

*Empire, repetition, and reluctant subjects: British home movies of Kenya, 1928-1972*

In 1928, Lieutenant Commander Glen Kidston, a renowned racecar driver, pilot, and playboy, visited Kenya with a group of male and female companions from Britain. Amongst Kidston's companions was a friend and cameraman who took a series of 'home movies' or amateur film of the group's safari. Shot in black and white, without sound but including intertitles throughout, these films document the group's activities, including luxurious travel by boat, expansive lunches, and the wildlife they encountered. The footage is punctuated with images of vast landscapes, Maasai housing, and a long scene of a laborious crossing of a river by car.

In 1972, 44 years after Glen Kidston visited Kenya with cine-camera in tow, and 9 years after Kenya gained independence from Britain, David Lean, the successful British director, also visited Kenya and made a series of home movies while there. Accompanied by his then mistress and future wife, Sandra Hotz, Lean visited a number of luxury lodges, taking extensive footage on his cine-camera. Lean and Hotz went on safari as well, dined in the wilderness, and produced metres and metres of film of the surrounding landscape, including Maasai homes, river crossings, and wildlife. Indeed, the differences between the amateur 1928 footage by Kidston's party and the footage of a critically acclaimed director are scarce. Other amateur films produced by Britons visiting Kenya in this same period follow similar visual patterns. Ultimately, what stands out in these films shot over four decades by multiple men, including the five amateur film-makers examined here, is the sheer repetition of imagery on screen. These films are both remarkably similar and

remarkably undisturbed by the formal end of empire. The holiday films produced by a range of Britons visiting Kenya seem to follow a clear visual pattern that remained static in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Locating the repetitive aspects of culture produced by Britons while abroad in the empire is not a particularly new discovery for those engaged with empire studies, even if that repetition has seldom been the subject of sustained examination. One need only have a passing familiarity with John MacKenzie's 'Studies in Imperialism' series and other key works on the culture of empire to note the persistent similarities in material such as film, fiction, posters, soap advertisements and the like.<sup>1</sup> This imperial culture collectively fosters narratives that, at times, verge on an exhausting pastiche.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly the case that 'culture,' widely conceived, produced by metropolitan-based imperialists, travellers as tourists, and settlers, made for a series of cultural conventions of empire that are striking in their similarities. These conventions, and what we could even identify as a formula, underpin various terms used by scholars, such as the 'imperial gaze,' the 'imperial eye,' the 'colonial order,' or, in an acknowledgement of the fixed nature of this trope, concepts of 'colonial nostalgia,' as Anna Bocking-Welch has argued.<sup>3</sup> The repetitive, stylized, and persistent representations of places and indigenous people by the white European traveller, and sometimes settler, are evident in these works but rarely explicitly addressed as a topic in itself, as each scholar concentrates on the specificities of their time period and region.

These varied terms for the repetition of imperial culture are also evident in works on the literature, photography, and film of empire. The work of James R. Ryan, Elisabeth Edwards, Anne Laura Stoler, Wendy Webster, and Philippa Levine uncover the sheer monotony

associated with the imperial eye as bearers of empire photographed indigenous populations and colonial landscapes. Ryan's work captures the repetitive aesthetic conventions associated with photography while big-game hunting, while Edwards notes the persistent imperial framing, and related absences, associated with photographs featured in museums of empire.<sup>4</sup> Stoler's work shows the circumscribed visibility of servants within family photographs in the Dutch East Indies, as servants held children in place but were simultaneously marginalized within the frame, and often situated just outside or awkwardly positioned in the photograph.<sup>5</sup> Levine's recent work on photography by anthropologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century refers to this as the 'Victorian optic,' while both her article and work by Richard Vokes on photographs of Uganda from 1904 to 1928 highlight the similarities in the period.<sup>6</sup> Wendy Webster and Bill Schwarz, on the other hand, have noted that this imperial gaze in post-colonial Britain was incredibly slow to shift, resulting in what Schwarz sees as the ongoing romanticisation of the empire in the face of its decline abroad.<sup>7</sup>

Amateur films of empire are, at first glance, simply another vehicle for this imperial gaze. These films were first produced by the wealthy middle and upper classes that could afford the expensive cine-cameras available from the mid-1920s. Fascinating for family members to watch, but often dull for the casual viewer, the home movie or amateur film, for all its ubiquity in film archives both in the UK and abroad, remains an underutilised resource for academics. Historians and even media studies scholars, with a few exceptions, have been reluctant to make use of amateur film.<sup>8</sup> The challenges associated with an examination of these films are quickly apparent to the modern viewer. On the one hand, amateur film captures particular moments, places, and people in the past that are seldom represented on

either feature film or television screens. On the other hand, amateur films are also poorly edited, poorly filmed, and of primary interest to those subjects captured on camera. These largely silent films are usually accompanied by very little contextual information when they are deposited into archives by family members or less interested parties wanting to clear their closets and who have little idea of what the films contain, beyond handwritten scrawls on the film cans themselves. These are truly archival orphans, often leaving us only with the material on the screen and little information about the circumstances of production and exhibition. Yet we know that a broader swath of society gradually embraced the practice of amateur filmmaking in the 1950s, and particularly after 1965 when Kodak introduced the affordable Super 8mm camera. Consequently a considerable volume of amateur film populates media archives in the UK, including the Media Archive for Central England (MACE) and the British Film Institute (BFI), where the bulk of films discussed here are drawn from.

The ubiquity of amateur film, both in contemporary archives and as a unique form of media that arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, makes these sources both hard to ignore and also something beyond just another medium for capturing and producing the imperial gaze. This is the seemingly ordinary, if initially wealthy, Briton taking charge of the camera and turning it upon the world around him, unhindered by the usual strictures in the period. These strictures included the pressure to engage with audience markets, and censorship in the case of feature films, or in the case of the nascent documentary movement, with the mandate and government oversight of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (1928-1933), the GPO Film Unit (1933-39), and the Colonial Film Unit (1939-1955).<sup>9</sup> As Heather Norris Nicholson argues, the emergence of the portable cine-camera in the late 1920s offered the

experience of filmmaking to a range of people beyond the professional film producer, both in the metropole and the empire.<sup>10</sup> Those taking up the expensive hobby of home-movie making in the 1920s and 1930s, as Norris Nicholson also acknowledges, were primarily wealthy upper and middle class men, who were seen as masters of the tricky technology of the cine-camera. The playboy racecar driver, Glen Kidston, is a good example of this sort of film-maker. Even as socio-economic and gendered patterns of cine-camera ownership shifted in post-war Britain, the hobby remained strongly associated with the middle classes and with men.

