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„THE FILM INDUSTRY IN CAMEROON :
STATE CULTURALPOLICIES AND FOREIGN
CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS“

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ABSTRACT

After independence in 1960, Cameroon's film industry was one of the most successful in former French colonies in Africa, with an important film production, dozens of cinema halls around the country, and cultural policies encouraging filmmaking in the country. However, despite these promising beginnings, film production started declining in the 1980s, the Cameroonian state progressively disengaged from supporting the film industry, and cinema halls shut down. Filmmaking in Cameroon has not improved much since, and the cinema industry nowadays is still weak, partly due to lacking infrastructure and little support from the government. However, France and Germany, through their foreign cultural policies and through the French Institute and Goethe Institute, provide some support to the Cameroonian film industry.

This thesis will present an overview of Cameroon's film industry since the 1960s, showing how the state's cultural policies have evolved and how it has impacted filmmaking in the country ; it will analyze who the main actors in the current industry are, with a special focus on France and Germany's cultural action in the country, and the effect it has on the film industry. It will show that the French and Goethe Institutes' activities are, to an extent, compensating for the lack of state support to cinema, and discuss potential limitations and risks of this situation. The thesis is mainly based on literature, and on semi-structured interviews conducted with people involved in the film industry in Cameroon.

Seit der Erlangung der Unabhängigkeit in 1960, erwuchs in Kamerun eine der erfolgreichsten Filmindustries aller ehemaligen französischen Kolonien in Afrika. Sie umspannte dabei eine beachtliche Filmproduktion, dutzende im ganzen Land verteilte Kinos und genoss eine beflügelnde nationale Kulturpolitik des Staates. Den vielversprechenden Beginn jedoch zum Trotz, folgte bereits in den 1980er Jahren ein jähes Ende der jungen Filmindustrie aufgrund eines progressiv degradierenden kamerunischen Staat. Anno dato, hat sich die kamerunische Film- und Kinoindustrie aufgrund mangelnder Infrastruktur und geringer Unterstützung der Regierung nicht wieder etablieren können. Durch die französische und deutsche kulturelle Aussenpolitik sowie dem Französischen Institut und dem Goethe Institut konnte jedoch der Filmindustrie Kameruns internationale Unterstützung gewährleistet werden.

Diese Thesis soll im Folgenden einen Überblick über die Filmindustrie Kameruns seit den 1960er Jahren gewähren. Es soll gezeigt werden, wie die nationalen Kulturpolitiken im Land sich entwickelten und welchen Einfluss sie auf die Filmindustrie nahmen. Die aufgestellte Analyse betrachtet dabei die heutigen Hauptakteure des Bereiches, wobei ein besonderer Fokus auf den französischen und deutschen kulturellen Einflussnahmen liegt. Es wird aufgezeigt, dass die Massnahmen des Französischen Institutes und des Goethe Institutes in einer gewissen Tiefe die fehlende Unterstützung der nationalen Regierung kompensieren und diskutiert, ob die aktuelle Situation potentielle Limitierungen und Risiken birgt. Die Thesis basiert zu grössten Teilen auf Literatur sowie semistrukturierten Interviews mit Akteuren der Filmindustrie Kameruns.

THE FILM INDUSTRY IN CAMEROON : STATE CULTURAL POLICIES AND FOREIGN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
CHAPTER 1 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY.....	10
CHAPTER 3 : AN OVERVIEW OF CAMEROON'S FILM INDUSTRY.....	18
I. BRIEF HISTORY OF CINEMA IN CAMEROON	18
II. THE MINISTRY OF ARTS AND CULTURE	24
III. OTHER ACTORS.....	32
CHAPTER 4.....	41
I. FRENCH CULTURAL POLICY AND THE INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DU CAMEROUN ..	41
II. GERMAN CULTURAL POLICY AND THE GOETHE-INSTITUTE IN CAMEROON .	50
III. IMPACT OF FOREIGN CULTURAL INSTITUTES IN CAMEROON ON CINEMA	58
CONCLUSION.....	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

INTRODUCTION

The history of African cinema, particularly in former French colonies, began before the independences and film production was closely linked to colonial structures. In the most part of the continent, the end of colonialism did not suffice to create independent national cinema industries and with the notable exception of Nigeria, whose famous *Nollywood* film industry even surpassed Hollywood's film production in 2014¹, most African countries still do not have strong cinema industries. This holds true for Cameroon, a country of 22 million people in Central Africa, which was colonized by Germany and divided between France and Great Britain following World War I. The country gained its independence in 1960, and in terms of cinema, the following two decades are considered a golden age as film production and structures were booming, and suggested a promising future. However, this era did not last, and soon the Cameroonian film industry became less and less successful, up to the point where the last cinema halls shut down, and film production to this day is insignificant.

The evolution of Cameroon's film industry is to be analyzed in relation with governmental action in the field of cinema, particularly regarding cultural policies which are managed by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. There are, however, several other actors involved in Cameroon's cinema industry, notably foreign actors which support Cameroonian cinema mainly through the activities of their two cultural institutes in the country, namely the *Institut Français* and the *Goethe-Institut*. How is the Cameroonian cultural industry influenced by state cultural policies and by the activities of foreign cultural institutions? This will be the main research question for this thesis. It will also aim at answering underlying questions such as how the Cameroonian film industry evolved from its beginnings to the present time ; how the Cameroonian state's action in terms of culture has evolved and the impact it had on the industry ; who the main actors in Cameroonian cinema are ; what the French and German foreign cultural policies are, particularly in Africa and in the field of cinema, and how these operate in Cameroon ; how the French Institute and the Goethe Institute in Cameroon are involved in the local cinema industry, and

1 Jake Bright, "Meet 'Nollywood': The second largest movie industry in the world," *Fortune*, June 25, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/06/24/nollywood-movie-industry>. (accessed February 28, 2017).

what the positive and negative effects of their activities are ; and what the relationship between the Cameroonian state and these foreign cultural institutes is.

The main goal of this thesis is to give an overview of the current state of Cameroon's film industry, as this topic has been very scarcely discussed in recent literature ; this thesis aims to offer an up-to-date analysis of filmmaking in Cameroon, and of the main actors involved in cinema in the country. By examining the government's cultural policies and its impact, it also aims at analyzing how Cameroon's film industry is affected by these. Finally, as there is little scholarly literature on foreign cultural institutions and their activities, particularly in Africa, the analysis of the French Institute and the Goethe Institute's action on Cameroonian cinema will help to understand how much influence foreign cultural institutions can have on local cultural industries, particularly in a developing country where the cultural scene is relatively weak.

This thesis is structured in four main parts. The first chapter will briefly introduce the theoretical framework and the main concepts applicable to the subject ; the second chapter will discuss the methodology used for the thesis. Chapters 3 and 4 are the main part of the thesis. The third chapter will give an overview of Cameroon's film industry by presenting its evolution from the beginnings to the present day, by analyzing the structure and action of the Cameroonian Ministry of Arts of Culture, and by discussing the place of other actors actively involved in the film industry. Chapter 4 will analyze the foreign cultural policies of France and Germany throughout history and to the present day, examine the specific activities of both countries' cultural institutions in the field of Cameroonian cinema, and discuss the overall impact of these.

CHAPTER 1 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As this thesis focuses on cinema in the contemporary era, it will be useful to look at the impact of globalization on the cultural sphere. Cameroonian cinema is here researched from the economic perspective, it will therefore be necessary to take a closer look at cultural industries and creative economies. The thesis will then turn to theories on cultural policy and cultural diplomacy, as these are what define the actions of the two main actors we turn to here, namely the Cameroonian government and the foreign cultural institutions in Cameroon.

1. Cultural globalization

The increased global interconnectedness brought by globalization has led to a high number of global cultural flows, a phenomenon that can be described as “cultural globalization”². One of the important theories in the debate around cultural globalization is the thesis of cultural imperialism, according to which the repartition of cultural flows is unequal in regions of the world, as most of the flows originate from a “core” region, as opposed to the “periphery”³, leading to a small number of countries imposing their values and culture upon the others. Cultural imperialism is often associated to “Westernization”, as the core countries are widely understood to be located in the so-called West. To a greater extent, the USA have been the major dominating force on cultural industries throughout the twentieth century, a phenomenon described as “Americanization”, which is also understood as leading to the homogenization of cultures around the world.

While the cultural imperialism thesis was dominant in the 70s and the 80s, it has been refuted by several scholars. Appadurai, for example, has argued that the idea of Americanization falls short of acknowledging the importance of local cultures⁴. On the contrary, globalization is said to encourage the rise of regional and local cultures, which might themselves incorporate elements of

2 Diana Crane, “Globalization and Cultural Flows/Networks,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Tony Bennett and John Frow (SAGE, 2008), 359-381.

3 John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). 37.

4 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

“Western” culture. This “hybridization” process is defined by Nederveen Pieterse as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices”⁵. Therefore, globalization does not lead to a Western or American-dominated culture which is similar everywhere in the world, but actually encourages cultural diversity as it leads to the emergence of cultures where the global and the local come in contact.

The study of Cameroonian cinema therefore needs to be placed in the globalization context, as it surely is influenced by it. As a developing African country, Cameroon can arguably be seen as belonging to the “periphery”, and could be influenced by flows emanating from the “core”, i.e. Western countries. As this thesis looks at the influence of the French and German cultural institutes on Cameroonian cinema, the question here will be to find out whether this leads Cameroonian cinema to a certain uniformity and similarity to Western cinema, or whether this influence supports a certain cultural dialogue, and therefore the spread of Cameroonian cinema in the West.

2. Cultural and creative industries

The commercialization of cultural goods started as early as the nineteenth century, and with the rise of capitalism in industrial societies, it intensified during the twentieth century. The term *cultural industries* was coined in the 1930s and 1940s by Adorno and Horkheimer from the Frankfurt School, who criticized the commodification of art and the emergence of a popular culture as a way to manipulate the masses into being docile and obedient. The diffusion through mass media of unified cultural products that “no longer need to present themselves as art”⁶ serves capitalism by entertaining people and thus making them passive ; it also threatens higher forms of art as the cultural industries simplifies it, for example by adapting a complex Tolstoy novel into a film⁷. This view opposes culture and economy as incompatible, and posits that the former will always lose its integrity when it is accompanied by the latter.

With factors such as “rising prosperity in the global North, increasing leisure time, rising

5 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization," in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1995). 49.

6 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). 94-136. 95.

7 Idem. 96.

levels of literacy, links between the new medium of television and new discourses of consumerism, the increasing importance of ‘cultural hardware’ (hi-fi, TV sets, and later VCRs and personal computers) for the consumer goods industry”⁸, the cultural industries developed even faster. By then, cultural industries were not seen only in a negative light anymore, and the definition shifted to define “forms of cultural production and consumption that have at their core a symbolic or expressive element”⁹. As this thesis deals with the economic aspect of Cameroon's film production, rather than the films' content, the topic can be seen through the framework of the idea of the film industry as a part of the cultural industries.

While the term “cultural industries” was popularized in the 1980s by UNESCO, the organization additionally acknowledges creative industries as a broader term, to define a “range of activities which include the cultural industries plus all cultural or artistic production, whether live or produced as an individual unit”¹⁰. Creative industries are therefore not anymore limited to traditional forms of art, but also include industries where “the product or service contains a substantial element of artistic or creative endeavor” such as architecture, advertising or graphic design¹¹. Among the main concerns linked to these, is the realization that cultural production is highly unequal between countries from the North and the South : this leads to the necessity of “strengthening local capacity, improving access to global markets through new partnerships, obtaining support from experts, and combatting piracy and defending intellectual property rights”¹², issues which may be relevant to the analysis of Cameroon's film industry.

3. Cultural policy

As this thesis focuses on a large part on the actions of Cameroon's government in the field of cinema, and more broadly on culture, it will deal with the concept of cultural policy, which can be defined as governmental action “with respect to the arts (including the for-profit cultural

8 David Hesmondhalgh and Andy Pratt, “Cultural industries and cultural policy”, *International journal of cultural policy* 11 (2005): 4.

9 UNESCO. *Creative Economy Report 2013, Special Edition: Widening Local Development Pathways* (2013). 20.

10 UNESCO. *Understanding Creative Industries – Cultural Statistics for Public Policy-making* (2006). http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/30297/11942616973cultural_stat_EN.pdf/cultural_stat_EN.pdf. (accessed February 17, 2017).

11 Idem.

12 “Creative industries,” *UNESCO office in Santiago*, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/culture/creative-industries/> (accessed February 17, 2017).

industries), the humanities, and the heritage”¹³. Assuming that these actions by the government are intentional, it follows that they are accompanied by specific goals to attain. While an arts policy involves support for museums, visual arts, performing arts, and other traditional forms of arts, a cultural policy is broader as it also encompasses public support to institutions and locations such as libraries or parks, to popular events such as festivals and circus performances ; cultural policy is also involved with radio and television as they are important tools for the broadcasting of arts¹⁴. Cultural policy is of interest to various areas of government, such as the Arts/culture ministry, finance and treasury as cultural policy requires expenditure commitments, industry development as cultural policy can contribute to economic growth, labour as the cultural sector creates jobs, trade as cultural goods can be exported, education, and others¹⁵.

While the inclusion of a cultural dimension to governmental policy is not a recent phenomenon, cultural policies were for a long time opposed to the previously mentioned cultural industries, as the latter were seen as threatening high culture, which had to be protected by governmental actions : “The cultural industries were the ‘other’ against which cultural policy reacted, in the shape of arts subsidies, but also in the formation of public service broadcasting in some countries”¹⁶. It is only in the 1980s that the cultural industries started to be taken into account in cultural policy, as governments started to recognize the economic potential of culture, mainly in Western Europe. The French Ministry of Culture was one of the first to pay special attention to cultural industries, notably in the fields of film and cinema¹⁷. This reluctance to include the cultural industries in cultural policy is representative of the debate of “elitism” versus “populism” : while “proponents of the elitist position argue that cultural policy should emphasize aesthetic quality as the determining criterion for public subvention”, “the populist approach emphasizes a less traditional and more pluralist notion of artistic merit and consciously seeks to create a policy of cultural diversity”¹⁸.

There is little literature on cultural policies in Africa, mainly because they are generally less developed on the continent. Cameroon, notably, does not have a written cultural policy. This thesis will explore the governmental action related to cinema in Cameroon, and it will be useful

13 Kevin V. Mulcahy, “Cultural Policy: Definitions and Theoretical Approaches,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 35, 4 (2006), 320.

14 Idem. 321.

15 David Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 29.

16 Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, “Cultural Industries,” 4.

17 Idem. 5.

18 Mulcahy, “Cultural Policy,” 325.

to analyze how the absence of an official cultural policy impacts the result.

4. Soft power and cultural diplomacy

Joseph Nye defines power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes that you want”¹⁹. This can be achieved through two types of power : *hard power* relies on a country's economic or military resources to achieve the desired goal, while *soft power* “rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others”²⁰, which is rather based on cultural and ideological resources, and the ability to influence others' preferences through the attractiveness of your own ideas. This implies that a country does not have to rely solely on its *hard power* to be able to influence others, as a national image or values can also influence others. One way of exerting this soft power is *cultural diplomacy*.

