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cinema

Situated 20 000 km far from France, the French Overseas Territory of New Caledonia is about to host an interesting cinema event in a region without a cinema. The “ANÛ-RÛ ÂBORO” competition films festival is expected to take place in the “tribus” (Kanak villages) of the Northern Province in the form of a mobile “bush cinema” (Ciné-brousse) for a population of just 5 000 spread over twenty-two villages. The organizers announce an event which is “ambitious in its programming, although modest but warm in its organisation.”

A look at the festival selection confirms the ambitious project that is to bring the best of recent documentary cinema to the small Kanak population. Not less than 18 documentaries; some of these having competed at the latest edition of the IDFA (Amsterdam) are waiting to be screened during the festival. The programme is shaped to “articulate the spirit of freedom and emancipation for peoples, with a special focus on innovatory works produced by the peoples themselves”. To illustrate this perspective, the festival presents the films in three different sections and a retrospective on the Varan French Film Training Association.

The Official selection includes *["HERO'S JOURNEY"](#)* a film shoot on the Timor Island by Singapore Award-winning television presenter and producer, Grace Phan. This is Grace Phan first documentary film. The other sections are « Out of Competition », « Films du Pays » and the « Retrospective Varan. » The retrospective is the festival homage to movies produced worldwide by the French training centre celebrating this year its 25th anniversary. It aims to remind that the ATELIERS VARAN are at the origin of the training of the first Kanak documentary filmmakers in the beginning of the Eighties.

The Varan Association is officially created on January the 20th 1981 although its activities started earlier in Mozambique in 1978. Shortly after the independence of the country, the new authorities addressed a demand of filmmaking support to France, which the cultural attaché transmitted to the world acclaimed filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch. It was “the father of the Cinema Verite” who then trained the first African filmmakers with the objective of making of them the first Mozambican documentary film trainers.

The Varan steps

Better understanding the needs and sociological issues connected to the local communities involved in the film workshops; the African film training experiments built up solid roots. The experience gained contributed in drawing what makes the French cinema cooperation policy today. The [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs website](#) states that training is an essential component of its policy to support the independence of national production. Varan, forged by Jean Rouch philosophy, is today one out of five institutions that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website presents as a liaison partner for the implementation of its film support to national production.

Since the Eighties many Varan workshops have been initiated not only on the New Caledonian Territory but also in the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Portugal and Romania in Europe and new workshops are being implimented in other region this year again.

So, what makes these film training so much attractive to local communities? Varan workshops distinguished themselves for not being restricted to the technical aspects as it is often the case. Varan is constantly trying to transform mute subjects and consumers of audiovisual products into responsible authors who are creating their own images and their own stories

authors who are creating their own images and their own stories.

As for its begining in Mozambique, Varan still comes at the demand of countries representatives that can be a university, a trade union, a film school, or a television company. The demands for the launch of workshops often varied from country to country but some of the needs are common to all the situations. In the Philippines the first workshop was launched in 1982 with the Cinema Department of the University of Manila. The purpose was to weave bonds between the various ethnic groups using their own dialects.

Other country other issues; in Laos in 1988, a workshop and a movie was made with the participation of the "Laos National Radio Television" on the subject of the forest exploitation. "SWEET AND COOL" by Viengmone Champasith, Souay Thoumphala was about the trees transportation problems that the country faced at that time.

Romania hosted a Varan documentary film training workshop in 1994. The training brought together twelve young researchers, students in social sciences and professionals working in varous Romanian cultural institutions. The participants have created a permanent visual anthropology unit called "Atelier Cine 12". The purpose of this film unit is to capture images that translate the risk of fast changes in modern Romania on the traditional culture. This concern continues to motivate many groups and collectivities around the globe to shoot their own films.

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