The early association of cine-camera ownership with the wealthy elite of Britain also means that empire is relatively well represented in archives of amateur film. Wealthy Britons visiting settler friends or family, or increasingly participating in guided tours, brought along the cine-camera as a new and novel way of capturing the adventure and excitement of visiting African colonies like Kenya. Although we know little about individual circumstances of exhibition, from sources such as the hobby press *Amateur Cine World* we know that in general these films were likely shown in the home, with a running oral commentary by the film-maker himself. Records from The National Archives also indicate that amateur film-makers occasionally offered their films to organisations such as the Imperial Institute for editing and use in their own productions.<sup>11</sup> By and large, however, advertisers and editors for *Amateur Cine World* assumed a viewing of the films within the home. The challenge for the amateur film-maker and exhibitor was to avoid an outcome increasingly pilloried in the press, of assembled viewers suffering through such a viewing. A cartoon in the *Sunday Express* from 1961 referenced a new innovation in recording sound to accompany the home movie, and was captioned “Hold it folks—listen to a recording made a few minutes ago of

someone saying: 'Which do you hate most, his summer holiday films or his damn dog doing tricks?'"<sup>12</sup> In the harsh landscape of audience response to 'holiday films,' moving images of African game and Kenyan people, often in that order, could be a powerful and privileged currency in the new century of media production and exhibition. Home movies of the empire, while adding to the burgeoning archive of white representations of Africa, were from the film-makers' perspectives just what the audience wanted.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century then, amateur film becomes an important source of the imperial gaze, but where it distinguishes itself from photographs or the feature films and documentaries that scholars have been preoccupied with, is the sharp interplay evident between reluctant indigenous subjects and efforts by British film-makers to discipline both human subjects and the landscape. Put more simply, the subjects of amateur film talk back, walk away, avoid the gaze of the camera, or generally do not cooperate with the film-maker's direction. These are not paid actors taking direction. Efforts by amateur film-makers to shape the *mise en scene*, or what is in the frame, are much more evident in the rough world of amateur film-making. Consequently, the shaping of spatial infrastructure and the coercion of bodies into various poses and attitudes, successful or not, is evident in often breath-taking ways within amateur film.

Efforts by British tourists and settlers to produce the ordered imperial gaze as the final end product, and attempts by indigenous populations to resist this, are made visible in these sources. By bringing cine-cameras to Kenya to record images to be consumed back in the metropole by family and friends as 'holiday films,' the British visitors and film-makers examined here laid bare what Aboubakar Sanogo has argued was the 'order of the visible'

that defined colonialism.<sup>13</sup> This was the imperial gaze actively produced before the eyes of the film audience. Colonialism's obsession with ordering and positioning bodies within a projected image of power and control made cinema the perfect vessel for such an exercise; while amateur film, with its rather clumsy framing, grants us insight into the efforts involved in projecting such an image. The interplay between film-maker and subject, violent, coerced, reluctant, and also sometimes shrewdly navigated, is much more obvious in amateur film of the empire than in colonial photography. In other words, the amateur film at the centre of this article offers us the opportunity to gaze upon the cultural violence of the production of repetitive imperial image-making in colonial and post-colonial Kenya.

#### Kenya on Screen: Glen Kidston's 'Safari in East Africa' (1928)

The production of the amateur 'holiday film' is firmly rooted in the empire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taking early advantage of portable cine-camera technology, Glen Kidston travelled by boat to Kenya in 1928 with his friends, including the aspiring film director C.R. Beville, for what the film's intertitles tell the viewer was a 'Safari in East Africa.'<sup>14</sup> Running over four cans of film, Beville and Kidston shot numerous hours of footage, which was subsequently edited with the benefit of intertitles throughout. This was likely Beville's early experimentation with film production, as he went on to direct two feature films in 1931 and 1932 before declining to make another film. T.A. Glover, listed as photographer, was also a member of the party, which appears to have consisted of seven Englishmen ranging in age from twenty to fifty years old and two, if not three, British women including a rather glamorous young woman that the camera sometimes lingered on.

The composition of the party, dressed in fashionable safari clothing and with all the comforts of home as they travelled, including formal dining arrangements erected as they went, was an extension of Kidston's life in England. Kidston was a wealthy playboy already known to the press in England for his fairly successful record of car racing.<sup>15</sup> Kidston would again feature in the press the year after 'Safari in East Africa' was made, under the headline 'German Air Liner Disaster' when the passenger plane he was in crashed in a fiery blaze in Surrey, killing six of its eight passengers, including a minor German prince.<sup>16</sup> Kidston survived and went on to become involved in Union Airways, another passenger flight company that serviced East Africa, before his death in a plane crash in 1931 at the young age of 32. The footage held at the British Film Institute of the 'Safari in East Africa' are of Kidston at the age of 29.

Not surprisingly, giving Kidston's profile and background, the films of his time on safari in Kenya in 1928 are quite polished affairs. The terms 'amateur film' or 'home movie' do not quite capture the thought and editing that went into these films. The intertitles are seemingly rendered by a professional, in the style of studio-produced silent films at the time. Early on in Kidston's film, a map of Africa helpfully charts the movement of Kidston's party, borrowing a technique from earlier empire films such as the *Palaver* (1926) and repeated in empire feature-films from the 1930s such as *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *The Drum* (1938).<sup>17</sup> This early presentation of the map in the film indicates extensive travel by boat, car, and plane and also works to situate Kidston and his party as explorers engaged in mapping a colony made abstract through the imposition of map imagery into the narrative. Such a strong early narrative is certainly not always evident in holiday films of



this type; however the remainder of the film is also not as polished as these early shots and conforms to the general pattern and form of the home movie.

