directors. They have shared their experience and what they have learned very openly. How do we see the role of the male and the female film-maker? Where is the point of contrast?"

"It is very good that there are a number of women in film-making in Chile, but it does not alter the fact that overall they are still very much in the minority and have to struggle to get anything made. I'm not saying that men and women can't work together, or that men can't produce films which feature predominantly women. But we want to be able to take an active part ourselves, and to organise both with men and amongst ourselves to deal with the issues we choose in the way we choose."

"I think it might be more enlightening to concentrate not on the opposition of black and white or man and woman, but on that of oppressed and oppressor. You will find people of both sexes and both colours on either side of that division. Take the film by Prema Karanth, for example. A woman is the main character in that film, and it

could only have been made by a woman. But the film is not really about a woman, it is about how cultural tradition can be an obstacle to the well-being of the people. The woman is the means by which we observe this phenomenon, she is the victim of the process, and she is all the more suitable as a victim precisely because women are the most oppressed group in the social set-up."

"If you look at the history of the motion picture, it has been predominantly a weapon of men, and they have laid down the aesthetics of the form. The film world is in bad shape, it is fundamentally lop-sided, and that has a lot to do with the fact that it is male-dominated. I am not saying that all women have an inherently progressive vision, but I do think that if women had played a significant role in the cultural aspects of society, particularly cinema, we would be looking at a different situation now, with different sensibilities and temperaments coming out of motion pictures. I have noticed it in the women students I have had. Some have already accepted the male view-point and produce work no different from that of a man; others are questioning and seeking, experimenting with a unique sensibility, introducing a new sort of aesthetics to our university.

Even in the history of the African American film industry you can see how the male domination of the past twenty years has unbalanced and deformed the initial vision of the original pioneers. If you have a deformed representation of a woman in your film, then I believe the representation of the man will be deformed too. You cannot ride into a progressive world by oppressing somebody; that is a capitalist point of view. It is true that I have a great and justifiable quarrel with western society, but I have to channel creatively this anger against the society that has kept me silent so long. The tendency to create a 'bad guy/good guy' opposition, after the pattern of western cinema, is the most dangerous of all trends in the Afro-American cinema. We need to break down this absolute opposition of positive and negative which is so typical of Hollywood. We shouldn't need to bring white characters onto our screens in order to represent villains, for example."

"Another point worth remembering is that if a film is made by a woman it does not guarantee a particular vision. A way of looking at things is not inherent in the sexual status but is a result of a certain amount of analysis and study as well. Remember that even in this male-designed world, most men are in fact brought up by women. Adam was the only man who gave birth to a woman; since then, it is the women who have given birth to the men! The trouble is, they have to do so in a society whose institutions are defined by men."

"The really decisive thing is that the kind of film we make is determined by our vision of

humanity, and a vision that includes oppression of anyone, male or female, black or white, cannot be a progressive vision. If we want to find the way forward, we shall have to deal constructively with those with whom we have differences. No man or woman wants to be put down. You don't build a world by putting me down, nor can I build a world by putting you down. We cannot afford to fragment the struggle. The point is that western society can afford to fragment the struggle, but we need to confine and concentrate it, creating links with any and every progressive group."

"There is a real problem that we may get obsessed with the idea of polarisation. There are differences and we have to try and thrash them out, but we must expect there to be differences. I hope that we shall be able to find a point midway where we can work together because we need to work together. We do need each other, because of our common race and past history. But unfortunately what often happens is that women who want to work in films become very bitter because they can't get access to the facilities they need or take part in certain events. For example, in a festival like this, it is the established film-makers, who are all men, who are in the position of controlling and setting up such things. If the men refuse to listen to us, we come to a situation where we don't want to bang our heads against a brick wall any more and say, 'Please listen to me', we say to ourselves, 'Well, I'm going to organise with my sisters and put my images on the screen that way'. I don't see this question as one of polarisation. It's a question of women having to organise autonomously, like any other oppressed group."

"Whenever the issue of feminism is discussed there always seems to be a lot of tension. I once participated in a discussion on the place of women in African art and there was a great deal of controversy, particularly when one participant attempted an analysis of the position of African women from the western feminist viewpoint. The more I think about it, the more I feel that feminism is an economic issue. Perhaps because the economic realities of Africa are so different from those of the west, the rise of feminism has followed a different pattern and the motives are quite different."

"The questions that have aroused much of the dissension here today have been explored by black women writers in the USA, and I would like to mention an essay by June Jordan which discussed Zora Neal Hurston, the black woman novelist. When Zora Hurston's book appeared in 1937, she was attacked, by Richard Wright I think, because she was not lining up a troop in the struggle as he perceived it. It has taken many years of black women's writing to show up the fact that in the tradition of black writing it is

assumed that a decent book will be militant in the way in which black men have defined militancy, and will deal with politics and economics along lines laid down by men. When a woman steps out to give her own political reality, perhaps shown from a family point of view, the point of view of human relationships and interactions, it is seen as being divisive or ducking the issues. In fact such a book is profoundly political, because the personal is political."

"I would like to raise some points about representation of women in third world cinema using two examples, because I would like to have some idea what people mean when they talk about the representation of women in third world films, and the concept of the positive image. I am discussing this as somebody who deals in images. Most people have seen *Ceddo*, which deals with colonialism in Africa, particularly the intrusion of Islam into traditional societies. The hero is a princess who ultimately destroys the colonising force and retains her power over the people.

Now my problem with *Ceddo* is, what next? White people are saying that *Ceddo* is a positive representation of this woman. But Jose is right when he says that Prema Karanth's film deals with the way in which traditions inhibit change and progress, inhibit a more humanitarian and liberated society. I go to Africa and see women in that same tradition in situations which I don't see as progressive or contributing to the liberation of third world peoples or third world cinema. Is the hero in *Ceddo* a hero simply because she succeeds in shooting a coloniser and retaining a feudal system? Or do we have to look for something else, something more fundamental about how we see the changes in society and how we see people? Something which can equally well apply to Prema Karanth's character and the way she evolved in the film, and what she portrayed.

As I travel around, I see people in the third world dealing with certain fundamental issues, and when I come back here, I find third world people here wallowing in the privileges of European society and talking all kinds of irrelevancies. For instance, in our position here as black people in the community, we argue for more black people on television. I don't think the issue is more black people on television; we are talking about a certain quality. When we talk about third world cinema, we are talking about a certain quality of cinema, a certain development, certain ideals, certain essences which define our cinema as third world cinema. This is why I put this quest-

ion - not to those who criticise film but to those who make film - the question of *Ceddo* and *Phaniyamma*."

"We have already discussed the fact that film is a reflection of social reality, and we've talked about strengthening or changing the status quo. Plainly the portrayal of women in film cannot be different from their position in society, and that position is not good, we have to admit it. The woman has not been given her rightful place in most third world societies, and it is good that women are coming forward to make their own films now.

I have a friend who has just made a film on a women's problem, a middle class women's problem, and it is a very good film, which I wish we could have gone to the festival but he confessed to me that he would rather a woman had made it, because she would have seen certain nuances of the women's feelings better than any man could do; she would have felt it in her guts, because she would have known the same psychological oppression."

"It is right that many more women should come into film-making, but in our efforts to correct the imbalance of the past, let us not fall a prey to divisionism, otherwise we shall weaken our own cause. To polarise on sexual lines would call the whole idea of a 'third world cinema' festival in question, because the problems of independent film-makers the world over are the same, justice versus injustice, and I see the women's struggle as part of that."

"All this is very fascinating because it reminds me of the sixties when we would be talking to white folk about racism and they would say, 'Yes, well, everyone has problems', and we would say, 'Yes, but ours are specific'. I see the same thing happening now, when the men really cannot understand what the women are saying, why we are making all this noise when we are all part of the same struggle. But you know yourselves that there are struggles within struggles, and we have to fight our own struggle according to our own perceptions, and as long as you give us this sort of feedback, you will continue to hear explanations that sound very angry and divisive to you. Because we are not getting the feeling coming through that we need; we shouldn't have to explain, and when we get to the point where we don't have to explain, then we can go on to the next level..."

Concluding Session

The following are the comments/statements that were made in the final discussion session before the declaration was formulated.

We now need concrete proposals; tangible results of our being here for this symposium. The main ideas so far seem to be the setting up of distribution channels and working on co-productions.

Because we come from diverse situations, it takes a conference such as this for us to explain to each other our needs and problems, which we must do before we can work together or help each other. Now we can move on the practical front.

The practical difficulties are enormous. In the context of the world distribution market, can 'third world film', as everyone is calling it, succeed? If an Indian or American play can be put on in Ghana, and there can be something in the production that makes it definitely Ghanaian, will it work the other way round? Can a film that is obviously identifiable as 'third world' be put on the American or European market? What of the language problem? The current conversation, even, would be impossible in my native Ghanaian. Even if the access was there, could suitable third world films be made?

We have to recognise here the very great difference between African cinema up to the present time, which has been mainly educative and cultural, and the world cinema Africans now hope to compete with, which offers mainly commercial entertainment. Questions of language, the relative merits of dubbing and subtitles, have to be carefully considered.

Haile Gerima: We cannot expect that the system will arm us for the struggle to destroy it; independent cinema can expect no favours from commercial cinema or the financial establishment. Third world cinema is a political declaration. My brothers and sisters are not everyone who is black, but everyone who declares against the injustice that oppresses us. We cannot beat Hollywood at its own game; better to save our money. Film-making is only worth it if we have vision for change. If you have unlimited resources it is easy to learn how to make Hollywood films; we could all crash cars and burn

buildings and show everyone having sex regardless of the plot, but there is more purpose to life than this, and to film-making. Film-making should have very important consequences; in a few cases film-makers have been killed as a result of their work, and that should not surprise us.

