



American Films and the African Market

THOMAS GUBACK

As a survey of bibliographies or new book titles would reveal, the scholarly and critical literature about film deals overwhelmingly with the artistic, aesthetic, and technical sides of the medium, concentrating frequently on genres, directors, problems of structure and content, and how audiences comprehend meaning. This is especially the case of scholarship on capitalist societies, yet this is precisely where the medium has been absorbed by the economic system, which has turned film into a commodity. The contradiction this engenders seems to be ignored by many people; they study film as an artistic entity, even though in capitalist society its primary objective is economic. Those writing from a radical or progressive perspective often follow that course too, and frequently their study of film concentrates on superstructural questions of culture and ideology. They accept the object of analysis as defined by ideological opponents, with little attention to the productive infrastructure from which the product emanates. They differ from their opponents in that they view the text through a different ideological and political prism.

An important reason for this state of affairs is a comparative scarcity of analytical materials examining national and international cinema infrastructures. Few investigators have bothered to enquire into the economic and institutional aspects of the medium and to situate film where it really exists: as a really exists: as a component of a mass media complex that has global scope. Consequently, film usually is not considered part of an international marketing system that has its own economic and political dimensions. In reality, of course, film (as any communication) is conceived within a social milieu and embodies ideological and value assertions. It presents a point of view toward the world and implicitly reveals an agenda of priorities. Film necessarily impinges upon cultures everywhere because it is pushed as a commodity in international trade, with the impetus for circulation clearly being commercial interest, rather than social need.

Research into international trade and systems of domination has overlooked, until very recently, the role of communication in establishing empires. Although it is not the purpose of this article to review that literature, one can note that the work

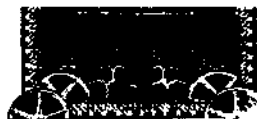
done in this area often has emphasized electronic media - that is, television and satellites, and to a lesser extent, shortwave radio. Their urgency as policy matters was highlighted a few years ago in debates over global spectrum allocation at the World Administrative Radio Conference in Geneva. Although these aspects are important, and will remain controversial issues between rich and poor nations, it is clear that motion pictures also deserve attention for their influential role and their position in international commerce. After all, the history of foreign trade in films goes back eight decades or so, and the patterns that emerged guide present global transactions in television programme sales.¹

My purpose in this article, therefore, is to identify very succinctly a few considerations that may stimulate efforts to consider the role of film as a private-sector communications medium in international systems of dominance and dependence, as well as to locate them in an African setting.

Such a task must begin with brief reference to the concept of imperialism, which in its modern meaning, developed mainly in the English language during the last third of the 19th century and described a system of *colonial* rule and trade. It was not until the early 20th century that the term acquired new meaning when it began to explain and analyze international expansion as a stage of capitalism. Although imperialism has referred to a formal power relationship in a strict constitutional sense, current descriptions also apply to informal empires that can be quite separate from traditional political treaties and instruments of governance.

Once mostly associated with British and French colonialism, imperialism clearly goes beyond that and, as an analytical term, can be applied to any effort by one nation to establish or maintain sovereignty, control, or influence over another nation or people. Imperialism denotes aggressive, although not necessarily warlike, behaviour used by one group to impose its power on another. Although the vestments of imperialism may be political, and often have been, the phenomenon is basically economic. Impact on culture is always a feature of imperialism because a people cannot remain immune to the imposition of a foreign will whose behaviour can dispossess them of their faith, language, traditions, heritage and institutions.

Cultural imperialism, a descriptive term whose genealogy and meaning deserve closer attention, is only beginning to be understood. It has been brought into prominence as more people become sensitive to the crucial role communication plays in society, and to the obvious link between communication and culture. Whether one thinks of culture as a people's particular way of life, or somewhat more narrowly as their artistic and intellectual activity, it is clear that imperialistic policies can leave indelible marks.



Part of the totality of culture is mass-mediated messages, and these assume the objective identity of a commodity, in relation to the economic system that produces them. The messages may embrace such diverse forms as news reports, recorded music, motion pictures, and school textbooks. The utility this material has for recipients, the way it is folded into the existing social and class fabric, is quite another matter. Although Marx was firm that considerations of use value were beyond the scope of political economy, the two necessarily are inextricably linked, particularly when the ideological functions of messages-as-commodities are highlighted for study. While an imported drill press and an imported motion picture share certain characteristics as commodities, the firm assumes a special identity in a social sense because of its ability to convey meaning and evoke response. As a medium, it allows people or institutions to communicate in some systematic way. While presenting images of reality or fantasy, a medium's content also defines and describes facets of existence. It may do this, moreover, as it reaffirms or challenges social structures and human relations.