The four Kidston reels are preoccupied with the filming of material that included the dramatic landscape of Kenya, various wildlife including lions and hippos, images of the travelling party dining outdoors, and some comparatively limited footage of assembled Kenyan men, women, and children. Lee Grieveson has noted the tendency of documentary empire films produced by the EMB and GPO film units after 1928 to juxtapose modern technology, presented as the domain of the British, against the tools of the indigenous population, presented as primitive and inefficient.<sup>18</sup> The same can be said about Kidston's amateur production, which crucially predates films by the GPO such as *Song of Ceylon* (1934) and *Cargo from Jamaica* (1933). Beville, Glover, and Kidston's footage of Mombasa's port-yards capture in the same frame wooden canoes and modern steel ships, emphasising for the viewer a sense of contradiction between the two ships and, by extension, the two cultures. The decision of Kidston's party to emphasise this in 1928 indicates that the impulse of British film-makers to draw such distinctions was not limited to those involved in the documentary film-movement of the 1930s, but was part of a broader imperial gaze at work and indeed actively carried from the metropole to the empire and back again.

Kidston's film also highlights efforts by the British party to traverse the Kenyan landscape by means of modern western technological innovation. First, footage is taken from a plane as the party journeys to the interior. As the plane flies fairly low to the ground, these frames shows the vast wilderness of the interior, providing a perspective that only the wealthy westerner could afford of Kenya. Later in the film, however, this physical and technological

mastery is challenged as an extended scene shows the unfortunate outcome of cars attempting to cross a swollen creek. One of the party's cars sinks into the groundbed of the creek and although the water is fairly shallow, the efforts of the Kenyan porters, supervised by a white male member of the visiting party, are not enough to dislodge the car and it is slowly subsumed by water and mud, all while the cine-camera captures the episode. The baggage in the car is subsequently recovered by the porters and the car is lost. Little evidence can be seen on screen indicating that this was a severe disaster for the party and presumably the number of cars, which numbered four in the footage, allowed the party to continue. Rather, the expressions of those Britons involved in crossing of the creek, all men, indicate a degree of excitement and thrill. In contrast, the expressions of the African porters are largely neutral and inscrutable.

At this point, Kidston's film turns to what becomes a very familiar feature of amateur film of Kenya, documentation of the wildlife encountered on safari. Long extended shots of wildlife including hippos, giraffes, and lions are featured in the film. The amount of footage granted to filming wildlife makes it clear to the viewer that this was the central purpose of the film. Kidston's party, at one point, ties the carcass of a dead animal to the back of one of the party's car and drags it along in order to film a pack of lions chasing the car. The intertitles tell us that the strength of the lions is such that they are able to halt the car and yank it backwards, proximity adding an air of danger and adventure to the activities of Kidston and his group. This safari footage takes up the bulk of the four reels of footage, making images of the indigenous population and even Kidston's own party secondary. The presumption underlying the film was that this footage of wildlife would be of interest to potential

audiences of the holiday film. This, in other words, was the empire a British audience back home would want to see.

When Kenyans feature in the film it tends to be through images of rural Kenya, not modern urban centres. Beville, Kidston, and Glover document images of rural Maasai housing, with its grass roofing, while also taking direct front-facing close-ups of men, women, and children they encountered. There is little hesitancy here, in 1928, on the part of the filmmakers in filming the people they encountered or assembling them for their reception. The Kenyans themselves often remained stoically still and neutral in expression for the camera. This very arrangement of the indigenous population for the camera speaks to the colonial framework of the encounter, an encounter through which travellers, as Levine argues, 'sought overwhelmingly to delineate difference.'<sup>19</sup> The paths along which the party travelled were further informed by colonial infrastructure, as one intertitle indicated upcoming scenes of 'Narok. District Commissioner's Native Guard,' which was followed by footage of the guard drilling for the visitors and the camera. This then, was the imperial display prompted not just by the British, but the British with a cine-camera.

More intimate footage exists with the filming of servants, what the intertitle tells us are 'The Gun-bearer, and our boys (on whom the successful safari depends)', showing servants lined up in front of the camera, eyes moving nervously side to side. An extended close-up of 'Farag Abdul', 'personal servant' to the party, shows him standing before the camera with a solemn face before some off-screen instruction or an attempt to break his serious pose causes him to break into a smile. His response to the speaker is all captured on camera. The cine-camera here, wielded by the British visitor, becomes a means of disrupting the

behaviour of Kenyans already familiar with the practice of acting as still, unsmiling objects to be captured by the British through their photo-camera. The instructions regarding appropriate behaviour in front of the cine-camera differ from those for the photo-camera, but nevertheless originate from the British to be passed on to the indigenous population. This was new behaviour for a different type of lens, yet within the persistent framework of empire.

What is remarkable about Kidston's 1928 film is the way in which its imagery is repeated in later amateur film produced by disconnected Britons in Kenya. The focus of Kidston's party upon specific rural shots of Kenyan landscape, Maasai housing, vehicles in the wilderness, and relatively few Kenyans who nevertheless face the camera, are all repeated in amateur film from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1970s. Indeed, these home movies, monotonous as they can be, were hardly disrupted by the declaration by the Governor of Kenya of the Emergency in October of 1952. Instead, the sheer repetition across these films, produced by film-makers who did not know each other but who had varying relationships to Kenya, is cause for pause. Even amateur holiday films from 1946, almost 20 years after Kidston's visit and in the decade before the anti-colonial uprising of the Mau Mau, feature similar elements, while also indicating the extent of British settlement in Kenya. These films display the concerted efforts of film-makers to bring about a specific home movie of Kenya which included images foregrounded as early as 1928 in Kidston's films. Kidston's film also points to new patterns of coercion, behaviour, and display there were increasingly instigated by these British amateur film-makers in their interactions with the Kenyan population.