The term *cultural diplomacy* has been used since the late nineteenth century by France, but it is only around the 1990s that other countries started referring to it, to express the use of cultural exchange as a means to advance national interests. Arndt differentiates cultural relations that “grow naturally and organically, without government intervention” from cultural diplomacy which is only applicable to a situation “when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests”²¹, thus highlighting that cultural diplomacy is a governmental practice which serves specific political objectives. Ang, Isar and Mar however note that the distinction has become more fluid recently, as cultural diplomacy is now understood as “pretty much any practice that is related to purposeful cultural cooperation between nations or groups of nations”²².

The most commonly used and perhaps most complete definition of cultural diplomacy is by Cummings, who defined it as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding, which can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on

19 Joseph Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 95.

20 Idem. 95.

21 Richard Arndt, *The first resort of kings. American cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006). xviii.

22 Ien Ang, Yudhishtir Raj Isar, and Phillip Mar, “Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, 4 (2015): 366.

promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or 'telling its story' to the rest of the world”²³. Cultural diplomacy is therefore a diplomatic practice that requires the involvement of a government, with the aim of promoting the nation's image or cultural understanding ; Cummings justly highlights the fact that cultural diplomacy does not necessarily involve two nations which are in an equal position. The concept of cultural diplomacy will be useful in this thesis to analyze the actions of France and Germany's cultural institutions in Cameroon, as these are instruments for the promotion of cultural exchange and for the national image of both countries.

23 Milton Cummings, *Cultural diplomacy and the United States government: a survey*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003). 1.

CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY

1. A qualitative research design

The aim of this thesis, as the research questions suggest, is to provide an overview of the current film industry in Cameroon with a special attention to the actions of the Cameroonian government, of the two international cultural institutions that are the French Institute and the Goethe Institute, and how these are perceived. A quantitative research design, which is largely based on the collection of large quantities of data and “upon the use of regression analysis and related techniques aiming at measuring causal inference”²⁴, seemed difficult to implement for this thesis as a quick research showed that data on the film industry in Cameroon was extremely difficult to find, if existent at all – barely any statistics seemed to be available on Cameroonian cinema, which was further confirmed during field research. Furthermore, the aim of this thesis was also to bring different perspectives from the various actors directly implied in the Cameroonian film industry, and a quantitative approach did not seem like an appropriate method to analyze the perceptions of a wide range of actors.

Therefore, a qualitative design seemed like the method of choice, as “interpretive/qualitative research aims at understanding events by discovering the meanings human beings attribute to their behavior and the external world. The focus is not on discovering laws about causal relationships between variables, but on understanding human nature, including the diversity of societies and cultures”²⁵. Indeed, using qualitative research methods would allow to observe the way the Cameroonian film industry is impacted by various actors not by analyzing statistics and numbers, but rather by hearing various actors' perspectives which would allow to deeply understand their opinions.

2. Sources

The choice of sources to use for this thesis was difficult as there is very little scholarly literature available on Cameroonian cinema and its industry. Academic literature was mainly used

24 Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating (eds.), *Approaches and the Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 27.

25 Idem. 26.

for the theoretical framework of this thesis, in order to research and understand concepts which could be applied to this thesis ; connecting these to the findings from the field research would then allow to place the latter in a broader concept, and ensure that the research questions could be answered in a broad context, instead of providing only the perspective of the interviewees. Scholarly articles and books were also used to research background information on the topic, such as the history of Cameroonian and African cinema, or France's and Germany's cultural policies throughout history. Additionally, I was able to access one Master thesis written at the University of Yaoundé I on Cameroonian cinema and used it for this thesis.

Besides scholarly literature, I used several news articles dealing with the latest developments in the cinema industry, which enabled me to know which events had been happening, particularly after I had left the country. As much of the information also circulates on social media, posts or comments which were relevant to this thesis were also used, since many debates taking place on Facebook brought interesting opinions from people not interviewed for this thesis. To understand the work of the French Institute and the Goethe Institute in Cameroon, as well as their global policies, their official websites and documents were consulted, to have their official message and compare it to other perspectives heard during the field work.

As this thesis focuses on cinema as an industry rather than on the content of Cameroonian films, using films and analyzing them did not seem particularly relevant. However, it still was important to watch at least some of them to have a better understanding of Cameroonian cinema, and to how it compares to European cinema as differences between both could have implications when looking at foreign institutions supporting the local film industry.

3. Fieldwork

Given the little availability of literature on this thesis' topic, conducting some fieldwork was necessary in the research process, and constituted at least half of the thesis writing process. Wolff writes that “research fields may be public places, groups, social milieux (‘scenes’) but also organizations or tribal groups”²⁶ ; for this thesis, the field could be defined as the cinema industry in Cameroon, and all of the people involved in it – meaning filmmakers, producers, actors, film

26 Stephan Wolff, “Ways into the Field and their Variants,” in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Flick et al. (SAGE: 2004). 195.

students, government officials whose work is related to cinema, people working at foreign institutions that are involved in cinema, and cinephiles.

The field research was done in the framework of an exchange semester spent at the University of Yaoundé I, studying in the history department. Having no previous contacts to anybody in the previously defined field, it was necessary to be prepared for potential difficulties to meet useful contacts or to get them to accept cooperating for this research. As the duration of my stay in Cameroon was six months, there was enough time to build connections in the beginning, and the first few weeks were mainly dedicated to building casual relationships with people in the field to ask them for advice on whom to meet with, and to develop a better idea of the field to later have a more structured plan. This part actually proved easier than expected, for several reasons. Firstly, Cameroonians were friendly and eager to help by sharing useful contacts and information ; this seemed to stem in part from the fact that since little attention has been given to Cameroonian cinema, people in the field were happy to meet someone, particularly from a foreign country, who was interested in researching the topic. The other reason why building connections was fairly easy is that given that the film industry in Cameroon is not very developed, relatively few people are involved in it and many of them know each other, which made it easier to be introduced to further contacts.

4. Qualitative interviews : the main method

As literature on the thesis' topic was scarce, it was necessary to find another method to access knowledge ; qualitative interviews appeared to be the method of choice for that, as “one of their uses here is the imparting of expert knowledge about the research field in question, the recording and analysis of the informants’ subjective perspective, or the collection of data relating to their biography”²⁷. The previously mentioned long timeframe available and the easiness of finding contacts in the field were two strong advantages which permitted to avoid certain difficulties related to the planning of the interviews, or the risk that they would not bring a sufficient amount of information. Interviews also were an easy way to gather perspectives from a wide range of

²⁷ Christel Hopf, “Qualitative Interviews: An Overview,” in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Flick et al. (SAGE: 2004). 203.

interviewees, which provided a set of varied opinions and ideas ; they also proved helpful, particularly in the beginning of the process, to raise further questions and bring more ideas to orient the process of researching the thesis.

Semi-structured interviews were favored over structured interviews or free interviews, as the former would have brought answers too narrow to be truly useful, and the latter would have brought too much information outside of the scope of the research questions, thus not being time-efficient. Instead, the semi-structured interview presents several advantages : one of them is that in the case of the researcher lacking knowledge on certain issues, a semi-structured interview allows to ask for further explanations by the interviewee. While it is important that the researcher prepares the interview well and does previous research on the issue in order to be able to ask meaningful questions, the lack of available information does not always permit this. In the case of this thesis, the lack of available literature and data could be compensated by asking for information directly to the interviewees, who were then free to add relevant information.

As the main goal for the interviews was to obtain knowledge which was not available elsewhere, the expert interview appeared most relevant here : “Im Experteninterview tritt die Biographie (und damit der/die Interviewte als Person) in den Hintergrund: Die Interviewten werden – die wissenssoziologische Unterscheidung von Laien und Experten sowie von Allgemeinwissen und spezialisiertem Wissen vorausgesetzt – als Akteure in dem von ihnen repräsentierten Funktionskontext angesprochen”²⁸. While some interviews, particularly with filmmakers, included biographical questions in order to understand how one would develop an interest for filmmaking in Cameroon, most interviewees were asked questions relating to their work and knowledge of the cinema industry, often with no link to their personal stories. Thus, in the case of scholars specializing in Cameroon's cultural industry or of government officials working at the cinema section of the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the expert interview was the most appropriate choice.

To get a comprehensive overview of the state of Cameroon's film industry, it was necessary to collect the perspectives and knowledge of a panel of various people involved in it, with different functions, so as to be able to compare opinions and thoughts. Given the large amount of time

28 Günter Mey and Katja Mruck “Qualitative Interviews,” in Naderer, Gabriele and Balzer, Eva, (eds), *Qualitative Marktforschung in Theorie und Praxis* (Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag, 2011). 265.

available, the interviewing process was not planned in advance and the number of interviews conducted would be adjusted according to the amount of information obtained from previous interviews. The first interviewees were mainly chosen according to the contacts I had already established ; as several interviews were conducted, further interviews were planned according to the contacts obtained from the first interviewees, and to the further issues and ideas arising from the interviews. In total, nine interviews were conducted with filmmakers, film festival directors, scholars specializing in cultural and film studies, officers from the Ministry of Arts and Culture, and a representative of the Goethe-Institute. To ensure that the perspectives obtained would be as diverse as possible, interviewees were of different age groups and were both from the Francophone and Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

In order to gain trust from the interviewee and ensure their cooperation, it is necessary to make sure that they are aware of the nature and the goal of the interview, by informing them of their duties and rights (*“Arbeitsbündnis”*), of the “assymetrische Gesprächssituation” and “Rollenzuschreibungen”, and of the possible consequences of the interview²⁹. The interviewees were briefly explained the research topic and goal of the interview during the first contact, or when planning to the interview. Before starting the interview, they were informed in more detail of the research topic, were asked for permission to record the interview, and they were informed of whom this thesis would be accessible to and of their right to answer questions anonymously where desired. They were also able to ask further questions regarding the interview process or the research topic.

The interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the interviewees. This was oftentimes their office or their home ; when this was not a possibility, interviews were conducted in public places such as university, restaurants or bars. Interviewees were previously informed of the approximate duration of the interview so that they could plan enough time for the interview not to be rushed ; the interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour. As the background of the interviewees was different, questions were tailored specifically for each interview, and included specific questions about their occupation, as well as general questions on the Cameroonian film industry and their personal opinions on it. It is generally recommended to start the interview with a general question which, although it might not be of central importance for the research, is easy

29 Idem. 268.

to answer and will not make the interviewee feel uneasy³⁰. Interviewees were therefore often asked to briefly describe their occupation and the content of their job, and questions then drifted to their area of expertise to become more specific. Further questions were sometimes asked when an issue of interest was raised by the interviewee, and towards the end of the interview, the respondents were asked about their personal opinions. Before the end of the interview, they would be asked if they wished to address a specific topic or add something to their previous response.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All the parts were transcribed except for those which were not relevant, for example if the interviewee started to talk about something off-topic. The content of the interviews was then used both for the factual information obtained, and to put the information in a critical perspective through the varied opinions collected with the interviews.

5. Participant observation

To gather information and gain better understanding of a certain practice, one can conduct participant observation, which can be defined as “taking part, for as long as possible, in this everyday practice and becoming familiar with it, so as to be able to observe its everyday performance”³¹. While this was not an important part of the research process for this thesis, it appeared as a suitable method to complement others, mainly to gain a better understanding of the cinema industry by being involved in certain activities. This involved mainly three types of activities. Firstly, the regular attendance of film-related events such as film screenings at the French and Goethe Institute and film festival openings offered networking possibilities, as well as the opportunity to observe the setting of film screenings and audience practices with regards to going to watch films. Secondly, since I was in Cameroon while the filmmaker Zigoto Tchaya Tchameni was shooting his movie *Calendar*, I was offered the possibility to act in some scenes of the movie, which enabled me to witness the shooting of a movie locally, and get a better understanding of film-making practices and conditions in the country. Thirdly, attending a weekly

30 Idem. 270.

31 Christian Lüders, “Field Observation and Ethnography,” in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Flick et al. (SAGE: 2004). 222.

cinema class at the University of Yaoundé I was a way to meet cinema students and aspiring filmmakers, and to get a hands-on experience of cinema training in Cameroon.

6. Hindrances encountered during research

Among the difficulties encountered while researching for this thesis were the low availability of sources, which has previously been mentioned. Besides the lack of available scholarly literature, which made the preparation of interviews more complicated, the unstable Internet connection in Yaoundé made it difficult to access other sources online including the websites of the French and Goethe-Institute, or social media ; most of the interviews therefore had to be conducted very early on in the research process. Also, the use of Internet is not widespread in Cameroon and information can be difficult to access, notably regarding contact information of specific persons.

Although the lack of available data led to the exclusion of a quantitative research design, the difficulty to find reliable numbers and statistics proved to be an issue even while using qualitative methods. Indeed, most of the information was obtained orally from interviewees, with little possibility to double-check it. The scarcity of reliable numbers made it difficult to thoroughly understand the size and scope of Cameroon's film industry as even basic information on the amount of films produced in a year, for example, was impossible to find and made it extremely difficult to estimate the importance of film production in the country.

The conduct of interviews was also sometimes complicated, as some interviews were not planned at all, but were conducted on the spot as interviewees were busy and did not have time to schedule a meeting in the future. Some interviews were not properly scheduled and I had not managed to be in direct contact with the interviewees prior to it, but was introduced to them on the same day by a friend. It therefore proved difficult to find an appropriate location for the interviews as Yaoundé is a noisy city with few quiet locations ; one interview in particular was conducted at a bar on the roadside, and was hard to transcribe as the background noise was too high. Another problem resided in the fact that some interviewees were extremely friendly and seemed keener on having a casual chat than a formal interview, which led to some off-topic

remarks and sometimes made it complicated to keep track of the interview's structure.

Finally, although finding interviewees was generally fairly easy thanks to the many people willing to help me in this task, I was not able to secure an interview with anyone at the French Institute, despite several attempts to get in touch with them. While the other interviews I conducted gave a satisfactory amount of information, this thesis would certainly have been enriched by talking to a representative of the French Institute, as the institution is a central subject in this research. The impossibility to talk to anyone from there was compensated by a larger focus on France's foreign cultural policy in history and in the present, and by focusing on opinions expressed by others about the French Institute.

CHAPTER 3 : AN OVERVIEW OF CAMEROON'S FILM INDUSTRY

This chapter provides a general overview of the current state of filmmaking in Cameroon. The first part will present a brief history of Cameroonian cinema since the country's independence in 1960, in two stages : cinema in Cameroon experienced a so-called golden era from the 1960s to the 1980s, before falling into a steep decline marked by the closure of cinema theaters and the rapid decrease of production. The second part of this chapter will discuss the role of the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MINAC), by presenting its mandates and structures, its policies related to filmmaking and by discussing its interest (or not) in the promotion of cinema. The third part will present other important actors with an important role in the Cameroonian film industry, namely the newest generation of filmmakers, anglophone Cameroonian cineasts, film festivals, and training structures including universities.

