AFRICAN POST-INDEPENDENCE CINEMAS

WITH AND AGAINST DEVELOPMENT:

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at Goldsmiths, University of London

by

Nikolaus Perneczky

Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies

Goldsmiths, University of London

August 2020

Abstract

This thesis is a reappraisal of West African filmmaking as an exemplary arena of African development after the independences. Combining historiographic reconstruction (histories of film production, distribution, and exhibition), film analysis, and critical theory, it highlights how West African filmmakers variously resisted "development" both as a set of modernising policies—whether promulgated by the developmental state or the institutions of development aid—and a wider framework of rationality. Though in essence a historiographic study, this thesis holds critical insights for today: Tracing and comparing the careers of Ola Balogun (Nigeria), Med Hondo (Mauritania/France), and Moustapha Alassane (Niger), it renders their respective practices as so many instances of anti-systemic worldmaking.

The first of the three main chapters (4–6) centres on Balogun's model of cinematic indigenisation, which aimed to reactivate lost or suppressed potentials of development inherent in African media environments through an equitable exchange with the Western technology of cinema. Attempting to build a national popular cinema befitting a (re)unified Nigeria, Balogun instead improvised a minor moving image practice whose transregional mode of production and distribution signally escaped the writ of the nation, pointing us to post-statist futures. The second chapter (5) considers Hondo's migrant practice as part of the wider struggle over Africa's forms of circulation. Following Hondo's transnational activities as film producer and distributor, I offer a reading of African cinema as tied into an unequally shared history of "world-cinema," arguing that Hondo's proudly "dependent" practice continually charted new routes of escape. The third of the main chapters (6) considers the emergence of Nigerien cinema from the institutional matrix of French anthropology and development aid (*coopération*), which both made possible and limited the possibilities of filmmaking in the former French colony. Reconstructing Alassane's struggle for self-determined development across the fields of animation and ethnography, I argue that, rather than attain autonomy, his practice at every turn elaborated new relations of interdependence. In conclusion (7), I contend that alongside alternative developmental trajectories, African post-independence cinemas also proposed a more fundamental critique of development as the "Western culture-systemic telos" (Sylvia Wynter) of global capitalist modernity.

Declaration of authorship

I, Nikolaus Perneczky, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date: 31 July 2020

Acknowledgments

Table of contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

In the 1960s, the first wave of sub-Saharan African independences heralded a phase of optimism regarding the possibility of growth and prosperity on the continent.[1] The end of colonial rule was the beginning of the "age of development."[2] The nascent African nations endorsed development policies geared towards import substitution and increased productivity at home while fostering South-South networks of exchange and support to improve the terms of trade internationally. But nation-building was about more than economic growth; its complementary aims were political sovereignty and cultural self-determination. Only if these three objectives were joined in a "dynamic renovative effort," said Senegalese polymath Cheikh Anta Diop in a 1977 interview, could Africa hope to develop on its own terms.[3]

For Nigerian filmmaker Ola Balogun, it was "an era blessed with the promise of new beginnings," when "a bright future seemed to await the peoples of Africa in nearly every conceivable field."[4] Hopes were high in this moment also and especially for African cinema. Both as an art and an industry, on screen and off, cinema would be a boon to nation-building—and a productive force in its own right. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, an early visionary of African cinema and one of its first chroniclers, saw cinema as a test case for the challenges facing the newly independent nations.[5] The development of African cinema was "belated," as Vieyra was perhaps the first to note: Films had been made and screened in Africa long before its native inhabitants were able—that is, legally permitted and materially equipped—to make their own.[6] However, as Vieyra projected in 1959, national cinemas would now emerge everywhere on the continent just as they had elsewhere in the world, taking essentially the same forms and following the same basic trajectory in their development as the cinemas of other sovereign nations before them.[7]

---

[1] A general disclaimer: Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French are my own.

[2] For a periodisation of the age of development, see 2.1. See also Wolfgang Sachs, "Introduction," in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (London; New York: Zed Books, 2010), xv.

[3] Cheikh Anta Diop, interview by Carlos Moore, *Afriscope* 7, no. 2 (1977). The citation refers to a reprint of the interview in the annex to Cheikh Anta Diop, *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company, [1974] 1987), 116.

[4] Organisation of African Unity and United Nations Development Programme, *Consultancy on African Cinema: Mission Report*, by Ola Balogun, RAF/82/003 (Addis Ababa: OAU/UNDP, 1986), 7.

[5] See Paulin Vieyra, "Propos sur le cinéma africain," *Présence Africaine*, no. 22 (1958).

[6] The first screening in sub-Saharan Africa took place in 1986 in Johannesburg, South Africa. See Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940* (Cape Town: H. Timmins, 1972). The first film screenings in West Africa were held in 1900 in Dakar and in 1903 in Lagos. See Roy Armes, *African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 21. Kenneth W. Harrow notes that as an entertainment medium, cinema served "not only for the amusement of African subjects but also, and especially, to provide cinema halls for Europeans in locations where European settlers lived." "Preface," in *African Filmmaking: Five Formations*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017), x.

[7] As we will see in 2.3, this stance was complicated by Vieyra's acute awareness of the limitations of African development on the one hand and his interest in the possibilities of indigenisation on the other.

In reality, "African cinema" has since come to designate a succession of individual efforts, hard won against great adversity, which have rarely been allowed to consolidate into coherent bodies of work, let alone national film industries.[8] Worse yet, because film distribution has long been under the control of foreign monopolists, the relatively few films that did get made have hardly found their way to local audiences. Many therefore have questioned the very existence of "African cinema."[9] Over the years, it has been declared "stillborn" (1964), "not yet born" (1978), or "embryonic still" (1995).[10] A "blocked cinema," its birth is forever deferred.[11]

With capital, technology, and infrastructure requirements surpassing those of most other art forms, cinema was inextricably tied to the social and economic development of the emergent African nations. But instead of the *motor* of development Vieyra had envisioned in 1959, cinema became a *mirror* of the blockages and breakdowns that beset African development. The immense difficulties filmmakers encountered in their efforts to build national cinemas clearly reflected those of national development at large.

In the wake of the Second World War, national liberation movements and an ascendant US hegemon pressured Britain and France to divest from their colonial holdings, but formal independence did not bring an end to Western investments and interference. Rather than continue to resist this transformational process, the objective was now to capture and "channel" decolonisation, realigning the newly independent nations with foreign economic interests.[12] Thinkers and activists of the African revolution warned that the promise of development was used to direct Africa from outside; that development aid and assistance were binding Africa ever tighter into the capitalist world-system.[13]

---

[8] Michel Frodon, in his obituary of Burkinabe filmmaker Idrissa Ouédraogo, who passed away on February 18, 2018, evokes "the extraordinary difficulty of bringing into sustained existence a cinematic oeuvre in Africa." "La deuxième mort d'Idrissa Ouedraogo," *Slate* (2018): http://www.slate.fr/story/158041/cinema-disparition-idrissa-ouedraogo.

[9] Writing in 1964, Senegalese filmmaker Blaise Senghor stated that "African cinema still belongs more to the domain of myth than that of reality." "Pour un authentique cinéma africain," *Présence Africaine* no. 49 (1964): 105. Manthia Diawara, in the first English-language monograph on the history of African cinema, wrote that "Africa has not developed a film industry." *African Cinema: Politics & Culture* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), viii.

[10] Timité Bassori, "Un cinéma mort-né?," *Présence Africaine* no. 49 (1964); Guy Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle, "Avant-propos: La fin du 'mégotage'?," *jeune cinéma (hors série)* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 7; Gaston Kaboré, "Foreword," in *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma,* ed. Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes (Paris & Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1995), 15.

[11] François Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains face à l'avenir du cinéma en Afrique," *Tiers-Monde* 20, no. 79 (1979): 606.

[12] "Apart from those colonies largely peopled by Europeans where resistance is inevitable, with few exceptions there is less and less violent opposition to the development of the movement. The new tactic rather consists in trying to direct it, channel it toward nonsocialistic forms, of the so-called Western type." Diop, *Black Africa*, 15.