'Bandy words with the natives': The cine-camera, coercion, and consent

The type of Kenya imagined and captured by Kidston's party in 1928 endured amongst amateur film-makers, even as the cine-camera itself became less exotic and a familiar tool in the British traveller's arsenal. Amateur film-makers continued to film Kenya's landscape and its animals in subsequent decades, following the same visual patterns evident in Kidston's early work. Kenyans themselves also showed up on screen, although crucially amateur film made in this period shows a growing awareness, by both the British film-maker and the Kenyan subject, of the unequal relationship captured, and indeed fostered, by the cine-camera.

The filming of indigenous populations by amateur film-makers abroad was a common enough occurrence that discussions of this practice were evident in Britain's hobby periodical on amateur filmmaking from its inception. *Amateur Cine World* (hereafter, *ACW*) was a monthly periodical published in Britain from 1934 to 1967, before it changed its title to *Movie Maker*, which continued until 1985. *ACW* was aimed at the amateur film enthusiast and included a range of articles on equipment, filming techniques, information about local amateur cine-clubs, and also an annual amateur film competition. Readers could also send in their films for comments and suggestions by the *ACW* team, which would then publish these as an often quite critical 'film review' of the work.

Discussions about filming local and indigenous populations while abroad, as part of the popular 'holiday film', are evident throughout *ACW*, as are discussions about the repetition evident in these films. In 1934, in a review of a reader's film titled 'A cruise to the Mediterranean, Palestine and Egypt on R.M.S. Luciana, Easter, 1934,' the reviewer noted 'With an expenditure of nearly 1,600 feet of film [the film-maker] has produced a picture

which tells very little about the countries through which he has passed and the camera work is violently erratic.' The review goes on to remind the film-maker and viewers to 'remember that the most interesting of all subjects are human beings, from peasants to princes, and that close-ups are always appealing.'<sup>20</sup>

*ACW* also acknowledged the difficulties that could be associated with filming local populations, and offered tips for securing both the cooperation of the locals and the possibility of 'natural' unpoised footage. This was the true challenge of film-making, as the posing evident in photographs did not sit easily with amateur film, as we have seen. As early as 1937, *ACW* offered up, as an example, techniques for the film-maker of 'An Indian fair':

If you are a visitor to an Indian fair you cannot bandy words with the natives. The only thing to do is to wait until their interest is exhausted and then to catch them when they are interested in something else. A telephoto lens is, of course, an enormous help here, but not all of us can rise to this luxury, and in any case it entails the use of a tripod which is even more conspicuous than a cine camera.<sup>21</sup>

The advice offered here traversed a range of options for the film-maker trying to overcome the 'interest' of the natives, ranging from verbal exchanges, to a hope that the assuredly short attention span of the natives will be exhausted, and failing that, avoiding issues of consent altogether by filming subjects who would be unaware of the process. The exchanges outlined all spoke to the presumption that such footage should and could be secured. The excitement, protests, or discomfort of the indigenous population with filming

practices was not viewed as a serious obstacle within this advice, nor were concerns of local populations about their representation on British screens for British audiences.

The first two suggestions by *ACW* of discussion and coercion as useful strategies for capturing local and indigenous populations on film are evident in the amateur films of Kenya shot in the 1940s by Sir Archer Earnest Baldwin, farmer, land agent, and Conservative Member of Parliament for Leominster (1945-1959). Baldwin first visited Kenya in 1946. Baldwin's interests, both politically and socially, revolved around agriculture and cattle-raising. His amateur film collection indicates that he made films from 1935 to 1964 and visited both South Africa and what he called East Africa, including Kenya. He first visited South Africa in 1935 and visited Kenya in 1946 and 1948, when he also visited Uganda. On all these trips, Baldwin took extensive cine-camera footage, often passing the camera to another member of his party so that he, in safari dress, could be featured in the film as well.

Baldwin's visits to Africa left him quite invested in the future of that continent. A Tory occasionally willing to go against the wishes of his party, Baldwin advocated both reduced government involvement domestically, arguing against subsidies for farmers in Britain, but also in favour of further investment in and continuation of the empire. He was a staunch imperialist, taking opportunities to speak of the government's role and responsibility in its African colonies. Baldwin was a prolific letter writer to *The Times* where he demonstrated these attitudes and weighed in on issues he saw affecting colonial Africa.<sup>22</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in 1949, Baldwin dismissed the idea of Africa as a potential beef or ground-nut oil provider to the UK, arguing 'Africa's problem is to feed her own rapidly increasing

population.’<sup>23</sup> In another letter to *The Times* in 1951, Baldwin again preoccupied himself with Africa’s ‘increasing population’ but argued that, rather than acting as merely a drain on Africa, this population could function as labour for British investment in the continent. He wrote of Africa’s considerable potential as a source of wealth for the UK, commenting on its ‘almost unlimited mineral wealth, including high-grade iron Ore’ and arguing that ‘labour is available from the rapidly increasing African population.’ He concluded that ‘We have a responsibility to develop these natural resources, and at the same time raise the standard of living of the African.’<sup>24</sup> Baldwin clearly lays out a variant of Caine and Hopkins’ ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ which underpinned efforts to ‘develop’ Africa between the wars and in the 1940s, and which was simultaneously met by the organised labour movements documented by Frederick Cooper and others.<sup>25</sup> Baldwin’s preoccupation with the population of Africa thus veered in uneasy ways between concerns about its size and the burden of empire, but also exploitation of this for British benefit.

For Baldwin in 1946, Kenya offered a landscape ripe for the modernising influence of Britain, and his amateur footage offered a means of visually defining his notions of both development in Kenya and a stable British empire. Central to Baldwin’s conception of development was the stability and romanticisation of settler society and the settler embrace of modern farming technology. Baldwin’s footage, in scenes similar to Kidston’s earlier films, shows a modern tractor first being inspected by Baldwin before being given over to a Kenyan man. The camera lingers on the black man driving the tractor, a juxtaposition of what Baldwin’s film presents as the primitive body of the Kenyan and the modern machinery of the British settler.<sup>26</sup>



Subsequent footage by Baldwin shows him visiting a coffee and sisal plantation owned by British settlers, possibly friends of Baldwin. Baldwin films their comfortable ranch house from the outside, the camera lingering on scenes of the settler family smiling and standing in their front garden, before the film returns to a panning shot of Kenyan labourers. We see over forty Kenyan men arranged for the camera, with Baldwin and an unidentified younger white man smiling at the camera directly. These labourers, whose neutral expressions never shift, were not being filmed surreptitiously as *ACW* had advised, but were subject to what *ACW* suggested as the first resort, the bandying of words ‘with the natives,’ itself clearly a loaded endeavour within the labour relations of colonial Kenya in the 1940s. We see this in the emotional framework empire captured in the scene between the cheerful and proud white visitors, acting as overseers in the construction of this scene, and the comparatively unsmiling faces of the labourers. Smiling can be discerned only amongst the youngest of the Kenyans shown on screen.