I. BRIEF HISTORY OF CINEMA IN CAMEROON

1. Post-independence : the Golden Age

The beginnings

The first film shot in Cameroon, *Le Haut-Commissariat de la République française au Cameroun*, dates from 1919 but the history of Cameroonian cinema really started after independence, in the 1960s³². The first films made by Cameroonian directors were shot in Paris, such as *Aventure en France* by Jean-Paul Ngassa (1962), narrating the daily life of Cameroonian students in Paris ; Thérèse Sita-Bella then shot *Tam-Tam à Paris* in 1963. It is not until 1966 that a feature-length was shot in Cameroon : *Point de vue n°1*, by Dia Moukouri. Over the period 1963-1973, about 15 short and medium lengths films were produced, mainly with the financial and technical support of French institutions³³.

Cameroonian film production took a new turn in the 1970s with the emergence of a new

32 Florent Coulon, "Une histoire du cinéma camerounais. Cheminement vers l'indépendance de la production," *Afrique contemporaine* 238 (2011): 96.

33 Idem.

generation of directors such as Jean-Pierre Dikongué Pipa, Daniel Kamwa and Alphonse Béni, with the common characteristic of having been trained in French film schools in the 1950s (in the *Conservatoire libre du cinéma français* for the two former, and at the *University of Paris 8-Vincennes* for the latter)³⁴. In 1975, Jean-Pierre Dikongué Pipa directed *Muna Moto*, the first Cameroonian film to be successful beyond national borders as it won several prizes at international film festivals, and is to this date the only Cameroonian film to have won the *Étalon de Yennenga* at the prestigious *Festival panafricain de cinéma de Ouagadougou* (FESPACO) in Burkina Faso in 1976. It is however worth noting that the film was a failure in Cameroon, as audiences were not used to this kind of film and rather confused by the oniric sequences and flash-backs³⁵. The same year, Daniel Kamwa produced *Pousse-Pousse*, which made the reverse career as *Muna Moto* : the film did not win any international prizes but was a huge hit with the audience with over one million cinema admissions on the whole continent, making it “one of the best-sellers of Black African cinema”³⁶. Alphonse Béni was one of the first directors to start making commercial films : he directed *Dance my love*, the first Cameroonian musical, in 1978³⁷.

The creation of public infrastructures

The development of a film industry in Cameroon came with the creation by the state of several public structures related to cinema. The first of these was *Cameroun Actualités*, created in 1962 and producing newsreels shown in cinema halls before films, thus enabling the state to ensure its own representation in a context where news were still controlled by the former French colonial power ; this structure was mainly a propaganda instrument³⁸. It was followed by the creation in 1967 of a *Service du Cinéma* attached to the Ministry of Information and Culture, with the aim of applying the governmental cinematographic policy. To decentralize its services, one centre of cinematography was created in each Cameroonian province. The *Commission nationale de contrôle*, presided by the Minister of Information and Culture, was created in 1971 to control the moral quality of films shown in Cameroon and exercise censorship³⁹.

34 Edwige Nzoutap Yempmo, “La diffusion du film camerounais : réalités et perspectives” (Master thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2010). 24.

35 Guy Jérémie Ngansop, *Le cinéma camerounais en crise* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), 19.

36 Idem.

37 Idem.

38 Nzoutap, “La diffusion”, 24.

39 Ngansop, *Le cinéma camerounais*, 29.

Following the creation, one year earlier, of the Direction of Cinematography, the government took a big step to support cinema by creating the *Fonds de développement de l'industrie cinématographique* (FODIC) in 1973. This structure was meant to meet the demand of cineasts to structure the sector and encourage the birth of a real film industry, and aimed to do so through six main goals : produce Cameroonian films through direct funding or in cooperation with other financial institutions ; produce newsreels ; improve the conditions of distribution and renting films in Cameroon ; provide technical equipment such as a laboratory, an auditorium, editing facilities ; build and modernize cinema theaters ; promote Cameroonian cinema both nationally and internationally. The institution was financed by an endowment by the state of 500.000FF, by a tax on cinema tickets (initially of 5%, but raised to 16,7% in 1977) and by a tax on screening visas for films⁴⁰. It could intervene in three ways :

1. Granting of loans for the equipment of cinema theaters ;
2. Guarantees for loans from lending institutions to national film producers and managers of cinema theaters ;
3. Attribution of various forms of financial support to Cameroonian cineasts⁴¹.

The activities of the FODIC added new momentum to Cameroonian cinema. It participated to the construction of five movie theaters, and in the 1980s, the country counted about 77 theaters spread in the whole country (there were 32 in 1973, when the institution was created⁴²). The FODIC acquired an important number of production and editing facilities of good quality such as cameras, a power generator, or projectors made available to Cameroonian cineasts. Its creation also boosted film production : Cameroon produced 41 films between 1973-1983, making it second largest in francophone Africa after Senegal⁴³. Filmmaking practices in Cameroon evolved towards “a distinctly commercial orientation with real efforts to reach a wide audience through the use of comedy”⁴⁴ ; Alphonse Béni, for example, made *Anna Makossa* in 1979 and *Saint Voyou* in 1980 in hopes of commercial success. In 1979, the government started the construction of a building of cinema (nowadays hosting the Ministry of Communication), in order to gather all

40 Idem.

41 Excerpt of the article 2-2 of the decree n° 73-673 from the 27th October 1973 concerning the establishment and organization of the *Fonds de développement de l'industrie cinématographique*.

42 Coulon, “Une histoire du cinéma camerounais”, 93.

43 Ngansop, *Le cinéma camerounais*, 20.

44 Roy Armes, *African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 45.

public structures related to film in the same place, showing the importance given to the sector⁴⁵.

2. Post 1980s : the decline

Despite promising beginnings, the success of Cameroonian cinema did not last. In the late 1980s, an economic crisis hit Cameroon and affected all sectors including culture, leading to a much less productive cinema industry⁴⁶. However, the decline of Cameroonian cinema was also caused by several other criteria, which will be analyzed in this part.

FODIC failure

While this thesis has previously discussed the positive role of the FODIC in the development of Cameroonian cinema, issues of mismanagement led to its ultimate failure. Although the structure did help boost film production, this has to be nuanced as most films produced in Cameroon were short films, and the number of feature-length films stayed low. The FODIC also presented several structural issues, its role not being always clear. Although the structure's general aim was to support Cameroon's film industry, the decree creating FODIC only mentioned a financial service, but did not refer to specific entities dealing with production, programming or operation, which are other vital parts of the film industry ; Dikongue Pipa called it a “structure without a soul”⁴⁷ in 1984. Despite the large sums of money invested by the government, some of the decisions can be considered incoherent : for example, the FODIC acquired technical equipment for a total cost of 300 million FCFA in 1985, when production had plummeted and Cameroon was producing on average one short film per year⁴⁸. The structure also lacked certain important facilities, notably a laboratory to develop the films : its absence forced Cameroonian filmmakers to turn to foreign institutions (mostly French) to develop their films in Europe, before returning to Cameroon for editing⁴⁹.

The loan and guarantee policies of the FODIC were also poorly designed, making it difficult

45 Charles Soh Tatcha, *Le cinéma de Daniel Kamwa. Parcours esthétique et identitaire*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 17.

46 Tchinda Ive Archil, Georges Madiba and François Gérard Mintunu (Head of the Cinema and Audiovisual department, Director of Cinema and Audiovisual and Sub-director of Cinematography, Norms and Control at the Ministry of Arts and Culture), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 16, 2016.

47 Ngansop, *Le cinéma camerounais*, 24.

48 Idem.

49 Coulon, “Une histoire du cinéma camerounais”, 97.

for producers (who were often the same person as the filmmaker) to pay back loans within two years ; given that only 30% of cinema ticket revenues were for the producer, it was almost impossible to meet payback deadlines if the film was not profitable on the national market, as revenues for international distribution would take more time to come⁵⁰.

Furthermore, the structure faced criticism in the attribution of financial help for films and for cinema halls, being accused of making partial choices and of favoring individuals rather than the quality of selected projects. On the other hand, several directors were accused of funneling the money they were granted, or of using it for personal purposes, as there was no follow-up mechanism ensuring that the money was not being misused (which could have been implemented by assigning an executive producer to each film which received public funds, for example). This ultimately led to a lack of trust between the state and the filmmakers, and sometimes resulted in directors being sued by the government⁵¹.

It soon became apparent that the FODIC was not efficient anymore, and in October 1984, its director Richard Basile Ngoumou even admitted that the FODIC had “a very limited role in the production of Cameroonian cinema”. The total cost of the project had amounted to over a billion of FCFA, but in 1987, Ngansop already feared it was “an operation of prestige without any commercial value”⁵². Finally, in 1990, during the *États généraux de la culture*, the failure of the structure was officially established and the FODIC was dissolved⁵³.

Shutdown of cinema theaters

The other factor leading to the demise of Cameroon's film industry is the shutdown of cinema theaters. We have previously mentioned the number of around 70 halls in the country in the 1980s. It is however worth noting that only three of them (*Le Wouri* in Douala, and *Le Capitole* and *Abbia* in Yaoundé) had a certain comfort, and targeted Europeans and higher classes of Cameroonians. Most other halls, although affordable, had uncomfortable chairs, and screened films with bad sound and image quality, and were therefore less attractive. Beyond comfort, technical equipment was generally old, and not well-maintained ; but renovation costs were

50 Idem.

51 Ngansop, *Le cinéma camerounais*, 34-35.

52 Idem. 25.

53 Nzoutap, “La diffusion”, 31.

prohibitively high, theaters were already subject to high taxes, and filmmakers complained about the high taxes imposed by the government.

Cinema halls also became less profitable as by 1985, the national channel CRTV became available in the whole country, and frequentation of theaters quickly decreased. Piracy also became widespread, as videotapes were easy to duplicate. In the 1990s, so-called *ciné-clubs* proliferated in the whole country, showing the latest movies at very cheap costs, only days after they were out in theaters, or sometimes even before as was the case with *Titanic*⁵⁴.

Lastly, it seems necessary to point out that Cameroonian films were hardly profitable in their own country, as screens were monopolized by foreign productions. After independence, like in most francophone African countries, movie theaters in Cameroon remained controlled by French foreign distribution companies. These operated in a system of packages of films : they would send popular films to cinema halls along with lower-quality ones, and operators had to screen them both. This prevented the diffusion of Cameroonian films in two ways : firstly, it saturated the screens and left little time to program local films on top of the ones sent by distribution companies ; the low-quality movies made little profit, but their cost was cushioned with the revenues of the more popular films, thus making the package system much cheaper than screening Cameroonian movies which were generally not profitable⁵⁵. Most films shown were French, Indian or Chinese until the 1980s, when American films started entering the market ; by the 1990s, 60% of films shown in Cameroon were from the USA, while Cameroonian films only accounted for 0,5%⁵⁶. It is therefore unsurprising that in a country where local directors struggle to show their films, the cinema industry cannot exist properly.

The history of Cameroon's film industry can therefore be summarized in two main periods : first a thriving one, when the film industry was booming and seemed bound to a very promising future ; the second period was one of disillusion with the film industry being hit by the failure of the main state institution supporting cinema, and by the progressive shutdown of all cinema halls in the country. After this historical background, this thesis will start giving an overview of the

54 Annette Angoua Nguea, *Repenser la production cinématographique au Cameroun* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 41.

55 Nzoutap, "La diffusion", 20.

56 Angoua Nguea, *Repenser la production*, 24.

current situation of cinema in Cameroon, starting with the analysis of one of its main actors, namely the Ministry of Arts and Culture.

II. THE MINISTRY OF ARTS AND CULTURE

1. Structure and role

Organs related to cinema

Cameroon has had a Ministry entirely dedicated to culture since 1992 only. Before that date, culture was a part of the Ministry of Information and Culture, which split in 1992 to become the Ministry of Communication (MINCOM) and the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MINAC). The MINAC is located in a new building, but the structure dealing with cinema affairs still has its offices in the former Ministry of Information and Culture – which is now officially the MINCOM, as the building had originally been built for cinema infrastructures during Cameroonian cinema's successful period, with revenues from cinema taxes. The national film library and a screening room named Sita Bella are also inside the premises, which is another reason why the MINAC decided to leave the cinema offices there⁵⁷.

The MINAC was restructured in 2012, by the Decree N°2012/381 from the 14th September 2012 on the “Organization of the Ministry of Arts and Culture”. It is this decree that establishes the structures in charge of cinema, namely the *Direction de la Cinématographie et des Productions Audiovisuelles*. This structure is divided into two sub-structures : the sub-direction of “Cinematography, norms and controls”, and the sub-direction of “Audiovisual”, with two services each. A closer look at the services within these sub-structures highlights a number of organizational issues. The sub-direction of Cinematography, norms and controls, comprises a “service of cinematography and audiovisual”, while the sub-direction of Audiovisual comprises a “service of norms and controls” (article 56, paragraph 2), which seems rather confusing. The description of the tasks of each service are not much more helpful to understand exactly how the roles are divided : the service of cinematography and audiovisual is in charge of “technical assistance to national producers, distributors and operators” (article 57), while the service of Cinema and screening (in the other sub-direction) is in charge of “technical assistance to video

⁵⁷ Archil, Madiba and Mintunu, Interview.

and audiovisual production” (article 59). Both sub-directions themselves are in charge of “technical assistance to national distributors, producers and operators” for the first one, and “technical assistance to video production, conception and support to the making of films and audiovisual documents”. As Eloundou analyzes, “everyone does everything at the same time”⁵⁸, making it difficult to understand how exactly the different roles are distributed within all the different sub-structures. It therefore seems safe to assume that overlapping responsibilities for each service and the lack of precision in the description of their roles can pose a number of problems in the functioning of the ministry.

Mandates and policies

The general role of the Ministry of Arts and Culture is described in the previously mentioned Decree on its organization ; its mandates include, among others, “the development and diffusion of national arts and culture” ; “the protection, conservation, enrichment and promotion of cultural, artistic and cinematographic heritage” ; “the promotion of artistic and cultural creation” ; “the promotion and follow-up on the diffusion of art and cinematographic works, in relation with involved administrations”. It is however difficult to find documents describing actual policy orientations, either in terms of culture in general or more specifically related to cinema. Out of nine interviews conducted, none of the interviewees positively described the governmental action in terms of culture or cinema, and several agreed that one could hardly speak of a cultural policy as such. The Communications Officer at the MINAC, when asked about the Ministry's action, mentioned the promotion of Cameroonian national cultural identity, financial support to the film industry, the control of professions and activities in the field, as well as the delivery of shooting authorizations. He did however not cite any concrete measures or numbers, and did not communicate on a global strategy for the ministry of culture⁵⁹.

During an interview conducted with several officers from the DCPA several days after the one previously mentioned, the interviewees communicated on an attempt to “revive the flame of

58 Longin Colbert Eloundou, “La politique cinématographique de l'Etat du Cameroun.” (paper presented at the colloquium “Développement du cinéma et Politiques Publiques” at the *Rencontres Internationales du Film Court*, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 2013). 6.

59 Clavère Nken (Head of Communications at the Ministry of Arts and Culture), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 9, 2016.

Cameroonian cinema”⁶⁰. Five aspects to work on were mentioned : training, implying the implementation of good film schools in the country ; financing, which will be mentioned later ; a commission of arts and letters, intending to encourage quality projects through actions such as scenario contests ; distribution, diffusion and operation, to ensure that Cameroonian films can be distributed both in the country and abroad, and to create incentives for business people to invest in cinema and create an economy ; and regulation, as laws are outdated and need to be adapted to new technologies. Some specific projects were cited, such as training sessions organized by the Ministry, or a “ciné-outdoor” project where free screenings are organized outdoors by the Ministry to encourage people to go to the cinema and eventually create a need for cinema halls.

