

Review: The Kenya Boran: Appraisals of a Documentary Film Series

Reviewed Work(s): Faces of Change Film Series: Kenya Boran, Boran Women, Harambee: Pull Together by Norman Miller, David MacDougall and James Blue

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THE KENYA BORAN:
APPRAISALS OF A DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES

Faces of Change Film Series: *Kenya Boran, Part I* (33 min.), *Kenya Boran, Part II* (33 min.), *Boran Women* (18 min.), *Harambee: Pull Together* (19 min.). Producer: Norman Miller. Filmmakers: David MacDougall and James Blue. Advisers: Paul Baxter and Asmarom Legesse. Produced for American Universities Field Staff, with support from the National Science Foundation, 1975. Available from six regional centers. For information, write AUFS, Box 150, Hanover, New Hampshire 03755.

PART I:
The Kenya Boran:
Appraisals of a Documentary Film Series

This article discusses the application of documentary film data to the study of local societies, and in this context reviews a documentary film series on the Kenya Boran, recently produced by the American Universities Field Staff. The idea is to transform film episodes portraying empirical reality into conceptually relevant episodes involving local economic, social, and political processes. Employing evidential film resources in this manner may greatly extend the instructional and research uses of visual data in African studies, beyond the pre-scientific "windows on the past" approach frequently advocated by ethnographers and ethno-historians. Following a brief evaluation of this potential, the analysis focuses on the teaching applications of the Boran films in Africa-related courses at three American universities.

Film Data and the Film Sequence

Documentary films may profitably be applied to the investigation of ongoing crises and sequences of local collective change. At present, crisis and sequence analysis is mostly performed at the national level and relies heavily on qualitative historical and quantitative aggregate data. Film provides an additional source of subnational data and teaching materials. In particular, film permits the social scientist to collect and communicate unwritten and immediately unquantifiable data, hopefully in a systematically comparative and replicable manner. This methodological advantage should be particularly attractive to those of us concerned with learning and teaching about rapidly changing local Africa.

Regardless of whether it is intended for research or teaching, a successful evidential film is characterized by what the anthropologist Timothy Asch terms the "film sequence":

The method rests on the plan to photograph, in detail, naturally occurring sequences of social interaction. . . . In this sense, a sequence could be defined as a span of social interaction in which two or more individuals, through the natural course of their social activities, reveal patterns of behavior significant to their society ("New Methods for Making and Using Ethnographic Films," unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3).

Whether a sequence remains essentially as it was collected or is cut, edited, and perhaps narrated depends on its intended use in research or as part of a larger teaching documentary.

Of course, filming a sequence to generate, test, or illustrate hypotheses demands considerable prior knowledge about the subject patterns of interaction. This knowledge, combined with contextual information significant to but not obvious in the film sequence, can be recorded in written and quantified form to accompany the film.

As the basic unit of analysis and instruction, the film sequence can be used to depict a collective problem or process at a given point in time. The film sequence can also assist in the dynamic examination of local social systems, by portraying representative episodes in periods of even the most rapid and comprehensive change.

Film Sequences and African Social Change: The Boran Series

Until recently, few film sequence data existed in the social sciences, except in the pioneering field of ethnography. In 1971, the American Universities Field Staff, supported by the National Science Foundation, launched a documentary film project of multidisciplinary scope. During the ensuing four years, the project has collected over 100,000 feet of uncut research film and produced more than twenty-five teaching documentaries on various aspects of local change in Bolivia, Taiwan, Afghanistan, the China Coast, and Kenya. Film materials were shot from the perspectives of five substantive themes in the five locations (rural society, education and socialization, rural economics, the status and roles of women, and religious-political belief systems), each theme oriented toward individual and collective problems of modernization. The selectivity of data-gathering imposed by these themes has allowed a wide range of film sequences to be extracted from the whole collection of project footage, and some of these sequences to be assembled into teaching documentaries.

The educational value of these materials can be estimated by reviewing a single set of documentaries filmed in northern Kenya and prepared in part to serve multidisciplinary African studies education. To achieve this purpose, the Boran films may first be described, together with the supplementary teaching essays written specifically to accompany them. These films and essays may then be evaluated as to their ability to facilitate students' understanding of social change in tropical

Africa. This evaluation is based on preliminary teaching experiences with the film materials at West Virginia, Dartmouth, and Michigan State Universities.

Boran Modernization through Film: Documentaries and Essays

The Boran documentaries illustrate the various uses of visual data. *Kenya Boran* approaches the sophistication of research film in that it consists of nineteen episodes which are recorded as film sequences and joined together to elucidate various aspects of Boran social, educational, and political processes. The content of these vivid and at times quite moving sequences ranges from scenes depicting attempts to find the best solution to the problem of family size, to the importance and implications of formal education, the difficulties and future viability of the Boran cattle culture, and the Boran's ideological and legal obligations to the Kenya government.

The two *Kenya Boran* teaching essays provide background information on the Boran culture and the film's key actors. One essay provocatively explores the attractions and problems of traditional socialization and formal education among the Boran. Drawing from the film's portrayal of youth's fundamental disinterest in traditional and passionate desire for formal education, the essay poses the logical question: if education is the desired alternative, education for what? The essay cogently argues that the local effects of increasingly costly but highly preferred schooling are unemployment, disappointment, social inequality, and technical incompetence to deal with local developmental problems. Taken with the *Kenya Boran* visual data, the essays left the reviewer with a strong sense of the real but unavoidable tragedy which modernization often requires.