IMAGE 1 HERE.

Image 1. Archer Baldwin surveying labourers. MACE/Baldwin, Coffee and Sisal Plantation, Kenya, 1946/4272. Courtesy of MACE.

IMAGE 2 HERE.

Image 2. Baldwin’s unnamed companion in the same scene. MACE/Baldwin, Coffee and Sisal Plantation, Kenya, 1946/4272. Courtesy of MACE.

This image thus stands out in the film as a stark demonstration of both the power of the cine-camera and Britons, be it settlers, visitors or tourists, to order indigenous populations for the screen. For Baldwin, smiling broadly as he turns to gaze upon the arranged workers, this was a visual composition not out of step with what he saw as a peaceful Africa, and certainly worth documenting on film for viewers back home. This imagery, of assembled Kenyans, was also evident in Kidston's earlier film from 1928. At that point, the assembly of Kenyans on screen was accompanied by the obvious curiosity of the Kenyans themselves, while in 1946 within Baldwin's film this curiosity amongst the Kenyan labourers was absent, indicating a wearying familiarity and even reluctance in the face of such arrangements for the camera and for the British visitor.

By 1951, when Baldwin felt compelled to write again to *The Times*, the situation in Africa, and Kenya specifically, had shifted and he acknowledged that his conception of a peaceful Africa was not the reality. In a letter entitled 'Racial Tension in Africa,' Baldwin acknowledged that the hard-nosed attitude of some settlers was leading to talk of the partition of Africa and a regrettable step towards apartheid. For Baldwin, the solution lay in an Africa that was unified under British rule, but with clear distinctions in place. He argued 'This set-back should be countered by a forthright statement from the Colonial Office making it quite clear that white leadership in Africa is essential to the well-being of all races.'<sup>27</sup> For Baldwin, then, white settler leadership in Africa, supported by the Colonial Office, was key to maintaining the order and harmony that was enacted on screen in these films. The divide between the colonial office and Kenya's settler society was something to be bridged, not by settlers alone, but by the Colonial Office offering firm support for settler ownership and land management. This was the muddled formation of the 'white man's

world' that Schwarz has written about as a hallmark of the end of empire in post-war Britain.<sup>28</sup>

Baldwin's films capture the attitudes and tensions that would result in the actions of the Mau Mau in 1952 and the declaration of the Emergency, which would remain in place in Kenya until 1960. Baldwin's casual ordering of black labour, the proprietary way in which the Kenyan landscape is filmed, and his footage of white British settlers comfortably ensconced in their sprawling homes and engaged in large-scale farming of arid land, all foreshadow the protests against the British settlers that the Mau Mau uprising violently addressed. Indeed, warfare in Kenya, particularly from 1952 to 1956, prompted a pause in the production of amateur film of Kenya. The outbreak of the Emergency and the actions of the British in Kenya have been well documented by Caroline Elkins and David Anderson, amongst others.<sup>29</sup> In the amateur film available in media archives in the UK, there is a notable silence around the Emergency. This was not a time for the usual film-makers to be filming.

The events of the Emergency also changed the outlook of previous visitors such as Baldwin, who wrote to *The Times* for the last time on the topic of Africa in July 1952. In a letter entitled 'Land in Kenya' Baldwin wrote that a previous article published in the paper that identified white settlement in Kenya as problematic was 'inaccurate.' He wrote, 'In the first place, there is a considerable area of fertile land on the coastal belt almost entirely occupied by Africans. In the second place, a very large proportion of the African people in Kenya themselves occupy territory in the Highlands consisting of land much of which was and still is, at least as fertile as the so-called White Highlands, if properly used.' He went on to

conclude that 'Since it is admitted on all sides that no African peoples were moved (except for very minor adjustments) as a result of European settlement, it follows that African peoples are in possession of the land they occupied before the Europeans arrived.' Baldwin finished his letter with defensive comments about land use in the colony: 'It would be extremely surprising, to say the least, if the indigenous peoples had occupied the poorest land, leaving the best land to be taken over by newcomers.'<sup>30</sup> For Baldwin, then, the land had been fairly allocated and, perhaps most importantly from an English farmer's perspective, to those who knew how to use it. From this point on, however, Baldwin is silent on the subject of Kenya or Africa in his subsequent letters to the editor. The events of the Emergency did not offer up the Africa he had visited, documented, and even arranged, in his films. While British feature-films awkwardly addressed the Emergency and the end of empire, as Wendy Webster has argued, amateur films remained largely silent and presumably avoided the bandying of words with the natives that *ACW* had suggested twenty years previously.<sup>31</sup>

### Tourism and subterfuge

Amateur film produced by a number of British visitors to Kenya on the eve of, or shortly after, Kenyan independence in 1963, replicate in content both Kidston's films from 1928 and Baldwin's from the late 1940s. Amateur film produced by a range of film-makers discussed here, including two brothers, Bill and A.E. Bengry in 1963, Donald F. Griffiths, Professor of Geophysics, in 1964, and David Lean in 1972, all show images of Kenyan landscape, animals on safari, travellers lunching at various points, vehicle travel, and the occasional Kenyan. The ongoing production of such imagery in amateur film speaks to an

enduring imperial gaze, undisturbed by Kenyan independence or the events of the Emergency. However, while the content of this amateur film stayed quite static, the means by which this footage was obtained demonstrates efforts by British film-makers to evade issues of consent with Kenyans and documents the sometimes hostile economic transactions between the film-maker and Kenyan subjects.