Third world film must not be an imitation of world cinema. The Argentinian industry had to start again from scratch in the sixties because before that they had concentrated on producing a photocopy of Hollywood. They postponed their own creativity. Many of us here have the professional skills to do the same, to have this false success, and we have a unique point of view as a result, because we are familiar with the machinery of distortion. Africans have a lot to offer and should not postpone their creative work.

What about the question of writers in cinema?

Things Fall Apart failed because it was produced for profit and not to put writer's message across. It is very difficult to express yourself in someone else's language, especially if humour or idiom play a large part in your writing. *Things Fall Apart* is now used in English as a study text and if the film had not been made in a 'Hollywood looks at Africa' sort of way it might have been a success. The writer could have been given at least a consultative position, so that he could explain what he had actually said in Ibo, which was lost in the translation into English, and the audience might have been delighted to discover something new. It is most important that the adaptation of our writing for the cinema is handled by black or third world people.

Miguel Littin: The relationship of writing and film-making has been different in Latin America. In Chile, for example, novels were just imitations of the form of the French novel and had virtually nothing to say to the people. The film-makers had to go directly to the people, and then they found a rich fund of art and artistic expression which was never used in literature. Contrary to the usual picture of a paternalistic landlord and acquiescent peasants, they found

that popular culture enshrined the capacity for rebellion, and in the popular memory a very different history was being told from the one in the official history books. In time, the new literature of Latin America emerged and the models of cultural domination were broken. The new writing is truly popular and not imposed from above. Cinema has to learn now to achieve the same relevance to reality combined with aesthetic expression. Political cinema, the cinema of underground struggle, is not the only thing we need, we have to create art and entertainment as well, but in keeping with the popular experience.

N V K Murthy: To revert briefly to the question of distribution: it is very dangerous for third world cinema to try to enter the rat race for theatre time, because it then becomes easy for the commercial film industry to throw us a few crumbs to entice away our most imaginative film-makers. This is the surest way of corrupting third world cinema. If a film is produced in a third world country, that doesn't necessarily make it 'third world cinema', as witness the 700 Indian films made every year, most of which are trash. This is where we come back to the question of writers again, because in Hindi films for example we have had no intelligent imaginative scriptwriting for years, just the same old hash of boy meets girl, the chase sequence and so on. It is a box office formula, not an art form.

Fortunately we are now getting a new generation of writers in the cinema, particularly in Kerala, Bengal and Karnataka, who are writers of novels or plays or short stories, and have already learned to capture the cultural idiom of their region in their writing. You saw an example of this yesterday, in the student film *Palib Pahi*, which uses a folk drama form of the Gubad area that involves a lot of ad-libbing and audience participation. The student film-maker is steeped in the cultural forms of that area so he had been able to bring this to the screen, and in doing so he has solved the problem Miguel Littin mentioned, that of providing entertainment as well as increasing awareness in the audience.

Now this sort of thing is not just a film produced in a third world country, it is cinema with a certain connotation, cinema which reflects the ethos of the third world peoples, people who are demanding justice for themselves and all humanity. Third world cinema ought to be universal cinema, because it upholds the rights of people everywhere.

This is why it is useless for us to waste our time trying to get theatre time from the existing distribution system. As Haile Gerima put it, why should they provide us with the tools to destroy them? If you have clearly recognised that this is what third world cinema is trying to do, to destroy the existing motion picture industry and the

unjust social structure that supports it, then don't ask them for help. It is completely futile insisting that a theatre or distributor should show your films instead of MPEAA films. We have to provide alternative means of distribution and exhibition, and fortunately our climate is such that we can show films out of doors during nine months of the year. When the people know you, and know you are there, and have recognised your integrity, it is they who will help you not the theatre owners, who would sell their souls to the MPEAA.

We need links between third world countries so that we can co-operate with each other in our common aims. If I want a film from Zimbabwe, I don't want a film from Zimbabwe made by Hollywood, I want a film that will reflect the culture of the Zimbabwean people, how they live, what their aspirations are, what is going on there. We should be concentrating on setting up such links and not wasting our time begging for scraps from the existing structure.

Is it necessarily the ideology concerned that makes a film 'Hollywood'? It is not a question of whether any deliberate mystification takes place? The audience may intend to judge a film rationally, but the very medium of film is seductive, and the audience may not have any previous knowledge of the issues to use as a reference. The early films of Edison and Porter which we know to have had such enormous effect, even influencing what went into contemporary history books, were classified in fact as entertainment. Entertainment influences very subtly and deeply indeed because the audience is relaxed and off their guard. Particularly in a conventional theatre where the lights are dim and you sit absolutely still, is a psychological fact that you become much more passive and receptive.

Now, we can make films as persuasive and seductive as any. The early cinema of the Soviet Union, the films of communist Cuba, the short-lived cinema of free Chile, these are all carefully studied and highly regarded even by right wing teachers. We have a lot to offer but we must not make the mistake of dominating with our culture, as we have been dominated with others. Any information that leaves me choicelss is oppressive information, even if it is technically true. As long as a film makes me think, as long as it leaves my brain gymnastic with the information, I am safe. Who speaks for the people? We don't know; it has to be your truth and my truth out on the table and let people draw their own conclusions. You could tell the truth as you see it in most progressive terms, but unless your film promotes dialogue between the audience and the cinema, if the reaction of the audience is entirely passive, then it is still an oppressive film.

There are great dangers in clinging too closely to one ideology in film-making. For example, we have the situation in India where the trade union

movement is divided along religious lines. In the western part of Bombay there is even one very militant working-class group which is subsidised by the capitalists, because they expect to benefit from its divisive and destructive effect. During the centenary celebrations, I was asked to make a film and I took this chance to educate the workers about the effect of these divisions. I offered to make four films about the current situation in four areas of society which were close to Gandhi's heart, and one of these was national integration. How I did this was to go to the people and get them to talk about their lives and concerns, thus bringing out the fact that economic injustice and exploitation lay at the root of these divisions.

When India became free, everyone interpreted that 'freedom' in his own terms. The bonded labourer expected personal freedom, the landless labourer hoped for free access to land, the industrialist thought of freedom to exploit the market in the place of the departing colonials. Our film said, 'Look, this is separatism, this is how it has grown and what it is doing, this is how we are cutting our own throats. Don't fritter away our chances and weaken our movement, or we will go back to square one instead of forward.' And this applies to cinema, as part of that movement.

Jose Massip: Talking about teaching and learning, we in Cuba had to learn how to make films and what to put in them at the same time. The technical side we picked up as we went along. We had seen a certain amount of left-wing cinema from Soviet Russia in the intellectual film societies, and we began by making a film about the impoverished slum-dwelling charcoal burners of southern Cuba. It didn't occur to us that we were in effect the pioneers of independent cinema in Latin America. Of course the films were branded subversive – it is always subversive to show the existence of poverty – but by the time of the revolution, we had some little technical training and could therefore begin film-making rather more easily. As to what we put in our films, the people themselves provided us with our material and we learnt from them and spoke for them and were part of them. We were able to express the culture and rewrite the history and our documentaries have been our school of film-making. We have not done so well yet in our feature films, but I think we are improving all the time.

But what about making a film of another country? My own country I know, but how can

you become part of another culture sufficiently to represent it truly on film? When I was sent to cover the war in Portuguese Guinea, as it then was, I found it was of the greatest benefit that I had done military training, as we all have to do in Cuba, and so I could march with the liberation army for 50 kilometres carrying a rifle and all my equipment. In that situation it was a physical skill that helped me to be part of the people I was filming. In another film in Africa, I used poetry as a commentary. I learned a lot of the poems by heart and that helped me greatly in identifying with the country and its people.

Haile Gerima: The majority of worthwhile films are produced by cinema 'in exile', rather than the sort of state-protected cinema that flourishes in Cuba or Mozambique. There are hundreds of struggling film-makers, producing films in very difficult conditions, and the most useful thing we can do for them is to provide a 'landing-strip' for the films they have launched. Wherever there is a group that is organised – church, community centre or women's group – film societies can be created which will give these films the initial audience they need in order to create awareness of their relevance and thus secure a larger exposure for themselves. There is no harm in using theatres if you can, but it is fruitless wasting your efforts in trying for theatre time if it is going to be denied you.

One important point is that films should never be shown free of charge; this only diminishes the audience's opinion of the film. The films have got to pay their own way or they lose their value. An advantage of creating your own exhibition situation is that you can use films which are not in themselves constructive or progressive. By educating the audience somewhat beforehand, you can provoke consideration of what the film is saying, so that the audience analyse and criticise rather than accepting blindly. It is necessary to promote consideration of a variety of attitudes and opinions, otherwise we can fall into the same one-sided bigotry that we are fighting in others. But you have to get out and actually do something – like film-making itself, this is a matter not just of ideas and principles, but of physical hard work.

Chair: One of the things which we certainly want to see coming out of this conference is a framework for sharing information and contacts which could be of use to independent film-makers and promoters in all countries. ■

Appendices

Appendix 1

SYMPOSIUM DECLARATION

Introduction

1. In defining the term 'Third World' we have chosen not to deal with it as a geographical indicator but as a political concept, embracing historical and cultural relations which make the term much broader in scope and meaning. Thus the term 'Third World' defines the nation state as well as metropolitan based communities forged out of the relationship. While the content of the films, issues raised, format adopted, etc., may differ in these countries and communities, their historical experience under imperialism, the legacies of underdevelopment and cultural domination, their historic and current struggles to free themselves of domination are the common denominators which underpin the definitional use of the term in our thinking.
2. The audio-visual products by way of film television film, video, slide shows and other audio visual forms of communication shall be referred to in this document as 'film' for the sake of brevity.