Unlike the sixty-six-minute *Kenya Boran* film, *Harambee*, *Boran Herdsmen*, and *Boran Women* are brief (nineteen, seventeen, and eighteen minutes) and more conventional teaching documentaries, but with certain nuances introduced to enhance their presentation of the Boran dilemma through the film sequence. These innovations include the close juxtaposition of highly charged political issues in *Harambee*, and the sparing use of narration in all three films either to summarize the episodes just screened or to introduce new episodes. Narration is also employed, in place of subtitles, as a translation device (*Kenya Boran* relies on subtitles).

In three major film sequences, *Harambee* illustrates the discontinuities and conflicting values associated with local political decision making, political socialization, and socio-economic modernization with all of the empirical richness and normative ambiguity apparent to a field researcher. The first two sequences reconstruct the heated debates of a Boran local council meeting and the festive yet somehow strained events transpiring at an independence day celebration. The third sequence symbolizes the inexorable, but only partly wanted, penetration of technology and communications, in the

comments of the film's chief protagonist on the construction of a new trunk road linking Nairobi, Kenya, with Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. From these brief but fascinating film sequences, the following issues are raised in *Harambee* and further discussed in the film's teaching essay: the conflictual relationships and misunderstandings that dominate the Boran's dealings with official and informal agents of modernization; the disunity that exists, and is being exacerbated, between the Boran, and rest of northern Kenya, and the country as a whole; and the disorienting environmental changes affecting the Boran, represented in the opening of the Boran country by the new road.

Boran Herdsmen is an exploration of the Boran's agro-economic system. With the assistance of a cleverly animated map and in several subsequent film sequences, the viewer is introduced to the dangerously delicate balance between man, cattle, grass, and water, the maintenance of which consumes much of the Boran's time and effort. In one sequence, which would be amusing if the survival stakes were not so high, the pragmatic conservatism, ethnic pride, and political alienation of the Boran are at once depicted. A Kikuyu range management officer is trying to convince a Boran elder to relocate his large herd at a Kenya government ranching scheme. The range management officer is unable to speak Borana and must communicate, in Kiswahili, through an interpreter. The Boran elder dismisses him, in Borana of course, as a "foreigner" and refuses to join the scheme unless it is relocated at a place of the elder's own choosing. The sequence ends as the officer's Land Rover drives slowly away.

The *Boran Herdsmen* teaching essay forcefully drives home the economic and social risks of Boran dry lands herding in a skillful presentation of film-linked qualitative and statistical data.

Boran Women discusses the roles of women in Boran society by leading the viewer through a typical day in the life of a Boran woman. This tour includes such physically demanding, rather dull, but socially and economically vital activities as the tending and milking of cattle, preparation of meals, ritual observances, house repairing and cleaning, and gardening. The film draws attention to a crucial relationship that solidifies the social and even political status of Boran women. Although women may not own cattle, they do control the apportionment of milk between calves and children. This guarantees them great influence over nothing less than the future size and prosperity of both the herd and the community. The accompanying teaching essay extends the daily routines of Boran women to their entire life-cycles and their rapidly changing patterns of health, work, ritual, and male-female interaction.

Teaching Experiences with the Films at West Virginia University

During the spring and summer of 1975, the Boran documentaries and teaching essays were presented to several West Virginia University audiences of faculty, staff, and students, among them small undergraduate and graduate classes in African politics and political

development (N = 18 students). These students were asked to summarize their direct film observations under what they considered to be the most appropriate general concepts relating to local political change in Africa. (The classes had previously discussed such concepts, but not in relation to the films.) The screening room was not completely darkened, so that the students could make brief notes while they viewed the films, which they elaborated and generalized immediately after each screening. Both undergraduates and graduates demonstrated considerable facility in attaching abstract political meaning to specific visual evidence, in addition to the supplementary information provided in the teaching essays.

Not surprisingly, the *Kenya Boran* documentary produced the largest number of what should probably be called proto-concepts. This is partly because of its relatively great length and also, in the reviewer's opinion, because of the cutting and editing techniques uniquely applied to this film. Unlike the other Boran materials, *Kenya Boran* consists of marginally cut and edited film sequences grouped into what appear to be three major themes or problem areas. A testimony to the teaching effectiveness of the film sequence, the *Kenya Boran* sequences vividly and unambiguously illustrate dilemmas and politically infused conflicts typically confronting the Boran in the process of modernization. The sequences are conceptually relevant in that the problems they exemplify are not unique to the Boran, but also seem salient in similar local settings of modernizing change.

The students generally identified their *Kenya Boran* observations with normative and behavioral competition in both the instrumental and affective spheres, emerging from conflicting traditional and modern obligations, expectations, and perceived needs. On the basis of this initial classification, the students generated the following themes and proto-concepts from the film:

A. *Subsistence Tradition and Modernization*

1. Generation Conflict: the Pastoral Lifestyle and the Attraction of Formal Education
2. The Political-Economic Utility Values of Large Versus Small Families
3. Cattle as Food and Socio-Political Status Versus Cattle as Personal (Cash) and National Wealth
4. Communal Versus Individual Socio-Political Obligations

B. *Sex, Social-Economic Status, and Ethnic-Political Class Differences of Opinion Concerning Education for Modernization*

1. Older Women as Innovators Versus Male Elders as Keepers of Tradition
2. Poorer Children as Innovators Versus Richer Children as Keepers of Tradition
3. Kikuyu (Elite) Versus Boran (Non-Elite) Views of the Nature and Purposes of Education (elite values stress its technical nature and local techno-economic task applications; non-elite

values stress its social and political nature and district to national political-administrative career applications)

C. *The Communication of Modernization*

1. The Nationally Versus Locally Determined Content of Technology Transfer
2. The Primacy of National Goal Penetration Versus Priorities Resulting from Local Political Decision-Making

To these may be added a fourth summary theme and its proto-concepts:

D. *The Relentless Dynamic and Uncertain Direction of Local Modernization*

1. Urban Versus Rural Cultures of Innovation
2. Security, Sustenance, and Local Autonomy Versus Risk, Economic Specialization, and Socio-Political Dependence
3. Similar Perceptions—but Conflict-Producing Distributions—of Wealth, Status, and Power between Elites and Non-Elites who are Ethnically and Geographically Differentiated.