For some amateur film-makers producing films in the 1960s, issues of consent were directly addressed through the employment of Kenyan labour on their travels. Donald Griffiths, an avid amateur film-maker with 23 films deposited in MACE that date from 1936 to 1985, visited Kenya numerous times as part of his work at the University of Birmingham. Griffiths, a conscientious objector during World War II who engaged in development work in Africa along with his wife, did not seem to hold quite the same ideals of gentlemanly capitalism that motivated Baldwin.<sup>32</sup> He was, however, possibly motivated in his surveys of both Kenya and Antarctica by the same exploratory impulse that brought the other film-makers discussed here to Kenya.<sup>33</sup> Griffiths' holiday films indicate a man with considerable appetite for travel, while film shot in England also shows an engaged and imaginative family man. Yet Griffiths' footage of Kenya in 1967 is particularly relevant for this article in its close imitation of Kidston's 1928 footage. Shots are included of Griffiths and his white companions at their camp in rural Kenya, as black porters do the washing up. In this case, the frank way in which the porters are filmed was predicated on their engagement in Griffith's fieldwork as employees. The paid nature of employment made them subjects of the camera's gaze, something that the porters did not avoid. Indeed in one scene of the porters washing up after lunch, the Kenyan labourer stares back at the camera without smiling as he is filmed drying the dishes, before the camera moves on. Notable as well is an

extended scene of vehicles crossing a shallow river. As in 1928 with the Kidston footage, one of these vehicles becomes trapped in the riverbed and Griffiths and the predominantly black workers in his party attempt to pull the vehicle from the mud, with little success. The episode, again much like in 1928, is depicted as yet another adventure in the wilds of Kenya with the porters maintaining a neutral expression as they work to unload the vehicle. Throughout the episode, the porters indicate an awareness of both the camera and their role as labourers in such a scene.<sup>34</sup>

IMAGE 3 HERE.

Image 3. Image of a vehicle in Donald F. Griffiths's party in 1967 and shortly before one of the vehicles becomes trapped while crossing a river. This shot, presumably taken by Griffiths, mirrors an earlier shot (held at the BFI) taken by members of Glen Kidston's party in 1928 in terms of subject, location, and framing. MACE/Griffiths, Lake Baringo, Kenya, 1967. Courtesy of MACE.

In the case of the Bengry brothers, we see a slightly different type of amateur film-makers who were very much the product of the post-war period. While both racecar drivers like Kidston before them, these brothers came from less vaunted backgrounds and were owners of a car dealership in Leominster. The brothers visited Kenya in 1963 to take part in the East African Safari Rally. While participating in the rally (in which they finished seventh), they filmed parts of the race itself and the remainder of their trip.<sup>35</sup> Travelling through Kenya, the Bengrys and their companions took multiple shots of the road they were driving on, making for rather uneven and shaky camera work, but they also produced footage again of Maasai housing, and lush Kenyan landscape.

The visit by the Bengryns in 1963 dovetailed with both a newly independent Kenya and efforts in the aftermath of independence to capitalise on the economic possibilities of the imperial gaze of English tourists.<sup>36</sup> In 1965, the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism in Kenya published, in conjunction with the East Africa Tourist Travel Association, a brochure printed in the UK and circulated there.<sup>37</sup> This brochure emphasized first and foremost the land and wildlife of Kenya, highlighting what would be of interest to the British visitor. Out of a 48 page booklet, only 6 pages in the last section are devoted to ‘The People of Kenya’, while the first 42 are devoted to ‘The Country’ ‘Transport and Communications’ for English travellers, ‘Sport in the Sun’, ‘The Coast’, and ‘National Parks.’ Urban centres and Kenyan people occupy only a small portion of the brochure, which further presented, under the ‘history’ of Kenya, an account favouring the story of empire and British travellers:

It was left to the adventurers of modern times to penetrate the remote corners of Africa. Men like Livingstone, Stanley, Burton, Speke and Grant helped to reveal to the world something of the romance, the wealth, and the great potential importance of the great Continent... There is perhaps no more forceful reminder of the recent date of the new age of discovery than the fact that the last of the band of devoted Africans who carried the body of Livingstone to the Coast died at Mombasa as recently as 1935.<sup>38</sup>

The brochure, quoting Honourable R. Achieng Oneko, Minister of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, cited Kenya’s six-year development plan which highlighted tourism as the potential major income generator and noted the investment in the building of tourist lodges

as well as infrastructure such as roads and airport facilities, all which would further support visits to the country.<sup>39</sup> Tourism-related works further developed existing physical and spatial routes that underpinned the recognized market for those British visitors wanting to persist in the pursuit of a post-independence imperial gaze.

While the imperial gaze itself remained remarkably fixed in pre- and post-independence Kenya, the films themselves indicate that the objects of this gaze increasingly exercised reluctance and resistance when encountering the amateur film-maker. In the Bengry films, evidence of a culture of economic exchange that accompanied the practice of filming indigenous populations is evident, as the brothers failed to engage in the economic transaction that underpinned the footage obtained by Griffiths from the same period. Again, this type of transaction was discussed in the pages of *ACW* early on in its publication history, when a letter by Leading Aircraftsman K. Boulton detailing his amateur film-making while stationed in Cairo was reproduced as an 'Overseas Item.' Boulton relayed his difficulties in filming Egyptians:

Egypt is full of material for the cine camera, but it is very difficult to obtain natural shots of the natives as they cluster around you and clamour for 'baksheesh.' My knowledge of Arabic (by now fairly good) is a great asset, and by talking to them a bit first and then distributing a little 'baksheesh,' or a few cigarettes, I managed to get things organised.<sup>40</sup>

While Boulton describes this as a fairly benign exchange where his interests as a film-maker were ultimately satisfied by doling out goods he valued as minor and inconsequential, this speaks to a completed transaction between the film-maker and the subjects of the film's



gaze. This type of exchange is shown in startling detail in the works of later visitors to Kenya, such as the Bengry's filming as they progressed through their rally in 1963.