Declaration

3. We Third World people who have participated in the Third Eye Symposium, recognise the difficulties we face in the production, distribution and exhibition of film. We recognise that these difficulties arise out of issues of an economic, technical, social and political nature.

We therefore call for the formation of a provisional executive secretariat based for the moment in London, in order to call for the formation of the *Third World Film makers Association*.

We also call for the formation of representative sections all over the Third World, including London.

4. The organisation will be called The Third World Film makers Association'.

5. The primary purpose of the Association will be to promote the development and dissemination of film which reflects the aspirations of the mass of people in the Third World and advances the scope for racial, sexual, political, economic, linguistic, cultural and religious liberation from oppression and domination.
6. The objectives of the Third World Film makers Association are as follows:-
 7. (a) To explore, demand, pressurise and lobby the funding bodies who could make available resources for the production, distribution and exhibition of Third World film.
 - (b) To establish an international network of financiers, producers, distributors and exhibitors of Third World film.
 - (c) To establish a centre with library resources and facilities for cataloguing, researching, analysing and criticising, the issues and concerns of Third World film and film-making.
 - (d) To develop understanding of Third World film culture in respect of theory, representation of images, and perspectives and techniques of production and dissemination of Third World film.
 - (e) To actively encourage Third World women to take control of the processes of production, distribution and exhibition of film.
 - (f) To recognise the emergence of a cinema concerned with Third World feminist perspectives.
 - (g) To demand that all Third World Film makers should critically assess the representation of women in the films they produce.
 - (h) To create a subscribing membership to the organisation.
 - (i) To produce a newsletter which will reflect the activities and the objectives of the Association.

- (j) To promote Third World films by distribution and exhibition and to ensure proper payment to the film makers from such activities.
- (k) To create conditions for the support of emergin Third World Film makers by way of funds, expertise and advice.
- (l) To develop the means and skills of publicity and media coverage of Third World film.
- (m) To build and expand audience involvement and interest and to advance audience understanding and response to Third World film.
- (n) To make contact with support groups that advance the objectives of the Association.
- (o) To explore and develop contacts for co-production opportunities for film.
- (p) To take up active opposition to state censorship, and to publicise issues of oppression and censorship of Third World film and film makers in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Association.
- (q) To set out the parameters for excluding films which go against the aims and objectives of the Association.
- (r) To organise seminars and international meetings periodically on the issues and concerns of Third World film and film making and their distribution and exhibition.
- (s) To enable representatives to go to other Third World Film events, and to other cultural conferences for the purpose of promoting the interests of Third World film.
- (t) To raise resources and facilities for a regular festival of Third World film.

Appendix 2

SYMPOSIUM RATIONALE

1 In defining the term 'Third World' we have chosen not to deal with it as a geographical indicator but as a political concept, embracing historical and cultural relations which make the term much broader in scope and meaning. Thus the term 'Third World' defines the nation state as well as metropolitan based communities forged out of the relationship. While the content of the films, issues raised, format adopted, etc., may differ in these countries and communities, their historical experience under imperialism, the legacies of underdevelopment and cultural domination, their historic and current struggles to free themselves of domination are the common denominators which underpin the definitional use of the term in our thinking.

2 It is this relationship of developing countries and the metropolitan centres resulting in the primitive accumulation of capital that influenced not only the economic relations but the traditional and structural props to this political order. This lopsided economic and political relationship meant that 'foreign' cultures were co-opted and integrated to serve specific functions within a dominant imperial ideology and cultural discourse.

This discourse is important for Third World people struggling to redress the balance for at the core of this discourse was the denial of any artistic

virtues of popular creativity among the colonised; in fact, an ascendancy of an Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. The artist in such a situation had to resist the totality of the historical impasse which was inextricably bound up with political disenfranchisement, economic exclusion and cultural expropriation. Thus the imperial culture neutralised the creative impulses of the colonised, redefining priorities, denying elements which generate contradictory postures to itself and legitimising features reflecting the imperial ethos. In concrete terms culture assumed reformist postures as exoticism became the concubine of creativity while achievement was assessed on the extent to which the artist appropriated the imperial ethos and myths.

A growing body of Third World artists are confronting this situation and thus their creative processes have incorporated an examination of this history of cultural reproduction as well as a critical reappraisal of their history and culture with the ultimate aim of dismantling and undermining the dominant position of the ideological ivory tower of colonialism and new-colonialism.

Cinema is one of the crucial mediums which are being utilised to transcend these cultural and political limitations and the dialogue between practitioners, analysts, critics and viewers must continue for the basis of this new creativity is the similarities of working for liberation by

differences in time, distance and local conditions.

3 The Festival of Third World Cinema aims to highlight the wide range of films being produced in this tradition. However it is not enough to just show these films to the people but to engage the film makers and their audience in a dialogue that will lead to a greater development of this movement. Thus the central aspect of this film festival is the five day symposium to be held in the presence of film makers, film students, critics, buyers and distributors and others. The single most important objects of the symposium will be to move towards a critical understanding of Third World Cinema.

4 Symposium papers will address common issues in their specific geographical contexts.

Thus basic issues such as the 'structure of film industry'; the 'politics of cinema', representation of women and the practical issues of production, finance and distribution will be discussed by a range of film makers.

We believe what needs to emerge from these discussions is a way forward together for Third World Film makers where through a structure way they are able to provide moral, financial, political and critical support for each other. Until such unity is achieved, Third World film and film makers will continue to be exploited and selectively exposed as chosen by the white (makers). Third World Film makers must unite and form an organisation which will serve their interest throughout the year and not just at festivals. We believe London provides an ideal base from which this could take place.

Appendix 3

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

31 October-4 November 1983

■ Monday 31 October

Welcome

Keynote speech by Haile Gerima

STRUCTURE OF THE FILM INDUSTRY

Chair: Shyam Benegal

INDIA - K. V. K. Murthy (*Head of Poona Film Institute - retired*)

AFRICA - Gaston Kabore (*Burkina Faso*)

LATIN AMERICA - Miguel Littin (*Chile*)

U.S.A. - Haile Gerima

BRITAIN - Colin Prescod and Henry Martin

Open Discussion

Summary from The Chair

END

■ Tuesday 1 November

THE POLITICS OF CINEMA

Chair: Clyde Taylor

Introduction

INDIA - POPULAR & ART CINEMA -
Shyam Benegal

AFRICA - THE DISPLACEMENT OF AFRICAN CINEMA BY FOREIGN FILMS
- Segun Oyekunle (*Nigeria*)

LATIN AMERICA - CINEMA OF COMBAT AND POPULAR CINEMA

USA - HOW BLACK CINEMA HOLDS UP AGAINST HOLLYWOOD - Bill Gunn

Open Discussion

Summary from The Chair

END

**THE INFORMATION USES OF
DOCUMENTARY FILMS IN THE
THIRD WORLD**

Chair: Bill Gunn

Introduction

Jose Massip (Cuba)

Panel Discussion: Jose Massip
Shyam Benegal
Miguel Littin
Gaston Kabore

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN
BLACK AND THIRD WORLD
CINEMA**

Chair: Behroze Ghandi

Introduction

Panel Discussion: Monona Wali
Behroze Schroff
Claudine Booth
Prema Karanth
Suleka Nath
Stella Diego
Martina Attille

Open Discussion

Summary

END

**CO-OPERATION IN PRODUCTION,
FINANCE AND DISTRIBUTION IN
THE CONTEXT OF A WORLD
MARKET**

Chair: Lionel Ngakane

Introduction

Identification of Issues and Problems:

Contributions from: Kwaw Ansah
Martina Attille and
John Akomfrah (Video)
Ferid Boughedir
Haile Gerima
Shyam Benegal
Behroze Ghandi
Monona Wali
Horace Ove