The director of cinematography, Georges Madiba, explained these new goals by referring to a new will from the Ministry to recover the national film industry, mentioning “new orientations coming, with a much more global vision”. He explained that they were under the impression that cinema seemed to be a priority for the new Minister of Arts and Culture (who came into office in 2014), but that other sectors had been prioritized first and that it was now cinema's turn to be in the spotlight⁶¹. While this seemingly new priority placed on revitalizing Cameroon's film industry is praiseworthy, it is unclear how official this strategy is. Indeed, besides the interviewees at the Cinema department of the MINAC, nobody mentioned the new ongoing projects, including the communications officer of the Ministry who did not seem aware of this. There were no documents available either mentioning the new efforts. It therefore seems wise to wait a few months to see whether these efforts are real, and words are followed by actions.

3. *Compte d'Affectation Spécial de soutien à la production culturelle*

Goal and funding

This structure was created through the presidential decree n° 2001/389 in date of December 5th 2001, as a replacement for the FODIC. Its goal is to “encourage excellence in the creation, production and diffusion of intellectual works ; encourage the safeguarding and valorization of the national cultural heritage ; help the creation or modernization of collective management

60 Archil, Madiba and Mintunu, Interview.

61 Ibid.

organizations ; guarantee the loans granted by lending institutions ; award prizes to the best works through contests organized in the various creative genres ; contribute to the financing of professional solidarity organizations ; help traditional cultural associations”⁶². More concretely, this structure functions as an account with an annual budget of 1 billion FCFA, which is meant to be used to support various projects in all domains of culture, such as music, painting, theater, and cinema. Eligible are cultural enterprises based in Cameroon, Cameroonian authors and artists, cultural associations registered in Cameroon, organizations of professional solidarity, and relatives of deceased Cameroonian artists. Applicants are invited to submit their proposals to the MINAC, where a special commission is in charge of examining the projects and making a decision.

While this structure has many issues, the main one is the amount of money it is granted : 1 billion FCFA equals about 1,5 million euros, which is a ridiculous sum : as a comparison, the average budget of a French film is about 4,4 million euros⁶³. This sum of 1 billion FCFA is meant to finance all cultural sectors for a whole year : there are 7 official sectors, it seems obvious that this is largely insufficient, especially as cinema is by far one of the most expensive sectors of cultural production. There seem to be no official guidelines or strategy regarding the choice of financed projects : the communications officer of the Ministry, when asked whether the budget is meant to rather finance a few projects with an important sum or several projects with a modest contribution, explained that “if a project is good, there is no reason why we would not support it with more means, but if there are many good projects, we have to support them too”⁶⁴. Actually, all the people involved in Cameroonian cinema seem to agree that the fund is not high enough to be helpful, starting with the people at the Ministry themselves, who talked about it as a symbolic way to show support to the cultural sector, but also described it as “almost insignificant” and recognized that it was “un saupoudrage qui ne porte pas nécessairement des effets”⁶⁵.

62 “Compte d'affectation spécial pour le soutien de la politique culturelle”, *Document d'information*, Direction De La Cinématographie et des Productions Audiovisuelles (Facebook page), August 16, 2016. Accessed January 5, 2017.

<https://www.facebook.com/dcpaminac/photos/a.978952242116120.1073741828.976797712331573/1261646997179975/?type=3&theater>

63 Anaïs Demont, “Cinéma. En France, le budget moyen d'un film est de 4,4 millions d'euros,” *Ouest France*, May 18, 2016, accessed January 05, 2017.

<http://www.ouest-france.fr/culture/cinema-en-france-le-budget-moyen-dun-film-est-de-44-millions-4235400>

64 Nken, Interview.

65 Archil, Madiba and Mintunu, Interview.

Issues of mismanagement and lack of transparency

Beyond the insufficient funds allocated to this account, there seem to be major issues of transparency and accountability related to this structure. Data on the funded projects is impossible to find as there seem to be no statistics on this *Compte d'Affectation Spécial* ; even governmental officials, when asked about it, did not seem to have an idea of how the money was granted. The Communications officer said he did not know the percentage of the budget that was dedicated to cinema as he had “not had the occasion yet to look at the statistics of the account”, implying that these statistics existed⁶⁶. However; the officials at the DCPA said that no statistics had been collected since 2008, and therefore it was not possible to know how the money was distributed between the different sectors of culture⁶⁷. It is puzzling that the people in the government in charge of cinema were not able to give a rough estimate of the funding granted to their own sector. But even more strange is the fact that when I asked the DCPA officials to give me examples of films or directors that had been supported through this fund, they only mentioned two films : *Confidences* by Cyrille Masso and *Les Saignantes* by Jean-Pierre Bekolo ; the former came out in 2006, and *Les Saignantes* in 2005. All three interviewees had started working at the DCPA after 2013, but none of them seemed to have heard of any specific project funded by the account, which I found strange.

A possible explanation to this absence of information on funded projects came from other interviewees : according to several people, the reason for this lack of data – or at least the lack of transparency on the numbers - was simply that the money had not been granted. One person interviewed for this thesis, Longin Colbert Eloundou, created an observatory for cultural policy in Cameroon as part of the panafrikan *Observatory for cultural policies in Africa*, and analyzed Cameroon's cultural policy. The government claimed to have granted 800 million FCFA over the 2008-2012 period to cinema, but the observatory was denied access to the accounting documents. Following this, they conducted research and their findings indicated that not 800 but only 200 millions had been granted⁶⁸. As for the question of who receives the money, several interviewees

66 Nken, Interview.

67 Archil, Madiba and Mintunu, Interview.

68 Longin Colbert Eloundou (lecturer at University of Yaoundé I and expert in cultural policy), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 17, 2016.

described the process as entirely corrupt. According to one scholar that I interviewed, “even those granted the funding are not cineasts but fictitious persons, persons that are created and that we give to because we are related. Even if there is a follow-up, a fake file is created, everything plays out on paper”. One other said that “for the past 6 years, filmmakers have hardly had that money, unless they're a person close to the minister they can't get that money. (...) Festivals have received some money, but individual filmmakers rarely receive money. I can't figure out whether it is because they don't know how to apply for this money, but when I ask filmmakers, most of them say they have applied and had no opportunity to get money”⁶⁹. The FODIC had been accused of favoring certain people close to those in charge of deciding who was awarded funding, which had been cited as one of the causes of its demise, but it seems that the corruption issue is very similar in the current structure.

4. Lack of willingness to promote cinema

Lack of interest for culture

Structural issues, a tradition of incoherent cultural policies, insufficient funds and a lack of transparency and accountability are all reasons why the MINAC's role in the promotion of Cameroonian cinema has not been successful so far. However it must not be forgotten that the Ministry is part of Paul Biya's government, which raises one important question : does the government really have an interest in encouraging Cameroonians to make films? Members of the government are often criticized for being incompetent and corrupt, and in the case of the MINAC, for not understanding the value of culture. As a filmmaker put it in one interview, “The cultural policy concerning filmmaking in Cameroon is very disastrous, because (the people at the MINAC) don't even have a value for the profession. Even the ministers of culture don't know the value of filmmaking so they don't care if the cinemas have closed down. Because they don't know that cinema can promote tourism in Cameroon. (...) And because they have no value for that, they don't care about giving money for films”. This perspective on the MINAC seems to be widely shared among cinema professionals, who express a “real sense of abandonment from the

⁶⁹ The interviewees from both quotes asked to remain anonymous.

MINAC facing all these challenges on the road for Cameroonian cineasts and Cameroonian cinema”⁷⁰.

Cultural expression as a threat for the government

However, several factors can lead us to think that the MINAC's inaction is not only due to their failure to recognize the value of culture for Cameroon. It is necessary to remember that Cameroon's president Paul Biya has been in power since 1982 and has been criticized for not being willing to hand over his power. As one interviewee put it : “cultural policies in Cameroon over the last 20 years show that culture is not a priority for the state, and we can guess the reason why : because culture bothers. The creator of intellectual works is primarily an observer of the environment, somebody who re-tells the environment with words. And whoever re-tells the Cameroonian environment with his own words will say that it is a country that does not work, which is bad for the regime who wants to show that this country works, although everybody knows that the country doesn't work well. That is why culture is not a priority, and even worse, it seems as if everything is being done to harm cultural expression in Cameroon”⁷¹. The argument that the Cameroonian state does not support cinema because they would rather silence artists who are critical of the regime was brought up several times by different people.

Several events that occurred over the last few years seem to support this argument. In 2013, Richard Djif, student at the University of Yaoundé I, made *139, Les Derniers Prédateurs*, a film set in the fictitious country of Chimpanze, where an autocratic ruler who has been in power for 139 years refuses to leave office and tortures political activists asking him to do so. Although Cameroon is never evoked in the film, it is hard to ignore the similarities with the country's regime. Despite the refusal of the MINAC to grant a shooting permit, Djif and his team still secretly shot the film and after screening it in March 2013, started receiving threatening messages. Djif was abducted in the night of the 23rd to 24th March and freed on the 3rd of April, after having been tortured and getting one finger cut off, according to his claims. In a declaration published hours before news of his release, several Cameroonian artists and activists accused the government of being responsible for Djif's abduction, mentioning “authoritarian tensions in

70 Joseph Pascal Mbarga, “L'industrie cinématographique du Cameroun : évaluation et perspectives,” *CamPuce*, 2013, <http://eprints.campuce.org/56/> (accessed September 18, 2016).

71 The interviewee asked to remain anonymous.

Cameroon, noticeable for several years now by multifaceted barriers to free dissemination of works of artistic creativity, orchestrated by the powers that be, and targeting especially film productions, via outright censorship and prohibition of the screening of films and documentaries deemed “embarrassing”⁷².

This incident was not the first one of the kind. In April 2011, a human rights film festival organized by the French association *Alliance Ciné* was cancelled only 30 minutes after the first screening, through an order of the prefect of the Mfoundi region. Among the reasons invoked for this ban, all the administrative ones (such as absence of official declarations by the organizing associations) were considered invalid by the organizers, but the main reason of “danger to disruption of public order” was interpreted as an infringement on free speech by the organizers of the festival Vincent Mercier and Mélanie Barreau, who saw the breach as “a political refusal to tackle issues related to human rights in Cameroon”.⁷³ In March 2013, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, one of Cameroon's most prominent film directors, made *Le Président – how do you know it's time to go?*, a fiction also dealing with an old president in the end of his reign, which was censored in Cameroon and did not get a screening visa – presumably for the same reason that it could be interpreted as criticism towards Biya.⁷⁴

In 2009, Tchouaffé analyzed the works of the most prominent Cameroonian filmmakers throughout history and highlighted the way most directors use film as a medium of political expression and criticism towards the regime, arguing that “Cameroonian film reveals complex social and ideological tensions as it confronts institutional power”⁷⁵. While he made the argument at the time that “the fact that filmmakers are not being killed or jailed indicates the state’s recognition that these citizens are major political actors,” in light of the events mentioned above, it seems that the opposite argument – namely, that the state's repression of filmmakers indicates that it sees them as a real threat – could be made.

72 “We call for the release of Richard Djif as well as freedom of speech, thought and imagination!” Declaration by Cameroonian artists and activists” *Africiné*, April 01, 2013. Accessed October 27, 2016.
<http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=11432>

73 Mélanie Barreau and Vincent Mercier, “Censure, mode d'emploi” *Festival international du film des droits de l'homme, Yaoundé*, April 18, 2011. Accessed October 27, 2016.
<http://www.festival-droitsdelhomme.org/yaounde/>

74 “We call for the release”

75 Jean-Olivier Tchouaffé, “Reframing African cinema and democracy: the case of Cameroon”, *Journal of African Cinemas* Vol. 1 No 1 (2009): 58.

The public structures in charge of cinema in Cameroon present several important issues, and overall, public action related to cultural and film policy has, until now, been far from successful. Organizational problems such as inappropriate structures, lack of accountability and insufficient funding are to blame, but mostly, a possible perception by the government of cinema as a threat to political power seem to explain the relative failure of the MINAC to support the film industry efficiently. We will now discuss the role of other major players in Cameroonian cinema in order to better understand the field.

III. OTHER ACTORS

The third part of this chapter will give an overview of other important non-state, local actors in the Cameroonian film industry, and analyze their roles in it. Firstly, it will focus on the people directly involved in film-making, namely filmmakers and producers, to give an overview of different processes of making films in Cameroon. Film festivals are a major part of film-making in Cameroon, it is therefore important to look at the various ones and their impact on the film industry. This thesis will also take a closer look at Anglophone Cameroonians in the film industry, as film-making practices and environment are different from the Francophone areas. Finally, this part of the chapter will analyze training opportunities for local filmmakers, and analyze the consequences of their scarcity.

1. The young generation of filmmakers

To understand the film industry in Cameroon, the research for this thesis included several interviews with film-makers and producers who shared their perspectives on film making in Cameroon. Despite the difficult environment they are working in, all film-makers I met seem to have in common the passion of cinema : they make films “for the love of art”⁷⁶ - which often implies finding strategies to overcome financial obstacles. This first starts at the stage of funding the film. We have previously discussed the very limited financial support offered by the state, and will in the next chapter discuss funding from foreign organizations. But overall, opportunities are

⁷⁶ Mbarga, “L’industrie cinématographique”, 7.

very limited and filmmakers generally struggle to find the necessary financial resources to make their films as they want.

Several interviewees have pointed out that the configuration in Cameroon makes it difficult to follow the typical process of film production in other countries. One interviewee, Dieudonné Alaka, explained that “in traditional production, when you sign a contract, the producer has to give you a minimum guarantee, an advance. Once the funding arrives, you get another 10%, and during the shooting you get the salary of director. But in the local configuration, this is impossible, because the producer might have the technical means and could give you that – these means are about 15 to 20% of the budget of a film. But you can't wait for a producer who doesn't have the money to pay you, it's impossible”⁷⁷. With trusted producers, there can be alternative arrangements. A director who really wants to make his film can agree to sign a contract without getting any advance of money, and without paying the producer, only if he can be given priority to get his share once the movie is sold. Alaka said that he had used this formula three times, but it is risky as when the producer is not paid, there is no guarantee that film will actually be made : technicians are scarce and not always trained, and the quality of the film is not certain. This strategy can therefore be used only with trusted producers.

But trusted producers are rare, and in case there is no producer the director can work with, he will often do the job of the producer himself. The lack of funding opportunities means that the director will generally need to find other means – often this means using personal funds, borrowing money from friends, or asking banks for a loan. During my stay in Cameroon, I followed my friend Zigoto Tchaya Tchameni during the making of his film *Calendar*, and I could witness the various problems arising from financial issues. Zigoto had his own filming equipment, and his wife took care of writing the scenario and later editing the movie ; the crew was a team of volunteers, usually film students from university who, as most young aspiring directors, were willing to work for free as they knew they could not find any paid work in the field and wanted to gain experience. No money was spent on shooting locations, but the movie was shot in friends' houses or in public spaces. Actors were also unpaid, and not always experienced : most of them were university students, friends of Zigoto or his family. But cutting

⁷⁷ Dieudonné Alaka and Jacques Merlin Bell Bell (Film producer and lecturer at University of Yaoundé I, and PhD candidate at University of Yaoundé I), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 09, 2016.

down on all these costs comes with a number of issues : hiring university students as technicians means they are not necessarily qualified, and unexperienced actors are not as good as trained ones. Filming in public spaces without much preparation also led to issues : in one instance, the crew ended up in a heated argument with owners of a bar nearby who refused to stop playing music after they were asked to because it was disturbing the shooting.