Cultural imperialism can be construed, in a limited way, as the cultural fall-out of an imperialist policy -- that is, the unintentional impact that flows from behaviour such as political or military domination. More importantly, though, and particularly in view of the nature of communication, the term has come to describe purposeful attempts by an expansionist power to dominate aspects of another nation's social life. This involves, but certainly is not limited to, exportation of media products and techniques such as books, films, magazines, television programmes, advertising etc.

The seriousness of this form of expansion often is clouded by the apparent entertaining and distracting quality of the materials involved. Motion pictures, comic books, and recorded music seem harmless compared to warships, colonial governors, and diplomatic ultimatums. The presence of an imperialist military forces can be a daily reminder to a people of its subjugation, but mass media can be embraced as amusement and education. An astonishing aspect is that colonized people might not recognise the impact of imported communication, especially when it comes from supposedly benevolent nations, and when it is part of the so-called 'free flow of communication'. Similarly, powerless groups in a country might not be sensitive to the controlling features of media messages originated by the nation's own dominant classes who alone have access to the means of producing and disseminating communications.

In traditional conceptualisation, imperialism is understood as a government policy, executed by state officials or agents, supported where needed by military might. But imperialistic behaviour of market-dominated countries, as it concerns communication, has the special character of being carried out principally by private business. This creates the illusion that such practices are totally independent of the will of government and responsive only to the natural laws of marketplace economics -- the traditional demand-supply equation. This perspective is fed by conventional beliefs of Western liberalism that polarize

the public and private sectors and construe them as adversaries. In reality, it may be more fruitful to speculate about the ways in which the State accommodates the needs of private interest².

It would be easy, but misleading, to excuse cultural imperialism as being nothing more than a mere commercial response to the surplus of mass media products in dominant selling countries, and receptive attitudes in colonized buying countries. But especially for film and television programme exports, standard industrial analogies did not fit well. Material on film and videotape tends towards being infinitely exportable because making an extra print of a picture represents a very tiny incremental cost, compared to the expense of making the original. The cost of the copy, in fact, bears no relationship to any attribute of the original except length. In this way, exporting copies of cinema films and TV programmes deprives the home market of nothing, while offering financiers additional markets in which to recoup investments and make profits. In view of this, it is erroneous to think of cultural exports as surplus goods that must be disposed of abroad on a casual basis, and sometimes below cost. Indeed, a feature of advanced cultural imperialism is the manufacture abroad by the imperialist power of cultural materials for global distribution and consumption. Moreover, exporters occasionally develop outlets for their wares by offering funds and technical assistance for the establishment of foreign television stations, or by contributing in various ways to the modernizing or construction of cinemas.

The several dimensions of imperialism, as they concern communications, can only be suggested here. Often, the domination of foreign markets is defended by exporter societies as being the natural outcome of competition³. In practical terms, the argument put forward by American media managers is that foreign peoples, time and again, have had the opportunity to choose, and what they have chosen freely in the market place of alternatives is American entertainment. As long as the market is unobstructed and free from government-contrived advantages for the home team, the argument goes, American films are the consistent favourite of people around the globe. With a slight change of wardrobe, these free trade assertions emerge also as demands for international rounds of tariff reductions and relaxation of trade barriers. Historical evidence demonstrates, however, that dominance is achieved, not through the usual interplay of competitive forces, but by the initial smothering of smaller and weaker rivals⁴. If the growth of a potential competitor can be stunted, it can never emerge as a threat. The status of the Canadian and British film industries, in the face of decades of American exports, stand as evidence⁵. In many nations around the globe, film making has managed to survive only as a protected activity.

The general manager of an American film company once explained how it countered resistance to its products in foreign countries that wished to develop their own indigenous film making:



We are trying to do that by internationalizing this art, by drawing on the old countries for the best talent that they possess in the way of artists, directors, and technicians and bringing these people over to our country, by drawing on their literary talents, taking their choicest stories and producing them in our own way, and sending them back into the country in which they are famous. ⁶

That statement was made more than half a century ago, but there are modern parallels. In the field of news, for example, Africans wishing to learn about events on their own continent are obliged to turn to American, British or French news agencies.