**Open Discussion to identify solutions to
problems raised.**

Summary

END

■ Friday 4 November

**PROSPECTS FOR BLACK AND
THIRD WORLD CINEMA**

Chair: Haile Gerima

Introduction

Open Discussion

Discussion

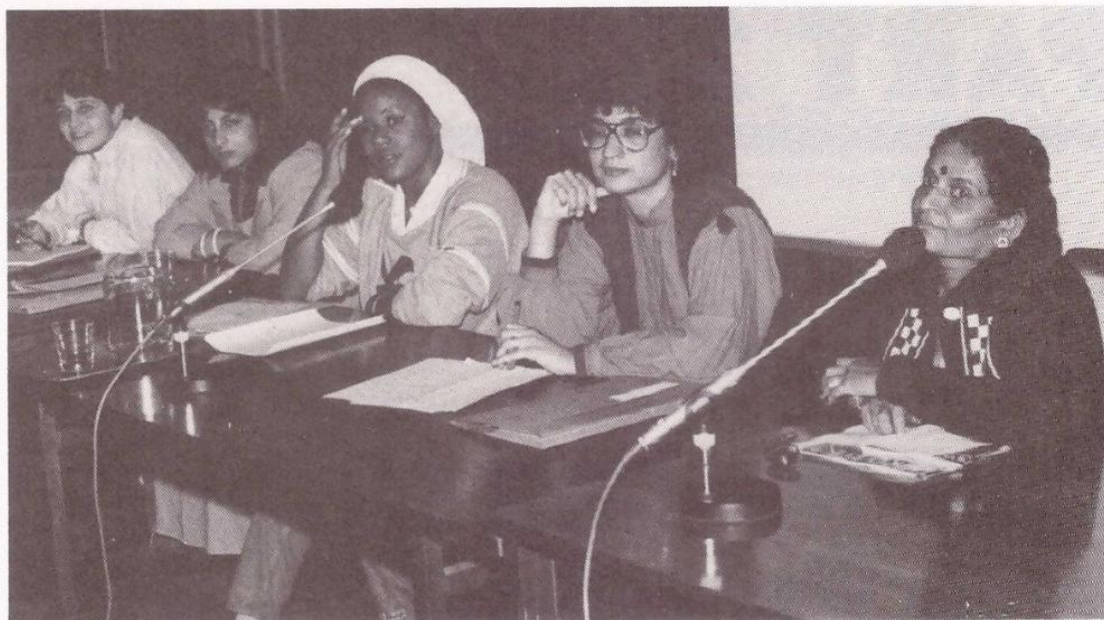
Formation of Symposium Declaration

PART 2

BLACK FILM SECTOR: Which Way Forward

A REPORT

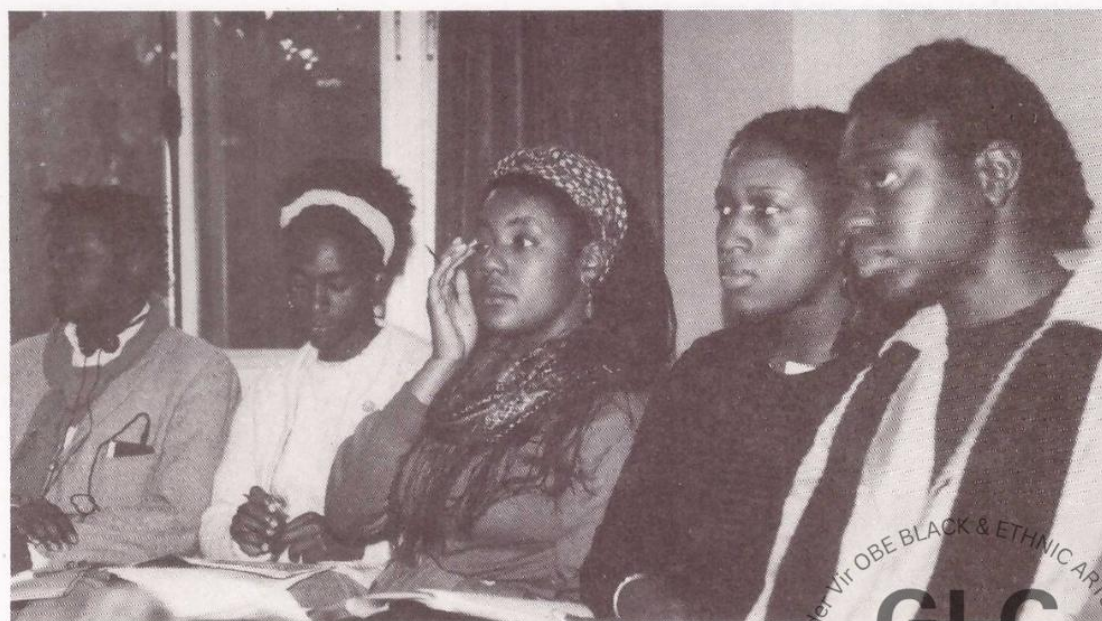
May 18th 1985



Representation of Women in Third World Cinema (left to right): Stella Diego (UK), Suleka Nanth (UK), Maureen Blackwood (UK), Behrose Gandhi (UK) and Prema Karanth (India).



H.O. Nazareth (UK) and Parminder Vir (Festival Organiser).



(Left to right): Issac Julien, Martina Attaile, Maureen Blackwood, Karen Alexander.

Introduction

The 'Black and Third World' and 'Third Eye' film festivals organised annually since 1982 have provided for the first time a centre for exhibition and exposition of Black and 3rd World film in Britain. These festivals, which also became gatherings of Black and 3rd World film makers, were the starting point of critical discussions on the nature and role of Black film in Britain – in the cinema, and in relation to the struggle of our communities. The advent of Channel Four television, and the establishment of several Black film production companies and Black film/video co-operative workshops, through the early 1980s (particularly since 1981) has further stimulated these discussions. And so, when, on 18 May 1985, at the NFT, more than 100 independent Black film-makers met, including representatives from all the major, London based production companies and workshops (bar the very new Bandung) – the major agenda item for discussion was the development of a new strategy for a way forward. This report presents the main lines of argument opened up at that conference.

Of course a viable strategy will only emerge once we acknowledge the community of interests that unite us, over and above the obvious divisions and variations and different priorities which exists within what has become a very dynamic Black film and video sector. It is as well to note that this 'community' is simultaneously a powerful resource and a constraint – as was demonstrated by the different contributions to the conference discussion. All of which is to say that in addition to concern about the product and prod-

uction, there is concern about the context of production, which poses the question – production for what? This involves consideration not merely of where we're coming from but also of where we want to go!

The conference found that it could address itself to some issues more readily than to others, and it focussed in the main on the immediate tasks of securing and improving emerging 'independent' Black film and video production structures. The central subjects of discussions as reflected in the report, were therefore: (a) training; (b) finance; (c) funding; (d) distribution and promotion; (e) exhibition; (f) developing film critique; and (g) educating and servicing audiences. And with regard to improving and developing structures related to all these areas, the contributions to the second half of the conference, by Claudine Boothe and Parminder Vir are particularly noteworthy for the challenges they presented. Claudine Boothe because she presented 'cable' as a field for opportunities which most of us have hardly considered. And Parminder Vir because she spoke to concrete and practicable organisation for a way forward.

This report constitutes then the most complete and significant statement to date of the experience and direction of the relatively young Black film video sector in Britain.

Colin Prescod
Chair for the Conference
1985

Presentations by Workshops and Production Companies

BLACK AUDIO FILM COLLECTIVE (Reece Auguste)

'Given that this conference is about the black film sector, which way forward, Black Audio Film Collective is going to address that particular issue.

This paper will be concerned with the possibilities of black independence. The language of possibilities is necessary, because what we mean when we invoke the term "black film sector" is a film making practice characterised by different points of entry, different desires, different strategies, and intervention in film making. But a language of possibilities is fixed by a context and it is this question of context that we wish to explore today. Black Audio Film Collective believes that the grant aided sector now exists in a critical conjuncture. It is a location which is governed and structured by a number of considerations: (a) political; (b) cultural; and (c) financial.

These are the sets of considerations which constitute the present structural crisis, of which the dominant of these is financial. Black Audio Film Collective, like other workshops, is still developing. Our presence is part of the result of the 1981 uprising, but our development cannot be simply understood in mechanical or reductionist terms. The relation between black film making and the riots is both of determination and convergence, not of reductionists of mechanical criteria. Black film making existed before the riots, but it took different forms, and here lies a paradox which confronts workshops. In 1981 we witnessed the riots which in turn created a space for our intervention in the media, but curiously enough the further entrenchment of Thatcherite policies, i.e. the abolishing of the GLC, rate-capping, the arts Council's 'Glory of the Garden', etc. presents a threat to the sector's existence. With the demise of the GLC and the absence of a 1981 conjuncture, the workshop sector is not only vulnerable to future histories of financial uncertainties and traumas, but even annihilation. Now the reason for this should be made clear. Black workshop practice, like other forms of cultural production, necessarily exists in relation to funding agencies. Given the present political climate, this

relation of dependency can easily take the form of separate development. Black workshops face a future in which they could become recipients of a rhetoric of aid.

The implications of this shift, and it's a structural shift, mean that the sector is pushed into a different context of operation. A new context therefore demands a coherent, but broad strategic practice. For the task ahead no single strategy is adequate. We must, therefore, deploy a multiplicity of strategies, because the conjuncture as it exists demands it:

1. It is imperative that we take on the priorities of institutional struggles.
2. That we take seriously the question of representation within institutions.
3. That we debate and dialogue around institutions.
4. That a collective mobilisation must take place for additional change.

This necessarily means calling for the reformulation of present cultural policies. We need policies which take account of race, but only as a means of concretising debate on media access and control. We recognise that on the subject of race and cinema the majority of funding practices amount to nothing other than rhetoric; empty words, empty categories and this rhetoric is fully articulated in present funding criteria. Because funding policies are primarily geared towards white film and theatre groups, and it has to be stated because that is the case, a massive disparity has been created and sustained by present funding policies. Black workshops do not need independence by proxy.

Now the question of institutional struggle is also important at the level of film training. Very little can be learned from short courses because students can inevitably do little after that. We therefore need to work towards a position from which we can begin to demand that race and cinema become a permanent feature of film school training. In this context knowledge of technique is in itself not enough. It falls short of the mark. Politics and language is just as important an imperative in black film culture as any other element within that general process. Film familiarisation courses that are conducted by groups in the sector and those organised by the film schools have

to contextualise that technology in the black body politic. That must be seen as part of a general strategy for the future development of the sector.

In relation to black and Third World cinema, and it's a very important relation, institutions currently involved in distributing these films are not effectively circulating and publicising them. Britain's black and migrant communities have been forged out of unequal relationships between the centre and the periphery. These relations, as we all know, extend to cultural forms and the circulation of imagery. Distribution institutions have laxed in their priorities to the point where there are more and more African film makers, for example, becoming increasingly reluctant to send their films to British distribution agencies. An alternative structure or institution whose primary aim is to disseminate Black and Third World films is absolutely necessary. The politics of such an institution would have to be informed by Black and Third World histories, and how that relates to the specificity of Britain's Black and migrant communities.'

KUUMBA PRODUCTIONS (Menelik Shabazz)

'Kuumba Productions is a film company formed in 1982 by three Black film makers, Menelik Shabazz, Henry martin, Imruh Caesar. All three of us have a background in both the broadcast and independent areas. The formation of Kuumba as a viable company came out of a new situation made possible by the formation of Channel 4. A new Channel with a mandate to cater for 'minority groupings' and specialised programming, generally to be serviced by the Production companies formed out of the Independent sector as a whole.