However, not all costs can be avoided, and with little funding it can prove hard to cover even a small budget. With uncertain finances, Zigoto was not able to plan the making of the movie in advance and adapted to circumstances ; he sought funding while making the movie, and the shooting often depended on how much he could find. For example, when the main actress planned a private trip to the beach in Kribi, Zigoto had the idea to shoot a scene there and joined the trip with two friends who assisted during the shooting, for which he had to borrow money. But at a later stage, he ran out of money which slowed down the shooting process, as technicians would not come if their transportation expenses were not covered. After the movie was shot, marketing again caused financial issues : the movie premiere had to be delayed as the funds for renting a space, printing posters, making DVDs, etc. were insufficient.

Not only Zigoto, but several other filmmakers have described such processes when making a film. In the absence of trained professionals, funding sources and proper film structures, the filmmaking process in Cameroon seems to be a do-it-yourself one and while filmmakers can be admired for the creativity and ingenuity they demonstrate, they mostly find their potential limited due to lack of resources.

2. Anglophone film makers

While this thesis focuses on the role of state cultural policies and of international institutions on Cameroonian cinema, it is important to mention one group which does not seem particularly concerned with these, and these are Anglophone Cameroonians. While the Francophone and Anglophone Cameroons reunited in 1961, and the country is officially bilingual, tensions are still very present and beyond the language barriers, cultural differences are important between both regions. Because of that, cinema in the Anglophone region can be analyzed separately from cinema in Francophone Cameroon, and tensions between both regions can arise.

The Nollywood influence

Cinema in Anglophone Cameroon is largely influenced by Nollywood, the name given to the Nigerian film industry – which can be characterized by cheaply made home videos, widely distributed on DVD on the streets or on TV all over Africa⁷⁸. As Anglophone Cameroon was governed as part of Nigeria for several years, Anglophone Cameroonians are culturally close to Nigeria ; the language also has a role, as many Anglophone Cameroonians do not speak French, but English or pidgin which is also spoken in Nigeria. The Anglophone Cameroon film industry is therefore based on a similar model as the Nigerian one : films are shot and produced in a very short time, and the budget is limited, with smallest productions sometimes costing about 200000 FCFA (around 300 euros). In a blog post dating 2012, Dongmo cites Waa Musi, official coordinator of *Collywood* association, who estimates the yearly average at 80 movies produced in a year, and 150 production houses registered in *Collywood*⁷⁹.

But besides making films similar to Nigerian ones, Cameroonian directors also use the popularity of Nigerian cinema in Cameroon in a more direct way to promote their own movies. They will hire famous Nigerian actors to shoot in their own productions in Cameroon, and later sell their films both in Nigeria and Cameroon – the presence of Nollywood stars making it more attractive. Agbor Gilbert Ebot first did this for his 2005 film *Before the sunrise*, for which Nigerian stars were in the cast and the movie was shot in Douala and Limbé⁸⁰.

Anglophone-specific organizations

In 2008, Anglophone filmmakers had the initiative to create an association called Cameroon Film Industry, which became *Collywood* in 2009. The official name changed back to Cameroon Film Industry Incorporated (CFI Inc.). Though only Anglophones seem to be actively involved in CFI's activities, they mention on their website that “the Cameroon film industry (CFI) (...) saw the need to unite with their francophone brothers who came with a mutual understanding as

78 Uchenna Onuzulike, “Nollywood: The Influence of the Nigerian Movie Industry on African Culture.”, *The Journal of Human Communication: A Journal of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association* 3 (2007): 231 – 242.

79 Stéphanie Dongmo, “Collywood, le Hollywood du Cameroun,” *Le blog de Stéphanie Dongmo* (blog), July 07, 2010, <http://stephaniedongmo.blogspot.co.at/2010/07/collywood-le-hollywood-du-cameroun.html> (accessed September 18, 2016).

80 Idem.

artists with similar vision and let go their egos to join the CFI as one people with a common goal.”⁸¹. However nothing is concretely mentioned about cooperation with Francophone Cameroonian filmmakers, and the website is only written in English. One recent incident seems to show tensions between both : an association called Cameroon Film Federation was created several months ago, without any official information, and was selected as official selection committee for Cameroonian films to the Oscars with the approval of the Ministry of Arts and Culture. This association's president is Agbor Gilbert Ebot, also president of the CFI, and other known members are all Anglophone Cameroonians. When this became public, many (Francophone) people in the film industry were angered that a federation that no one had ever heard of had become entitled to submit films for the Oscars. But what made them even more mad is that the film chosen to represent Cameroon at the next Oscars ceremony was not even a Cameroonian film : *Yaahan Ameena Bikti Hai* was produced and directed by an Indian director, Kumar Raj, and only some scenes were shot in Cameroon with Cameroonian actors. The submission of a foreign film to represent Cameroon at the Oscars was seen as a disgrace, and as the proof that this federation was not competent to represent the interests of Cameroonian cinema internationally, according to a petition created by Francophone film director Narcisse Wandji to ask the Minister of Arts and Culture to revoke or revise the Cameroonian Film Federation⁸².

What seems to define filmmaking in Anglophone Cameroon therefore is a similar model to the one of Nigeria, that is a system where movies are shot with very small budgets, over short periods of time, and with a star system which helps marketing the movies. When talking to Francophone filmmakers, they seem to insist more on the significance of the film and on its aesthetic and artistic qualities ; it thus seems that Anglophone cineasts are aiming at making popular films mainly for entertainment purposes, while Francophones see cinema in a more intellectual sense, and perhaps more influenced by French perceptions. We could assume that this difference of vision is what fosters disagreements between both sides, and prevents them from working closely together for the promotion of Cameroonian cinema as there is no consensus on

81 “About Us”, *Cameroon Film Industry – Collywood*, <http://cameroonfilmindustry.cfi.com/about-us/our-history/> (accessed November 6, 2016).

82 “Au Ministre des Arts et de la Culture du Cameroun: LA REVOCATION / REVISION DE LA CAMEROON FILM FEDERATION”, Petition, 23 October 2016, accessed 6 November 2016, https://secure.avaaz.org/fr/petition/Au_Ministre_des_Arts_et_de_la_Culture_du_Cameroun_LA_REVOCATION_REVISION_DE_LA_CAMEROON_FILM_FEDERATION/?pv=0.

what this national cinema should look like.

3. Film festivals

In the Cameroonian context where there is no proper cinema hall and therefore no classic distribution circuit, film festivals play an important role. A representative of the Goethe Institute estimated that “there is an inflation of festivals in Cameroon. Today in 2016, if we count all of them, the ones that work and the ones that don't, there are close to 30 in the whole country. Some are managed by one or two people who do the things from their bedrooms, if we caricature a little bit, but there are about 4 or 5 serious festivals, and new ones every year”⁸³. Indeed, some of the festivals seem very prominent and are well-known even by the wider public with no particular interest in cinema. The most important festival, without a doubt, is *Écrans Noirs* which celebrated its 20th edition this year, and has a regional influence as it is considered one of the most important festivals in Central Africa. Other festivals have specific thematics, such as *Mis Me Binga* which aims at promoting films made by women, *Yaoundé Tout Court* which specializes in showing short films, or *Yahra*, a festival for “first films” showing directors' earliest works. The most recent festival, Cameroon International Film Festival, focuses on English-language Cameroonian films.

As there are little possibilities to watch films on a big screen in Cameroon, festivals are even more important since they are one of the only opportunities to do so. As Mouchangou analyzes, through festivals, a new popularity and socialization is created around cinema as when there is a festival, people gather and spend several days at the venue watching the films shown on this day. There are a number of events arounds festivals, such as opening and closing ceremonies, and meetings with film directors, which bring people to come together. Festivals are also an opportunity to discuss certain issues through debates after some films, or in the case of more specific festivals such as *Mis Me Binga*, which aims at bringing light to gender equality issues : its creator Narcisse Wandji says that “Mis Me Binga positions itself as a tool for raising

83 Raphaël Mouchangou (Cultural Programmation Officer at the Goethe-Institut Kamerun), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 02, 2016.

awareness among men on women rights' issues”⁸⁴.

Festivals are also a tool to try and make the film industry active, and events related to Cameroonian cinema are numerous during most festivals as many debates, workshops and training sessions are organized. In the case of *Écrans Noirs*, the festival is an important platform for international cinema in Central Africa, and international directors gather in Yaoundé every summer for the occasion. The organizers also insist on the festival being a platform for film professionals to network and meet with the public, and enjoy all the activities centered around film that take place such as a film market, workshops, debates and colloquiums⁸⁵. The newly created Cameroon International Film Festival (CAMIFF) held its first edition this year and has similar aims, according to the founder Agbor Gilbert Ebot : “In Cameroon there is *Écrans Noirs* – the reason we created CAMIFF was not to rival with any festival in Cameroon, but we want to try and exploit the distribution network of English origin, because Cameroon is bilingual. (...) It has been difficult to get my films on Francophone platforms, but there are other anglophone platforms such as *Nolly TV* and we are looking at bringing these platforms closer to Cameroonian filmmakers so they can talk about business, have exchange programs and look for possible opportunities for exploiting distribution in Cameroon”⁸⁶.

4. Universities and training structures

Finally, one important aspect of the film industry is professional training. This is an important issue in Cameroon as training opportunities for aspiring film directors and technicians are low, which means that people making films usually are not properly trained for it. This has an impact on the quality, and on the industry overall as Cameroon cannot have a competitive cinema if the films have bad actors and technical mistakes. This issue was highlighted at the latest edition of *Écrans Noirs* festival, when the jury decided not to award any prize in the category of Cameroonian feature-length, considering that none of the films in the competition were of satisfactory quality.

84 Narcisse Wandji (Filmmaker and founder of the Mis Me Binga film festival), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 15, 2016.

85 “Dossier de presse 2016”, *Écrans Noirs*, accessed 13 November 2016. <http://www.ecransnoirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/DOSSIER-DE-PRESSE-1-ECRANS-NOIRS-2016.pdf>. 3.

86 Ebot, Interview.

The first university to provide film training was the University of Yaoundé I through its department of *Arts du Spectacle et Cinéma* : film is therefore not taught as a discipline by itself, but always along with theatre, which is deemed problematic by several interviewees. Practically, students generally only have one cinema class each semester – and not necessarily focused on practical training. During my studies at the university, I was able to attend the cinema class offered to students of the third year : it was a class on film theory and critique, and only took place two hours a week, which is clearly insufficient for students who aspire to a career in the film industry. However, lecturers are cinema professionals and scholars, and the university seems to enable students to network with professionals from the field, who give them advice and training outside of classes.

The Goethe Institute lists 8 institutions providing film training at higher education level, among which 5 are public and 3 private⁸⁷. However, the majority are concentrated in the big cities of Yaoundé and Douala, and there is no such facility in the anglophone territory, therefore not everybody can access training opportunities. Furthermore, as one scholar I interviewed highlighted, film training is only accessible at university level, and culture and cinema are not at all included in the curricula up to high school, meaning that few people learn and know about cinema at a young age⁸⁸. I also realized this during interviews with filmmakers, as every one of them seemed to have developed an interest for cinema by chance or through meeting people who got them interested in film making, but none of the interviewees said they entered a film school out of interest. Therefore, implementing film education from an early level would potentially lead more young people to develop an interest for cinema, and to consider filmmaking as a professional field.

Besides universities, the European Union finances a capacity building project named *237 Travellin*, initiated by the filmmaker Narcisse Wandji⁸⁹. Over 4 years, the program aims to train 100 Cameroonians on film analysis, scenario writing, realization and production, and the goal is to produce 30 documentaries on societal issues in the framework of this project. Started in 2014,

87 Martial Nguea, “L’offre en formation aux métiers du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel,” *Goethe Institut Kamerun*, 2014. <https://www.goethe.de/ins/cm/fr/kul/mag/20822796.html> (accessed December 7, 2016).

88 Ibrahim Mougande Aliloulay (lecturer at University of Yaoundé I, cinema critic), interview by author, Yaoundé, February 09, 2016.

89 Paul S. Kouonang Kouomo, “Fiche structure : 237 Travellin,” *Africultures*. <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=structure&no=12740> (accessed January 5, 2017).

35 young people have already benefitted from the training, and 35 others are currently receiving it⁹⁰. The funding of such a program is proof that the local training facilities are insufficient, and while the initiative is useful, it shows the necessity of more training facilities.

This chapter has given an overview the current state of film-making in Cameroon, tracing back history and how the promising beginnings of cinema were rapidly replaced by its demise, presenting the governmental action through the Ministry of Arts and Culture's activities, and mentioning the main actors in the domain of film-making. This analysis has shown that Cameroon has a history of rather successful cinema activities, limited but existing governmental support to film-making, and a multitude of passionate filmmakers, film festivals and some training structures. However, there is a lack of trained professionals, little material and financial resources to produce high-quality films, and insufficient coherent governmental action for a film industry in Cameroon to properly exist ; while film-making exists, the obstacles preventing the emergence of a competitive Cameroonian cinema are too important, mainly because of insufficient public policies. The next chapter will discuss whether and how the French and German cultural institutions can support local cinema in such a difficult context.

90 Wandji, interview.

CHAPTER 4

The third chapter gave an overview of the current state of Cameroon's film industry, focusing on local actors. This chapter will now turn to the role of foreign cultural institutions, as they also have an important place in the Cameroonian cinema industry. It will focus on the foreign cultural policy in Cameroon of France and Germany, as they are the only countries who are active in the cultural scene in the country, mainly through their respective cultural institutes : the *Institut Français*, and the *Goethe-Institut* ; both countries have also colonized the country in the past, which makes it all the more relevant to analyze their current actions there. This chapter will discuss both countries' foreign cultural policy throughout history and contemporarily, and their cultural institutes ; it will also analyze their specific actions relating to cinema in Cameroon and the impact of these. The chapter is structured in three parts : it will first analyze France's cultural policy and the French Institute's activities in Cameroon ; the second part will focus on Germany and the Goethe Institute ; the third part will be dedicated to analyzing the effects of both countries' support to Cameroonian cinema, both positive and negative.

I. FRENCH CULTURAL POLICY AND THE *INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DU CAMEROUN*

1. French cultural policy in Africa : a historical overview

Film policy before independence

The first cinema halls in Francophone Africa were constructed in the 1920s and although the audience was made of French citizens rather than Africans, the latter started to develop an interest in films, leading them to purchase films and organize viewings in their homes in the 1930s. This growing interest for cinema by Africans is what started a French film policy in Africa, through the Laval decree from 1934, which sought to control distribution, content and audiences of films mainly by controlling the images available to African audiences, defining the type of films on

Africa which could be shown to non-Africans, and regulating the system of licensing to show films in West Africa⁹¹.