[13] See, e.g., Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, [1965] 1966), ix. Julius Nyerere, in 1977, warned that Africans were "being bound tighter and

Recent comparative scholarship on African development in the post-independence era has foregrounded both the path-dependencies resulting from different historical forms of colonial rule but also the agency of Africans to forge their own paths from within a position of profound entanglement and dependency. Frederick Cooper, for instance, has pointed out that while the discourse of development originated in the colonial era and was in due course instrumentalised by neo-colonial forces, it was also taken up by Africans to articulate radical political demands—first for equal rights and political participation, then for self-determination—which hastened the end of empire. Rather than a simple tool of capture, then, "development" was a site of major contestation. The development of Africa after independence was overdetermined by various forces, yet its outcome was not preordained. Decolonisation, as Achille Mbembe has observed, "inaugurated a time of bifurcation towards countless futures."[14] Adom Getachew, likewise, emphasises the radical possibilities inherent in this moment, arguing that what is now widely considered a period of "nation-building" also gave rise to transnational and post-statist horizons of "antisystemic worldmaking."[15]

This thesis is a comparative study which approaches this fertile site of contestation through the development of African cinema, more specifically, the practices of three pioneering West African filmmakers: Ola Balogun (*1945, Nigeria), Med Hondo (1936-2019, Mauritania/France), and Moustapha Alassane (1942-2015, Niger). Returning to the hour of liberation, it seeks to renew demands that were never met, to inquire into lost potentials, and reassert the urgency of this moment against the "accreted condescension" and "accumulated superiority" of the present.[16] Against the dichotomous teleologies of liberation or defeat that are prevalent in African cinema scholarship, the analytic of development will help me restitute a sense of "African cinema" as an open-ended struggle. It is precisely by highlighting the filmmakers' systemic entanglements that the antisystemic possibilities elaborated in the course of their struggles will fully come into view.

West African filmmakers contributed to the project of nation-building, however, struggling with the conditions of filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa they also challenged the developmental state, pointing towards post-statist futures. Most West African

---

tighter into an international capitalist structure which we can never hope to control, or even influence." *The Arusha Declaration: Ten Years After* (Dar es Salaam: The Government Printer, 1977), 6.

[14] Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisé* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2013), EPUB, "Avant-propos."

[15] Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

[16] These phrases are borrowed from Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray, "The Militant Image: A Ciné-geography: Editors' Introduction," *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 2.

filmmakers came to rely on some kind of financial and technical foreign aid:[17] Heeding Felwine Sarr's reminder that development is an "envelopment," this thesis focusses not on the internationalism of African cinema but its forced internationalisation or "extraversion," emphasising how development aid both made possible and confined African filmmaking. African filmmakers fiercely criticised the terms of what they were offered—which did nothing to build local capacity and perpetuated existing dependencies—while building alternative networks of solidarity and support. Struggling for greater autonomy from the envelopment of development, they wove new relations of interdependence.

I present the works of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane as object-lessons—and as forms of thought in the making. Analyses of individual films—as the "eye of the needle through which the whole effort has to pass"[18]—branch out into wider environments and conduits; their contexts of production and pathways of distribution.[19] The films represent and debate questions of development, but they also inhabit a "developing" world which infringes on cinematic forms and operations. As objects to think with, they are interesting not simply in their unity and integration but also for the ties that bind and the divisions that run through them.[20] I describe how the world moves through and labours within the moving image, developing or, as the case may be, *underdeveloping* it in the process.[21]

Many commentators have raised doubts as to whether African *films* do add up to an African *cinema*.[22] Others have questioned if this cinema is best described as *African*, in-

---

[17] I will discuss the reasons for this in the literature review (2) and throughout the main chapters (4–6).

[18] I take this phrase from German media theorist Hartmut Winkler: "Cinema is possibly the only social technology that allows for the compression of one hundred million dollars, a sophisticated train of machines, and the specialised labour of several thousand participants, all into a single ninety-minute text that, on this basis, will attract a mass audience to refinance the expenditure. Film, thus understood, is the eye of the needle through which the whole effort has to pass…" *Diskursökonomie: Versuch über die innere Ökonomie der Medien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 35.

[19] This work of reconstruction relies on extant historical scholarship and the filmmakers' own testimonies supplemented by original archival research. For more on my sources and how I approach them, see chapter 3 on methods.

[20] Unity and integration are important evaluative criteria in the Western discourse of aesthetics but elusive qualities in the context of African filmmaking. Throughout this thesis, I will foreground the ways in which African cinema fails—and in failing them challenges—Western prescriptions of art-making and appreciation.

[21] For a discussion of the term "underdevelopment," see 2.2.

[22] The classical formulation is Med Hondo's, here in a 1979 interview: "I think that one will not be able to speak of an African cinema as such until the day when there will be structures (infrastructures and superstructures) which permit for this cinema to exist. For the moment, I prefer to stay closer to reality and to talk about African filmmakers: There are films by African filmmakers of different nationalities and of one [and the same] continent." "Entretien avec Med Hondo," interview by Madeleine Dura, *jeune cinéma* no. 121 (1979): 27. More recently, Samuel Lelièvre has argued the term "African cinema" ought to be replaced by "African cinematographic practices." "Les cinémas africains dans l'histoire. D'une historiographie (éthique) à venir," *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze* no. 69 (2013): 139. For critical considerations of the problem(s) with "African cinema," see also Keyan G. Tomaselli, "'African Cinema': Theoretical Perspectives on Some Unresolved Questions," in *African Experiences of Cinema,* ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham (London: BFI, 1996).

sisting on the distinction between plural *national* cinemas.[23] For the purposes of this thesis, I will hold onto "African cinema" as a conceptual provocation. It is a "cinema" because this better conveys the expanded field of practice that concerns the filmmakers of this study. Only through this expanded field, looking beyond the artistic creation and textual form of individual films, can we grasp the close continuity and mutuality that existed between filmmaking and the larger process of development. And it is "African" because these filmmakers' struggles, whether by choice or by force, exceeded the writ of individual nations. While I will look closely at particular instances where this relation is experienced and struggled against locally, I will also insist on what all of these instances have in common: their common position in the global economy of industrial image-making. From the systematic perspective that I will elaborate in this comparative study, "African cinema" emerges as part of the combined and uneven development of "world-cinema." To discuss the works of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane as works of "African cinema" is thus not to suppress the substantial differences between their respective practices but to triangulate the system of domination common to all.[24]

Felwine Sarr has questioned "the civilisational injunctions that are progress, development and modernity"; his "Afrotopia" is an African undercommons where new futures are constantly being configured which escape these teleologies of history-as-development, thus bringing forth another regime of historicity. But Sarr's Afrotopia is not some distant utopia, nor a place in the future; it is already, continually, being elaborated in the everyday struggles of African peoples.[25] While this is in essence a historiographic thesis, it brings urgent contemporary questions to the study of history. I will argue that the predicament of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane is fundamentally recognisable to us—that their questions are not dissimilar to ours. Tracing their linked struggles *with and against development*, this thesis aims, first, to restitute a sense of development as contested practice, wresting it away from technocratic usage—"as a set of technical measures outside the realm of political debate"[26]—, and second, to dis-place and re-member "development"

---

[23] See, e.g., Alexie Tcheuyap, "African Cinema(s): Definitions, Identity and Theoretical Considerations," *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2011): 23.

[24] For a critique of the "African" in African cinema as the "distillation" of some "'pure' substance from […] 'unclean' Western influences," see Stephen A. Zacks, "The Theoretical Construction of African Cinema," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (1995): 7. However, while Zacks argues that "it may be assumed that Africa as an entity is an ideological product, that its unity and identity are constructed rather than being given a priori, historically or materially," (ibid.) I insist on the material and historical reality of both "Africa" and "African cinema" as more than mere ideology. And while Zacks's concern is with establishing the *participation* of African cinema in World Cinema, my perspective emphasises its *entanglement*.

[25] Felwine Sarr, "Rouvrir les futurs," in *Politique des Temps: Imaginer les devenirs africains,* ed. Achille Mbembe and Felwine Sarr (Dakar: Philippe Rey/Jimsaan, 2019), 186.

[26] Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2008), 78.

as a sense-making paradigm.[27] I will argue that the historical experience of African filmmakers has some things to teach us about development, suggesting ways to resist and de-link from a form of life that continues to colonise our future.

1.1 Research questions

In returning today to West African filmmaking during the "age of development," the main question I will ask is this: *What can the historical experience of post-independence filmmaking teach us about "development"?* More specifically, this research sets out to answer the following questions:

1. How did African filmmakers encounter and respond to the challenges of African development?

2. How did they, as filmmakers, understand the potentials and risks of development in relation to industrialisation, technological modernisation, and global exchange?

3. What was their relation to the developmental state and pan-African cooperation? What was their experience of foreign investment and development aid?

4. How do their films figure, and reconfigure, development? But also: In what ways did underdevelopment infringe on the operations of filmmaking and cinematic form? (What impediments to development did they encounter specifically as filmmakers?)

5. How and under what conditions did filmmakers access the tools of their craft? Where did they receive training? How did they obtain the requisite funding? How did they distribute their works?