Prior to the new Channel, the few Black film makers that existed were trying to survive individually, dependant on the whims of Network Television. Both the BBC and the ITV companies have shown a consistent reluctance over the years to take on Black film makers, although there have been a few exceptions. Still today the bulk of programmes produced about black people by all four channels is predominately a white domain. Blacks may be involved in minor positions but the real power and control rests in white hands. Also Network Television has shown that it serves to reinforce already held attitudes and stereotypes rather than being in the forefront of change. Television is the dominant educator in this multi-racial Britain but yet it still carries 'superior' colonial and racist attitudes present in its programmes, from current affairs to drama. It has not been possible for black film makers to make programmes that challenge attitudes within the ITV and BBC companies and there is no indication that this will change.

On the other side the independent arena offered the same possibilities, slim and none. Grant Institutions that funded film were just as racist as the BBC and ITV companies but in a guise. The end result was always the same... It has taken the periodic tide of black unrest to create any possibility for Black film makers to be recognised as capable of making films. Today the situation has not changed much, film makers still have to justify their way of seeing to those who don't have any basis to judge and who often have unhealthy condescending attitudes towards Black people. The past records of these institutions show the real facts, and it remains to be seen whether they will do something in practice despite their words of understanding and agreement.

So the formation of Channel 4 with its commissioning policy, relying on outside companies to provide its programmes represented an important opportunity to produce programmes and to have creative control. Also it allowed for the building of an ongoing company structure with possibility of growth and employment for Producers, Directors, technicians and trainees.

Since then these possibilities have failed to be realised within Channel 4. Still to date commissioning Editors have yet to take on board the inequality and racism that still flourishes in disguise within the Channel in its attitudes to Black production Companies. Black companies if seen - are seen in the domain of multi-cultural programming. Yet most of the commissioning editors are funding productions about Black people's history, culture and reality both here and all over the world, by those who have little or no knowledge of black people and the Black world. Thus have they really thought about what they are doing? It seems that as with the BBC and ITV companies, just about anybody qualifies except Black film makers themselves. Many excuses will be offered but the facts remain. There have been some exceptions, in particular Alan Fountain's (Commissioning Editor for Independents and Workshops) area which has supported the Black independent sector and recognises its significance especially in the workshop sector. He remains one of the exceptions for C4 - it is not enough to talk about equality when in reality the door remains as closed as it ever was. What we are witnessing so far is the reshuffling of the pack but the same trick.

The development and growth of the Black Independent sector represents more than economics, for it's the programme by film makers and the film/video image that attracts viewers and therefore credibility to the Channel. Black production companies represent the inner eye from which the whole society can begin to review Black people. They present in a national and international context, rather than continue to take Black people out of their historical and current reality: where else will we find the images which we all agree are necessary for changing racist attitudes toward Black people?! Black production com-

panies and workshops carry this tremendous responsibility to carry fresh air into the polluted atmosphere. Black people don't have any representation in this society that can reach across millions of people: C4 can play a crucial part in breaking down barriers.

With Farrukh at the rein, the agenda remains the same—that is to provide concrete support to those Black companies and workshops who are the cornerstone of Independent Sector and Black film culture of the present and future. It is clear that the Black independent sector cannot provide all Farrukh's programmes at this stage: this is not the issue. The matter is to recognise that without the inclusion of these companies there is no change. There is certainly enough scope within Farrukh's budget to accommodate the growth of the independent sector which is small, and to develop other relations. There should be 'no problem'. Black Production companies are not asking for favours, or token gestures, or to help friends in need, but support based on quality and the importance of the future of Black Production companies and workshops. In the future what Black Companies need is to get on with the business of making programmes, for in the final count, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We don't want the same old song we want real change... no disguises.

(By Black Production Companies I mean those run and administered by Black professionals working in the industry. This is distinct from other companies that involve Black and white professionals working together, such companies it would be unfair to describe as 'Black Production Companies'.)

For C4 as a whole it must take up its commitment and responsibility to change. It has been successful in some other areas which has strengthened its support. However, unless it continues to bring fresh ideas then as is already happening it will slip into a struck groove. It has yet to become as challenging in its ideas towards Black imager representation, it has still to recognise its practices towards involving Black production companies and technicians. We are living in changing times and unless C4 responds to these changes, then it is just reshuffling the pack...

SANKOFA FILM AND VIDEO WORKSHOP

(Isaac Julien)

'My name is Isaac Julien, and we've named our paper "The Black Independent Sector Towards Pluralist Approach". The debate that took place between ACTT and the Black Media Workers' Association was around the issue of black people being engaged in a workshop practice as a way forward, notions of economic and cultural marginalisation, and notions of professionalism or lack of it. The Workshop Declaration was in effect thrown out by the BMWA. Black groups

like Sankofa were constituted under the Declaration and took all those arguments on board. We were also critical of the Workshop Declaration, but with all its shortcomings, it was a document that could be expanded upon, reworked to accommodate our demands. However, first and foremost, the workshop, as a politically progressive model facilitated a kind of film practice that we want to be engaged in. A political film practice to accommodate our particular political perspectives, a practice that would allow a black film culture to develop; to initiate as a sector the development of a visible black distribution network of black independent film and video; to develop ways of sustaining a dialogue with our audiences through the visibility of our work. Our practice is production-based towards that and it will be important for us to create points of entry for our audiences, not necessarily engaged in film production, by way of screenings, discussions and a general media education programme. As a sector, we thought it essential to have an organisation that could best represent our views to institutions forming policies that would affect our existence and our future. This organisation, The Association of Black Film and Video Workshops, is made up of all the black workshops in London and the regions, and through this organ we aim to put forward our demands as Black cultural workers.

The Black independent film sector was born directly out of the political climate created after the 1981 riots. Through their struggles, certain institutions were forced to take up black people's demands; so under the misguided names of 'multi-culturalism' as 'ethnicity', black film makers were able to become more visible. That visibility brought with it recognition of the fact that black film production has a history. Third Eye and the Anti-Racist Film Programme went a long way to establish this fact to the embarrassment of almost all white distribution companies. The future of black independent film culture lives despite the constraints of economic marginalisation. to develop effectively, we do however need real financial commitment from funding bodies.

Sankofa's entry into this sector was based on our experiences in making productions such as 'Who Killed Colin Roach?' and 'Territories'. Our aim was to make an intervention into independent broadcasts which have been dominated by the white left, who are prepared to, and in some cases, engaged in the business of the appropriation of our experiences. This has led to our marginalisation behind the cameras as well as in front. Sankofa evolved with the desire to make more visible and diverse a black independent cinema to take account of our experiences as black peoples in a post-industrial Britain. A cinema which references the concerns and desires of the black communities that we are part of. Questions of class, gender, sexuality, representation of our histories, herstories, and images of ourselves. We demand that there needs to exist

diversity in black independent film production. Black independent production that utilises different film practices, which inform each other without threat. A black independent sector that embodies a pluralist approach in its attitude to production with mutual respect to each practice.

So we welcome initiatives taken by the GLC Race Equality Unit and their commitment to our practice. We also welcome Channel Four's commitment and hope that it does not diminish with the demise of the GLC. We also welcome the decision of Channel Four to fund black independent production companies, thereby expanding the sector as a whole. Sankofa, with other black workshops is formally constituted as the Association of Black Film and Video Workshops to develop a strategy for the survival of the black workshop sector as a whole; to create resources; to create resource centres; exhibition and distribution networks. The furtherance of this sector has to be determined by us, especially in the light of this present funding crisis. The exchange of information, the need for dialogue between workshops and black film companies is essential. A discourse that elaborates on the possibilities for the black independent sector as a whole, and one that will inevitably challenge the policies of film and T.V. financing bodies. The power is in the hands of a few. We think it right to contest a British film culture that does not accept our demands, especially in the light of British Film Year, revealing colonial fantasies and secure in its hegemony by asserting its own political perspective on independent cinema. There needs to exist for black film and video workshops and independent production companies, points of contact, possibilities for dialogue. If there are not, the black independent sector will become weak and divide, and bow once again to the colonialist monetarist policies of 'divide and rule'. In the light of this funding crisis, a situation can easily arise where we can become paranoid in the sector and so hold back our demands of funding bodies. Sankofa believes that there is not one way forward, but many, to make visible our differing aspirations, to make visible the existence of the new black pluralism in British film culture. How far will the funding policies of the GLC be taken up by ACGB, GLAA, BFI? If we go by Channel Four's recent decision not to give any of the black workshops a three year contract, the future is mostly certainly uncertain. These dominant funding bodies will have to make it clear to us where their commitment lies. They are either with us, in concrete financial terms, or it's tokenism.'

PENUMBRA PRODUCTION (H.O.Nazareth)

'In 1982, at a seminar during the Black Film Festival at the Commonwealth Institute, I was asked to sit on the panel as a representative of the British sector. I had just produced my first bit of television for Channel Four (C4), a series with

CLR James. One person in the audience suggested "In five years' time you'll be driving round in a Rolls Royce, you'll forget about accountability to the community, and you won't bother to appear on panels like this". His "contribution", if it can be called that was singular in getting almost everything wrong.

Firstly, working on a C4 commissioned programme does not guarantee further work. Secondly, it doesn't make very much money. Thirdly, it does not get you enough contacts to get work elsewhere than C4. Fourthly, I did not see myself as "accountable to the community" then or subsequently, and I was not even clear who in "the community", one accounted to. Fifthly, working as an independent company gives a lot of people the wrong impression as to what you are, and what your status is.

