



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the Colin Turnbull and Joseph Towles films, circa 1950-1972

Human Studies Film Archives
Museum Support Center
4210 Silver Hill Road
Suitland 20746
hsfa@si.edu
<http://www.anthropology.si.edu/naa>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Human Studies Film Archives
Title:	Colin Turnbull and Joseph Towles films
Date:	circa 1950-1972
Identifier:	HSFA.1991.13
Creator:	Towles, Joseph A. Turnbull, Colin M.
Extent:	Film reels (32,350 ft) Video recordings Linear feet
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Received from Myrtle G. Glascoe, The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, in 1991.

Related Materials

The Joseph A. Towles Papers are held by the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston.

Processing Information

Titles are supplied by the archivist for untitled films.

Preferred Citation

Colin Turnbull films, Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The collection is open for research. Please contact the archives for information on availability of access copies of audiovisual recordings. Original audiovisual material in the Human Studies Film Archives may not be played.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Scope and Contents

Footage shot by Colin Turnbull and Joseph Towles among the Mbuti Pygmies, Zaire and the Ik, Uganda, between 1954 and 1972. Footage documents the nkumbi initiations among the Mbuti, villager-Pygmy interactions; subsistence and daily life among the Ik pastoralists of northwestern Uganda.

Supplementary materials: associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives)

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or Anthropology Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Bira (African people)
- Mbuti (African people)
- Ndaka (African people)

Cultures:

- Bira (African people)
- Mbuti (African people)
- Ndaka (African people)

Types of Materials:

- Sound films
- Video recordings

Places:

- Africa
- Belgian Congo
- Congo (Democratic Republic)
- Ituri Forest (Congo)
- Mbandaka (Congo)

Container Listing

Ik Film Study, 1964-1965

Film reels (1 hour 36 minutes; color silent; 3,439 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot among the Ik, a formerly nomadic hunting and gathering people of northeast Uganda. Footage documents the fragmentation of Ik life caused by drought and displacement from their traditional hunting territory. Included are: ecology and terrain of the Ik homeland, life around homesteads, relocation of a homestead, cultivation of rocky mountainsides with hoes and digging sticks, last ritual priest of the Ik divining with sandals, calabash carving, Ik men making spears and headrests, interactions between Ik and Turkana around cattle, and butchering a cow.

Supplementary materials: annotations (recorded narratives).

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.1

Ik Film Study: Edited Version, 1964-1965

Film reels (58 minutes; color sound; 2,103 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film shot among the Ik, a formerly nomadic hunting and gathering people of northeast Uganda. Film depicts the fragmentation of Ik life caused by drought and displacement from their traditional hunting territory. Footage includes: Ik homesteads, woman carving a calabash and churning milk, scenes of agricultural practices, and interactions with the pastoralist Turkana with whom the Ik traditionally had relations as both part-time cattle herders and raiders.

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.2

Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1954

Film reels (1 hour 48 minutes; color silent; 3,870 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot among the Mbuti of the Ituri forest, Belgian Congo (Zaire). Footage includes documentation of both subsistence and ritual activities in forest and village contexts. Sequences include: a Pygmy forest camp, construction of domed leaf houses, barkcloth manufacture, hunting forest deer with nets, collection of honey, and Pygmy boys at play in a tree swing. Sequences of ritual include: an Elima camp on the banks of the Epulu River for a month-long seclusion of pubescent Mbuti girls, the Elima ritual held for the initiation of girls, and a village wedding ceremony. Bride is shown being rubbed with oil, carried on a palanquin into the village, and regaled by dancers. Documentation focuses prominently on the nature of social relations between Ndaka (Bantu) villagers and the nomadic Mbuti forest dwellers.

Supplementary materials: associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives).

Legacy keywords: Hunting nets Mbuti Ituri Rainforest, Zaire ; Housebuilding Mbuti Pygmies Zaire ; Subsistence activities gathering honey Mbuti Pygmies ; Barkcloth manufacture of

Mbuti Pygmies Zaire ; Play Mbuti Pygmies Zaire ; Initiation rites elima Mbuti girls Zaire ; Weddings Mbuti Pygmies Zaire ; Dancing wedding ceremony Mbuti Pygmies Zaire