6. What agencies and resistances were African filmmakers able to exercise from within their various entanglements? What alternative praxes and trajectories of development did they invent in the process?

7. What challenges did their respective practices elaborate to development as the "Western culture-systemic telos" (Sylvia Wynter) of global capitalist modernity? Did they succeed in delinking from its teleology?

---

[27] Saër Maty Bâ makes a related observation about "labor and migration's ability to dis-place, dis-locate, and re-member Film (studies, theory, practice, criticism, and so on)." "When Labor and Migration Dis-Place Film: Sketch of an Idea," *WorkingUSA* 16, no. 4 (2013): 450. The "sense-making paradigm" is borrowed from Peer Illner, "Who's Calling the Emergency? The Black Panthers, Securitisation and the Question of Identity," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 7, no. 3 (2015): 480.

1.2 Chapter overview

In <u>Chapter 2: Review of the literature</u> I discuss extant research on early sub-Saharan African cinema and highlight research desiderata. The first two sections (2.1 and 2.2) offer a broad primer on the history and theory of development. Building on this foundation, the remainder of the chapter looks at the experience of African post-independence filmmaking in relation to African development. (Research on the three filmmakers at the centre of this thesis will be discussed not here but in the respective chapters.)

In <u>Chapter 3: Methods</u> I explicate my methodological approach, discuss my sources, and argue the selection of my case studies. I also discuss limitations, omissions, and ethical concerns pertaining to the research as well as my positionality as researcher.

<u>Chapter 4: Communication</u> centres on Ola Balogun (*1945), a preeminent Nigerian director whose prolific career stretches from the 1960s through to the 1990s. His films' popular appeal distinguishes him from most of his Francophone colleagues and makes of Balogun a direct precursor to Nollywood.[28] In addition to his filmmaking practice—or really, as a necessary and integral part of it—Balogun tirelessly campaigned for the development of a Nigerian national film industry. Trying (in his own words) to "make cinema at home in Africa," he worked within the remit of the emergent Nigerian state but also above and below the threshold of the nation. Tribal or regional affiliation, the growing divide between urban and rural populations, foreign aid and investment, were all challenging the unity of this "model of a great Black nation."[29] Balogun's communication struggles sought to overcome these divisions and re-establish a sense of continuity.

<u>Chapter 5: Circulation</u> follows Med Hondo (1936-2019), a Mauritanian descendant of trans-Saharan slaves who came to France looking for work as part of the first wave of African labour migrants after the independences and became one of the first chroniclers of this growing population. Hondo's militant practice followed the linked movements of goods and people across the globe, from the routes of the slave trade to the itineraries of contemporary migration. Anticipating the emergence of the South in the North and the North in the South, Hondo's films tie the lived experience of migration into wider histories of trade and displacement, toward an "unequally shared" history of France, West Africa, and the Caribbean. A fierce critic of both Françafrique and African governments, Hondo was subject to censorship and boycotts throughout his career. He also worked as a distributor and for ten years served as the principle coordinator of the Comité africain de

---

[28] Though he himself would reject this attribution.
[29] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria* (Brussels: Éditions OCIC/L'Harmattan, 1984), 9.

cinéastes (CAC), a pan-African lobby group aiming to break the foreign monopoly on film distribution in West Africa. Tracing Hondo's migrations as he roams in sundry capacities (as director, producer, distributor, actor, or dubbing voice) across France and West Africa, this chapter focusses the struggle of African cinema in the sphere of circulation.

Chapter 6: Animation looks at the workings of French development aid on the ground, specifically how the institutions of French Cooperation (*coopération*) and ethnography involved themselves in the emergence of "native filmmaking" in Niger. The filmmaking career of Moustapha Alassane (1942-2015) began during the colonial era as one of several African "pupils" of French ethnographer Jean Rouch.[30] Following in Alassane's footsteps, the first part of this chapter turns on the fraught and fitful relationships that were formed around programmes of "technical and cultural assistance"—and the colonial legacies that informed them.[31] I will show how the French both enabled the production of African *films* and at the same time disabled the development of African *cinemas*. Alassane "cooperated" in various constellations but also confounded the technological paternalism of French Cooperation, elaborating his own cinematic pedagogies.[32] In Tahoua, a trade hub five hundred kilometres northeast of Niamey, the late Alassane pursued an increasingly self-sufficient and autonomous mode of reproduction, relying only on locally available materials and predicated on constant care and repair. He also became his own distributor, touring the countryside in a one-man mobile cinema, the "ciné-bus de brousse"(cine-bush-taxi). Though not without its own conditions and limitations, Alassane's familial subsistence economy will serve as a lesson in cinematic delinking.

In Chapter 7: Conclusions I summarise my overall argument and reflect on the aims, methods, and results of the research while also pointing out important limitations. Finally, I indicate desiderata and directions for future research.

---

[30] These so-called pupils received their informal training either behind the camera, as in Alassane's case, or in front of it, like Oumarou Ganda, Safi Faye, and others.

[31] Sometimes these relations led to—equally fraught—forms of friendship. Hondo, for instance, is intensely critical of Rouch and has reiterated Sembène's famous reproach that Rouch looked at Africans "as if we were insects" but at the same time called him "un copain." "Je suis un cineaste mendiant," interview by Philippe Lefait, *Des mots de minuit*, France 2, January 5, 2005.

[32] See Manthia Diawara, "Sub-Saharan African Film Production: Technological Paternalism," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 32 (1987).

Chapter 2
Review of the literature

The only dedicated monograph on the precise subject of this thesis in the English language, James E. Genova's *Cinema and Development in West Africa*, renders as a story of underdogs succeeding against the odds what African filmmakers themselves would often describe in terms of Sisyphean struggle.[1] Like so many histories of the period, Genova's follows the redemptive script of "liberation," which conceives of the relationship of African filmmaking to colonial modernity and its cinemas—commercial, ethnographic, or otherwise—as simply antagonistic, and therefore obscures the protracted struggles in the compromised and entangled aftermath that followed the event of independence—the "travails of the plains" after the "travails of the mountain."[2] And while Genova's history frequently evokes the "nefarious workings of the global capitalist system," like much Anglophone scholarship on early African cinema, it rarely considers this system in detail.[3] Post-colonial entanglements and the ongoingness of decolonisation are broadly accepted as theoretical premises, yet accounts of early African cinema, even where they acknowledge the immense difficulties facing filmmakers at the dawn of independence, are still told as stories of incremental progress and, ultimately, redemption. "Post-national" critics, on the other hand, tend to treat the demise of developmental nationalism and its institutions as a foregone conclusion, merely replacing one teleology with another. French economic historians of African cinema have provided more detailed accounts of the reasons behind the "blockage" of African cinema. However, because this literature assumes "developed cinema" as the norm, it is deeply pessimistic.[4] African cinema is found wanting, underdeveloped, and, for both exogenous and endogenous reasons, incapable of development—in short, "an impossible industry."[5]

---

[1] The book tellingly ends on an optimistic note. James E. Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 156-157. There is also a French monograph on the "development" of West African cinema: a part statistical, part anthropological study of "Black African" cinema and cinema-going published in 1974. See Pierre Pommier, *Cinéma et développement en Afrique noire francophone* (Paris: Éditions A. Pedone, 1974).

[2] Femi Okiremuete Shaka has made some important qualifications to this antagonistic view, especially in relation to missionary cinema. See his *Modernity and the African Cinema: A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcoloniality, and Modern African Identities* (Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004). The two "travails" are taken from Bertolt Brecht's poem "Observation," where they refer to, respectively, the defeat of Nazi Germany and the protracted work of reconstruction and "denazification" in its wake. *Poems 1913-1956,* ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1976), 415.

[3] Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 144. There are important exceptions, e.g., Claire Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema: Financial and Technical Assistance Between 1961 & 1977—Operations and Implications for African Cinema," *Society for Visual Anthropology Review* 6, no. 2 (1990); Dominic Thomas, "Africa/France: Contesting Space," *Yale French Studies* no. 115 (2009).

[4] See, e.g., Raphaël Millet, "(In)dépendance des cinémas du Sud &/vs France: L'exception culturelle des cinémas du Sud est-elle française?," *Théorème: Revue de l'Institut de Recherche sur le Cinéma et l'Audiovisuel* no. 5 (1998).

[5] Claude Forest, "Le cinéma en Afrique: l'impossible industrie," *Mise au point* no. 4 (2012), https://journals.openedition.org/map/800.