Once C4's plans became known Horace Ove and myself decided to set up an independent black production company, to do things for C4. It seemed to be the right time, with the opportunities that C4 seemed to offer. We had a lot of ambitious schemes and invited everyone we knew with any media experience to join us. Stuart Hall did not answer, Menelik Shabbazz had other plans, but we got together Mustapha Matura, Michael Abbensetts, Alem Mezgebe, Margaret Busby, Farrukh Dhondy - about 11 of us in all.

After two initial commissions, we got no more work from C4 (from Sue Woodford, the Multicultural commissioning editor). All the individual members of the company were getting work in their field but not with and through Penumbra. Inevitably, the group disintegrated. We got some money for a project from the GLC Peace Year group. It wasn't enough, but we finished the project, hoping to sell the very interesting film that resulted: 'Talking History: CLR James and E P Thompson' to C4... Again we were rejected by S Woodford and Alan Fountain. We had done the original shoot on the production fee that we received on the two C4 commissions.

Since Penumbra was getting no work from C4 we approached the Ethnic Minorities Unit for help. They did help, but always by cutting down our small funding demands even further - this is because the GLC decided that since we had done, and planned to do more things, for TV, we were not just independent but 'commercial'. Though by what stretch of the imagination any of our work could be called commercial I have not fathomed.

We are fortunate that things improved since then because Farrukh Dhondy, a person who was sympathetic and was also interested in the subjects and approach we wished to adopt, decided to help us when he became commissioning editor at C4.

As a result we have managed to get at least four people into the ACTT, and we are training another as production manager. We have stuck to our principles that we did not want to become part of the workshop sector. We did not wish to be almost entirely dependent on grant giving bodies (and the compromises that entailed) and find our work marginalised as "amateurish". We were determined also to take our place in mainstream broadcasting—mass broadcasting. One can't make good mainstream contacts from the workshop sector, and the skills one acquires, being none too professional would prevent one from breaking out of the workshop ghetto.

Now I want to make some general points about what the black sector should do. Firstly, there is no excuse for black people to make films/videos which are poor in technical standards. Secondly, I feel that black people who want to learn audio/visual skills and to work in the industry should not be shoved into the workshop sector. Those with the clout to help should get them attached, after initial training to professional outfits, black or white, to get professional training and experience. The media workers should forget about using racism as an excuse to realise that if they want to succeed they just have to work hard and skillfully to break through. It is a difficult industry to get into, and they should never expect easy options. Our subject matter should go beyond the petty confines of anti-racism. We are people with a world view and our choice of programme subjects should reflect them. Our view of our people should also not be distorted by suppressing evidence of our own shortcomings within our communities, because we would not be able to speak with authority, if we tried to give a falsely cosmeticised view of ourselves.

The programmes we make should inform and entertain and seek to appeal by the depth and breadth of their focus, to everybody, and not trade on "guilt-tripping" to make points. We should do what we do with an eye on the future, on action to change things, though this does *not* mean ignoring the pros and cons of past history. In short, the black sector should challenge by both its technical ability as well as the scope and integrity of the subject matter, the given view both of Britain and of the countries we come from. And that, it is hoped, Penumbra and its sister company, Azad Productions, will try to do.

RETAKE FILM AND VIDEO COLLECTIVE (Mahmood Jamal)

I am presenting a view of Retake Film and Video Collective in relation to our own history and decisions to become a workshop, and our own view of how we see the development of black film making.

I think that two important facts to bear in mind are that film making is economically a very risky

business, and that the development of black film making in particular takes these into consideration. First of all there is the economic consideration that people get into film making because they have been trained and they need jobs. One of the reasons why black film makers are putting on a lot of pressure is because they've been denied these opportunities in white dominated institutions, particularly unions in terms of commissioning, and in terms of all sorts of film making. The second is that some people have also got into film making because they consider it a very important medium of artistic and political expression. The Workshop Declaration has meant support, even in the white sector, for a certain political and cultural area of film making, and I think that this is the basis from which workshops must start: we became a workshop, precisely because that was also our starting point. When we decided to come into film making we had several options open to us. One, to become a production company and seek commissions, the other was, for political reasons and for cultural reasons, to try to carve out a sector for ourselves through which we could put some sort of pressure on those bodies which are subject to political pressure, and not just to economic forces. Those bodies happened to be local authorities, naturally, because local authorities are where political pressure can be exerted, and where we pay our rates, and we have a right. We cannot go in the same way to Channel Four and demand things: although the Charter that allowed the creation of Channel Four demanded that it catered for the demands of the minorities, we could not go with the same kind of force to Channel Four because we found that they were not responsive to that. We felt that we had to develop as film makers to involve ourselves both in community politics and cultural development in the community, and also to express this through film. Thus we went to local authorities for our grants to survive. The thing is that the BFI is so entrenched in their attitude in favour of white workshops that we have a very difficult time with them, and we felt that the GLC, in this respect, has made a very important intervention to develop a black film sector, particularly in London.

Going further, we would like to say that it is not our motive from the start to make the kind of programme that would necessarily have a commercial viability: they could and they could not. Therefore, we had to be grant-aided as in terms of art, this country and many other countries recognise the importance of a grant-aided sector, whether it's in film making or whether it's in literature, or any other arts. The Arts Council and all those bodies which are supposed to be involved in film were not responsive to us, and we found that the only people who were responsive to our needs were the local authorities. So, although we could say we fell into this area, it was not really a matter of choice, it was a matter of where one could win this kind of battle. This battle is continuing and is going forward into other sectors: into the BFI, into putting pressure

The other point which I think is worth making here, is that we are now in a situation where the GLC is going to be abolished and rate-capping is coming into force. Channel Four is also beginning to tighten up on its policies towards workshops. The BFI has got limited funds. Consequently this is a time when as workshops we've got to apply political pressure, to ensure survival. on Channel Four, into other areas of film making. It is clear that unless we have a developing economic situation in Britain where black people begin to control large chunks of the economy, we will have to depend for our survival, in this kind of film making at least, on local authority and those sort of grant-aided bodies.

However, Retake did not come about as a result of a local authority initiative. Retake was set up because we wanted to engage ourselves in film making, and therefore we applied for a franchise early in 1983. We then went to seek funds wherever we could, and eventually made our first video, 'Living in Danger'. It was not funded by Channel Four, it was not funded by GLC, it was not funded by Camden Council, the local authority in which Retake is based. 'Living in Danger' was the practice with which we operationalised our chosen policy. It was not a result of some sort of anti racist politics which the council was trying to introduce. Although it coincided with Camden's Anti-Racist drive.

'Living in Danger' was a film made about racial harassment of people in housing estates, which we, in Camden, felt very strongly about because we were the people who were being harassed in very serious ways. This film was made because it gives an idea of the way we see a workshop functioning, in that we made an approach to the local authority, we got in touch with community groups, we made the film, then the rough copy of the film was shown to various community groups at various stages of the development. The people who worked on the film took part in different capacities: so we were learning, developing and also making a political intervention. The film was not subject to being sold to anybody, although it was later sold to Channel Four and Camden Council used it for its own purpose, for training etc. The basic thing is that that film was made by us on a subject that concerned us, without regard to its saleability, and that is something very important to remember as far as the workshop sector is concerned. So if that is ghettoisation, it's something which I do not think of in terms of any kind of minority film making, and any kind of independent film making, has to come to terms with that aspect. We want to make films which are not necessarily subject to economic forces in the same way as mainstream film making activity, because we do live in a capitalist country, we do live in a capitalist environment, so if we've got to choose some sort of alternative way of developing, we have got to apply political pressure to get ourselves to develop in that way.

I don't see that the existence of the workshop sector in any way undermines the independent black film sector; in fact we are complimentary. I would like to see us develop as a complimentary whole, and there should be no contradictions there. Now if we look forward from here we'll find that there'll be increasing reduction of funds and there'll be increasing competition between different groups for funding. I think that is why we need a coherent approach, so that the funds which have been put into workshops through the GLC are not suddenly taken away from us when they are transferred either to BFI or to other organisations.

The last point I'd like to make here is that because of the way we work we do not feel we are limited in any way from going beyond into other areas. We have got a limit of 20% of commercial work, that's all we can do. At the same time, there's nothing to stop us from developing contacts, both nationally and internationally, to have and develop a whole film culture, a whole relationship with both community groups and other film making companies, and indeed other organisations in other countries of the world. And we are particularly well placed as black film makers to make those connections for cultural, linguistic, political and other reasons. I feel it would probably be easier for us than for white production companies to do so, if we decide to choose that option. Finally, the whole area of workshop development as we perceive it is both progressing contacts with the community, cultural work, bringing in community groups, and progressing in that way.

As far as the idea of representation is concerned, it's very difficult, when you choose ideological and aesthetic considerations, to represent anybody, really. Where there is a presentation, there's also an opposition, because in any community there are different gender interests, there are different groupings. The approach must be pluralistic as Sankofa have pointed out, because you cannot have one person or organisation, whoever they may be, to represent everybody in a community or even the major proportion of a community. The black community in this country is made up of different kinds of interests and different sorts of priorities. So we have to look to find a common platform so that we can work together and develop black film making as a viable force in British film culture."

STAR PRODUCTIONS (Raj Patel)

'Star Production was formed in 1981, to produce films with an Asian perspective. This was done in the wake of Granada's announcement of Jewel in the Crown. They wanted to live in the past glory again and we felt we should show them an Asian perspective of what's happening there now. The project was based in Hackney, and

activities were varied; acting workshops, basic lighting workshops, and basic video technology courses. All this was done on a small scale without any financial help from any funding bodies. After two weeks of intensive work the group produced a three minute drama entitled "Ask You Out". The entire crew and artists were members of Star. This experience led to a greater awareness of the financial requirements of film production. As a part of a revenue earning exercise to provide the administrative support for the workshop to function, we had to undertake filming of events, exhibitions, etc.