The Bengry footage vividly depicts a group of Kenyan men navigating the political economy of amateur filmmaking in Kenya and their own role as objects of the camera. As Bengry and his brother frame an elderly man for their shot, the man stands still for the camera, smiling as though for a photograph.<sup>41</sup> A.E. Bengry is then filmed showing his cine-camera to the three Kenyan men, who nod and smile even as one of the men puts out his hand for payment. When the British film-makers seemingly refuse payment, the men express frustration, frowning and striking their sticks on the ground or dropping down behind the cars of the Bengry party when the camera turns to them in order to hide their bodies. One man raises his fist in frustration and the white Englishmen are then shown on camera from within their vehicles, using these to push back against the four men now demanding payment. These were the reluctant subjects, willing to engage initially as objects to be filmed as part of a transaction with the British that was expected and tolerated. When the Bengry brothers failed to complete this transaction, the subjects of the film resisted with their attempts to physically remove their bodies from the frame. The brothers and their companions, having obtained this footage, used their cars to exit the scene, leaving this incomplete transaction behind.

IMAGE 4 HERE.

Image 4. Initial footage of elderly Kenyan man. MACE/Bengry, East African Safari, 1963, 8109-384. Courtesy of MACE.

IMAGE 5 HERE.

Image 5. Man with his hand outstretched. His companion is in the background. MACE/Bengry, East African Safari, 1963, 8109-384. Courtesy of MACE.

Other evidence of the growing discomfort and difficulty associated with the British tourist's production of the imperial gaze through film in a post-independence setting can be seen in the increasingly furtive actions of some amateur film-makers. *ACW's* comment in 1934 that a telephoto lens would be useful for avoiding issues of consent when filming indigenous populations was prophetic of the actions of some of these film-makers. The David Lean films demonstrate that even a film-maker heavily associated with the production of professional films, in his leisure time fell prey to the same impulses that directed amateur film-makers such as Kidston, Baldwin, and the Bengry brothers when it came to taking footage of oft-filmed landscape in Kenya. Lean's footage of the wildlife himself and his partner encountered on safari in 1972, while almost identical in terms of content (lions proving persistently popular) is simply of greater quantity than quality. The sheer volume is the main difference between the footage shot by Lean while on holiday in Kenya and the other films discussed. Lean's films are also landscape focussed, although in his case, his amateur film also documents the lifestyle of the rich and famous, with stops at the aforementioned lodges that the Kenyan government invested in after independence. Lean's group took advantage of this industry as he toured from one luxury lodge to another. Lean and Hotz visit Keekorok Lodge and the Mount Kenya Safari Club, both still in existence as luxury accommodation. Ultimately the aftermath of independence in 1963 saw the

commodification of the imperial gaze that was evident as early as 1928 when Glen Kidston filmed his 'Safari in East Africa,' within the realm of tourism.

David Lean also, in an uncomfortable stretch of film-making in his four tapes of home-movies produced of Kenya in 1972, evades issues of consent with filmed subjects within modern Kenya by means less dramatic than the Bengry brother's use of vehicles to escape such transactions, but also rather more disturbing. Lean opts for subterfuge in his films, taking advantage of equipment that *ACW* had identified in 1937 as available only to the wealthy. Lean films Kenyans both from a distance in urban centres like Nairobi, such as from his fourth floor room in his hotel, but also evidently with a zoom lens, as he captures relative close-ups of a range of young Kenyan women and men in the city as they cross the square outside the hotel.<sup>42</sup> Such footage seems relatively harmless in some ways, and was easily obtained through a telephoto lens and from a distance within a bustling city centre. It nevertheless betrays both Lean's fascination with the local population as objects to be documented and his discomfort with obtaining this footage through more direct means that would make that fascination evident.

Lean's mild subterfuge in urban Nairobi looks markedly different in a different section of his home movie, when he films the paid Kenyan guides on his and Hotz's boat tour of an unnamed island off the coast of Kenya.<sup>43</sup> Hotz and Lean are accompanied by a male and female guide, yet it is the topless young female guide that is the subject of Lean's cine-camera. The guide, wearing fashionable bikini bottoms in a psychedelic print and a wide brimmed hat, is crucially only filmed while she is looking away from the camera. Within eight minutes of film, he takes four full-body shots of her, all while she is looking away from

the camera while steering their boat, sunbathing with a hat over her eyes, or with her head bent over some leaves she is weaving into a mat. Lean stops filming when she is about to look at the camera, indicating that he knew or suspected he would not gain consent for this. His furtiveness in filming becomes another aspect of this story, both acknowledging Lean's continued interest in the black bodies of Kenyans, and the likely difficulties of the British film-maker in gaining consent for such image making. This, then, was not consent obtained in the coercive framework of empire or in the transactions that were expected to accompany independence and tourism, but rather a type of subterfuge obtained through the judicious application of the camera and without the consent of the film's subject. Yet, both the process of film-making and the content of the film were still predicated on the film-makers own movement along formerly imperial and now tourist networks within Kenya.

### Conclusion

It is the uniformity of these films, the grinding repetitiveness of them across both time and space, that is notable. From 1928 to 1972 this sample of films, from five British visitors to Kenya, present the country in the same manner, sometimes almost precisely mimicking shots across the period. These images that favoured landscape, wildlife, and brief representations of Kenyans, were not fashioned by studios, were not censored by local authorities or the British Board of Film Censors, but rather speak to the frank vision of an upper and occasionally middle-class male perspective on Kenya itself. Together these films capture an imperial gaze that demonstrated an overwhelming interest in Kenya and its wildlife, limited engagement with Kenyans themselves, and in highly prescriptive ways, a gaze that remained largely untouched by the end of empire. This sample of films also

demonstrate that amateur film offers us a valuable archive that straddles the end of empire, offering an answer to Jordanna Bailkin's question of the post-colonial archive, 'Where did the empire go?'<sup>44</sup> Kenyans and other African subjects exist within this archive initially as servants and workers, stoically filmed for the camera, and then later as disruptive bodies increasingly reluctant to be filmed, who then had to be subdued through payment or filmed secretly, but above all, filmed.