French scholar Samuel Lelièvre accuses his Anglophone peers of having missed the critical turn against "History" that so transformed the humanities in the latter half of the twentieth century.[6] At this level of generality, this is clearly an overstatement. As regards the subject of this thesis, however, the "underdevelopment of historical reflexion" diagnosed by Lelièvre may be found in both in the Anglophone and Francophone research literatures, where "development"—be it capitalist or otherwise—mostly appears in a descriptive vein, without theoretical exposition or exploration of the concept.[7] Because of this largely descriptive approach, "underdevelopment," in turn, can only appear as lack and not—as in the practice-thought of African filmmakers centred in this thesis—a challenge to "development" itself.[8] Although more recent scholarship, especially on Africa's videoscapes and from a comparative perspective, has foregrounded the anti-systemic potentialities in sub-Saharan African filmmaking,[9] extant scholarship on early African cinema has largely missed these important agencies.

To address this lacuna, the first two sections of this literature review (2.1–2.2) give an introduction to the history and theory of development. Although they are here presented sequentially, I will later emphasise how historical praxis and theoretical understanding evolved together and informed each other. The rest of this chapter provides a condensed history of African cinema in the age of development. Revisiting a host of activist writings of the 1960s through to the 1980s, I will show that development was then a central and urgent concern for filmmakers, thereby recovering a sense of the development of African cinema as a contested terrain.[10] In the concluding section, I summarise key findings and define the aims and perspectives of this research.

---

[6] Lelièvre, "Les cinémas africains dans l'histoire," 141.

[7] There are exceptions, e.g., Brian Goldfarb, "A Pedagogical Cinema: Development Theory, Colonialism and Post-Liberation African Film," *iris*, no. 18 (1995). Shaka rightly challenges the "essentialist Eurocentric conception of human development as a consequence of European colonization of much of the rest of the world" while insisting that modernity must be placed within "the ferment of the European colonial conquests and empire building projects of the 19th century." However, his discussion of modernisation is mainly concerned with the formation of what he calls "modern African subjectivity" and neglects questions of political economy. Shaka, *Modernity and the African* Cinema, 26.

[8] A notable exception is Sylvia Wynter, who in an article on the "African cinematic text" presents a persuasive argument for seeing "underdevelopment" not as a descriptive category within the field of economy but the signifier of a "dysselected" alterity that grounds the (now globalised) local discourse of Western "Man." "Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man," in *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image,* ed. June Givanni (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 36.

[9] See, e.g., Alessandro Jedlowski, "African Videoscapes: Southern Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Côte d'Ivoire in Comparative Perspective," in *A Companion to African Cinema,* ed. Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019).

[10] Conceived at the height of the age of development, many of the pioneering studies of African cinema are centrally concerned with African development. See, e.g., Pommier, *Cinéma et développement*; Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain: des origines à 1973* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975); Tahar Cheriaa, *Écrans d'abondance ou cinéma de libération, en Afrique?* (Tunis: La société d'impression/Édition Laplume for SATPEC Tunisia and Organisme Lybien du Cinéma, El Khayala, 1978).

2.1 The age of development: a historical overview

The idea of development can be traced back to the Age of Enlightenment, along both idealist and materialist strands of thought. Notable tributaries include Nicolas de Condorcet's 1795 tract on the infinite perfectibility of the human spirit and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of natural selection (1859), but the true originators of "development" as that concept came to be understood in the post-war era are without a doubt G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx, who converged on a conception of modernity as an unprecedented historical dynamic that moves through stages, rests on the modern nation-state, and, if harnessed properly, would benefit the greater good.[11] In the 1950s, "development" re-emerged as a singularly versatile and influential idea shaping economic and political fortunes everywhere, and giving license to everything from US neo-imperialism to pan-African unity.

According to a now common periodisation,[12] the "age of development" began towards the end of the colonial era, with the implementation of colonial development policies, and lasted until the late 1970s, when "structural adjustment"—the pilot project of an ascendant global neoliberalism—was imposed on the developing world, dismantling the institutions and infrastructures that had been main policy conduits of "national development." In the following brief history of the period, I will first look at "modernisation theory," the dominant paradigm of US development thinking at the time, which can be traced back to Euro-colonial precedents, and then turn to sub-Saharan Africa at independence, where I will find that despite important differences between capitalist, socialist, and non-aligned countries, a broadly hegemonic set of development policies was pursued across geopolitical divides. Finally, and anticipating the more sustained critiques of development that are the subject of the following section (2.2), I will highlight important voices in Africa and in the "Third World" who challenged this broad—indeed global—orthodoxy.[13]

---

[11] On the import of Condorcet and Darwin, see Rist, *History of Development*, 42. For Hegel and Marx as "true originators" of development, see Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Oxford, Bloomington, Indiana & Nairobi: James Currey/Indiana University Press/East African Educational Publishers, 1996), 4. For a more a more nuanced appreciation of Marx's conception of historical development, see 2.2.

[12] See, e.g., Joseph Morgan Hodge, "Writing the History of Development (Part 1: The First Wave)," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6, no. 3 (2015).

[13] Watchwords like "tricontinentalism" or the "Third World," now outmoded or met with opprobrium, were for a time the self-designations of choice of a non-aligned internationalism deemed instrumental in countering the globalised machinations of Empire. Coined in 1952 by the French demographer, anthropologist, and historian Alfred Sauvy, in an article for the French weekly *L'Observateur* entitled "Tiers Monde, une planète," (August 14, 1952) the "Third World" originally grouped nations that were aligned neither with NATO nor with the Communist Bloc, though Sauvy's definition excluded wealthy and industrially developed non-aligned countries such as Sweden or Austria. In spirit at least, the term was roughly coextensive

US president Harry S. Truman's inaugural address on January 20, 1949, at the start of his second term in office, is often cited as having launched the age of development: "Fourth, we must embark on a bold new programme for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas."[14] Though apparently improvised without much deliberation by one of Truman's speechwriters,[15] this, the famous "Point Four," is now considered the classical template for subsequent US attempts to capture and shape the process of decolonisation. The rise of "modernisation theory" has to be seen in the historical context of the emergence of the United States as neo-imperial hegemon and the onset of the so-called Cold War.[16] Coveting new territories for resource extraction and access to new markets for export and investment against a backdrop of falling rates of profit, the US wielded development policy to draw the newly independent nations into its sphere of influence while at the same time counteracting communist influence and ideas.[17]

Modernisation theorists operated on the premise that there was but one trajectory of development for all the nations of the world. Empirical polities may occupy different, that is, more or less advanced, positions on this single track, but all were headed in the same direction, through what were essentially identical stages. Less developed elsewheres thus were seen as "belated" instances of earlier stages of this globally uniform process, whose reference point was thoroughly Eurocentric. To develop, in essence, meant becoming more like the West.[18] The main impediment to development as modernisation theorists saw it, were entrenched traditional values that resisted the logic of the market.[19] For "underdeveloped" societies to progress along their preordained path, they had to shed their pre-capitalist, "neo-patrimonial" social and political structure, which was breeding corruption while de-incentivising investment and accumulation.[20] Hence modernisation theo-

with the Non-Aligned Movement. However, Sauvy's coinage was not free of the associations with poverty and backwardness reified in later usage. For a thorough interrogation of the term, see Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987). For a redemptive reading, which constructs and defends a "Third World ethic" in relation to cinema, see Christopher Pavsek, "Kidlat Tahimik's 'Third World Projector,'" in *The Utopia of Film: Cinema and Its Futures in Godard, Kluge, and Tahimik* (New York & Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[14] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, *Harry S. Truman*, year 1949, No. 5 (United States Government Printing Office, 1964), 114-115, quoted in Rist, *History of Development*, 71.

[15] Rist, 71.

[16] So called despite the often combative confrontations the Cold War fomented in all parts of the world.

[17] See Hodge, "Writing the History of Development," 430. Walt Whitman Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth,* a milestone of US modernisation theory first published in 1960, gave the game away in its subtitle, *A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Another stalwart of the genre is Samuel P. Huntington (of *Clash of Civilizations* notoriety). Prominent influences include sociologists Max Weber and Talcott Parsons.

[18] See Aidan Foster-Carter, "From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting Paradigms in the Analysis of Underdevelopment," *World Development* 4, no. 3 (1976): 172.

[19] See Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 110.

[20] The concept of patrimonialism was taken from Max Weber.

rists' abiding concern with the transition from "traditional" or communal values, attitudes, and social practices, to supposedly "modern" ones, such as role separation, rational relations, and achieved statuses.[21] The gradual absorption of a "modern" conception of personhood through education and technology transfers targeting African elites, would restructure social relations, loosen communal ties, and strengthen the individual, thus spurring economic growth.