New momentum was added to French foreign film policy after World War II, as cinema started to be seen as a tool to promote French power in Africa, particularly in a context of rising anti-colonial movements. This period marked increasing regulations of cinema in Francophone Africa, and the creation in 1949 of the Overseas cinema commission within the Ministry of Overseas France was a sign of the willingness of the French government to articulate a film policy targeted specifically towards African audiences. Cinema became a tool to promote French interests in Africa, through measures regulating the type of films shown in West Africa as a propaganda tool to disseminate French ideas, and promoting the screening of French films as a means to support an industry that had suffered from war ; creating an industrial cinema complex in the region was also seen as a way to develop West Africa. By the mid-1950s, French film policies for Africa were very precisely articulated : Genova notes here that even though Cameroon has, to this day, never had an official cultural policy, France had one for the country even before its independence⁹².

The politics of cooperation after independence

The independences gained in the 1960s by former French colonies technically should have marked the end of French film policies for Africa. However, France rapidly made it clear that there was no intent to abandon plans of cultural development in the region ; in the end of the 1960s, the President Charles de Gaulle explained that “France is changing from the outdated colonial system to a system of fruitful and friendly co-operation”⁹³, showing that the end of the colonial era did not mean the end of French-African relations, but only a different type of relations. The former colonial structures were thus modified : the Ministry of Overseas France became the Ministry of Cooperation and Technical Assistance, and the former *Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social* (FIDES) and *Fonds d'Équipement*

91 Decree regulating the organization and control of cinema films and phonographic records, of film shooting and audio recordings in French West Africa,” *Journal Officiel de la République française*, March 11, 1934, 2541.

92 James E. Genova, *Cinema and development in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 34-44.

93 Quoted in Gérard Bossuat, “French Development Aid and Co-operation under De Gaulle,” *Contemporary European History* 12 (2003): 433.

Rural et de Développement Économique et Social (FERDES) merged and became the *Fonds d'Aide et de Coopération* (FAC), responsible of fostering development in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, including funds for film production⁹⁴. In 1963, a *Bureau du cinéma* was created within the *Ministry of Cooperation*, similar to the agency that existed within the Ministry of Overseas France. As Genova notes, “even as the West African countries achieved political independence, France reconstituted the institutional structures of colonial rule, specifically with regard to motion pictures”⁹⁵.

The *Bureau du cinéma* contributed to African filmmaking in a time when the number of produced films was so low that all of them could get support. Between 1963 and 1975, 185 films were made in Francophone Africa, among which 125 received technical and financial support from France. Teresa Hoefert de Turégano describes the process : “Most importantly, the Ministry of Cooperation aid was allocated to the director, via a French producer. The funds were above all to be spent in France on aspects such as technical services, purchasing materials, editing and laboratory costs. Being primarily disbursed in France, this form of assistance did little to benefit local African infrastructures and thus perpetuated African dependencies on France for film production. Such support was entirely consistent with the rationale behind most development aid, which is often designed to provide a reciprocal return to the donor country”⁹⁶.

Indeed, while French aid greatly contributed to film production in Francophone Africa, it is important to note that it did not benefit the local film industries much, for several reasons. Firstly, film operations in the region were largely controlled by the *Compagnie africaine cinématographique et commerciale* (COMACICO) and the *Société d'exploitation cinématographique africaine* (SECMA), two companies based in Monaco. In 1960, 85 cinemas were owned by COMACICO and 65 by SECMA in fourteen French-speaking countries in West and Equatorial Africa : as 40 to 50% of the turnover of these two companies was sent back to Monaco, “hundreds of billions of francs were stolen from the continent without any substantial compensation”, according to Sama. In the case of Burkina Faso, the declared income from cinema exploitation was 70 millions of francs, of which 10 millions only were taxes⁹⁷.

94 Gérard Bossuat, “French Development Aid”, 434.

95 James E. Genova, *Cinema and development*, 131.

96 Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, “The New Politics of African Cinema at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, *French Politics, Culture & Society* 3 (2002): 23.

97 Emmanuel Sama, “African Films are Foreigners in their own Countries,” in Imruh Bakari and Cham Mbye B.,

The policy of France's Ministry of Cooperation derives from the colonial concept of cultural assimilation, where Africans were encouraged to develop strong ties to France and French culture. France was not ready to give up on this strong connection after independence, therefore film policy after independence aimed “to maintain the colonial legacy of assimilation, perpetrating and strengthening a Franco-African cultural connection through newsreels, educational documentaries and films of cultural expression produced by Africans and distributed and shown in non-commercial venues such as *ciné-clubs*, *cinémathèques* and French embassies throughout Francophone Africa”⁹⁸. As previously mentioned, as aid for film production was tied to the ceding of noncommercial rights, African filmmakers did not profit from this type of distribution ; and commercial exploitation was mainly dominated by French distribution companies. African filmmakers therefore mainly produced so-called *cinéma d'auteur* (art-house cinema), and their relegation to this non-commercial type of cinema prevented the emergence of a truly mainstream African cinema.

France's decision to maintain close cultural ties to former colonies in Africa, including Cameroon, has certainly not helped the emergence of an independent, truly African cinema in the region due to cineasts' dependence on French funding and technical capacities. However, the overall result is not entirely negative as, in spite of “neocolonialist aspects” to the French support to cinema, many films could not have been made at all without the financial and technical assistance provided. Boughedir summarizes it accurately by saying that : “one can say, broadly, that African cinema, in Francophone Africa at least, exists thanks to France and also does not exist thanks to France”⁹⁹.

2. Contemporary French cinema policies In Africa

Specific Africa-targeted programs

French cultural policy, notably in Africa, now operates with different structures and institutions ; this part of the thesis will present the main structures relevant to African cinema.

eds, *African experiences of cinema* (London: BFI Pub., 1996). 149.

98 Claire Andrade-Watkins, “France's Bureau of Cinema: Financial and Technical Assistance Between 1961 & 1977 — Operations & Implications for African Cinema,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 6 (1990): 28.

99 Boughedir in Philippe J. Maarek (ed.) *Afrique noire, quel cinéma?: actes du colloque, Université Paris X Nanterre* (Nanterre : Association du ciné-club de l'Université Paris X, 1981). 32.

French cultural policy abroad is managed both by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, and the three goals in terms of culture are the “diffusion of contemporary creation under all its forms”, “the radiance of French culture and implementation of cultural diversity”, and the “professional capacity-building of artistic domains” especially in developing countries, falling under the category of “Priority Solidarity Zone”¹⁰⁰. With regards to these countries, the aim is to support culture in a way that local artists can access markets nationally and internationally, and develop the cultural economy.

French cultural policy is mainly implemented internationally through a large network of cultural institutions around the world, such as *Institut Français*, *Alliance Française* and *Centre Culturel Français*. These institutions often offer French language classes, organize debates and exchange of ideas, promote studies in France and organize various cultural events. The priorities are different according to each large region of the world. As the *Institut Français* is the French cultural institution present in Cameroon, this part of the thesis will mainly focus on their activities in Africa and Cameroon.

France currently has several programs supporting cinema in developing countries. One of them, *Aide aux cinémas du monde*, is jointly operated by the *Centre National du Cinéma* (the national institution dealing with cinema in France) and the *Institut Français*¹⁰¹. The program aims at supporting cultural diversity by giving funding to a French production society who has signed a co-production agreement with a production society from any country in the world. Different conditions apply to a list of developing countries where cinema is considered fragile, in which Cameroon is included, where the local production society can apply in place of the French one if a co-production agreement has not been signed yet. The program is similar to the previously mentioned support to African cinema after independence, as it largely favors French cinema and the French economy : besides the obligatory co-production with a French society, at least 50% of the granted funding has to be spent in France (and 25% in the local country, in the case of a country with a fragile cinema industry), which again clearly benefits the French economy more

100“La politique culturelle extérieure de la France”, *France Diplomatie*, October 2015.

<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-culturelle/> (accessed January 21, 2017).

101“Aide aux cinémas du monde”, *CNC*, October 2015. Accessed January 20, 2017.

<http://www.cnc.fr/web/fr/cinemas-du-monde>

than the local one¹⁰². However, the funding is quite important as it can go up to 250.000€ - in other words, about 1/6 of the budget of Cameroon's *Compte d'Affectation Spécial*.

The French Institute as the main foreign cultural policy structure

French cultural policy in foreign countries is mainly operated through the *Institut Français*, with 96 of them around the world. It was created in 2010 and is operated jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development and the Ministry of Culture. Its objective is to encourage the dialogue between cultures in order to develop the influence of France abroad, thus making it a true instrument of cultural diplomacy. Although French Institutes are present all over the world, geographical priorities are different, and the *Institut Français* has a few programs targeting specifically Africa, including some particularly relevant to cinema.

There are three main programs oriented towards Africa : the first one, *Afrique et Caraïbes en création*, seeks to support artists and cultural expression by supporting festivals, promoting diffusion of art with tours in Africa or support to artists' mobility so that they can access international markets. The program also organizes longer projects, for example in the field of dance, where the program *Danse l'Afrique danse !* accompanies dancers through residencies and regional platforms, and international festivals. In the field of photography, the *Rencontres de Bamako* is co-produced by the French Institute and Mali's Ministry of Culture, and brings together hundreds of international photography professionals who can use the visibility for their future career. The program also works on helping artists build a network in the international art market, supports creation through aid and provides scholarships for artists to receive training in European schools¹⁰³.

The French Institute supports cinema in developing countries, and in Africa, through two other programs. *La Fabrique des cinémas du monde*, supports the emergence of new cineasts from developing countries by selecting 10 young filmmakers each year and taking them to the Cannes Film Festival, and providing them with training on aspects such as coproduction, distribution or pitching a film¹⁰⁴. Finally, the *Cinémathèque Afrique* is a catalog of African films

102“Liste des pays aux cinématographies les plus fragiles,” CNC. Accessed January 20, 2017.

<http://www.cnc.fr/web/fr/pays-beneficiaire-de-mesures-derogatoires>.

103“Afrique et Caraïbes en création,” Institut Français. Accessed January 20, 2017.

<http://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/afrique-et-caraibes-en-creations>.

104“La Fabrique des cinémas du monde,” Institut Français. Accessed January 20, 2017.

that the *Institut Français* makes available free of charge to cultural institutions in France and to French Institutes around the world, free of charge, to promote the diffusion of African films worldwide for non-commercial purposes. The library has over 1600 movies, including 700 free of rights, from the 1960s to contemporary cinema, making it “one of the most important collections of African films”¹⁰⁵.

It is clear that culture still occupies an important part in French foreign policy. A large network of cultural institutions around the world serves this aim, with two objectives, namely the promotion of French culture and the support of local cultures in countries with limited resources. The means invested in the latter are important, and there is no doubt that artists can benefit from the support of the French Institute when they come from a country where culture is not one of the government's priorities. However, the criticism that was made of early post-colonial cultural policy can still apply, because the support to local artists is generally not accompanied by an effort to develop local infrastructures, thus keeping them in a relation of dependency towards France. Secondly, despite efforts to help artists access the international art market, little seems to be done in terms of supporting or developing a local economy of culture, and it is unclear whether the works produced also please a local audience, or whether only international audiences are targeted.

3. The French Institute in Cameroon

Overview of the French Institute's work

In Cameroon, cultural policy is operated through the French Institutes, which depend on the French embassy's Service for Cooperation and Cultural Action. The two Institutes, in Yaoundé and Douala, were created in 2012. Their missions as written on their website are similar to the general objectives of French cultural policy abroad, as the Institute aims to be “a platform of dissemination and outreach of French and European culture, ideas, values and knowledge ; an instrument of appreciation of *Francophonie* ; a tool for French-Cameroonian cooperation”, and

<http://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/cinemas-du-monde/la-fabrique-des-cinemas-du-monde>.

105“Cinémathèque Afrique,” *Institut Français*. Accessed January 22, 2017.

<http://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/cinematheque-afrique>.

describes itself as “a major actor of cultural cooperation”¹⁰⁶.

Film screenings

The French Institute in Cameroon is active in several kinds of art and organizes various activities such as photography exhibitions, theatre workshops and cultural festivals. In the field of cinema, the most important activity is the screening of films. Considering that the last cinema halls in the country closed in 2009, the IF's activities are significant as they are the structure closest to a functioning cinema hall, organizing screenings at least once a week. The films screened are from France, the USA, other European countries, but also some African films. Notably, an important part of the films screened – around half or more - are for children. Entry is not free of charge : for non-members of the French institute, a ticket will cost 2000 FCFA for an adult and 1500 for a child (around 3 and 2,30€). A quick look at past films screened shows that most of them are recent, and mainstream as opposed to art-house type of films¹⁰⁷. The programming therefore seems to be targeting an audience who might not be used to go to the cinema, and one can assume that these screenings aim at popularizing cinema as a leisure in Cameroon, with people who are not used to going to watch a movie – the large number of films for children reinforces this impression, as it seems that the French Institute is aiming at developing an interest for cinema in children from a young age. However, it can be assumed that the prices still are a barrier to poorer families who may not be able to afford it.

Support to film festivals

Besides the regular screenings, the French Institute organizes and supports a large number of festivals and events. Among them are *My French Film Festival*, the first online festival organized worldwide by the French Institute, where screenings were organized for free in the Yaoundé centre. Another event was the *Night of Ideas*, where a film screening was followed by a debate. Both events were free of charge. Finally, in January, an evening called *Ciné-bière* (Cinema and beer) was organized for the same price as the regular screenings, where participants could pay

106“L'IFC,” Institut Français du Cameroun. Accessed January 23, 2017.

<http://www.ifcameroun.com/category/yaounde/ifc/>.

107“Cinéma,” Institut Français du Cameroun. Accessed January 23, 2017.

<http://www.ifcameroun.com/category/yaounde/culture/cinema-yaounde/>.

2000 FCFA and get a beer and a ticket to watch a movie, followed by a DJ night. The event reminds of a concept developed in 2012 by filmmaker Thierry Ntamack, *Cinema for the price of a beer*¹⁰⁸, which highlighted the paradox that although many Cameroonians had no interest in cinema because it was too expensive, they were willing to spend large sums of money on alcohol.

The French Institute co-organizes several film festivals in Cameroon. The *Pocket Film Festival* seems to promote film-making with little means, as it supports candidates to shoot film with their mobile phones, while providing them with capacity trainings and designating winners of the final competition. It also co-hosts the *Yarha* film festival, screening the first films of prominent filmmakers (both recent and classic) and hosting workshops on production, acting techniques and debates.

Limitations

While many efforts are made to promote interest in cinema and to accompany young talents, many Cameroonians do not go to the French Institute because the prices are a deterrent, or because it is not in their habits. Indeed, during my frequent visits there, I noticed that most events were attended by many regulars who knew each other and were often involved in artistic activities themselves. An event in June addressed the issue, co-organized by the French Institute and the *Cinéma Numérique Ambulant*, an association traveling through Cameroon to organize free film screenings in remote areas. The event, named *Écrans dans la ville* (Screens in the city), took place over 8 days in June 2016 and consisted of screenings in 8 different locations around Yaoundé, mainly in popular neighborhoods with little offer regarding cultural events. The screenings were free of charge and showed short films, usually one by Buster Keaton at the start, followed by several other African short films (including Cameroonian), with discussion breaks with the public. On the blog *Le Film Camerounais*, the event is presented as the first part of a project aiming to renew interest for cinema by Cameroonians : this first event intended to bring cinema to the public, while the next would be to bring the public towards cinema¹⁰⁹. No

108“Cinéma : Thierry Ntamack connaît le prix de sa bière”, Cameroon-Info.net, 23 April 2013.