Although they are narrated and more heavily cut and edited than *Kenya Boran*, the remaining films produced their own themes and proto-concepts, associated with problems arising from unplanned changes in the organization of Boran social, economic, cultural, and political affairs.

Problems in Applying the Boran Documentaries

To be most helpful in the systematic teaching of comparative social change, such films as the Boran documentaries should enable students to interpret change in terms of increasingly generalized *and* conceptualized issues and problems. The West Virginia University evidence suggests that these requirements are successfully addressed by the Boran series, but perhaps not to the fullest possible extent.

Following the trial screenings described above, the reviewer conducted student evaluations of the Boran documentaries and teaching essays, using a rather informal questionnaire adapted from a more comprehensive instrument developed at Indiana University. No claim is made for the statistical reliability of these evaluations, not only because of the informality of the survey instrument, but also because the total number of student evaluators was fewer than twenty. If these interim results are not reliable, however, at least they are interesting.

The students were first asked to respond to seven statements:

1. The film essays provided a substantial contribution to what I learned from the films.
2. I feel that more out-of-class assignments or readings would have helped me better to understand the materials we were dealing with in the films.
3. My skill in identifying concepts concerning rural development is improved as a result of seeing the films.
4. Overall, the evidence provided in the films is easily understood.

5. Overall, the evidence provided in the films is relevant to evidence provided in readings and class discussions.
6. I was able to understand any one of the Boran films without seeing the other three.
7. It would have been preferable, for understanding, to have gone back and seen certain film segments again.

In response to these statements, the students overwhelmingly supported the use of the Boran films and teaching essays, with an equally decided—and predictable—opposition to additional out-of-class reading and writing assignments.

Of particular importance to the reviewer were responses to Statement 7, together with answers to six questions which completed the questionnaire:

1. Which film(s) did you like best? Why?
2. Which film(s) did you like least? Why?
3. Did reading the essays before or after seeing the films better facilitate your understanding of the films? Why?
4. What was your overall impression of the films as evidence for learning about rural societies?
5. How could the film essays be improved?
6. How could use or discussion of the films be improved?

Strong agreement with Statement 7, coupled with strong preference for the more sophisticated *Kenya Boran* film and substantial interest in the intermixing of visual and written data, would presumably indicate a predisposition toward the kind of teaching application best served by the film sequence. Such responses would also suggest that relatively uncut and unedited sequences are more effective instructional devices than more heavily cut and edited sequences, the empirical and conceptual meanings of which are frequently “given” in film narratives.

In fact, the students almost universally preferred to go back and re-view selected film sequences, especially those dealing with political decision making, technology transfer, and various aspects of Boran socialization. The following answers to Question 6 (“How could use or discussion of the films be improved?”) are representative of this interest:

If it could be practical, to show flashbacks of sequences being discussed.

By students and professor posing key questions and reviewing the responses on film.

By possibly discussing the films after viewing and reviewing certain segments of the films to get a better understanding in certain areas.

Kenya Boran was also heavily favored over the other films because, typically, it “gave a good overview of Boran life,” “assisted the viewer in obtaining more comprehensive information on the functioning of the society,” and

not having a narrator explaining the film made it necessary to focus all of one's attention on the film. As there were no other voices than those of the actors, one could feel more involved—I don't really know how to express it—more on the scene.

It was also generally agreed that the film essays should be read prior to viewing the films, and subsequently reviewed in conjunction with the relevant film sequences: "The essays should be condensed and offer more film links."

The West Virginia University experience suggests that the Boran visual data are conceptually meaningful to students in African politics and political development, but that these students are ready for more flexible uses of these data than those to which they are exposed in simple screenings of the Boran films and readings of the Boran teaching essays. The questionnaire responses in particular indicate that students are eager to treat film sequences and related materials as simulated raw data, to be manipulated in the generation and testing of hypotheses about the Boran.

Improving the Teaching Application of the Boran Documentaries

As argued earlier, to be most helpful in the teaching of African and comparative social change, films should permit students to interpret change in terms of increasingly conceptualized problems. Preliminary teaching applications of the Boran films resulted in partial satisfaction of this requirement. Most notably, students were provided with a sense of conceptually disciplined participant observation from having viewed the films and read their accompanying essays. This sensitivity to Boran society could probably be exceeded only by exposing the students to an actual field experience.

It has also been suggested that the Boran films were not exploited to their fullest possible extent, to encourage students to develop and test hypotheses on the basis of their conceptually organized visual and written data. The reason for this is that the Boran documentaries have until now been treated as essentially passive, single-use teaching aids, through which students view the entire range of visual evidence once, and then attempt to convert behavioral episodes into abstract relationships. By supplementing single screenings of full-length documentaries with repetitive re-screenings of selected film sequences, it may be possible to expand the films' application to include simulation projects in which students identify research problems, generate hypotheses, test these hypotheses, and report their findings. The reviewer is presently developing such a project which, in small discussion group settings, will hopefully serve as a vehicle not only to acquaint students with the empirical reality of village Africa, but also introduce them to the workings of social science field research.

Admittedly a relatively time-consuming and expensive approach, a simulated Boran research project represents only one of several possible ways to convert evidential films from passive to active teaching

resources. The common purpose of all such approaches should be to encourage students to participate in the discovery of knowledge by employing film sequences as data, instead of compelling them simply to absorb the messages of pre-digested documentary "movies." That this improvement of use seems worthwhile is suggested by early teaching experiences with the Boran film series in its conventional application. The American Universities Field Staff should be congratulated for providing the opportunity, through its excellent Boran documentaries, to move forward in this direction.