Modernisation theorists characterised development as a non-contentious process, as Aidan Foster-Carter summarises this view, "not involving irreconcilable conflicts of interest between developed and underdeveloped countries or between different social groups within the latter."[22] While there is some disagreement as to how influential modernisation theory was in terms of actual policy-making, its vision of international relations was perfectly aligned with "Pax Americana," the ideological contract that has underwritten Western intervention in the rest of the world since the Second World War. Anticipating later invocations of the "global village," modernisation theorists pictured developed and underdeveloped countries as "partners in progress" (Truman) whose relationship would level the global playing field by eroding archaic residues everywhere, thus benefitting all mankind.

More recent comparative research into the "history of development"—by now an established field of historical inquiry[23]—points to an earlier beginning of the age of development dating back to the early to mid-1940s, when the British and French empires, pressured by local elites and a growing population of urban labourers, adopted various programmes of "colonial development."[24] There were many continuities between colonial development and later US-led "modernisation," from paternalistic ideas of trusteeship— "leading people onward and upward to civilisation"—to the strategy of assimilating a thin stratum of local elites into technical and administrative positions, and on to a highly abstract conception of "backwardness" which often disregarded diverse realities on the ground.[25] As Frederick Cooper has argued, both colonial development and modernisation

---

[21] Leys, 110.

[22] Foster-Carter, "From Rostow to Gunder Frank," 172.

[23] For overviews of this field, see Marc Frey and Sönke Kunkel, "Writing the History of Development: A Review of the Recent Literature," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 2 (2011); Hodge, "Writing the History of Development"; idem, "Writing the History of Development (Part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider)," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 7, no. 1 (2016).

[24] In 1940, the British government launched the Colonial Development and Welfare Act. Six years later, the French followed suit with the Fonds d'Investissement en Développement Economique et Social. See Frederick Cooper, "Writing the History of Development," *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine* 8, no. 1, Modernizing Missions: Approaches to 'Developing' the Non-Western World after 1945 (2010): 7.

[25] See Aidan Foster-Carter, "Neo-Marxist Approaches to Development and Underdevelopment," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 3, no. 1 (1973): 15.

theory conceived of development as "focused on an endpoint, not a process of moving forward from a constrained but dynamic present."[26] Like Truman after them, the colonial powers cited altruistic motives for their development efforts, however, the industries and infrastructures (such as ports and roads) they built mainly served their own purposes, notably the extraction of resources, not those of the colonised. At the same time, as Cooper is quick to add, "development" provided a language for colonial subjects to articulate demands for equal rights and political participation; demands that Britain and France were unwilling to meet, hastening the end of their empires.[27]

At independence, sub-Saharan African governments adopted a variety of approaches to development. Socialist-aligned polities in particular deviated in important ways from their free-market counterparts.[28] However, political actors across the ideological spectrum agreed that industrialisation was needed if the newly independent nations were to share in the wealth enjoyed by the First World.[29] Sub-Saharan African national economies were characterised by a preponderance of agricultural production;[30] the degree of labour rationalisation was generally low and technological penetration minimal, manufacturing still largely household-based. The creation of industries of scale would allow local production to satisfy local demand, increasing import substitution and thereby lessening the deleterious impact on national economies of fluctuations in the global market volume. The expansion and intensification of agriculture would also, crucially, "free up" labour-power—a limited resource in the relatively underpopulated sub-Saharan Africa of the 1960s. To diversify single-crop economies and raise agricultural production, African states endorsed land reforms combining arable land into larger units, alongside the introduction of modern agricultural methods and technologies. Most political leaders agreed

---

[26] Frederick Cooper, "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept," in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge,* ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 71–72.

[27] Cooper argues that, having conducted a "cost-benefit analysis" taking into account the demands of colonial subjects for a radical transformation of the colonial relationship, Britain and France determined that a continuation of the relationship in a different form would be more beneficial to their long-term interests. It is important to note that this is not the same as to say that their empires had become economically unsustainable.

[28] African socialism took many forms, but some basic features were present in all of them. Leys lists them as: "public ownership of strategic industries; state or co-operative trading; limits on foreign investment; trade and aid orientations that included Comecon economies [the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance comprised the Eastern Bloc along with a number of other communist-ruled countries] or China, or both; restraints on the emergence of indigenous capitalism; efforts to equalize private consumption; efforts to promote collective or co-operative farming; and, most important of all in the long run, efforts to foster popular power in local as well as national institutions." Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 127.

[29] See Giovanni Arrighi, Beverly J. Silver, and Benjamin D. Brewer, "Industrial Convergence, Globalization, and the Persistence of the North-South Divide," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 38, no. 1 (2003): 6. This is borne out, for instance, in Nkrumah's study of neo-colonialism, which recommends development of manufacturing industries over agriculture. See Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 7.

[30] A mixture of monocropping and subsistence farming.

that to realise such far-reaching policies, the nationalisation of vital industries and an element of central planning were necessary.[31] A strong state, held together by the social cohesive of national culture, would concentrate the means for development and orchestrate its implementation. Ronald Chilcote called this general orientation "developmental nationalism."[32]

But not all adhered to this broad church of "industrialise or bust." Prominent among dissenters was Julius K. Nyerere, the first president of Tanganyika and later Tanzania (1963-1985), who challenged the industrial and urban bias of post-independence development. The agrarian socialism expounded in the Tanganyika African National Union's 1967 *Arusha Declaration* turned to the countryside as a source of strength and renewal while turning the modernisation theorists' view of Africa's "patrimonial" social structure on its head by arguing that the strength of communal ties and relative weakness of individual striving were in fact favourable, rather than detrimental, to African development.[33] For Nyerere, the "pre-capitalist" lifeworld of rural communities pointed to an original path for African socialism. The Arusha Declaration is notable for deriding the then customary stageism of the socialist left encapsulated in the phrase "without first building capitalism, we cannot build Socialism".[34]

Looking back at Arusha ten years later, Nyerere added that the emphasis on industrialisation had led to a critical neglect of the sphere of circulation; nationalisation and centralised planning had to encompass not only the productive sector—not only the means of production—but also the "means of exchange."[35] Cheikh Anta Diop, a stout proponent of "rational industrialization," likewise emphasised that African development was crucially

---

[31] See Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 192.

[32] Ronald H. Chilcote, "The Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 3 (1968): 387.

[33] Julius Nyerere, *The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance* (Arusha: 1967), 11.

[34] Nyerere, *Arusha Declaration*, 12. Most socialist/communist parties in the Third World, sub-Saharan Africa included, accepted as doctrine the belief that their countries had to in some sense "pass through" the stage of capitalist accumulation before being able to overcome capitalism. In practical terms, this usually took the form of political alliances with "national bourgeoisies" presumed to be the agent of a "necessary" bourgeois revolution, generally with disastrous consequences—see Spain, Guatemala, Argentina, Indonesia, etc. When actually existing communisms made accommodations with capitalist development, from Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921-1928) to Deng Xiaoping's "Socialism with Chinese characteristics," it was under this same assumption. In Africa, too, socialist planners would frequently allow for temporary and limited accommodations with capital to further national development. Amilcar Cabral's projections for post-independence development, for instance, envisioned a model of economic planning "directed according to the principles of democratic centralism," but a PAICG-ruled government would also, according to the party statutes of 1962, tolerate and even encourage private enterprise so long as it was deemed "useful" to economic development. Partido Africano de Independencia de Guiné e Cabo Verde, *Statuts et programme* (Conakry, 1962), quoted in Chilcote, "Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral," 383. Cheikh Anta Diop similarly argued for a NEP-inspired, transitional economic programme. *Black Civilization*, 84.

[35] Nyerere, *Arusha Declaration: Ten Years After*, 7. Nyerere considered it the greatest failure of his political career that he had been unable to see through the realisation of a projected East African Federation.

a struggle over the continent's forms of circulation, comprising not only the distribution and valorisation of commodities but also communications, transport, and freedom of movement.[36] The domain of circulation and logistics thus emerged as a central site of contestation on the path to self-determined development. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first prime minister (1957–1960) and later president (1965–1966), in his influential study of neo-colonialism (1965), described how European imperial-colonial powers had for decades actively undermined inter-African communication and exchange, cornering African markets and establishing in the process a lasting reliance on both European imports and distribution networks.[37] In Nkrumah's analysis, the political boundaries, monetary zones, and language groupings created under colonial rule were perpetuating a trade orientation towards the former "mother countries," which was centred on the extraction of natural resources—from soil nutrients to precious metals—and primary goods destined for processing and valorisation in the metropolitan centre.[38] Political, economic, and linguistic borders served to "emphasise differences" among African nations that, in a context of historically low population levels, were too small to support viable internal markets.[39] By undermining unified economic development, Nkrumah argued, this systematic "Balkanisation" of the continent further entrenched individual states' dependence on predatory foreign capital.[40]

---

[36] Africa would never be united, Diop warned, without the concurrent development of continental transport networks and mass communications. For Diop, economic and political development were as two faces of the same coin; viewing freedom of movement as indispensable for the development of a continental political consciousness, he deplored that Africans were still not free to cross national borders without identification. Diop, *Black Civilization*, 95.