Attention to the amateur film produced by British visitors in places such as Kenya point to two conclusions: first, the persistence of an imperial gaze and a related colonial order in a range of films produced by British visitors to Kenya both before and after the Emergency and Kenyan independence; and second, to the political economy of the production of this filmic gaze in these settings. This includes the physical ordering of black bodies by white bodies for the cine-camera, underwritten by a range of interactions loaded with the physical, visual, and also emotional frameworks of empire. We see within these films efforts by Kenyans to evade those frameworks by remaining neutral in expression when faced with the cine-camera, by removing their bodies altogether, or by staring back at the camera. These films tell us about the persistent and messy acts of cultural production, coercion, exchange, and subterfuge that were associated with efforts by amateur British film-makers to capture the right type of holiday film of Kenya. An examination of the particular unruliness of amateur film-making in Kenya from 1928 to 1972 grants us insight into crucial issues of consent as part of the production of cultures of empire, a consent which itself was coerced, bought, or evaded, and which underpins the seemingly benign production of holiday films.

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## Notes

[1] Mackenzie, ed. *Imperialism and Popular Culture*; McAleer and Mackenzie, eds. *Exhibiting the Empire*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*; Chapman and Cull, *Projecting Empire*.

[2] Price, 'One Big Thing.'

[3] Bocking-Welch, 'Ghost-hunting.'

[4] Ryan, *Photography and the visualization of the British Empire*; Edwards, *The camera as historian*; Edwards and Mead, 'Absent Histories and Absent Images.'

[5] Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power*.

[6] Levine, 'The Mobile Camera'; Vokes, 'Reflections on a Complex (and Cosmopolitan) Archive.'

[7] Webster, *Englishness and Empire*; Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World*.

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[8]The relatively small field of published work on amateur film includes excellent work by Bocking-Welch; Norris Nicholson, *Amateur film*; Ishizuka and Zimmerman, eds. *Mining the home movie*; Rascaroli et al. *Amateur Filmmaking*. Francis Gooding, writing for the *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire* project, has also produced a number of insightful entries on amateur film for the online archive; see colonialfilm.org for his work.

[9] See Grieveson and MacCabe, eds. *Empire and film*; Grieveson and MacCabe, eds. *Film and the end of Empire*; Rice “Are You Proud to Be British?”; Aitken and Deprez, eds. *The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia*.

[10] Norris Nicholson, *Amateur film*.

[11] Letters between T.Y. Watson, Esq and Sir Harry Lindsay, 13 June to July 16, 1935, Central Office of Information, INF 17/48/TNA.

[12] Ronald Carl Giles, *Sunday Express* 24 Dec 1961.

[13] Sanogo, ‘Colonialism, Visuality and the Cinema,’ 227-245.

[14]Glen Kidston et al. ‘A Safari in East Africa (Part 1)’ Reference #457932, 1928 production, DVD, British Film Institute, hereafter BFI.

[15] ‘The Irish Motor Grand Prix.’ *The Times* (London, England) 15 July 1929, 5.

[16] ‘German Air Liner Disaster.’ *The Times* (London, England), 23 Nov 1929, 9.

[17] On feature-length empire films and empire documentaries from the 1930s, see Grandy “The Empire and ‘Human Interest.’”

[18] Grieveson, ‘The Cinema and the (Common)Wealth of Nations.’

[19] Levine, 488.

[20] *Amateur Cine World*, 1, no. 8, Nov 1934, 365-366

[21] “‘Scenes from an Indian Fair.’ By A.R. Dafle 100 ft. 16mm” in ‘Readers’ Films Reviewed’ *Amateur Cine World* 4, No. 7, Oct 1937, 340.

[22] On Baldwin’s coverage in the *Daily Mail*, see for example, Geoffrey Wakeford, ‘Farmer Baldwin Attacks Tory Policy’ *Daily Mail* 18 Oct 1952, 2.

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- [23] Archer Baldwin, 'Beef Production.' *The Times* (London, England) 01 Apr 1949, 5.
- [24] Archer Baldwin, 'Strategic Migration.' *The Times* (London, England) 20 Jan 1951, 7.
- [25] Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*; Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*; Ochonu, 'African Colonial Economies; Killingray, 'Labor Mobilization in British Colonial Africa for the War Effort.'
- [26] Baldwin, Coffee and Sisal Plantation, Kenya, 1946/4272, Media Archive For Central England, hereafter MACE.
- [27] Archer Baldwin, 'Racial Tension In Africa.' *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, Apr 10, 1951; pg. 5.
- [28] Schwarz, *The White Man's World*.
- [29] See Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya*; Anderson, 'Mau Mau in the High Court and the 'Lost' British Empire Archives.'
- [30] Archer Baldwin, 'Land In Kenya' Letter to the Editor. *The Times* (London, England), 24 July 1952, 7
- [31] Webster, *Englishness and Empire*.
- [32] 'Donald Griffiths 1919-2007' *Astronomy & Geophysics* 49, Feb 2008, p. 31.
- [33] Special issue 'Decolonising Imperial Heroes' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*.
- [34] Donald F. Griffiths, 'Lake Baringo and Northern Kenya,' 1967, 9084/192, MACE.
- [35] B.U.P. 'Seven finish Safari.' *Daily Mail*, 16 April 1963, 6.
- [36] Matheka, 'Decolonisation and wildlife conservation in Kenya.'
- [37] Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism, *Kenya Safari*. Kenya: Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism, 1965.
- [38] *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- [39] Matheka, 'Decolonisation and wildlife conservation in Kenya.'
- [40] 'Overseas Item' *Amateur Cine World* March-May 1945, 195.



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[41] Bengry, East African Safari, 1963, 8109-384, MACE.

[42] David Lean's Home Movies, Africa, N-232184 David Lean Compilation Italy, Kenya, Tape No. 1, Copy: B-212539, BFI.

[43] David Lean's Home Movies, Africa, N-232184 David Lean Compilation Italy, Kenya, Tape No. 2, Copy: B-212539, BFI.

[44] Bailkin, 'Where did the empire go?'

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