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PART II:
The Michigan State University Experience
with the Kenya Boran—
The Professor's Perspective

Late in 1974, Dr. Norman Miller of AUFS asked me to participate in the process of evaluation of his new film series, *Faces of Change*. After reviewing the *Kenya Boran* portions, I agreed to make the films an integral part of Hi 394 (History of Modern Africa), which is normally offered in the spring quarter to about fifty-six students. I believed that the films would be most useful during the last two weeks of the course, when the readings and the lecturer focused on economic, political, and social developments in post-independence Africa. I always had experienced great difficulties in transmitting the ambience and reality of changing and neurotic Africa to my students. Depending on whether they were black or white, left wing or on the political right, they chose usually to be romantic or cynical about conditions in independent Africa. The films, I thought, would serve to point out the types of the development of the modern African nation-state. Since I wanted the students to be exposed to a balanced view of historical origins of contemporary Africa, I built the course around two opposed texts, L. Gann and P. Guignan, *Burden of Empire* (New York, 1967) and E.A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, 1919-1939* (New York, 1974). There were no text readings for the final portion of the course, since I decided to use the pamphlets that accompanied the films.

Moreover, I wanted my class to perceive the films as something important and integral to the course as text-films, if you will, as opposed to audiovisual aids. These days, students generally and unfortunately regard the incidence of films in the classroom as opportunities to doze off, or as interludes when the instructor does not want to work. In other words, films are nice, perhaps, but not to be taken seriously, and,

in any case are superfluous to the actual educational process. This unfortunate assessment mirrors their experience with films in primary and secondary school and replicates the judgment of most professors, whose antediluvian views on film also betray an atavistic fear of anything as complex as celluloid and machine. Whatever the case, in my classroom, I emphasized the Boran series as existential evidence of the process of modern history in Africa, and I stressed that the films were an exciting educational innovation as they devoted enough time to situations to complete the data base students would obtain from the required readings and the lectures. I affirmed that the films were an act of scholarship by a highly regarded political scientist, as well as art. In short, I conditioned my students to regard the Boran films as substantially different than the ordinary movies they had hitherto seen in classrooms. By so doing, I also built up their positive anticipation, an emotion I also fed by accenting the fact that they and only a few other groups in the United States were important participants in evaluating a cinematic innovation.

Yet, I fully realized that the films were as perfect as most of the books being considered in this issue of the *ASA Review of Books*. I knew that the disciplinary purist would fault the *Kenya Boran* series for the most narrow—even if justifiable—reasons. The point is that the film just cannot be evaluated solely in disciplinary terms. They are a holistic experience, and must be judged from the benefits accruing to our often inexperienced and callow students. For them, the films are a direct and exciting confrontation with a society vastly different from their own. They usually learn about social and economic change only in theory but the films foster direct, experiential apprehension. I was therefore unconcerned that the films' reflection of Boran society might not be valid for the Boran up or down the road a hundred miles, or even off the thoroughfare twenty miles. What was significant was the clarity of the message of transition for this Boran society, obviously close to the road and rocked by its connection to Nairobi and the developing Kenya nation-state.

Although the films are an excellent vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, they become even more effective in the hands of the experienced Africanist. If the instructor also has a general appreciation of the artistic devices used by filmmakers, so much the better. A brief example will suffice to explain what I mean: *Kenya Boran I* commences with a long pan of a youth driving cattle from one field obviously toward another, in much the same fashion as young men have shifted herds for several thousand years in this part of Africa. However, in this case there is a significant difference because the horizon towards which the herdsman is moving is a built-up road, down which trucks—shown beautifully from afar as proceeding with majestic determination—roar past southwards towards Nairobi. The contrast between the new and old ways could not be more starkly represented, and it amazed me to discover that my class totally missed the symbolic importance of this

cinematographic representation.

The fact is, however, that roads are such an ordinary part of the American scene that students attach no particular significance to them. They did, on the other hand, appreciate that a young man was driving a herd somewhere, a fact of some innate importance, because in the United States you do not often see youths leading cattle anywhere, unless, I imagine, you come from America's small farming community. In other words, my students easily could have missed the whole point in the opening sequence of the series' very first film instead of immediately being placed within the framework of social and economic change, which the director obviously had intended. However, since I knew a great deal about the Boran—albeit from the Ethiopian side of the border—and really understood the importance of the graded gravel road down which the lorries were travelling, I was able to drive home to my class the illuminating contrast between the cattle-based subsistence mode of existence and the modern, money economy as symbolized by the road. From this point of understanding on, my students and I embarked upon an excellent discussion of third world social and economic change and the implications of such developments.

If the instructor is a trained Africanist and has actually experienced traditional herding societies, he or she will obviously be able to clarify the films and to pass along information and ideas far more effectively than someone who knows little about Africa and its development problems. However, one must assume that the films will be utilized mostly by teachers who are not Africanists and not really conditioned to the realities of the third world. There is, therefore, significant danger here of misrepresentation, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding; or the instructor may merely show the films without comment, greatly diminishing their educational impact. I have therefore recommended to AUFS that a series of teachers' pamphlets be developed to explain the films and various significant sequences to the classroom instructor. The aids should be prepared with great care because the student pamphlets that already accompany the films were unanimously regarded by my class as too simplistic.