[37] Nkrumah saw this state of affairs as a direct continuation of the colonial relation: "The young countries are still the providers of raw materials, the old of manufactured goods. The change in the economic relationship between the new sovereign states and the erstwhile masters is only one of form." Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 31. Nuancing Nkrumah's earlier formulation of neo-colonialism, Samir Amin later distinguished three "macro-regions", all still defined by the colonial relationship: the Africa of the colonial trade economy, roughly coextensive with West Africa; the Africa of the concession-owning companies, largely in Central Africa; and the Africa of the labour reserves in the eastern and southern parts of the continent. Note how this structural distinction cuts across differences between the French, British, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial legacies. "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Origins and Contemporary Forms," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (1972): 504.

[38] "When the countries of their origin are obliged to buy back their minerals and other raw products in the form of finished goods, they do so at grossly inflated prices." Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 14.

[39] There is a general consensus among historians that Africa is the only continent whose demographic development from the early sixteenth to the late nineteenth century was stagnant and sometimes negative. See, e.g., Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Petite histoire de l'Afrique: L'Afrique au sud du Sahara de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2016), 129. Chief among the reasons for low population levels were the depredations of the slave trade, including internal wars and displacements spurred by the growing demand for slaves, which factors were further exacerbated by climactic conditions, in particular a high incidence of droughts, recorded in Arab sources, throughout that same period (48–49).

[40] Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 227. Underlying these ties and separations was the common method of divide and rule—"the ancient, accepted one of all minority ruling classes throughout history" (253).

Nkrumah was a first vocal critic of what he termed "the new scramble for Africa, under the guise of aid."[41] Western development aid, he argued, was self-interested and designed to turn a profit, or at least recuperate expenses: "a revolving credit, paid by the neo-colonial master, passing through the neo-colonial State and returning to the neo-colonial master in the form of increased profits."[42] Then as now, North-South financial flows, including investment, aid, and everything else, leave the North with a substantial surplus.[43] Aid is a not only a modality of foreign investment, as Nkrumah pointed out, but also has a broader purpose, "for there are conditions which hedge it around."[44] Donors impose limitations on the uses of aid or demand match funding. Payment is made conditional on the purchase of goods, the employment of skilled labour, or the use of processing facilities in the donor country. The promise of aid is used to extract concessions from African governments regarding commerce and traffic treaties, agreements for economic co-operation, and even internal finance. Finally, there are military and logistical implications, from the stationing of foreign armies to the management of migrant populations.

While the bloc-free nations of Africa and Asia which in 1955 gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to form the Non-Aligned Movement shared a largely uncritical emphasis on "catch-up" modernisation—epitomised in Jawaharlal Nehru's, the first Indian prime minister's, famous quip: "What Europe did in a hundred or a hundred and fifty years, we must do in ten or fifteen years"[45]—there was also, as David Scott has remarked, "a certain radicalizing moment in the unfolding of the Bandung project," which saw the formulation of an anti-imperialist critique of political, economic, and cultural dependence.[46] Consequent to this wider critique of international relations, there was a push in many corners for "inward-oriented," "auto-centric," or "self-reliant" strategies of development attempting to "delink" from international dependencies.[47] "No country can be completely self-

---

[41] Nkrumah, 109. Nyerere's *Arusha Declaration* was similarly disparaging of foreign aid, whether in the form of loans, investment, or so-called "technical assistance." Though this stance was not generally reflected in policy terms, Nyerere did on occasion oppose foreign aid for political reasons, for instance, from countries supporting white-minority rule in southern Africa.

[42] Nkrumah, xv.

[43] Today, around $2tn per year flow from the global North to the South, but $5tn flow in the other direction, using 2012 data quoted from Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions* (London: Heinemann, 2017).

[44] Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 243.

[45] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung," in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives,* ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), 53; Arrighi et al., "Industrial Convergence," 6.

[46] *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 221–22.

[47] See Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 51. See also Nyerere, *Arusha Declaration: Ten Years After*, 6.

sufficient,"[48] however, as Nkrumah wrote in 1965, and so the quest for national sovereignty had to go hand in hand with a re-linking and re-routing of transnational *interdependencies*.[49] Nkrumah advocated the removal of all barriers to inter-African trade and the creation of an "all-African planning body" that "could take immediate steps towards the development of large-scale industry and power."[50] Echoing Nehru, Nkrumah was convinced that Africa could not hope to industrialise effectively "in the haphazard, laisser-faire [sic] manner of Europe. […] The challenge cannot be met on any piece-meal scale, but only by the total mobilisation of the continent's resources within the framework of comprehensive socialist planning and deployment."[51] While these plans may have been particularly ambitious, many agreed that a more profound unification of the continent was needed. The establishment in 1963 of the Organisation of African Unity (UAO) bears testament to this ambition.

That the developing world had to make up for lost time was a widely held belief, but not everyone agreed. Frantz Fanon, in his seminal *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), expressed the hope that the so-called underdeveloped countries of the world would refuse to "catch up," and instead find their own answers:

> The Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to. But what matters is not a question of profitability, not a question of increased productivity, not a question of production rates. [...] The notion of catching up must not be used as a pretext to brutalize man, to tear him from himself and his inner consciousness, to break him, to kill him. No, we do not want to catch up with anyone.[52]

"Europe" is here deployed not in its geographically limited sense but as the name of a global rationality that imposes itself as universal—to the point where it becomes identified with "History" itself.[53] *This Europe* had not only failed to provide answers to the

[48] Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 25.

[49] The programme advanced at Bandung Conference propagated collective action to win sovereignty for all non-aligned nations by leveraging existing intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations or the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, alongside fuller South-South economic, cultural, and political cooperation. Prior to taking collective action within the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement had to fight for inclusion of its member states, some of which had not yet gained independence, arguing that membership in the United Nations should be universal and representation on the Security Council based on a "principle of equitable geographical distribution." "Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 100.

[50] A pan-African central bank, moreover, would allow for a unified policy regarding "all aspects of export control, tariff and quota arrangements." Nkrumah, 28.

[51] Nkrumah, 1966: 11.

[52] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 238. Instead, "underdeveloped countries must endeavour to focus on their own values as well as methods and style specific to them" (55).

[53] As recently as 2015, French president Nicolas Sarkozy asserted that "the African man has not entered far enough into History [sic]." "Le discours de Dakar," *Le Monde*, November 9, 2011. We can see in this belief

problems it created but was compelling the entire world to accept its premises and finalities as unquestionable. The properly "historical" role Fanon entrusted to the wretched of the earth was to break this circle and unhinge the systemic telos of development, so that we may begin to build radically different futures.

2.2 Contesting "development": a theoretical survey

In sub-Saharan Africa after the independences, productivity gains owed little to actual increases in industrial or agricultural capacity and much to expanding global demand, leaving national economies extremely vulnerable to contractions in global trade and therefore prone to crisis. Where there was growth, it was growth without development.[54] The global spread of capitalism, pace modernisation theory, was not in fact producing globally uniform outcomes. "Development" was always manifestly uneven; explosive in some parts of the world, stagnant or regressive in others, that is, if we accept economic growth and industrialisation as performance indicators. The disappointments of the age of development brought a number of important theoretical contestations, including to the concept of development itself, which I present here in brief.

From the mid-1960s onwards, harking back to earlier formulations by communist forebears such as Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, a group of neo-Marxist[55] economists hailing from or working in the Global South began to argue that development was and had been for some time "combined and uneven."[56] This line of critique was most immediately a refutation of modernisation theory: Where modernisation theorists identified a backwards tradition as the main impediment to development, the neo-Marxists emphasised the deleterious effects of Africa's position in the global economy. Modernisation theorists, the argument went, had both overstated the impact of patrimonialism, tribalism,

---

the lasting influence of Hegel. In Hegel's view, Africa not only lacked a written history (as it was wrongly assumed at the time); its past, whose basic reality not even he could deny, lacked the fundamental properties that make of mere pastness the stuff of history, and with it the capacity for self-directed development. "Africa [...] is the Gold-land compressed within itself,—the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night." *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 95. "This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been." Hegel, *Lectures*, 102–103. The hold of such views over the Western imagination is hardly diminished. In its May 2000 issue, the *Economist* asked: "Does Africa have some inherent character flaw that keeps it backward and incapable of development?" Editorial Board, "Hopeless Africa," *The Economist*, May 11, 2000.