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.3

Mbuti Pygmy Film Study: Edited Version, 1954

2 Film reels (70 minutes; color silent; 2,507 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film shot among the Mbuti of the Ituri forest, Belgian Congo (Zaire), and the Bandaka (Bantu) villagers with whom they maintain economic and ritual relations. Documentation focuses primarily on the phases of the Nkumbi village initiation of young Pygmy and village boys. Nkumbi--meaning "to share the blood"--reflects one aspect of a flexible relationship between Mbuti and Bantu villagers whereby Pygmy bands experience periodic respite from the rigors of nomadic forest life. Film sequences detail the separation of boys in the Nkumbi camp, ritual flogging and hazing, and training in the *keefa* (raffia skirt) dances. Liminal status of the initiates is shown by their daily covering with white pemba clay, symbolic of their social death, and being led to the circumcision of initiates by a village "doctor." The burning of the Nkumbi camp is followed by the enclosure and rebirth of the initiates from a banana leaf "womb." During this phase the new public status of the initiates is recognized as they are danced through the Ndaka village of Epulu led by a ritual doctor in a leopard mask. Boys are shown being marked with the *bengafi* scars around chest and ribs which identify jural males who have "shared the blood." The final reincorporation of the initiates is marked as boys are washed in the river, covered with palm oil (a village symbol of wealth), and led in procession to the center of the village where they dance on stools to symbolize their adult and sexually active status. See also [Joseph Towles Zaire Film Study: Nkumbi and Elimina Initiations: Mbuti, Bandaka and BaBira, 1970-1972], [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1971-1972], and [Mbuti Pygmy Footage: Forest Camp, Bira and Ngwana Villages, and Station de Chasse, 1954]. Cameraman: Chapman, Frances, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Legacy keywords: Initiation rites nkumbi Mbuti Pygmies Bandaka Belgian Congo ; Ordeals flogging initiation rites Mbuti Pygmies Belgian Congo ; Camps initiations Mbuti Pygmies Belgian Congo ; Scarification initiation rites Mbuti Pygmies Belgian Congo ; Liminality separation body paint pemba Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Doctors ritual specialists Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Circumcision initiation rites Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Rites of passage phases of Mbuti Belgian Congo

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.4

Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1971-1972

Film reels (color silent; 3,059 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot in and around the BaNdaka (Bantu) village of Epulu, Ituri forest in northeast Zaire. Footage documents

various aspects of village subsistence and the initiation rituals which bring villagers and the Mbuti Pygmies into contact. Sequences include house types, harvesting and pounding rice, activities around a local market, and digging and kneading clay for use in house construction. Documentation of a village initiation features the first Nkumbi circumcision ceremony held in this area of the Ituri since the Simba Revolt. Included are the Nkumbi camp, training of initiates, masked Nkumbi dancers, initiates in line dance, and an initiate's head being shaved. Also included is a flag raising ceremony at a nearby government post commemorating Zairean independence. See also [Joseph Towles Zaire Film Study: Nkumbi and Elimina Initiations: Mbuti, Bandaka, and BaBira, 1970-1972], [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1954: Edited Version], and [Mbuti Pygmy Footage: Forest Camp, Bira and Ngwana Villages, and Station de Chasse, 1954].

Supplementary materials: associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives).

Legacy keywords: Subsistence activities pounding rice Bandaka Zaire ; Housebuilding clay Bandaka Zaire ; Markets Bandaka Ngwana Zaire ; Initiation rites phases of nkumbi Mbuti Zaire ; Masks dancing of initiation rites Mbuti Zaire ; Dancing line dance initiation rites Mbuti Zaire ; Liminality head shaving Mbuti Zaire ; Ceremonies Independence Day Zaire

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.5

Mbuti Pygmy Footage: Forest Camp, Bira and Ngwana Villages, and Station de Chasse, 1954

Film reels (black-and-white silent; 677 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot in the Ituri forest, Belgian Congo (Zaire). Footage includes: Pygmy camp life near an Ndaka village; Nkumbi initiates in the Ngwana village of Musafu (later destroyed during the Simba Revolt) and the Bira village of Eboyo; and Station de Chasse on the Epulu River organized for capturing elephants and okapis and training elephants. See also [Joseph Towles Zaire Film Study: Nkumbi and Elimina Initiations: Mbuti, Bandaka and BaBira, 1970-1972], [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1954: Edited Version], and [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1971-1972].

Supplementary materials: associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives).

Legacy keywords: Initiation rites nkumbi Belgian Congo ; Musical instruments slit gong playing making of Bira Belgian Congo ; Drumming nkumbi initiates Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Smoking pipes banana stem Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Musical instruments zither string bow Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Cloth trade cloth Ndaka Belgian Congo ; Camps Mbuti Belgian Congo ; Tourism zoos Belgian Congo ; Elephants training of Epulu Station de Chasse Belgian Congo

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.6

Mbuti Pygmy Edited Segment, circa 1961

Film reels (6 minutes; black-and-white sound; 183 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film segment produced for unknown use from footage shot in 1954 among the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Forest, Belgian Congo (Zaire). Included are scenes of a Pygmy camp, domestic life, hunting with nets, collecting honey, and a wedding ceremony.