Generally, however, the students in my history class appreciated their exposure to the films and unanimously recommended that the Boran series become as permanent a feature of the course as any textbook would be. Michael Vavrus, a graduate student in education, a member of the class, has written about the films from the student point of view. It is important to realize that Michael is not only a very capable student but also spent two years in southern Ethiopia, living among people similar to the Kenya Boran. Vavrus's positive treatment of the student experience is matched in the evaluative essay by Charles Eberly, a scholar in the Learning and Evaluation Service of MSU. His task, however, was complicated by the fact that none of us really knew what we were looking for and what kind of evaluation we really

needed. He manfully managed to contrive an ad hoc procedure that yielded excellent results.

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The Michigan State University Experience
with the Kenya Boran—
The Student's Perspective

The *Kenya Boran* film series was viewed by students of diverse backgrounds, who already had many ideas about contemporary Africa. Since the films were presented in a later segment of a Michigan State University upper-division undergraduate course on the History of Modern Africa, the students already had been exposed to readings, lectures, and discussions about modern Africa. Some students had previously participated in courses about Africa, while for others, this course marked their first exposure to Africa as an area of study. Half of the fifty-member class were blacks, of whom a considerable proportion expressed what could be classified as black nationalist attitudes. Most of the white students saw themselves politically moderate to liberal, with a general inclination for learning about different cultures.

The unifying factor for all of these students, however, was their collective exposure to a new kind of film series, which received nearly unanimous acclaim from the class. Though they had all been assigned the same textbooks and had been present during the lectures and discussions, the films were recognized as a unique approach, an attempt to take the history of Africa beyond works on a page to visual involvement in the lives of a transitional African society. As a twenty-one year old student explained:

The biggest problem I have been having with African history courses is a lack of coordination between my opinions and the actual situation in Africa. Because of the movies, I have been able to improve on my ideas and get a more rounded opinion of what is going on.

From the perspective of an English major, the film format was quite pleasing: "The lapses of no narration, just natural sounds of the people, the animals, and of the silence of the land impressed me most and drew me closer to the experience of the Boran." As a student in international relations tersely summed up, the "films were definitely not 'sleepers'."

The films stimulated students to question their previously held conceptions and provided them new perspectives on Africa. According to one student, within the affective domain "the films provided the human feelings and emotions associated with a changing Africa." It seems that for this particular group of students the films were an exciting new venture in classroom instructional materials.

According to student comments, the films were watched on various levels of comprehension. Upon initial viewing of a film (early in the series), there were some students who saw the films basically as a general presentation of the lives of a pastoral people. For example, a spear-throwing lesson for young Peter Boru Guyo by his father, Guyo Ali, had at least three distinct levels of interpretation. First, as was seen initially by some students, the scene had no more significance than a demonstration of the traditional art of spear handling and throwing. For other students this incident illustrated schoolboy Peter's lack of interest at that moment in the skills associated with a spear. The students at the most insightful level, though, went a step further and interpreted the situation as an example of the declining interest of the young Boran in the traditional ways of their society as a result of their contact with Western values and institutions. Although the accompanying study guides were useful, in cases where integration of knowledge beyond the immediate action of a particular film link was necessary, guidance and direction by the professor was invaluable for the students to begin to fully appreciate the learning value of the films.

The films also provided scenes which gave students a chance to have some visceral reactions to what they were watching. An agricultural economics major thought that "many of us in our comfortable society do not realize how hard life really is for these people [the Boran]." After seeing film segments about the centrality of finding adequate water supplies for the Boran's cattle, one student confessed that although "life depends on water, I've always taken it for granted." In addition to leading a physically strenuous life, the Boran were also seen as each having tremendous responsibility for the maintenance of their society. Regarding the life of the young herdsmen, a black female noted that the task of cattle herding "is more of a challenge and more serious to a young Boran male than anything I can think of offhand for a Western male of the same age."

The traditional role of women and children as portrayed in the movies elicited a mixture of emotions. In the United States the need for proper birth control is generally accepted as vital and crucial. Often the answer to problems of human suffering is a call for a decrease in the population growth rates of third world nations. But the films did not show Boranland as an area suffering from overpopulation. Given the drought conditions, food shortages could not be easily explained away by the too-many-mouths-to-feed hypothesis. Some students were able to empathize with the Boran's desire for an unlimited number of children by relating back to the former needs of agriculturalists in the United States: "the old man sees offspring in the traditional sense, much like the Southern farmer in the not-so-distant past of our country, as a built in labor force. . . ." A white female accounting major further explains:

Viewing the Boran women in their daily chores should make us American women feel pity. But when you look beneath the surface, you can see that it's the women who hold the families as well as the tribe together. . . . [The films] show women with prestige.

Recognizing the crucial responsibilities Boran women assume, a white male noted in passing that he “wonders what would happen to the Boran families and herds if the Boran women went on strike for awhile.”

The subject of African nationalism was presented from the perspective of an ethnic minority outside the mainstream of Kenyan political life. Even though the films concentrated upon the Boran, other Africans, most noticeably those representing the Kenyan government, were also active participants in the series. This meeting of the traditional Boran and the Westernized Kenyan raised within students the question “who is an African?” Scenes of the agricultural extension agent, the district officer, and the school teacher confronting a traditional culture attempting to retain its identity forced students to reconsider previously held assumptions about “the African.” Convenient stereotypes of the African, whether as a subsistence peasant or a revolutionary in a fight against colonialism, simply did not hold up.

Although this point was applicable to most all of the students, it was particularly true for the black members of the class. Prior to the showing of the films, the blacks were nearly unanimous in their support of the concepts of “blackness” and “negritude.” Shedding some light on a possible change of this attitude after viewing the films, a black male reported “Senghor coined the term ‘negritude’ as a way of unifying all blacks under a common cause but from what I can understand from the films, the Boran are little affected by it.”