In film, the imposition of the imperialist's cultural material hinders locally-made products from being exposed to public view, and this often leads to withering of financial backing for them, especially in market-dominated economies. When half the cinemas in a country are playing American films, and many of the rest are showing French or Italian films, there is simply that much less opportunity for local film makers to present their own work. Consequently, the medium becomes less attractive as an avenue of cultural expression, and the development of traditions for its use becomes problematic. Of course, an alternative is for local producers to copy commercially successful imported materials, although imitations never are as good as originals. The imperialist's products become models of achievement, while local themes and needs go ignored. ⁷

Imported materials, when turned into a deluge, establish an order of cultural, economic and political priorities that may be inimical to the recipient society, diverting it from developing its own goals, and substituting those of a different culture. Consumerism may be pushed at the expense of more basic needs, perhaps provoking an emphasis on certain kinds of manufacturing rather than other forms of development.

A serious consequence of cultural imperialism is that it creates a dependency relationship. The colonized country is encouraged to develop retail outlets for, let us say, motion pictures, and these are filled by films from the imperialist power, whereas little attention may be given to establishing a production and distribution infrastructure that meets local needs. Similarly, managerial skills, production techniques, and capital may be offered under certain terms by the expansionist power's commercial sector, and these tie the receiving country to the standards and procedures of the imperialist. This can happen when the imperial power agrees to finance films made abroad by foreign companies, providing the content of such films meet criteria considered important by the investor. In practice, this means that such pictures generally must have stars or themes that are merchandisable in many markets. Dependency inevitably places the receiving nation at a disadvantage. If it seeks to rupture ties, it risks losing capital, technology, and jobs; if it continues in a dependent position, it obviously loses the chance to be economically and culturally autonomous.

Humanistic cultural exchange is an ideal goal; many diplomats and corporate executives talk about it. The American film industry can afford to call for free flow and unhindered exchange because it already dominates the global market. Indeed, for many media, the flow of communication around the world is largely uni-directional⁸. The American industry - more precisely, its production-distribution sector - could survive comfortably the loss of any one of its foreign markets, and for that matter, from the loss of the entire African market. However, film makers in many foreign countries cannot survive the loss of their own home markets, yet it is in home markets that they must contend for attention against superior forces. This is true not only for small or young countries that are struggling with problems of development, but also for industrialized nations that nonetheless find themselves dependent on the United States for a significant share of their media products.

The interests of the business sector of the imperial state often are camouflaged by self-serving doctrines such as "free flow of information", which is made to apply to entertainment as well as news. This simplistic application of free trade policies to the domain of communications glosses over the actual conditions and terms of production and distribution. The doctrine also confuses the commodity basis of the international exchange it purports to justify. Such a slogan does nothing more than rationalize the position of the powerful, while theoretically throwing open international communication to other parties who, in reality, are unable to participate in any meaningful way. The doctrine is hollow because it presumes that a multitude of participants exist; in fact, only a few strong states and their private sectors are capable of taking part.

Implicit in cultural imperialism, as carried out by market-dominated societies, is that decisions are fundamentally commercial. *What will sell* and *what will contribute to capital accumulation* are the standards that guide production and exportation. Although the economic aspect is fundamental, political overtones never are absent. Africa, for example, constitutes a tiny economic market for American motion pictures, but that continent's political importance cannot be denied.

In addition to the customary flow, from developed industrialised nations to developing nations, media imperialism can be shown to work on another level. One hardly could call Western Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia, developing areas, but they are essential markets for American exporters. It is clear that while a nation may be a wealthy, industrial power, and an *imperialist itself*, it can be in a dependent position *vis-à-vis* communication because it is unable to fulfill its own media needs. There seems as well to be networks of dominance and dependence. The United States has had a huge media impact in the United Kingdom, which in many ways has become one of America's media colonies. But at the same time, the U.K. exerts its influence in Ireland and in English-speaking African nations. A parallel exists for France and its media, too.

These levels suggest a network centering in market-dominated economies. But even though there are regional centres of power and control, the major thrust comes from American media. Consequently, some countries are faced by a threat not only from the United States, but also



from linguistically similar or geographically close nations. Many African countries exemplify other circumstances as well. Formal political independence has not meant a guarantee of cultural independence for they must contend with the language and culture imposed by their formal colonial rulers, in addition to media products emanating from their old masters and the United States.