After one and a half years in existence the group decided to seek grants from funding authorities. By this time, three main areas of work were developed. Unit A, which was work on our modern project entitled "Caught in a Tangled Webb". Unit B was experimenting with new forms of video use and marrying of video and live theatre. Unit C, was producing films for community groups and individuals; filming events, exhibitions and so on.

On approaching funding bodies we found that there was very little provision made for projects like ours. However, despite the financial difficulties the developments of the workshop continued. We were in a situation where there were lots of creative ideas, but not enough resources to put them on celluloid. This led to the birth of the British/Asian Theatre, our alternative media project, to ensure a kind of constant flow of fresh ideas and offer youngsters a chance to have an outlet for their expressions. It is now a professional theatre company which has produced three plays that have received critical acclaim throughout the country.

Star Productions in the meantime, was becoming a training body specialising in holding workshops for other community groups interested in using video as a form of expression. We have held summer schemes, workshops and exchange visits with various groups like Waltham Forest Video Project, Ankur, Brent Asian Youth Service, Contact Theatre in Manchester, and Luton Video to name only a few. We also provided the first all black stage management crew in Britain. This was for the Festival of India. As one of the very few black workshops, Star Productions has evolved yet another way for itself in its process of development which is as a consultancy to mainstream, film, television and theatre companies. We have supplied artists as well as technicians for companies like EN Productions, George Lucas Films, London Weekend Television, and Age Exchange Theatre.

Star members have worked in the mainstream media; some of them under permanent contract because lack of resources and training provided by us was limited. Some of our members, after achieving basic training, went on to the National Film School. At present we are a provisionally franchised video workshop with two ACTT

members and five Equity members working in the media as technicians. After immense amount of hard work providing various forms of advice and facilities, we managed to get our first paid worker last year through Urban Aid. This year we hope to be fully franchised, offering facilities from our base in Hackney. Low-band U-matic editing facilities, a studio/theatre facility which is 30ft by 20ft, viewing room facilities, props and costumes department, dark room facilities, will be ready. Finally, after a long struggle, we hope to achieve our initial aim which was to get together to produce an Asian perspective series, called 'Caught in a Tangled Webb'. We also pride ourselves on having the first Asian camera woman in the whole world who is a union member. Amongst the seven members who attended the courses at Beaconsfield, four of our members were female.

There has been talk about people who have said we have to be professionals, we have to struggle, and we have to be good in order to get on the air. Our work has involved youngsters who never got the chance to do things, never allowed the right kind of funding required, yet we have been able to work with them. There's a saying, 'charity begins at home'. That's exactly what we've started doing. We started from our living room, and we have provided tape-slides documenting youngsters who have been training themselves in their living rooms because of lack of resources.

Today, we hope through this gathering, to look for a way forward, as the GLC as we know, sadly is being abolished. We have also been rate-capped, and borough councils have got community groups who they've got to fund, but we, in the black sector, are yet very young. Star is a group which has been engaged in a variety of activities; not because we didn't know where we were going, but because we had to struggle and look for a way around obstacles.

After working on a voluntary basis we don't know where else we would go. It is a dark area for everyone of us. We have been a constant high priority for funding authorities, 'in principle'. The amount of money received has been small for the amount of responsibilities that we have to take on board. We have to be an advisory bureau service for other groups, for other members, and we get told constantly 'you are funded, you should be doing this.' The workshop sector is not a ghetto as has been said. This is the lable that is associated with blacks in this white society. The people gathered here today are here to change that system. Let's hope we can come up with some solution'.

CEDDO FILM AND VIDEO WORKSHOP (Ujebu Masokoane)

'Ceddo's contribution to this gathering is an open-minded position, *Working for London*

comes at a time when we face, yet again, one of those crucial periods in the development of black film culture here in Britain. We are indeed involved in a serious business as film makers. Our history, their history, does bear witness to this. The business of the creation of a truly independent black film sector is a necessary force in our time to redefine in advance the course of our image, content, and representation within the broad field of communication.

For the present moment Ceddo takes the view that at the core of our strategies ideas could rise in our effort to solidify our present production resources and work capabilities. This conference must further advance collective radical approaches to the questions relating to the funding of black independent film makers and black workshops. By and large we're all aware of the financial constraints under which we operate; at least we in Ceddo are quite familiar with the constraints of working with low funding. If we're not mistaken the black independent film production companies face similar financial problems. We therefore hope that at least this conference will focus on the necessity of making interventions with the funding bodies towards the creation of meaningful production prospects for black independents and the black workshops. For after all, at the end of the day, a black film culture becomes the reality if the products exist in the form of endless miles of film and video stories and documentaries that will later lead to critical appraisal.

It goes without saying therefore, that our position as regards distribution would remain the same: ie that a black film distribution network is an important factor in our growth and development. Black films must open up independent new market channels, and these channels must be encouraged to grow in order to sustain the black film sector. Therefore, Ceddo hopes that this conference will attend to the questions of production, funding and distribution as really urgent matters that need collective attention, perhaps common approaches to realise strategies to be adopted for the way forward.

Another question that Ceddo is quite interested in is training, because we believe training forms the basis of our manpower development. As such, this area will need special attention by this gathering. It is within this area that the black independent technicians, practitioners etc, can work collectively with the black workshops to advance and train black film makers for now and the future. While we will not be over-critical of the courses that go on at the National Film school, the opinion that we hold of these courses is that they are inadequate for they run for very short periods of time, eg. the familiarisation courses that are organised on a two week basis. Without any properly trained and orientated human force we cannot sustain a fully progressive black independent film culture. The future could still be in our hands, let us therefore, make

this gathering a turning point where we can push and advance black film making in this country to become a recognisable force.

COMMUNITY CABLE PRODUCTIONS (Claudine Boothe)

'First of all I'd like to say that the project that we're actually doing at the moment, CCP, is actually based on a position that the GLC held about a year ago, March '84, on cable, when they brought some black people together to discuss the way in which cable would affect black people and minority communities. We felt after that meeting that we needed to set up an organisation that would bring pressure to bear not only on the local authority, cable operators and prospective cable operators. So we set up this organisation called Community Cable Productions and we've been carrying out our remit, so to speak, since then. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since 1984. The fact is that in February the Cable Authority announced five areas that have been franchised to operate cable. One area that is important is Wandsworth. 25% of the Wandsworth population is black and Asian. And the other area of importance is the dockland area that spans Tower Hamlets and Newham and 40% of the population of each borough is actually black with a very huge Bangladeshi community.

Now we live in Hackney, and therefore, we felt that because we had done all this research in the last year what we'd do is give these people the benefit of our expertise and hold a conference to tell them about cable, tell them about our experience, tell them how to deal with the animal. The thing is that part and parcel of the Cable Broadcasting Act stipulates that the Cable Authority has to give a franchise area at least 28 days public consultation period. A period in which the local authority and the residents of the franchise area are asked to submit views and opinions as to what they think about a cable operation in their area, and what they'd like to see that cable operation deliver. Now as I said, the areas have been enfranchised since February. What is actually now happening is that the Cable Authority has called on these enfranchised areas, the local authorities of these areas and the residents of these areas to come forward and present views. And the fact is that because nobody was actually doing any research in how cable would affect their particular community, and because we were the only people doing that research, we were able to find ourselves in a position where local authorities actually called upon us to provide them with information. And that's what we've done.

Now what is a franchise? A franchise is 100,000 homes, 100,000 units in any one franchise, I don't know how many people live in 100,000 homes, nobody knows. It varies from borough to

borough, from franchise area to franchise area. But you're talking about a distribution system, cable that is, based at community level essentially, that will service 100,000 units. Now that is in any language a massive audience, and it is an audience that is based right beside you. It's an audience that is next door. It's the people you talk to in your borough. It's the place where you talk about your politics, you fight out your politics, you demonstrate. Now if the black workshop sector, the independent sector is about anything, it is about the issues that affect people locally. That's one of the main tasks of the independent film and video sector. They concentrate on those issues. Now when you have a system that can actually provide you with distribution of what it is that you want to say about those issues, then you ought to be interested in it.

What I really want to turn you on to is our major project, that is CCP's major project, which is the Black channel. Now a channel is in terms of the cable operations that are actually coming on stream a black channel is four hours of production a day, made by black people. The fact is that, I think you have to listen to this very, very carefully, we have a chance as a black production sector, not only the workshop movement but also black production companies, to make and produce a channel for black people in this country. A channel, like BBC1/BBC2. At first it will be four hours a day. My company is only going to have the capacity in the first year to produce eight hours a month. And in this particular climate we need a diversification of production methods, a diversification of the way in which we mobilise our resources, the methods of production that we use, the production practices. We need to be very flexible, we need to think of satellite, we need to think of cable, we need to think of broadcast television, we need to think of local distribution systems.

The fact is that each workshop and each production company will be based eventually in a franchise area, which means that you can be producing for the black channel, which is a general appeal channel to black people all over the place, and you can also be producing for the local channel, i.e. a community channel. Because a community is a community, made up of different kinds of people, so you produce for that channel as well, and that's a whole area of production again.

Now I think that it is necessary at this particular point in time to bring in money, to talk about the

finances of such channels. The fact of the matter is the way in which cable works, in that it offers some basic services, like the four broadcast channels. It offers, say, the music box, which is a channel with music and video and stuff like that. It offers a channel with sports. It offers a children's channel. It offers a life style channel, and it offers all of that as a package and you pay £8.00 plus VAT for that. That's the package. And of that package, the way in which cable pays for the stuff it gets in, is that it gives each producer a percentage of the £8.00. You probably get 22p from each subscriber, or 25p from each subscriber for your particular channel. But the money is divided up into bits and pieces, and people get reimbursed for their work by basically how much take-up the franchise area has. For instance, in Wandsworth, the people who are cabling Wandsworth, i.e. Shaw Cable, they envisage a take up rate of about 55,000 units, which is more than half their 100,000 units. So that is going to be a massive source of funds. In terms of a black channel, we would have to sell that as a premium channel, i.e. we would have to sell that channel exclusively to black people or to people in general who want the channel, who will take it. So that if we sell the channel to 20,000 people in Wandsworth, then income is 20,000 people by however much money we sell the channel for, less the cable operators sub for overheads and that sort of thing.