Beside the issue of negritude is the broader one of African unity. The film *Harambee* attempted to give visual definition to the concepts of Kenyan nationalism and independence, especially as they affected an ethnic minority and politically powerless groups such as the Boran. The apparent contradictions of African nation-building within boundary lines that contains many diverse ethnic groups was readily illustrated by the contact between Kenyan governmental officials and the Boran. Evaluating this interaction between traditionalism and modernization was not an easy effort for the students. Although this point will be returned to later, it should be recognized that the issue concerning the value of progress, modernity, and Westernization remains largely an unresolved one among the student viewers. What the films did, however, was to encourage them to begin questioning these terms which they generally had assumed represented positive and constructive forces.

Most students would originally have granted the need for the various cultural groups within Kenya to unite and work for the nation’s betterment. But for a student who is studying social work the events of the films seemed to indicate that “for the Boran, [Kenyan] independence has meant *losing* some of their [Boran] independence.” One student analyzed the situation as follows:

The Kenyan government would like to see its people throw away their traditions, become one nation and to live like the western world. . . . It seems, however, that somewhere the planners missed a few steps in the process. The Africans are being asked to change overnight, to believe in national standards which the majority of people are unable to relate to.

Thus, an idea like autonomous development for Kenya was being re-evaluated by many students on more of a micro-level, i.e., “self-determination for whom?” After seeing the movie *Harambee*, one student bluntly stated, “Although this term [Harambee] means ‘pull together,’ I actually saw what was pulling Kenya apart.” Based on student reactions, it seems highly unlikely that any of them after watching this particular film series would be able to speak in broad generalizations concerning African “unity” and “nationhood” without seriously qualifying these concepts.

Quite clearly, the films undermined student prejudices regarding African independence. To many students independence is something that happened to most African nations in the early 1960s, while colonialism was basically an event of the past. Neo-colonialism was and remains a somewhat confusing concept to them, but generally it implied white efforts to subvert Africa. Built into these not uncommonly held opinions was again the idea of the *unified* Africans fighting a different form of white colonialism, as exemplified by the term neo-colonialism. With the exception of some white tourists whom the students generally felt were quite obnoxious (“I disliked the tourists. . . . It seemed as if they were inspecting the people like cattle”), the confrontations in the movies were between peoples of color. Recalling earlier course material, a black social science major drew a parallel between the behavior of the Kikuyu-dominated Kenyan government and the former white colonial regimes: “I can see a similarity between [the Kenyan government and] the way Europeans used to force Africans to work by imposing taxes and forcing them into the monied economy.”

The issue of bringing traditional Africans into the money economy was well developed in the film series. Since the Kenyan government presently is trying to settle the pastoralists onto cattle ranches, the topic became alive and immediate through the media of the films. Nearly all of the students saw the transition of the Boran from a traditional culture to one more oriented to Western values as inevitable. As far as resolving this as the correct direction for the Boran to move, there was rarely a definite positive or negative evaluation of this process. More often, though, basic philosophical questions concerning “development” were raised: “Traditional or modern—what is the right way to go?” or “Is modernization [i.e., Westernization] really development in the third world countries where there is an obvious split between traditional and modern cultures?”

For most of the class the films offered a clear glimpse of the effect of modernity upon Africa. To a sociology student,

The films offered a different insight into the idea of modernization. By actually seeing how the Boran live and the effects that the road, school, and district capital had on the lives of the herdspeople, the difficulties of transforming a society are more accurately realized.

The persistent question for the students, though was “transforming a society into what?” The conflict of values initiated by this problem was not easily answered (if at all) by many students. The main considerations were succinctly noted by one undergraduate: “A Boran might find himself receiving more economic security with the new life-style, but loses freedom and self-reliance in the process.” Based upon the mixed and sometimes contradictory statements of students, it appears that the Western concept of progress, which once was accepted as natural and productive by these students, had been seriously made suspect by their exposure to the films. Commenting upon this realization, albeit somewhat romantically, a journalism major stated, “To a Westerner, their [the Boran’s] life seems so primitive. But even so, with the primitiveness comes a peaceful, simple, honest life (maybe modern society is a little backwards).” In reflecting upon the transition of the pastoralists, a white psychology major lamented, “Must other cultures always become as ‘white’ as possible before they are accepted as people?”

For the students, education was the most obvious representation of Westernization. The myth of education as the panacea for the problems of a country was seriously questioned by exposure to the movies. Because of this, many students began to approach a new level of sophistication by differentiating between various goals and modes of education. Generally, it was recognized that formal education patterned after the British colonial model is ineffective particularly since (1) employment opportunities are limited in the modern sector for school graduates, and (2) young Boran are becoming alienated from their traditional heritage. There were some students who hoped that a balance could be struck between the needs of modern Kenya and those of traditional Boranland. Despite the obvious mis-education taking place, the dream of education had captured the minds of many Kenyans, from the Kikuyus, to Peter, to the elderly Boran woman. In order better to comprehend this phenomenon, many students remarked that the study guide “Education for What?” was quite useful. A student recalled an incident in that essay about a boy turned away for admission to a government school by reflecting that “this boy had to face the embarrassment of returning to the village with no education, just as Peter feels returning with an education is also shameful.” Once more, the films had successfully caused this group of students to reconsider conventional wisdom by posing questions and knotty problems rather than answers.

A concluding remark relates to the general significance of the films for a student audience. Those with sufficient background in African and other Third World cultures were able to transpose what they learned from the films to other parts of the world. Some students with

lesser exposure were unable to do this or tried to apply the films' message too broadly. A sophomore who felt that a correlation could be drawn noted:

Although the Boran inhabit only a small part of East Africa, I think you can relate their story quite easily with little modification to other transitional societies in present day Africa. Like Joshua [a Nigerian Ph.D. candidate in African History] said in class one day, the Boran situation seemed very similar to the situation in Nigeria.