There is some debate whether communication imperialism is a process of invasion or of a receptive attitude on the part of recipient nations. Actually, it can be either or both, depending upon the situation in question. It is clear that part of the global power of American media stems from the aggressive behaviour of their owners and managers, and in that respect the analogy of an invasion may be tenable. But it is important to acknowledge that American media domination in many countries could not have been achieved without the aid and comfort provided by some elements of the local bourgeoisie who allied themselves with the interests of international capital. In such cases, it is not surprising to see splits in the foreign bourgeoisie: one segment wishes to encourage the activities of foreigners; another wishes to exclude or minimize their activities. It is hard to think of a country where this is not the case. The issue occasionally reduces itself to the choice between media products provided by a foreign commercial sector or by a national commercial sector. Further confusion is introduced because either side may attempt to enlist the government for its own advantage. Locally-owned film production companies in foreign lands may petition the government to impose import quotas or even to nationalize cinema chains so that locally-made films will have a chance to be exhibited. On the other hand, local commercial interests allied with foreign capital, or benefitting from business done with foreign companies, may urge free trade and unregulated imports.

Whether foreign or local, a pattern of control and dominance exists within countries and internationally; it is obscured when the problem is superficially drawn in terms of foreigners vs. the United States. Although there is a truthful basis for that dichotomy, it hides the operation of an international market system and class antagonisms within countries. A trend toward the ideological homogenization of the world is not the product of a single nation. Rather it is the outcome of an integrated network composed of national sectors, admittedly some more powerful than others, but operating nonetheless according to the same economic beliefs. That is true for the general area of communication. But in the case of film, the balance of power swings decisively in favour of the United States. Although American films account for perhaps six or seven percent of all feature pictures made annually in the world, they occupy about half of screen time in world cinemas and probably collect close to half of world film rentals.

As a market for American films, Africa really did not attract much attention from American companies until the 1950's. Even today, it contributes a tiny portion of total foreign receipts. Africa's value, though, is chiefly as a market of the future.

Achieving formal political independence by many African states, generally around 1960, did not automatically ensure their autonomy. They were confronted with neo-colonialism from certain European powers and by advances from the United States. In many cases, independence meant a restructuring of prevailing film marketing patterns and offered American companies an opportunity for a foothold on the continent. Even by the early 1950's, it had

become evident to American film industry executives that companies had better consider developing new markets abroad, rather than relying for revenue solely upon the then existing ones. With the spread of television in Europe looming in the immediate future, it was apparent that significant growth in export earnings for American pictures in European cinemas could not be counted upon. However, new sources of revenue could be expected from developing countries where consumption of all kinds was bound to rise. With few exceptions, these nations had sparse film production capabilities. Moreover, the nature of films as an easily exportable commodity offered the likelihood that the rising demand could be filled by films manufactured by American companies that already dominated other global markets.

American efforts to develop the African market began to crystallize around 1960. In that and the previous year, representatives of the U.S. industry toured West Africa to survey exhibition facilities, and to assess trade measures that could restrict importation and circulation of American pictures. The purpose of these investigations, according to the American trade press, was "to make them aware of the U.S. film industry and of the fact that we are interested in the future of their countries."⁹ More clearly, it was to develop strategy for organizing a market and for stimulating demand for American films, while thwarting any trade barriers that could protect these countries and their potential to make their own films.

The commercial policy of the American industry clashed with proposals offered by a UNESCO-sponsored conference on media in Africa, held early in 1962. According to the report,¹⁰ participants agreed that "action should be taken to develop the media in all African countries ... and [to] promote their effective use as a means of information and education for the people." Concerning film production, the report declared that "encouragement and support to national film units" should be given "in order to promote rapid development of the production and distribution of films that are *truly African in style and content*." (Emphasis added.) The report recommended:

Governments should take all possible measures to assure the expansion of national film production. They might consider levying an import tax on foreign films commercially distributed in their countries.

It was precisely proposals of this nature that American industry visits to Africa had been designed to head-off.