<http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/thierry-ntamack-connaît-le-prix-de-sa-biere-179097.html> (accessed February 26, 2017).

109“Projection : “Des écrans dans la ville débarquent à Yaoundé !,” *Le Film Camerounais* (blog). 10 June , 2016. Accessed January 23, 2017. <https://lefilmcamerounais.com/2016/06/10/projections-des-ecrans-dans-la-ville-debarquent-a-yaounde/>.

information on the conduct of the event is to be found online.

This part of the chapter has shown that France has a long history of supporting cinema in Francophone Africa, though its post-colonial policies are criticized for preventing the emergence of an independent, mainstream cinema in the region. A look at France's current activities in the region show that the politics of cooperation and support to the local culture are still very prominent today, and several programs of training for African artists and filmmakers offer important support and resources that may not be available in their own countries of origin. In Cameroon, the French Institute is an important actor in the local cultural scene and their activities seek to promote cinema both as a leisure for Cameroonians, and as a professional activity for interested young talents. While the aim of promoting French culture is present in several activities of the Institute, namely with the strong presence of French films during screenings, the institute seems to find creative solutions to overcome issues that prevent the development of cinema in the country, sometimes with no obvious interest for France itself. This thesis will now turn to the evaluation of the activities of German and French cultural centers in Cameroon, and their impact on cinema.

II. GERMAN CULTURAL POLICY AND THE GOETHE-INSTITUTE IN CAMEROON

1. German foreign cultural policy through history and now

The “third pillar” of foreign policy

Germany too uses culture as an important instrument of diplomacy ; the German Institute for Foreign Relations estimates that “Foreign cultural and educational policy (FCEP) is a central element of foreign policy for the Federal Republic of Germany, and is considered the "third pillar" of foreign policy alongside political and economic relations”¹¹⁰. The aims of German

¹¹⁰“Foreign Cultural Policy at a glance,” *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen*. <http://www.ifa.de/en/culture-and-foreign-policy/foreign-cultural-policy-at-a-glance.html>, (accessed January 27, 2017).

cultural foreign policy echo those of France, as “the most important tasks of FCEP are to portray contemporary culture, media and research in Germany, as well as to communicate current social, political and cultural discourse” and “to promote access to the German language across the globe”¹¹¹. However, it is considered that “FCEP also has a role to play in overcoming and preventing conflicts arising from cultural, religious or ideological differences”, as cultural exchange is strengthened through foreign cultural and educational policy, thus promoting better understanding and peace across the world. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, former German Foreign Minister, explains that mutual understanding “is the basis of a policy dedicated to peaceful reconciliation”¹¹², showing how German's cultural diplomacy efforts to promote cultural diversity and understanding can foster peace. Germany and France have similar foreign cultural policies in the sense that both countries consider cultural diplomacy an important tool of foreign policy, and both attach much importance to the promotion of their respective cultures and languages around the world, as well as the promotion of cultural dialogue. However, only Germany mentions foreign cultural policy as a way to promote peace and solve conflicts ; this does not seem to be an immediate goal of French cultural policy abroad, which appears to promote cultural and artistic expression, French language, and certain values, but does not emphasize the role of culture in solving political issues.

German foreign cultural policy structures throughout history

Germany's foreign cultural policy was developed following World War I, when the state started to realize the potential of culture as a diplomatic tool and created institutions such as the *Kulturabteilung* (Cultural Department) of the Foreign Ministry, as well as state-funded private organizations. The first ones were established in the 1920s, notably the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD) which still exists today, the *Alexander-von-Humboldt Stiftung* and the *Deutsche Akademie* ; the latter was built on the idea that cultural propaganda would help rebuild Germany's positive image around the world¹¹³. However, the *Deutsche Akademie* was used as a strong propaganda instrument during World War 2 and was therefore dissolved in 1945, to be

¹¹¹Idem.

¹¹²Frank-Walter Steinmeier, “Review 2014 : A fresh look at German foreign cultural and education policy,” Goethe-Institut, 15 September 2014. Accessed January 27, 2016. <https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/akt/20423857.html>.

¹¹³Somogy Varga, “The Marketization of Foreign Cultural Policy: The Cultural Nationalism of the Competition State”, *Constellations* Vol. 20 No 3 (2013): 444.

replaced with the *Goethe-Institut* in 1951, which is now still the main foreign cultural policy institution for Germany¹¹⁴. As of March 2016, there were 158 Institutes in 98 countries¹¹⁵. The *Goethe-Institut's* activities and missions sound very similar to the ones of the French Institute, as its goal is to promote Germany's image and language, and aims at “fostering international cultural cooperation through cultural events and festivals in the fields of cinema, dance, music, theatre, exhibitions, literature and translation”¹¹⁶. Like the French Institute, Goethe Institutes often have libraries and German language classes.

The Goethe Institute around the world and in Africa

The activities of the Goethe Institute appear to have different focuses than the ones of the French Institute. While the latter seems to have ongoing programs with a specific geographical focus on African countries, or more broadly developing countries, a look at the website of the Goethe Institute or at their latest annual report seems to show that the activities are rather developed according to current events. One example of this is the festival *African Futures* which took place mainly in Johannesburg, following the student protests in October 2015. In their annual report, the Goethe Institute explains their aim to organize this festival “because, of course, the German cultural institute knows that, in the perceptions of the West, Africa is rarely associated with the future, at least not with a promising one”¹¹⁷; the event highlighted people and projects bringing change to Africa, in diverse fields such as technology, dance or art. In the framework of the festival, events with post-colonial authors were organized under the theme “decolonization of knowledge”¹¹⁸. It therefore seems that the Goethe Institute tries to challenge stereotypes about Africa, and highlight the work of contemporary Africans in an attempt to emancipate them, rather than using its power as a Western country to gain influence.

Regarding film, no program is specifically focused on the African region. The Goethe-Institute appears to focus mainly on promoting German cinema, and unlike the French Institute, no large program is aimed at supporting filmmakers from developing countries. Among global activities in film making, the Goethe Institute awards a yearly Documentary film prize to a

114Idem.

115Goethe-Institute, *Jahrbuch 2015-2016* (2016). 82.

116“Aufgaben”, *Goethe-Institut*. <https://www.goethe.de/de/uun/auf.html> (accessed February 2, 2017).

117Goethe-Institute, *Jahrbuch 2015-2016* (2016). 44.

118Idem. 46.

German filmmaker, and encourages the screening of film in all the Institutes worldwide¹¹⁹. Apart from this specific competition, the Institute's activity in the field of film seems mainly focused on screening German films around the world : the Goethe Institute has a repertoire of around 900 films of various times and genres, which are shown at Institutes around the world. Besides screenings at Goethe Institutes, films are shown in other locations such as universities ; 75% of films are fictional works, and 60% are contemporary. Additionally, the Institute organizes or partners with around 150 film festivals around the world, and often contributes by showing German films or inviting German film makers ; it also organizes film seminars and workshops, where German film professionals cooperate and train local film professionals¹²⁰.

2. The Goethe Institute in Cameroon

There is one Goethe Institute in Cameroon, in the capital city Yaoundé. It is one of the oldest ones in Sub-saharan Africa with the Goethe Institute in Accra, both opened in 1961. Language classes are the main activity of the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé, which Raphaël Mouchangou, Cultural Programmation Officer, explained by the historical ties between Germany and Cameroon and by the fact that German is usually the second foreign language taught in schools, after English, and that many Cameroonians wish to study abroad in Germany¹²¹. But besides the promotion of German language, the Goethe Institute is also a very active actor in the local cultural scene in Cameroon, as it organizes concerts, exhibitions and other events on a regular basis. Similarly to the French Institute, in an environment with little cultural infrastructures and barely any concert halls or show venues, the Goethe Institute is an important space both for artists to express themselves, and for Cameroonians to discover and enjoy art. It is worth noting that most events at the Goethe Institute are free, unlike those of the French Institute, and during conversations with friends, this was often mentioned as a reason why they prefer the Goethe Institute.

119“Dokumentarfilmpreis,” Goethe-Institut. <https://www.goethe.de/de/kul/flm/ser/dok.html> (accessed February 2, 2017).

120“Film, Fernsehen, Hörfunk,” Goethe-Institut. <https://www.goethe.de/de/uun/auf/ffh.html> (accessed February 2, 2017).

121Mouchangou, interview.

A specific vision for Cameroon

An interview with the cultural programming officer clarified the specific goals and missions of the Goethe Institute in Cameroon. While this thesis has previously noted that the main missions of the institution, according to the material they publish online, seem to focus on promoting Germany's image around the world, in practice it seems that this objective is less applicable to Cameroon : “it is less and less about importing German programs and imposing them in the host country to rave about one's own culture, which is a little bit of a colonial model ; it is rather about showcasing what the host country produces, what the host country has, how it can enrich the German cultural scene and vice-versa”¹²². This is generally a specificity to developing countries, where the cultural infrastructures tend to be less efficient than in Western countries. As Mouchangou indicated during the interview, the Goethe-Institute focuses in big part on accompanying and training local artists because the need is higher than in countries with better cultural infrastructures. Besides responding to a local demand, supporting the development of local cultural infrastructures is necessary for the Goethe Institute to function properly : “we need to have a base on the field for our work, and therefore we sometimes need to support infrastructures and accompany the project, which the Goethe in Tokyo or New York would not do. Over there, the Goethe already finds the structures and the infrastructure, because there are already organizations of producers, galleries, theaters etc, and in such context the Goethe Institute only works on the individual people. But here in Cameroon, and in other African countries, this structure may exist but it is very weak : there are not enough galleries, not enough producers who invest in initiatives and there is therefore a lot to fill”¹²³.

The Goethe Institute's work in the field of cinema

One of the ways the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé fills the gap in cinema infrastructure is the same as how the French Institute does it, namely with regular film screenings. Every last Wednesday of the month, a *Film-Klub* is organized where a film is screened at the Goethe Institute, free of charge, followed by a debate moderated by the Cameroonian film critic Jean-

¹²²Idem.

¹²³Idem.

Marie Mollo Olinga. The event has been existing for over ten years, and the films shown are German, Cameroonian or African. It fits the mission of the Goethe Institute as it contributes to promote German cinema abroad through the diffusion of German films, but the platform mainly seems to work as a way to support the cinema in Cameroon, both for audiences and for filmmakers. Indeed, the debates following the films are moderated by an expert, thus encouraging the audience to reflect on the film and the issues it raises ; it helps the audience become familiar with watching movies and debating them, especially for Cameroonian movies. For the filmmakers, the *Film-Klub* is interesting mainly for two reasons. Firstly, as the possibilities to screen movies are limited, the Goethe Institute is one of the only options considering that apart from them, there is the *Sita Bella* hall from the Ministry of Arts and Culture – which is generally not used for commercial screenings, and expensive to rent. The other hall is the one from the French Institute, but this hall is a proper cinema hall with a high number of seats, while the Goethe Institute is a conference room which can be transformed into a cinema hall with 60 seats, as they have a projector. Another reason is the notoriety of the *Film-Klub* : the event is now well-known in Cameroon, and as Mouchangou explained, it is interesting for a Cameroonian filmmaker to have their films screened there because of the debate following the film, but also because it is prestigious for a young filmmaker to have had their films screened there, as their name will be online, on the flyers and in the press, which helps the filmmaker to be “put on the map”. Furthermore, the audience of the Goethe is generally interested in cinema and culture, and is therefore of a higher level than for a screening organized publicly in a neighborhood, for example. The screening is free for the audience, but the filmmaker gets a compensation from the Goethe Institute as a way of supporting the work, and because “the environment here is difficult, and when a young person struggled to make a film with the means they had, it is important for us to encourage that and stay in the international standards that the Goethe has”¹²⁴. Therefore, the notoriety of the Goethe Institute and the particular nature of the *Film-Klub* event contribute to make it an attractive option for local filmmakers, which is proven by the fact that most selected Cameroonian directors approach the Goethe Institute directly, rather than the institution having to look for them first.

Another important activity of the Goethe Institute is the support to local film festivals. This is

¹²⁴Idem.

again very similar to the type of activity that the French Institute does, and several film festivals organize screenings in both locations. The Goethe Institute is a partner of several important film festivals in Cameroon, such as *Yarha* (festival of the first film), *Écrans Noirs* or *Mis Me Binga* (women's film festival). This partnership generally includes the screening of films, which again is explained by the fact that the other options are limited ; there is no financial contribution or sponsoring activity. However, the training part is equally important and generally part of the festival : the Goethe Institute often organizes and funds trainings for young film professionals, film critics or actors in the frame of these festivals – while they do not directly finance films, it has happened in the past that they funded a film in the frame of these workshops. The organizers of the *Mis Me Binga* festival, for example, explained that when they wished to organize a training in the framework of the festival in the past, the Goethe would provide trainers and fund the whole workshop, which Wandji estimated at 10-15000€ - while there is no direct financial support, it significantly helps¹²⁵. The Goethe Institute also works on networking opportunities for cinema professionals.

Relations with the Cameroonian government

The activities of the Goethe Institute therefore focus on training and technical or material assistance, but there is no direct financial assistance to filmmakers or film festivals. This is representative of the Goethe's vision of its own mission : “we are a foreign cultural center in a host country, and our mission is absolutely not to support the local cinema as it is the role of local structures. Putting money in the production of a Cameroonian film which will then be sold to Cameroonian TV channels is the role of Cameroonian structures. We can intervene on peripheral things such as showing the film or organizing training workshops”¹²⁶. This quote shows that the Goethe Institute is concerned with the limits of its mandate as a foreign cultural centre operating in another country. This raises the question of the relationship with the local government : how do the Goethe Institute and the Cameroonian state interact? It seems important to the Goethe-Institute to remember that they are a guest in the country, and that the government is ultimately the entity that makes decisions and these should be respected. They collaborate with the Ministry

¹²⁵Wandji, interview.

¹²⁶Mouchangou, interview.

of Secondary and Superior Education, since they organize German classes and promote studies abroad in Germany, therefore they are active in universities. The other interlocutor, more relevant to the cultural activities, in the Ministry of Arts and Culture – while they do not cooperate on any specific project, the people in charge at the Goethe make sure that they keep the MINAC informed of all of their main activities.