Supplementary materials: associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives).

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.7

Algiers, Algeria, 1954

Film reels (4 minutes; color silent; 101 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage which was shot as a test roll of street scenes in Algiers includes a city square and apartment houses on the waterfront.

Supplementary materials: annotations (recorded narratives).

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.8

Gold Coast, 1954

Film reels (12 minutes; color silent; 441 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot in Accra, Gold Coast (Ghana) depicts domestic life in an extended family compound of an important chief of the Kwahu who was an important supporter of Kwame Nkrumah. Shots include: boys playing soccer, a seated circle game, and board game; washing clothes and ironing with coal heated iron; food preparation and cooking; nursing; children bathing; and sweeping compound. Additional footage shot in Ghana contains a rally in Black Star Square with Kwame Nkrumah and a market. Non-Ghana footage includes shipping port in Canada and Bedouin camp and market in North Africa.

Supplementary materials: annotations (recorded narratives).

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.9

The Gold Coast, circa 1954

Film reels (5 minutes; black-and-white silent; 167 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Footage shot in Accra, Gold Coast (Ghana) depicts domestic life in a family compound, food preparation and meals, and, of historic interest, shots of Kwame Nkrumah at various political rallies.

Cameraman: Frances Chapman

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.10

[Civilization on Trial in South Africa, circa 1950](#)

1 Film reel (24 minutes; black-and-white sound; 846 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film shot sometime between 1946 and 1952 (prior to implementation of the Group Areas Act). Reverend Scott, a campaigner for human rights, secretly documented appalling and oppressive conditions for the majority African and colored (Indian) population of South Africa with the intent of generating international support for their plight. Opening panoptic shots of Johannesburg and "the civilization intended for whites only" are contrasted with shots of township areas and government housing. Visual documentation of the color bar and its social and economic impact includes overcrowding, lack of public services, and the proliferation of squatter habitations that accompanied mass urbanization in post-War South Africa. Film also includes: street life in Sophia Town, a tribal ceremony, a "beggar band" in Tobruk performing for pennies, the little-known intertribal bare-knuckle fights which were organized by the police "to keep Africans off the street" and for the entertainment of white spectators, and separate facilities for Europeans, Africans, and Indians. Final sequences document scenes from the British protectorates of Basutoland, Swaziland, and Bechuanaland within the Union of South Africa. Herero sites outside of Windhoek are shown with women in dress which was introduced by German missionaries at the turn of the century. In Bechuanaland, Herero are filmed in an annual procession to pay tribute to ancestors who died fighting the Germans. As an advocate for the continued independence of these peoples, Reverend Scott presented a petition to the United Nations from the Herero of Bechuanaland stating their opposition to incorporation within South Africa. Herero are shown gathering to hear news of the United Nations response to their petition.

Legacy keywords: Race discrimination ; Poverty ; Scott, Reverend Michael minister (1907-1983)

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.11

Joseph Towles Footage of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Egypt, 1966

6 Film reels (140 minutes; color silent; 1,850 feet; 8mm)

Notes: Footage shot in East Africa and the United States.

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.12

Joseph Towles Zaire Film Study: Mbuti, Ndaka and Bira, 1970-1972

4 Video recordings (1 hour 46 minutes; color silent; 1 inch)

Notes: Footage documents various aspects of Nkumbi initiations in Epulu and Eboyo villages and an Elima initiation for girls at Kopu Village, Ituri forest, northeast Zaire. Nkumbi initiation includes preparations for the initiation involving Mbuti and village boys, masked dancers, initiates withstanding various ordeals, and initiates painted in white clay dancing in *keefa* (raffia skirts). Elima initiation includes mostly Mbuti girls wearing long grass skirts and headdresses dancing while holding small bows and arrows. Footage also includes Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda with shots of the falls and wildlife including rhinoceros, water buffalo, hippopotamus, elephants,

warthogs, and crocodiles; Towles compound and garden and pet baby baboon; Kinshasa docks; river banks as seen from a steamer; Kisingani and Mbuti villages around Kisingani; general activities of Epulu including clearing forest for fields and fishing. See also [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1954: Edited Version], [Mbuti Pygmy Film Study, 1971-1972], and [Mbuti Pygmy Footage: Forest Camp, Bira and Ngwana Villages, and Station de Chasse, 1954].

Supplementary materials: annotation by Colin Turnbull.

Local Numbers: HSFA 1991.13.13

Original 4 rolls of S8mm and 1 roll of 8mm film returned to owner.