[54] See, e.g., Samir Amin, *Le développement du capitalisme en Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

[55] The appellation is taken from Aidan Foster-Carter, "Neo-Marxist Approaches."

[56] For a history of the concept, see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981).

and corruption—while ignoring class divisions and struggles—*and* misattributed these issues to some monolithic "pre-modern" tradition.[57] The neo-Marxists instead stressed their colonial roots, pointing to the historical interplay of colonial, capitalist modernity with existing social and political formations. "Corruption" was really an outcome of the centralised structures of governance bequeathed by colonial authorities; "tribal conflict," a result of the colonial exploitation of ethnic difference; and "modernising elites," rather than a vanguard of development, were really compradores serving foreign interests.[58]

André Gunder Frank was perhaps the first to theorise "underdevelopment" not as the mere absence of, nor a state prior to, development but an active and ongoing process which simultaneously produced developed, or "metropolitan," *and* underdeveloped, or "peripheral," societies.[59] For Frank, developed and underdeveloped economies were co-constitutive and co-eval parts of a global historical dialectic that began in the early modern era with the incorporation of overseas territories into a global economy, thus creating the conditions for the transition to industrial capitalism. Rather than creating a level playing field, this global process really perpetuated the co-existence of the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" worlds, instituting between them a relation of "dependence." Underdevelopment, on this view, is not a "pre-existing condition" but a form of development itself—an active, productive, indeed transformational, process—which involved not only the undoing of existing social and economic relations but also the selective amplification or recombination of "traditional" hierarchies and values.[60] The displacement of existing exchange and concurrent monopolisation of the forms of circulation allowed metropolitan interlopers to reshape peripheral economies to their needs or, as they case may be, suppress them entirely. For Guyanese historian and activist Walter Rodney, "underdevelopment" was therefore best deployed in active verb form, as in the title of Rodney's influential study: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.[61]

---

[57] Giovanni Arrighi, "The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects," *New Left Review*, no. 15 (2002).

[58] See Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 190.

[59] See André Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," in *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969). Frank was a US-trained liberal political economist (his doctoral advisor in Chicago had been Milton Friedman) who made a theoretical about-turn following his move to Latin America.

[60] Aimé Césaire saw this clearly already in 1950, noting that "in judging colonization, I have added that Europe has gotten on very well indeed with all the local feudal lords who agreed to serve, woven a villainous complicity with them, rendered their tyranny more effective and more efficient, and that it has actually tended to prolong artificially the survival of local pasts in their most pernicious aspects." *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, [1950] 2000), 45.

[61] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, [1972] 1988). Rodney's study details the unfolding of this process—this relation—over a period of several hundred years, from the Euro-American trade in African slaves to colonial empire and on to the neo-colonial incursions of the post-independence era. His story stops short of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s only because Rodney did not live to see them. Even so, it is very much a history of the present.

While its primary target was modernisation theory, the neo-Marxist critique of development also implied a challenge to the orthodox Marxist view of capitalism as, in the final analysis, "progressive;" a then common view based on the assumption that the global spread of capitalism would eventually displace "archaic" social and productive relations everywhere.[62] The neo-Marxists pointed out that "pre-capitalist" and "capitalist" relations of production did not, as this nomenclature suggests, belong to separate and consecutive stages of world history but really coexisted and intersected with one another, recombining into ever new articulations.[63] "So-called primitive accumulation" had not universally given way to the impersonal compulsion of the market. Rather, as Rosa Luxemburg was among the first to note, "the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day."[64] Cedric J. Robinson, in his work on "racial capitalism," has reversed the customary chronology, asserting that the slave trade and plantation system, rather than a rear-guard of the old regime, were really the cutting edge of early capitalist development.[65] Similar arguments have since been advanced describing the colony as a "laboratory" of a global modernity.[66] This becomes apparent again in the early 1980s, when Struc-

---

[62] Some Western Marxists were even defending colonialism as a "stage" of capitalist development. See, e.g., Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism* (London: NLB/Verso, 1980). Many more believed in the necessity of a national and bourgeois revolution before the proletarian revolution, though this assertion had come under increasing pressure by the history of the twentieth century, which saw socialist revolutions in the periphery (Russia, Cuba, Korea, etc.) but not the core. There has been some disagreement about what Marx actually said. Amin argued that Marx had "yielded to the temptation of seeing in the worldwide expansion of capitalism a force that would homogenize economic and social conditions, reducing the workers of the whole world to the sole status of employees exploited by capital in the same way and to the same intensity everywhere." Samir Amin, "Popular Movements Towards Socialism: Their Unity and Diversity," *Monthly Review* 66, no. 2 (2014). Marx certainly spoke of the capitalist transformation he was describing as occurring "everywhere," but limited the applicability of his analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism to Western Europe. His correspondence with Vera Zasulitch is often quoted in evidence of his willingness to entertain the possibility of an original Russian path towards socialism, grounded in the peasant commune ("obshchina" or "mir") and precipitated by a peasant revolution.

[63] "Analogously to the relations between development and underdevelopment on the international level, the contemporary underdeveloped institutions of the so-called backward or feudal domestic areas of an underdeveloped country are no less the product of the single historical process of capitalist development than are the so-called capitalist institutions of the supposedly more progressive areas." Frank, "Development of Underdevelopment," 19.

[64] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso [1913] 2003), 351. Primitive accumulation—the "so-called" was struck in later translations—in Marx's original formulation covers everything from the enclosure of the commons and the separation of rural domestic producers from their means of subsistence to the slave trade and extractive colonialism. More recently, to emphasise the ongoingness of "primitive accumulation," David Harvey has renamed it "accumulation by dispossession." *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137–182.

[65] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4. Nikhil Pal Singh, referring to Robinson, argues that chattel slavery was not a residue of pre-capitalist relations of production but an original innovation of capitalist development—"a new species of property born with capitalism." "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation," *Social Text* 34, no. 3 (2016): 28.

[66] See, e.g., Bernd M. Scherer, "Preface," in *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past—Rebellions for the Future*, ed. Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010).

tural Adjustment remade sub-Saharan Africa into a testing ground for global neoliberalism.

Underdevelopment, the neo-Marxist argument continued, was not a survival of the old but a contemporary condition that was produced and reproduced as a global relation; not an inherent flaw, but a product of the "combined and uneven development" of capitalism on a world scale.[67] It stemmed not, as modernisation theorists would have it, from isolation from the global capitalist economy, but increased with integration.[68] If peripheral national economies wanted to develop, the neo-Marxists concluded, they had to "delink" from the global economy. This is not to be mistaken for the severing of ties to other nations or "autarky," as Samir Amin pointed out, but instead returns us to the broadly hegemonic development policies of import substitution and centrally planned capital accumulation described in 2.1, with the state managing economic growth and redistribution.

For French-Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, this conception of delinking did not go nearly far enough and in reality only produced more of the same: state capitalism "masked by a 'socialist' phraseology."[69] The neo-Marxists, Castoriadis argued, remained married to what he called the "social imaginary signification" of development: a rationality which posited economic growth, efficiency, and productivity as universal values and so limited our political imagination. Castoriadis insisted that a further delinking was necessary, this time from the entire canon of "development" thinking, which he broadly identified with "Western modernity," signally including the entire Marxist tradition. In Latin America, thinkers such as Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar continued this post-Marxist inquiry into the rationality of development, tracing its genealogy back to the early colonial era. For Mignolo, the idea of development naturalises modernity as a universal global process while obscuring its "darker side," the constant reproduction of "coloniality."[70] For Escobar, it was the discourses and practices of development which had produced the "Third World" in the first place.[71] Both thinkers formulated versions of an argument that from the 1980s onwards was fast gaining ground; an argument, it should be

---

[67] It is no coincidence that several of the neo-Marxist thinkers who started out as political economists of Africa—Amin, Arrighi, Wallerstein—later become world-systems theorists.

[68] "We must conclude, in short, that underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself." Frank, "Development of Underdevelopment," 23.

[69] Cornelius Castoriadis, "Reflections on 'Rationality' and 'Development [1976],'" in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 209.

[70] Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 450.

noted, which in retrospective accounts has been linked to the neoliberal takeover,[72] namely, that it was high time to divest from the teleologies of "growth" and "progress" in order to prepare the ground for a world "after development."