The activities from the Goethe Institute in Cameroon are regulated by cooperation agreements dating back to 1987, which Mouchangou described as “very general and administrative”, as opposed to political agreements. There is no official guidance on the content and topics dealt with in the Goethe's activities, and the agreements stipulate that the Cameroonian government does not intervene in the Goethe's programming – this means for example that, although all films screened in Cameroon normally need to be seen by a viewing commission first to decide if they can be shown, the films shown at the Goethe-Institute are not subject to this obligation. However, while the Goethe is relatively free to program whichever activities they want, they insist on maintaining good relations with the government, and on not being unnecessarily provocative as it may harm their work in Cameroon in the future : for example, considering that homosexuality is punished by law in Cameroon, they avoid screening films dealing with this topic as “it is absolutely counter-productive to do things against the government in a country”¹²⁷. That being said, the Goethe-Institute still tries to bring about some change in society, but it is a subtle balance to find : “It is a work of intelligence because we always have to know what is the efficiency and the limit of an action. We are in the field of culture, not of banking or science, and culture is by essence open, critical, and conveys a discourse. It is the work we do everyday, to know what the interest is, but it is also teamwork because there is on one side the state that is hosting us and the existing policy, and on the other side the population, the consumers and producers of culture. So we always need to know how to associate both”¹²⁸.

Besides keeping good relationships and communicating on their activities, the Goethe does not directly cooperate with the Cameroonian government in their work. The previous chapter of this thesis has shown that the existing infrastructure in terms of culture and cinema in Cameroon is extremely weak, and that the government does not offer much support to culture. With the

¹²⁷Mouchangou, interview.

¹²⁸Idem.

Goethe Institute being so active in this field, it is hard not to see them as a stopgap for the state's insufficient action. The Goethe tries not to view its own mission as such, but acknowledges that they are in fact filling a gap left by the Cameroonian state whenever they support artists, as this would normally be the mission of the government. This begs the question of how the Cameroonian government views the action of the Goethe Institute and other foreign institutions taking up mandates that should be their own. One filmmaker, when asked his opinion about this matter, was very adamant in his claim that culture was so low in the government's priorities that it did not matter to them at all : “They don't care and because of that, they don't feel that it is an insult if foreign organizations are supporting the local cinema, because they don't care about Cameroonians evolving in filmmaking”¹²⁹. The people I interviewed at the Ministry of Arts and Culture, when asked about their views on the Goethe Institute's work in Cameroon, confirmed that they were not rivals as they “all worked for the promotion of cinema”, and even praised their work by acknowledging that in this “almost desert situation”, their efforts to organize film screenings were very welcome¹³⁰. It therefore seems that there is no rivalry or sense of wariness from the MINAC towards foreign institutions, at least while they do not go against the will of the government – which is not the aim of the Goethe Institute anyways.

III. IMPACT OF FOREIGN CULTURAL INSTITUTES IN CAMEROON ON CINEMA

1. Positive results

After having discussed the activities of both the French Institute and the Goethe Institute in Cameroon, this thesis will now assess their impact on Cameroonian cinema. We will start by reviewing the positive impacts of their work in the country. Firstly, it cannot be denied that both institutes greatly contribute to the screening of films in Cameroon, as there is barely any other possibility to watch films on public screenings in the country. While they do not replace what a cinema hall would bring, the weekly screenings from the French Institute and the monthly *Film-*

¹²⁹Zigoto Tchaya Tchameni (Filmmaker), interview by author, Yaoundé, January 29, 2016. He indicated following the interview that his comment was mainly applicable to the previous Minister of Arts and Culture (Ama Tutu Muna) but acknowledged that the new minister seemed to have a better vision for Cameroon's cultural field.

¹³⁰Archil, Madiba and Mintunu, interview.

Klub of the Goethe at least offer a regular opportunity for film lovers to watch movies in public. Eloundou, Professor at the University of Yaoundé 1, confirmed this and praised their work as “when we had no hall left whatsoever, the French-Cameroon Alliances were the ones screening our films. Both the French Institute and the Goethe Institute are also major partners of the *Écrans Noirs* festival, and its director Bassek Ba Kobhio would not deny it”¹³¹.

Besides screenings, the trainings offered by both institutions are an important way for young Cameroonians to receive proper professional training, as well as network with other professionals in the field, especially international ones as traveling overseas is financially not an option for most of them. Eloundou particularly praised the Goethe Institute for that, citing the example of a training scholarship entirely funded by them in 2013 at the University of Yaoundé 1, where he was an associate trainer – the Goethe Institute invited German professionals for several weeks, and they organized a training for Cameroonian students free of charge for them¹³². The financial or technical support that young filmmakers sometimes get to make their first films is also important, especially since they do not get much of it from the Cameroonian state, and Eloundou praised the work of the programs supporting young talents from the French Institute as they greatly help African filmmakers for their first films. Equally, the *Cinémathèque Afrique* is an important tool to store African films : Eloundou reported that during the research for his PhD in 2015, many films were not available locally (including in Ouagadougou), but only through the French Institute's library. He is now trying to get copies of some films for the University of Yaoundé I through the *Cinémathèque Afrique*.

2. Shortcomings and limitations

An exaggerated influence?

However, the activities from both foreign institutions are not unanimously viewed in a positive light, and raise a number of issues for several of the interviewees. Some of them expressed concerns about the freedom of artistic expression when a project is funded by a foreign country, as “the institute is here to represent the ideology of a country, and when this ideology is

¹³¹Eloundou, interview.

¹³²Idem.

hurt, the project cannot be sustainable”¹³³. This issue was mainly raised relating to the French Institute and other kinds of French support to cinema (notably the funds from the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie), which can perhaps be explained by the history of France's support to African cinema. According to Eloundou, the issue is not so much that a foreign country is investing in Cameroonian cinema, but rather that foreign countries are investing more than Cameroon itself does it : “It is a problem that the Cameroonian state allows the French state to invest more money in the vitality of its art than it invests itself, because if this goes on for 15, 25, 50 years, we will end up with another cultural colonization”. He however nuanced his argument by explaining that he did not think that foreign funding directly dictated the discourse to adopt in a movie : “I think that we can say what we want before receiving anything, we don't have the same power relationships as in the 80s-90s – now, I feel free to say what I want”¹³⁴.

Even though there may not be any censorship as such, a look at the list of grantees from the French Institute's *La Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde* program, which encourages filmmakers from the Global South, seems to show a certain uniformity in the chosen films, and notably the fact that all the films are documentaries or dramas¹³⁵ – there seems to be no place for genres such as comedies or romance, although these are popular in Africa, as proven by Nollywood's success on the continent. This thesis has previously discussed how France's film policy in Africa after the independences encouraged an art-house kind of cinema over mainstream and popular films ; the same argument could be made now, and the important role played by foreign institutions in Cameroonian film production could easily prevent the emergence of a truly independent cinema. Beyond the issue of artistic freedom, economics also have a role to play as the films supported by the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* have to let the organization decide the conditions of operation for a duration of ten years ; regarding the *Aide aux Cinémas du Monde* program, the filmmakers are provided support when selling their film at the *Cannes Film Festival*. Again, similarly to what was done shortly after independences, African films are supported by France but the kind of support is such that they are bound to enter the French and international market in priority, and may not even be seen in their own continent. It thus seems

133Mougande, interview.

134Eloundou, interview.

135Sélection la Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde 2016, Institut Français.

<http://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/actualites/selection-la-fabrique-des-cinemas-du-monde-2016> (accessed February 10, 2017).

that what foreign support to Cameroonian cinema does is promote artistic expression and film-making activities, but the development of an African cinema which is popular locally and benefits the cultural economy in the filmmaker's own country is not a result of this foreign support.

Almost all of the criticism of foreign institutions' involvement in the Cameroonian cultural scene addressed during the interviews was directly targeting France, generally for the reasons mentioned above, i.e. France's financial help not being completely disinterested and potentially preventing the emergence of a truly African cinema. As much of the expressed criticism also was mentioning France's cinema policies in Africa in the past, one could assume that French film policy in Cameroon is more criticized than Germany's because France has been active in this field for a longer time, and people therefore know better what the positive and negative effects are than for German film policy, which is more recent. However, the prominent Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo addresses Germany's support to African culture and cinema in a blog article, and expresses doubts about the true motives of this cultural policy, wondering whether Germany wants to diversify its culture by bringing other influences into it, or whether it suddenly feels invested of a civilizing mission “like France at a certain era”. He highlights the difficulty to understand the true motives of Germany's sudden willingness to support African culture, as he thinks that “they are mainly looking for a position of power”¹³⁶.

Lack of a diverse audience

Finally, despite having a certain positive impact on developing film screenings and film making for Cameroonians, the action of these Institutes remains limited as it only reaches a certain audience. While there is no official information available on this, my observations seemed to indicate that most of the public of the French Institute, besides foreigners, is comprised of Cameroonians who are educated, and often active in the cultural community already. The fact that most activities at the Institute are not free of charge, although they remain relatively cheap, can be a deterrent for many young people to attend these events ; furthermore, these are generally advertised through social media and through the flyers that are distributed there, which are limited channels and may not reach everyone. The case of the Goethe Institute is similar, with the

¹³⁶“Un fantasme Germano-allemand”, *Le Blog de Jean-Pierre Bekolo*. April 23, 2016.

<https://bekolopress.wordpress.com/2016/04/23/un-fantasme-germano-allemand/> (accessed February 26, 2017).

difference that their events are free of charge and therefore more accessible – but there too, the public is generally relatively homogenous, and familiar with the cultural scene already ; in addition, a large part of the public at the Goethe Institute is comprised of students attending German language classes there. Mouchangou from the Goethe Institute mentioned this as he referred to the audience of the *Film-Klub* events as “an audience of a certain level”¹³⁷, which is positive as it creates a community of cinephiles in the country ; however it should not be forgotten that their activities only reach a certain public. One of my friends, Azazou, is a comedian and during the time I was in Cameroon, I saw him act in several shows, participate in an acting workshop and organize a photography exhibition at the French Institute, and take part in a slam contest at the Goethe Institute : this seemed to indicate that these organizations generally work with the same people, and focus on supporting several few talents, while not necessarily having a diverse pool of participants to their events.

Additionally, there are two French Institutes in the main cities of Yaoundé and Douala, and one Goethe Institute in Yaoundé, meaning that a large part of Cameroon does not benefit in any way from their activities. Besides the geographical inequality, it is notable that mainly Francophone Cameroonians access the activities of these two cultural centers, because they are always held in French, although the country is bilingual. Regarding cinema, the inequality is particularly increased by the aid offered from the French institutions : indeed, Eloundou estimated that “most young producers and directors do not have the means to make their first film, but with the *Fonds images de la Francophonie*, there is a whole section for young talents which supports first films”¹³⁸, thus implying that it was the main option for young directors seeking support. However, this by definition excludes all the Anglophone Cameroonians who want to make films in English, and are therefore not eligible to this aid as it is tied to the use of French language. Agbor Gilbert Ebot, when looking for sponsors for the Cameroon International Film Festival, said that he tried to contact the French Institute several times, but never heard back from them and thought that him being an Anglophone was an obstacle to cooperating with them – whereas the Goethe Institute had offered him a meeting with them¹³⁹.

137Mouchangou, interview.

138Eloundou, interview.

139Agbor Gilbert Ebot filmmaker, producer, and director of Cameroon International Film Festival), interview by author, Buea, February 13, 2016.

This chapter has analyzed foreign cultural policies of France and Germany, mainly through their foreign cultural institutes operating globally and the sort of activities they both do in Cameroon, particularly regarding cinema. It has shown that France's cultural policies in Africa – particularly with regards to cinema - date back to colonial times, and have continued after independences as a way to maintain French influence on the continent through so-called cultural cooperation. Nowadays, France still supports African cinema through various programs, and through their large network of French Institutes – in Cameroon, the *Institut Français* is particularly active with film screenings and support to film festivals. While Germany's foreign cultural policy is less focused on Africa, the Goethe Institute also works towards promoting German culture around the world, fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. In Cameroon, it is particularly active and appreciated for its efforts to support the local cultural scene. While both institutions are important in the local cultural scene as they often are the only locations where film screenings are regularly organized, and one of the only options to turn to for support when making a film or organizing a festival, their reach is still limited to a certain audience. Besides, their involvement in local cultural activities raises much criticism as their action is sometimes seen as a way of maintaining influence over the country, and of preventing the emergence of a truly Cameroonian cinema. Overall, the French Institute seems more focused on pursuing French interests in Cameroon than the Goethe Institute, whose objective to promote German seems to be in second place in Cameroon, after the support of local culture which appears to be the priority ; France is also more criticized by Cameroonian than Germany regarding involvement in local cultural activities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has aimed to analyze Cameroon's film industry and its evolution from the beginnings to the present day, by focusing on the Cameroonian government's action relating to cultural policies, and by analyzing France and Germany's foreign cultural policies and how these operate in Cameroon through the French Institute and the Goethe Institute. It has shown that despite relatively successful beginnings, especially compared to other countries in former French colonies in Africa, Cameroon's film industry declined from the 1980s onwards. This is in large part due to the fact that while the government supported cinema through institutional structures and cultural policies, the failure of these and the progressive disengagement of the Cameroonian state led to difficult conditions for filmmaking which harmed the country's film production. Although a variety of actors are actively trying to make films, weak action from the Ministry of Arts and Culture explains the fact that Cameroon's film industry is nowadays still struggling to be successful. France and Germany have developed elaborate foreign cultural policies and are actively involved in activities related to cinema in Cameroon through the French Institute and the Goethe Institute, who organize regular screenings and trainings, which are often the only resource that aspiring filmmakers and cinephiles can turn to. However, both cultural institutes' activities present several shortcomings, and the consequences of their active involvement in Cameroon's cultural scene are criticized by many local actors.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from these findings is the importance of effective cultural policies and support to the cultural industries for the success of the film industries ; indeed, the absence of this kind of framework is not compensated by the motivation of Cameroonian filmmakers who, for lack of training and resources, are not able to produce films that are of high quality and economically successful. The findings of this thesis also highlight the efficiency of an elaborate foreign cultural policy, as France and Germany's actions in Cameroon can be said to positively contribute to their national interests by promoting their culture and image in the country through the screening of their films, and generally through the help they provide to local artists, of which many express gratefulness towards the French Institute and the Goethe Institute. However, both countries have slightly different approaches to cultural

diplomacy in Cameroon, with France seeming more focused on promoting its national interests than Germany, which seems to be reflected by the more positive reactions towards the latter's work.

Both institutes can be said to be the most active institutions in the support to Cameroonian cinema ; considering that their action has more impact than any of Cameroon's cultural operators, this is a further indicator of how powerful these tools of cultural diplomacy can be. While none of the two countries claims to aim at filling the gap left by the insufficient governmental action, it appears clear that they do it to a certain extent ; the scope of their action is however only limited, and while their activities are certainly welcome in a context of weak cultural infrastructure, foreign countries do not have the power to fix deeper issues in the film industry, as an institutional framework and efficient policies are needed for that. From the side of Cameroon, allowing foreign countries to have such influence over their film industry may threaten its independence, which should be an incentive for the government to take action to support cinema.

The absence of tangible data makes it difficult to evaluate the real impact of France and Germany's cultural activities in Cameroon, and the findings of this thesis can only give an overview of it. Recent activities from the Cameroonian Ministry of Arts and Culture seem to indicate a possible change of policy and an increased will to support the film industry ; unfortunately, the scope and timeline of this research did not allow for further examination of this. If this willingness to encourage a more successful film industry is turned into action, it will certainly be interesting to examine future developments in Cameroonian cinema and how the French Institute and Goethe Institute adapt their activities to a new context.

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