In closing, the Nigerian graduate student stated, "The films are good examples that can be used as a case study of change in modern Africa."

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The Michigan State University Experience
with the Kenya Boran—
The Evaluation's Perspective

Introduction

This is an evaluation of the use of films developed by the American University Field Service, Inc., in a course taught at Michigan State University by Dr. Harold Marcus, the History of Modern Africa. The films were vignettes of the everyday lives of members of the Boran tribe of northern Kenya. The purpose of the films was to show the impact of change on the lifestyle of the Boran people. This purpose was congruent with the purpose of the course, which is to examine the conditions of modern African society and the effect of modernity on traditional African societies.

Method

Due to the short lead time between the initiation of the evaluation project and the actual use of the films in the classroom (about nineteen days), the evaluation method selected was largely of an informal nature (Bureck and Peterson, 1975). An evaluator observed all classes in which the films were shown. In addition, students were asked to provide selected demographic data, Dr. Marcus provided class achievement data, and students were encouraged to write their opinions and judgments about the films in the margins of the accompanying instructional booklets. These booklets were assigned a code by the students and collected at the final exam. Along with an essay item on the final examination, the booklets were used as the basis for a content analysis of student reaction to the films and materials.

Data Collected

Demographic data collected were sex, curriculum, race, and age.

Achievement data were the midterm, final examination, and course grades for each student. Individual student comments were read and classified on the basis of a content analysis. Comments were coded first as to whether an individual made mention of a given fact or issue, and secondly as to whether the tone of the comment was positive or negative toward the issue.

The following scale was used to code content areas:

- 0—no comment
- 1—recognized without relative comment of any kind
- 2—recognized with positive response
- 3—recognized with both positive and negative responses
- 4—recognized with negative response

There were fifty-six content areas classified using this coding system. Content areas classified were at three different levels of analysis. Some (seventeen) were simply recognition of and reaction to a fact (“The Boran prefer to have an unlimited number of children.”) Others (twenty-five) dealt with the translation or application of sociological or anthropological concepts to the Boran films, such as “The Boran are in transition from pastoralism to agriculture.” Still others (fourteen) related to the films and instructional materials themselves, e.g., “Note-taking during the films was satisfactory.”

Data Analysis

The relationship between demographic and achievement data were determined by means of the Pearson product-moment correlation. Chi Square tests of association were also performed on the same data. Frequency counts were made for each of the fifty-six content analysis variables, and correlated with the demographic and achievement data where appropriate.

Results

Respondents were evenly split by sex and race, and consisted of six white males, seven black males, seven white females, and seven black females. Modal age was twenty-one years. There was no concentration of majors from any particular curriculum, although most were in the Colleges of Arts and Letters and Social Sciences. Grades on all three achievement measures ranged from near failure to mastery (4.0). Chi Square tests showed no statistical relationship between any of the demographic variables and any of the three measures of course performance. That is, there was no systematic relationship between grades earned in the course and sex, race, curriculum, or age.

While demographic and achievement data do help to describe the people viewing the Boran films, they do not provide a direct means to analyze student reaction to the films themselves. The content analysis data supplied a more direct approach to such an analysis.

Content Analysis Results

As the frequency counts for the fifty-six content analysis variables demonstrate, the most typical reaction of the class as a group for any one variable was not to comment at all (Appendix A). Beyond that, the most typical comment was simple recognition without making an accompanying evaluative statement. When evaluative judgements were made by the students, they were most likely to attach negative statements to factual and application items, but positive statements to evaluation of the film and its accompanying materials. Student responses in several areas deserve specific mention.

Among the factual items, most students made particular note of the change in economic base for the Boran promoted by the Kenyan government, but only three made an evaluative judgement of that fact. Three other factual items received particular negative comment. These were the limited employment opportunities available to school-leaving Boran, the differentiation of male-female roles in Boran society, and the behavior of white tourists visiting a group of Boran.

There were three application level categories engendering a similar level of class reaction. All students made a note that the Boran were a transitional society. Over two-thirds of the group viewed the highway as an example of Western values, but evaluative judgements in the group about the highways were mixed. A large proportion of students also viewed the inevitability of "progress" and "modernization" for the Boran likewise with mixed feelings.

All reactions dealing with the films and instructional aids included a judgment of value. Students appeared to find the instructional booklets useful, but seemed to doubt whether they were sufficiently concise. A third of the class remarked about the difficulty of understanding English dialogue by Africans in the films. Overall, students concluded the films satisfactorily related to course materials and were a constructive instructional tool.

Discussion

Although the class members were mature students, the relatively small number making comments at all on any of the content areas was somewhat discouraging. Especially disappointing in the review of these notebooks and essays was the lack of evaluative statements in particular. It would seem that students at the upperclass level would be more prone to draw conclusions and tentative judgements from their reading and viewing. Indeed, these students received exceptionally strong encouragement from their instructor to do so.

Observation of the classroom discussion did provide some possible explanations for the results discussed above. Comments most often noted by students were also comments most likely among the content analysis variables to have been directly mentioned by the instructor. Perhaps the written comments were more a means of marking what

their instructor considered important in the films, and less their own intellectual product.

Finally, students may have been biased by the instructor's personal enthusiasms for the films. His introduction to the first film shown contained all of the items students tended to mention at the end of the course regarding both film and accompanying instructional materials.