According to the trade newspaper *Variety*, the American industry had decided that the "time is ripe to strike in emergent Africa. Planned is a united invasion of the Dark Continent ..."¹¹ The spearhead created by the U.S. companies was the American Motion Picture Export Company (Africa), which was chartered to operate in the English-speaking countries of Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Liberia. It was established in April 1961 and (like the Motion Picture Export Association founded in 1945) was registered under the Webb-Pomerene Export Trade Act, which permits companies supposedly competitive in the American market to combine as a cartel for purposes of foreign trade. The largest American film production-distribution companies became members of AMPECA and licensed it to distribute their films and to act as their sole bargaining agent and representative.¹² Because the West African market was too small to support independent operation by each

American company, centralized distribution through AMPECA offered administrative economies; it also eliminated the chance of competitive price-cutting among U.S. distributors. The cartel's power included monopolization of the supply of films handled by its distributor-members and the ability to turn the supply on or off, depending upon the rental terms it could arrange with exhibitors. (Revenues of AMPECA are presented in Table 1, and the numbers of films it has distributed in various markets are indicated in Table 2.)

Table 1: American Motion Picture Export Company

Gross Film Rental and Value of Assisted Film Exports

	Assisted Exports	Gross Film Rental
1974	\$1 242 877	\$1 114 852
1973	937 233	887 862
1972	532 991	821 896
1971	392 719	802 945
1970	795 922	700 346
1969	706 480	682 739
1968	671 399	604 051
1967	707 445	Not reported
1966	486 750	"
1965	578 667	"
1964	378 692	"
1963	274 712	"
1962	45 357	"
1961	No reported exports	

Source: Annual reports submitted to the Federal Trade Commission by the American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa). Reports submitted for 1975, 1976, and 1977 contain no financial data. The 1978 report was withheld by the Federal Trade Commission on the ground that it contains proprietary information. Subsequent reports are not available publicly

AMPECA's control of American films was also used to extract compliant behaviour from exhibitors. As late as 1970, "it had been AMPECA's policy [in northern Nigeria] that if any exhibitor showed another company's pictures without AMPECA's consent, supplies to this exhibitor would be stopped. This procedure at one time had worked quite well but now was not having the desired result."¹³ AMPECA officials believed that control still could be exercised over the market and "that in the future it might be well for the companies to obtain [African] distribution rights [to competitors' films] and this especially applied to Italian pictures which were quite popular in some areas supplied by AMPECA."¹⁴

Having established themselves in several English-speaking countries, American companies turned to French-speaking nations south of the Sahara, and AMPECA served as a precedent for strategy there. In September 1969, major American production-distribution companies created the West African Film Export Company Inc., but changed its name to Afram Films Inc. in December 1969.¹⁵ The corporation was registered under the Webb-Pomerene Export Trade Act and given essentially the same powers and prerogatives as its companion organization, AMPECA. Afram originally was chartered to distribute films of its members in fifteen countries, but by the end of the 1970's

it was operating in seventeen: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Dahomey, Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo, Upper Volta and Zaire. (Revenues for Afram are given in Table 3.)

Part of the process of distributing films involves creating a demand for them, not simply on the part of the consumers, but on the part of exhibitors as well. To enlarge the market for their pictures and to increase revenue, American companies in Africa have tried to stimulate construction and modernization of cinemas. They have also attempted to create alliances with some exhibitors to offset the influence of French-owned exhibition interests in some parts of Africa. Increasing the outlets for their films has been handled in several ways by American distributors. In some markets, they have awarded franchises to certain exhibitors who have used these contracts to facilitate obtaining bank loans for cinema construction. In this symbiotic relationship, the exhibitors become dependent on American companies for popular, commercial films, but at the same time offer U.S. distributors an assured outlet for their pictures. According to an AMPECA document from 1968, there were no air-conditioned cinemas in Accra, Ghana. However, an interested party was willing to build a 700-seat house provided AMPECA "agrees to enter into a three-year contract granting him the right to first refusal of all first-run exhibitions in Accra."¹⁶ The board of directors of AMPECA authorized the corporation to execute such a contract. At one point, Afram actively solicited the financial support of the U.S. government's AID (Agency for International Development) for the building of cinemas in developing countries. Although the Agency declared "that such construction would not be given assistance," Afram officials in Washington challenged

Table 2: American Motion Picture Export Company (Africa)
Number of Feature-Length Films Distributed

	Nigeria	Liberia	Ghana	Sierra Leone Gambia	
1974	99	57	149	87	
1973	113	58	69	89	
1972	54	107	60	62	
1971	91	102	72	113	
1970	72	125	85	54	
				Gambia	Sierra Leone
1969	15	96	82	39	96
1968	13	102	102	52	93
1967	102	146	60	39	101