The way in which money is made is not by selling the black channel to one franchise area, to 100,000 units. The way in which the money is made is if you sell the black channel to several franchise areas, so you'd probably sell it to Wandsworth, you'd probably sell it to Tower Hamlets and Newham, you'd probably sell it to Brent, when it's cabled, Camden, Coventry or whatever. And if you're selling it as a premium the amount of subscribers you get will determine how much you get for each producer of the channel.

Give it another two years and we'll be on stream properly. CCP is coming on stream in 1987, and at the moment what we're actually focusing on is training because we need 25 people to produce eight hours, that's what we've worked out. And we have to train 25 black people (well probably 15 by then) in the next two years. So cable isn't only a way to get your stuff distributed and an additional source of funding for production, cable is also a source for training black people in audio/visual media skills.

Strategic Black Intervention

Parminder Vir

I think we've had this morning fairly detailed contributions from the black independent Broadcast sector, independent film makers, and the workshop sector, outlining where they are, where they've come from and where they hope to go. I would like to address myself to some of the points which focus on the common concern expressed by this very broad-based Black Independent Film and video Sector. These are (a) training; (b) funding; (c) distribution; and (d) exhibition, and suggest ways for a strategic Black Intervention. I believe that the Black Independent Film and Video Sector must develop a collective strategy for a way forward.

Training

The need for a defined, structured training programme linked to acquisition of union tickets and job has been raised by every speaker. Channel Four, to some extent, responded to that need, by creating short courses. The GLC contributed to the continuation of these short courses last year by funding courses for ethnic minorities and women. The effect has been to raise the hopes of many people who believe it is possible to enter this highly competitive industry. It is now time to develop a structured approach to training which has the support and participation of the ACTT and the various television companies. The role of the Black Independent Film and Video Sector is to define the training programmes which meet the objectives of acquiring union tickets and jobs.

The ACTT have begun to develop a structured approach through their Job Fit scheme. This is a three year training scheme linked to the feature film industry and independent production companies. Job Fit aims to train up to 50 students over a three year period and the students get an opportunity to work in productions. The important thing about the scheme is that it leads to acquisition of union tickets with which students are able to find other employment in the industry. The GLC has supported the scheme by providing funding for the establishment of the sector with a condition of grant aid that a

number of places on the scheme should be allocated to black people.

Channel Four could have responded seriously to training black people when it set up 'Black on Black' and 'Eastern Eye'. It could have attached a series of trainees to the programme because here was an opportunity for an established television company to produce black programmes and train black people at the same time.

Creating specific training schemes attached to productions is just one way institutions can respond. The other equally important area is to get more black people into training schools. The ACTT has a particular relationship with these training schools where it actually guarantees some of these students tickets on completion of their training. It must use its position to pressurise the training schools into taking on more black students. This in itself would provide a structured training scheme. While the GLC has played an important role albeit small, I think the real responsibility for training lies with the film schools, the ACTT, Channel Four and other television stations. The Black Independent Film and Video Sector must formulate demands on these institutions to provide proper training for black people.

Funding

Funding bodies, such as the Arts Council, GLAA, Channel Four and BFI have to reassess their policies and criteria for funding, and acknowledge the emerging Black Independent Film and Video Sector.

The sector should also call upon these bodies to develop a national plan, one that enables the central participation of black people in formulating priorities and policies. It is up to the black people in the independent sector to make the demands for a strategic plan which takes into account this major development.

In addition to the above, the independent production companies, independent film makers and

workshops have to be beginning to look at other sources of funding. The EEC funding, for instance, is a source that needs to be investigated since there are already many organisations who are actually getting money in the names of black and ethnic minority communities for film making, and cultural activities. Black film makers need to tap this source of funding. Commercial sponsorship and business sponsorship have to be investigated as well as the trade unions. Local authorities is another area of funding, and a number of workshops have already begun to secure funds from this area both for revenue and production funds. We also have to look outside of Britain, to the experiences of black independent film makers in America and the Third World, to learn from them how they raise finance for their films.

It is important for black film makers to begin to make links with Black and Third World film makers for sharing of resources, skills and possible co-productions.

Distribution

This morning we discussed the failure of existing distribution agencies, such as the Other Cinema, Contemporary, Cinegate, to efficiently promote Black and Third World films. The need for an Independent Black Film and Video Distribution Agency becomes increasingly important as more and more film material is produced by black film makers. Such an agency would not only distribute films but also act as an important resource and information centre on Black and Third World films. It is also important that initiatives like Third Eye, and the Anti-Racist Film Programme are developed.

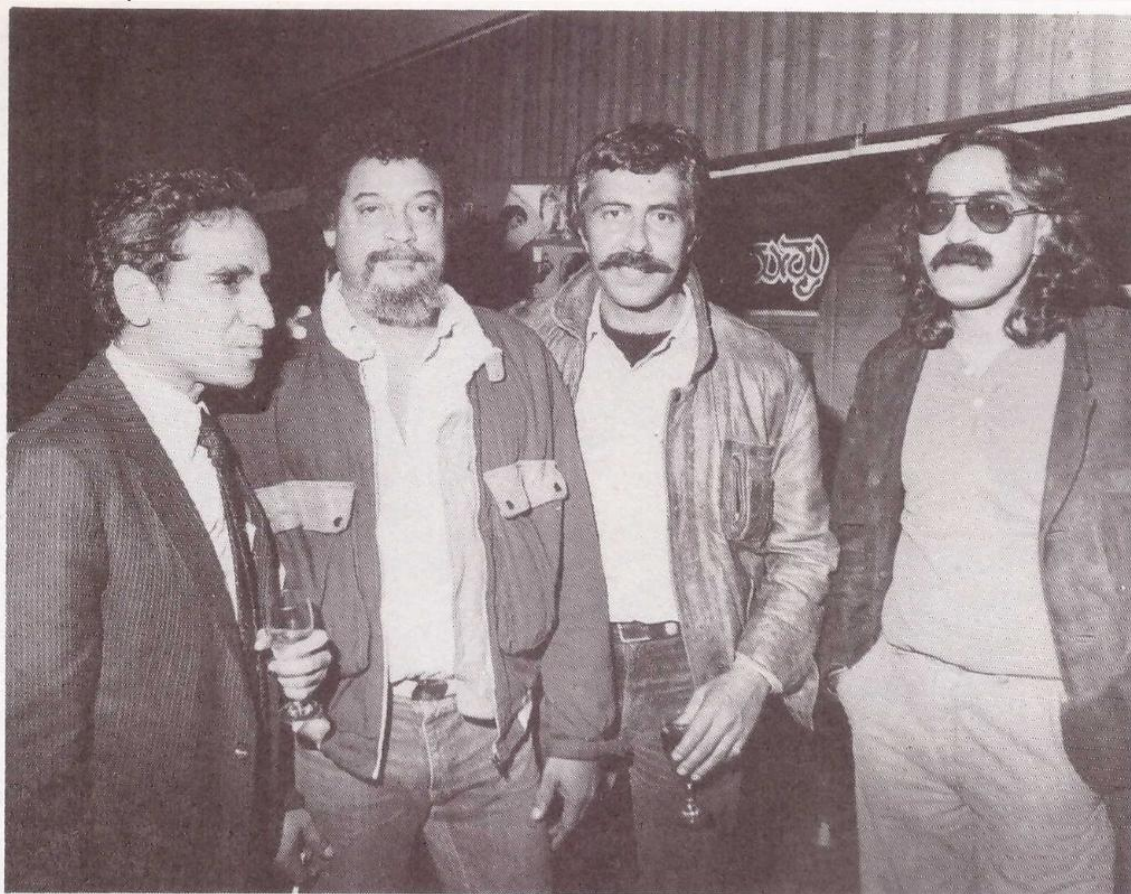
Black intervention

Finally, we have to talk about a strategic black intervention, on several fronts. The Association of the Black Film and Video Workshops need to begin to develop collective policy for securing funds from the BFI, Channel Four, and other sources of funding for the workshops.

The BFI have taken some steps towards implementing equal opportunity policies by ensuring representation of black people on its Regional Production Board: Funding of a number of black film and video workshops and the appointment of a specialist officer as an "Ethnic Advisor". It is important that the person appointed should have a working relationship with the independent black film sector.

The other major area for intervention is the Metro Cinema now acquired by the Other Cinema. The Metro Cinema is located in the Trocadero, Picadilly, and has been heavily funded by the GLC Arts and Recreation Department. It is important that black film makers are represented in the management and employment structures of the Metro. Black films makers must also be involved in developing policy for programming the cinema.

The Black Independent Film and Video Sector stands at a crucial stage in its development. Strategies for its future development must include developing structured training schemes; change in the policies of training schools; establishment of an independent black film and video distribution agency; identifying a range of funding sources for production and revenue and strategic interventions into existing institutions responsible for funding, distribution and exhibition.



Third Eye Party!

(Left to right): Nagi Ali (Film Critic), Horace Ore (UK), Salman Peerzada (Pakistan), Mustapha Matura (writer).



(Left to right): Olusegun Oyekunle (Nigeria), Manona Wali (India/USA), Haile Gerima (Ethiopia).



Black Film: Which Way Forward – end of conference