Conclusion

Viewed in light of the written comments produced by this class, it would seem questionable whether the film and the study aids were produced in such a way as to encourage high-level thought at the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels about the concepts involved in the films. While high-level comments by students are very likely a product of the interaction of several factors, including the instructor, written comments were nevertheless not as insightful as might have been desired given the sophistication of the media. Whether this can be viewed as a problem of the films and materials is not possible to determine given the unsophistication of these data. Often expectations for a new instructional approach have been far beyond the ability of the technique to produce (Fuller and Manning, 1973). These data do, however, raise the question of how complex student reaction should be, given the considerable resources expended to provide the films and instructional materials.

It is true that students did like the films as a medium of instruction in the History of Modern Africa course.

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PART III: A Historian's View at Dartmouth

The theme of the *Kenya Boran* films is revealed in the first minute of *Boran I*. A long camera shot zooms in on a single herdsman and follows him walking slowly and deliberately, spear in hand and cattle at his side, drawing closer and closer to a dust cloud stirred up by truck traffic on the newly constructed highway which connects Nairobi to Addis Ababa. Not a word is spoken either in dialogue or narration, yet the meaning is clear: the Old Order is confronting Change and Modernity.

This theme is explored in great depth and subtlety in the five films which make up the AUFSS Boran series. Focusing on a village in the grassland slopes of northern Kenya near Marsabit town, the films probe the impact of alien institutions, technologies, and values on the way of life and the lives of a number of individuals in this society—individuals

whom we come to know well in the series and with whom we can deeply empathize, if not always sympathize. They also capture the responses of these individuals to this impact, their resistance and accommodation to the new forces which confront and, perhaps increasingly, envelop them.

The introduction of formal education on the Western model is one of these forces. Held up to the Boran as the key for entrance and success in the modern world, it threatens their pastoral economy and organization by drawing potential young herdsmen like Peter Boro away to school, rendering them no longer fit, with neither the know-how nor the inclination to herd cattle. At the same time, successful schooling carries no guarantee of subsequent white-collar employment in a poor country already overcrowded with more graduates than jobs. *Boran I* and *Boran II*, the longest films in the series, capture the paradox inherent in this situation better than I have ever seen it done in any documentary about Africa and provide considerable insight into the human costs and benefits of educational change in the Third World.

The effort to integrate the Boran politically and economically into the new Kenyan nation is another force documented in the films. Most overtly, this effort is seen in the government's imposition of taxation, in attempts to instill "Kenya consciousness" to supercede the Boran's older ethnic loyalty, and in official encouragement of cooperative cattle ranching projects as replacement for the Boran's nomadic practices. They are also manifested in subtler ways. Government-run clinics for family planning and maternal health care offer a variety of services, including inoculations, medical treatment and advice on pre- and post-natal care. Successful implementation of the family planning program, however, poses a threat to the Boran's traditional desire for large families. In the past, a pastoral life depended in large measure on having many children, especially sons to tend the herds. Smaller families would also inevitably alter the role played by Boran women and modify long-accepted relationships between the sexes.

Since both educational change and efforts at national integration are characteristic forces at play throughout post-colonial Africa, the Boran experience depicted in these films and in the film essays accompanying the series serves as an excellent departure for a general introduction to the problem of change in the African continent. I used the films and essays to begin and undergraduate survey course entitled "The History of Africa since 1880." In addition to viewing the films and reading the essays during the first week of classes, the students were asked to read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Bohannan and Curtin's *Africa and Africans* and to write a short paper discussing whether for the Boran, as for Okonkwo's Ibo, "things" were indeed "falling apart." Students were also asked to submit comments about the films and essays as teaching materials.

In evaluating the Boran series, the students were in unanimous agreement that the films illuminate the problem of change in rural Africa

very successfully and, in illustrating the human context of the interaction between the “old” and the “new,” provide a formidable challenge to many assumptions of modernization theory. The students were especially convinced that the theory’s two main postulates—that modernization inexorably affects all peoples in the same, ultimately beneficial way and that “there is a direct and easy road” to modernity—are invalid in the Boran situation and, in the case of Achebe’s novel, the Ibo as well.

The students were also united in praising the evidential filming techniques employed in *Boran I* and *Boran II*. Using neither voice-over nor written narration, this technique draws the viewer “directly” into contact with the people and situations captured by the camera, avoiding the intrusion of an intermediary expert to interpret what is being seen on screen. Although much more demanding than more traditional documentary techniques, the evidential method provides the viewer with the opportunity for greater involvement with the film subject, and more freedom to assemble the information observed, analyze it, and draw independent conclusions from it.

For the historian, however, concerned not merely with the study of change, but of change over time, the Boran films are blemished by a bias which seems to be inherent in the overwhelming majority of documentaries depicting the confrontation between so-called “traditional” society and “modernity.” This became especially clear in class discussions and in the students’ essays. The observational films, recording what is happening in the present, lack time depth—a reference point in the historical past against which contemporary change can be measured and compared. A viewer without background in African history, therefore, may be left with two incorrect impressions: that all change in Africa today is stimulated only by the impact of “modernization”; and, second, that “traditional” society, until this impact, has been inert, unchanging.

In the case of the Boran, for example, adaptation to changes in the ecology as much a part of the past as of the present. Drought is endemic in northeast Kenya and it has often interrupted the pastoralists ideal pattern of movement through the area, forcing them, at least temporarily, into closer interaction with sedentary peoples. Some of them have been permanently transformed into settled agriculturalists as a result of this process. The metamorphosis as depicted in the films is therefore not as radical as it might seem. What is different about the current situation is the government’s conscious decision to intervene in the natural process and promote the transition to settled agriculture, including ranching.

But the bias can be corrected, and the AUFS films are on the right track in this respect. Each film is accompanied by printed materials which elaborate in greater detail on the people, society, and issues captured by the camera. At this point, still in draft form, the written sources are excellent for anthropologists and political scientists. It is

essential that at least one of them be expanded to include more of the historical dimension, making the series an equally valuable resource for the historian.

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