Source: Annual Reports submitted to the Federal Trade Commission by the American Motion Picture Export Company (Africa)



the ruling, albeit unsuccessfully?⁷

The rental rates for films channeled through AMPECA and Afram naturally bear on the solvency of exhibitors. For example, the AMPECA representative in Africa, Jack Labow, reported in 1970 "that the Liberia Amusement Company had built an extremely large theatre which was too large for the territory and in all probability would lose money." Mr Labow believed the company "was in extremely bad shape not only because of mismanagement but also because the rentals being paid to AMPECA on a number of pictures were too high."¹⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Table 3: Afram Films Inc.
Gross Film Rental and Value of Assisted Film Exports

	Assisted Exports	Gross Film Rental
1974	\$533 150	\$456 527
1973	354 379	281 864
1972	332 051	Not reported
1971	Not reported	101 662
1970	No reported exports	

Source: Annual reports submitted to the Federal Trade Commission by Afram Films Inc. A 1975 report was not solicited by the Federal Trade Commission; reports for 1976, 1977, and 1978 have been withheld by the Commission on the ground that they contain proprietary information. Subsequent reports are not available publicly.

Longer than usual cinema playing time demanded by AMPECA for its films not only increases the return of revenue, but also captures screens and makes them unavailable to rival productions from the local market or other countries. The AMPECA representative in Nigeria told the corporation's board of directors in 1970 that he "has tried to extend the playing time in theatres as long as possible and would offer an adjustment in film rentals if the [box office] grosses declined during the extended period."¹⁹

In areas not served by Afram and AMPECA, American companies distribute their films independently, but use the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) to negotiate import agreements and deal with numerous other trade and governmental matters. The MPEAA is the arena in which U.S. distributors hammer out their foreign policy and, if possible, agree on a common course of action. In the late 1960's, for example, the MPEAA engaged in extensive negotiations with the Kenya Film Corporation (KFC) concerning that country's importation of American films. The KFC indicated it would agree to the rental demands of the U.S. companies and would pay dollars for their films. However, the KFC insisted that all films had to be distributed through it, and that American companies would not be permitted to license their own pictures directly to cinemas.

Although at least one member of the MPEAA felt that American distributors should pursue negotiations with the KFC, the representative of another U.S. company pointed out that the long range view was far more important than whether the companies could generate dollars immediately from the KFC. He argued "that the development of the entire East African market is at stake and that if a monopoly is established [by the KFC] in Kenya, similar monopolies are likely to develop in other East African countries, thereby

preventing the [American] companies from developing and establishing their own systems of distribution." The MPEAA board of directors eventually "affirmed that no [member] company will be able to enter into a contract with the Kenya Film Corporation until a two-thirds majority of the companies agree on minimum terms and conditions to be enforced in the individual company's contracts or on some other method which is acceptable to a two-thirds majority."²⁰ Through the MPEAA, the U.S. companies, in this instance and in others, were able to develop a uniform policy that mitigates against competition among them.

In September 1968, the KFC and the MPEAA finally concluded a three-year import contract. An interesting feature of the pact was that the MPEAA agreed to:

encourage the member companies to undertake or shall itself undertake, as appropriate, broad cooperative efforts with KFC and the Government of Kenya to develop film activities and facilities within Kenya. Depending on the programmes which will be undertaken by KFC, areas of cooperation may include:

- (a) assistance in the training of personnel in the various fields involved;
- (b) provision of technical advice and assistance;
- (c) assistance in the development of rural and back-country exhibition facilities.

... MPEAA will endeavour to the extent feasible to encourage the production of films in Kenya by member companies and producers with whom they are associated, so long as the scripts of such films make it appropriate, and will also seek to develop interest in and facilities for production in Kenya of short films.²¹

The MPEAA has confirmed that during the 1970's "there have been a number of production and other arrangements ... between individual companies and the Kenya Film Corporation, but we are not in a position to provide the details on these."²²

The language of cooperation in formal agreements is always noble, optimistic, and if need be, face-saving. Production assistance clauses in the KFC-MPEAA pact are similar to those in a 1968 agreement between the MPEAA and the Government of India,²³ and to letters of intent from the MPEAA in Canada in the late 1940's. The record is clear about what happened in Canada. Two studies²⁴ have documented the emptiness of cooperation pledges made by the American industry so it could continue to distribute its films there. The record of what is happening - or not happening - in Africa still awaits research and publication. But could technical assistance, even if given, be worth the price extracted by American companies?

Although many African peoples have rid themselves of formal colonialism, they still must contend with its after effects and struggle against neo-colonialism. There is, in addition, the fight against intellectual imperialism that must be waged along with the fight for economic autonomy. This is not to say that indigenous cultures must remain intact, protected from change, whatever its source. Inequalities and injustices do exist, but their replacement by other systems of oppression and exploitation, imported from

abroad, hardly constitute liberation. Resistance to foreign domination so that internal systems of domination may prevail is not progress either.

After almost two decades of independence, how many African states have been able to develop a national policy for their cinemas? And on what basis have cinema relations been established among these countries? On the other hand, a *de facto* policy has been imposed by American and European interests, and its core is decidedly commercial with little regard for social need or cultural identity. In the early 1970's, the film maker Mahama Traore summarized the problem of his country's cinema in this way:

Distribution of films in Senegal does not reflect the needs of the people because what we receive are the latest commercial films from France, Italy and America. It's really an imperialist and colonialist assault - those films are vehicles of violence, sex and a culture that is alien to us, a culture into which we are not integrated and into which we in fact refuse to be integrated, because we want to remain ourselves²⁵.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Measured in dollars, America's earnings from cinemas abroad outstrip revenue from television two to one. In addition, the bulk of the television programme material exported from the United States is made and distributed by the same companies that dominate the cinema film business
2. A case in point, among many, is the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a US Federal government agency, which insured American private business firms operating abroad against loss from expropriation and revolution in certain developing areas of the world. Instrumentalist and structuralist analyses of relations between the State and the capitalist sector of the economy, although different in many ways, ultimately reveal how the State serves, perpetuates, and accomodates both the specific and general interests of capital
3. For example, see the statement of Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, in *International Communications and Information*, hearings before the Sub-committee on International Operations of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 95th Congress, 1st Session, 1977
4. See Guback, T. 1983: "Non-Market Factors in the International Distribution of American Films" in Austin, B. (ed.): *Current Research in Film*, Ablex, New Jersey
5. In the UK, the managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation has declared that the British film industry effectively no longer exists because films dealing with British life and culture take only a small percentage of the box office. Concerning the production sector, he said: "What we have now is a service industry, dependent to a great extent on US finance", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 March, 1980. The National Film Finance Corporation's annual report for the year ending March 31, 1979, announced that American films took 75% of the rentals; the remainder was shared among other imported films and British pictures.

6. Kent, S.R. 1927: "Distributing the Product" in Kennedy, J.P (ed.): *The Story of Films*. AW Shaw, Chicago and New York, pp. 225-226
7. Interesting work in this area by Bruno Nettl suggests similar consequences for recorded music. See "Some Aspects of the History of World Music in the Twentieth Century: Questions, Problems, and Concepts", *Ethnomusicology*, Vol 22, No 1, 1978
8. For example, see Nordenstreng, K. and Varis, T. 1974: *Television Traffic -- A One-Way Street?* UNESCO, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, No 70
9. *Variety*, 17 May 1961
10. UNESCO, 1962: *Developing Information Media in Africa*, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, No 37.
11. *Variety*, 17 May 1961
12. American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa), Certificate of Incorporation, State of Delaware, 18 April 1961
13. American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa), Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 16 June 1970
14. *Ibid*
15. Afram Films Inc., Certificate of Amendment of Certificate of Incorporation, State of Delaware, 10 December 1969
16. American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa), Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 24 April 1968
17. Afram Films Inc., Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting, 30 June 1970. Also, letter to me from the Motion Picture Export Association of America, 5 February 1980
18. American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa), Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 16 June 1970
19. American Motion Picture Export Co (Africa), Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 20 January 1970
20. Motion Picture Export Association of America, Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Directors, 12 December 1967
21. Motion Picture Export Association of America, Memorandum 492, 16 September, 1968. Agreement between the KFC and the MPEAA, 13 September 1968
22. Letter to me from the Motion Picture Export Association of America, 5 February 1980
23. Letter to Charles Egan, director, Motion Picture Export Association of America, South Asia Office, Bombay, from S Ramachandran, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, New Delhi, 24 April, 1968
24. Berton, P. 1975: *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image*; and Pendakur, M. 1979: *The Canadian Feature Film Industry: Monopoly and Competition*. Ph.D Thesis, Simon Fraser Univ.
25. "Cinema in Africa Must be a School" -- An Interview with Mahama Traore", *Cineaste*, 6, 1973, p. 33