Usually overlooked in histories of development theory but crucial for the purposes of this thesis is Sylvia Wynter's characterisation of development as a totalising thought that cannot think itself otherwise. For Wynter, development is "the Western culture-systemic telos that orients the collective ensemble of behaviours by means of which our present single and westernized world system is brought into being as a specific 'form of life.'"[73] Unlike Mignolo and Escobar, who turned to "non-Western" alternatives, Wynter acknowledged that by the time she was writing her essay, this circular, totalising "framework of rationality" had taken hold everywhere. Rather than affirm some geographically or culturally defined "other," she points us to a negative determination internal to the system, which she calls "We, the Underdeveloped." This liminal position, she argues, echoing Fanon, bestows an epistemic and practical advantage enabling us to unhinge the telos of development.[74] More recently, Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr has urged us to "think Africa outside of the terms of development, emergence, growth etc., which have served to project the myths of the Western world onto the trajectories of African societies."[75] Sarr passionately argues for a distinct and autonomous "African modernity" which would selectively assimilate or resist Western ideas, technologies, and institutions from within an African cultural and political universe. His surprising conclusion is that this "Afrotopia" is "already here and not yet to be invented": It is continually elaborated in the everyday struggles of ordinary Africans.[76]

At the end of this brief historical and theoretical primer, I will draw some first conclusions. As we have seen in this section, the historical crisis of development—and the failure of modernisation theorists convincingly to account for it—prompted two kinds of crit-

---

[71] See Arturo Escobar, "'Post-development' as Concept and Social Practice," in *Exploring Post-development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Aram Ziai (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

[72] See Hodge, "Writing the History of Development," 436.

[73] Sylvia Wynter, "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological? A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped,'" in *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed. Aguibou Y. Yansané (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1996): 299–300. Speaking from the "lay" or "liminal" perspective of Black studies, Wynter posits that "the goal of *development*, together with its subgoal of 'economic growth,' functions to lay down the prescriptive behavioral pathways instituting our present world system" (300).

[74] "[T]he liminal category is the systemic category from whose perspective alone, as the perspective of those forcibly made to embody and signify lack-of-being, whose members, in seeking to escape their condemned statuses, are able to call into question the closure instituting the order and, therefore, the necessary 'blindness' of its normative, in this case, 'developed' subjects." Wynter, "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept," 305.

[75] Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia* (Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey, 2016), 17.

[76] Sarr, *Afrotopia*, 17.

ical response: Internal to the concept at first, the critique later pushed "past" or "beyond" development. Frederick Cooper has suggested that in dealing with development, one has to make a choice between the historical analysis of particular uses or a metacritical approach. Though I have thus far held these aspects apart, as history and theory of development respectively, I will insist—pace Cooper—on the importance of thinking these two registers together. Following Wynter and Sarr, I will look at how the struggle of African cinema elaborated its own contestations of "development"—both as a set of historical practices and institutions *and* as a universal framework of rationality.

Turning now to the experience of early African cinema, it will be interesting to see how African filmmakers drew on these critical ideas to make sense of their situation. Med Hondo, echoing André Gunder Frank, spoke of the "development of underdevelopment" of African cinema[77] while Cameroonian filmmaker Félix Ewandé characterised the situation of African cinema as one of social, economic, and political "dependency."[78] My main focus, however, will be elsewhere. Rather than merely substitute these critical categories for the largely descriptive accounts of development/underdevelopment found in the African cinema scholarship, I will pay close attention to the contestations of development elaborated by the filmmakers themselves through their practice as a form of "thought in the making."[79]

2.3 Motor, mirror, reinvention: cinema and African development

This part of the literature review gives a condensed history of sub-Saharan African cinema from its beginnings through to the 1980s. In the present section, I consider the optimistic projections by African filmmakers and activists on the eve of independence, departing from Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's vision of the African cinema to come. Written in the late 1950s, at a time when "African cinema" was still—but barely so—a thing of the future, Vieyra's testimony encapsulates the hopes and aspirations of African filmmakers for cinema as a "motor" of African development.[80] I then confront these initial hopes with the tangled realities of African filmmaking in the post-independence era, showing how African cinema, rather than a *motor* of development, came to be seen in this period as a

---

[77] Hondo in *Caméra d'Afrique* (Tunisia, 1983) directed by Férid Boughedir.
[78] Félix Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement africain en matière de cinéma," *Présence Africaine*, no. 61 (1967): 203.
[79] For more on this concept, see chapter 3 on methods.
[80] Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma dans la formation d'une conscience nationale africaine," *Présence Africaine*, no. 27–28 (1959): 309.

mirror of its problems and limitations. Following on this insight, the remaining sections render key dimensions of African development— the developmental state (2.4), development aid (2.5), technological modernisation (2.6), and Africa's "forms of circulation" (2.7)— as seen through the mirror of African cinema.

In a talk delivered in 1959, less than a year before the first wave of African independences, at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, Vieyra hailed cinema as both the most important of the arts.[81] Like many African intellectuals at the time, he was convinced that modern audio-visual media were uniquely suited for the transmission of shared imaginaries and useful knowledges across societies marked by an oral bias and low literacy rates.[82] Film was for Vieyra a "universal language that can bring to every African understanding, things, and beings from elsewhere."[83] Reproducible on a mass scale, the medium could be harnessed to homogenise the social structure and guide the broad-based transformation of cultural values underway.[84] African cinemas, Vieyra believed, would instil a sense of belonging to a "nascent nation, a great people in formation," while also encouraging inter-African exchange, countering both tribalism within and Balkanisation without.[85]

Many African commentators agreed that film was a "pedagogical tool of the highest value."[86] Documentary and educational films would be useful vehicles for development by providing education on a wide range of subjects, from agricultural modernisation to irrigation methods and on to health and hygiene training.[87] But cinema would also have a

---

[81] Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma," 313. Vieyra is here echoing Lenin.

[82] "Ninety-five percent of illiterates: the written word thus finds itself unusable for the time being […]. There remains the language of cinema…" Vieyra, 312.

[83] Vieyra, 312.

[84] This was echoed by Hondo, for whom cinema was a means to the "necessary socio-cultural mutation of our peoples." Comité africain de cinéastes, "Communiqué du C.A.C.," *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, brochure (1981), 5.

[85] Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma," 305. See also Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 605. Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino made a similar argument in "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Culture: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 241.

[86] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "Cinema and Development in Africa [1978]," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham (London: BFI, 1996), 74. For a discussion of early African cinema in relation to developmental pedagogies, see Goldfarb, "Pedagogical Cinema."

[87] Ki-Zerbo believed that the "poetry of film," its powers of persuasion, could "render more attractive and convincing the audio-visual message of progress," thereby enticing Africans "to develop themselves." "Cinema and Development," 73. Yet the production of useful films in post-independence West Africa has received little sustained attention in the literature. Two notable exceptions are Noah Tsika, "Soft Power Cinema: Corporate Sponsorship, Visual Pedagogy, and the Cultural Cold War in West Africa," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 73 (2014); Vincent Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions: The Non-Fiction Film Production at the Origins of Francophone West African Cinema," *Critical Interventions* 11, no. 3 (2017). A particularly interesting late iteration of this genre is Mamadou Djim Kola and Maurice Bulbulian's *Cissin…Cinq ans plus tard* (1982), a government-commissioned yet highly critical documentary about a project settlement built by the Voltan government in conjunction with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (HABITAT), ostensibly in response to the urgent housing and infrastructural needs of the many rural migrants living in spontaneously erected compounds on the outskirts of the capital Oua-

critical, even radicalising, function, enabling African peoples to recognise themselves so that they may acquire "a more just notion of their own condition."[88] Sékou Tall extolled cinema as a "beacon" or "floodlight" for Africans to "signify themselves," illuminating their everyday concerns and stirring them to liberating action.[89] Without the capacity to make an image of oneself, true self-determination would remain beyond reach, as Gaston Kaboré later remarked: "If Africa were to dismiss its responsibility to become a producer of images, it would at the same time renounce the responsibility to decide and direct its own development."[90]

While Vieyra's own position was broadly aligned with these cinematic pedagogies of social and political development, his talk in Rome was mainly concerned with the potential of cinema as an industrial and technological art—a precious tool for societies in the process of industrialisation. Because of its industrial characteristics, he argued, cinema would be a motor of economic development and of technological modernisation. The development of film industries would instigate a general mobilisation of productive forces: "Just imagine the extent of skilled labour required, the number of citizens employed, the amount of energy released in the process."[91] Pointing to important economic reciprocities between film production and other sectors of the national economy, Vieyra projected that the development of African cinema would have an invigorating effect on adjacent industries, notably chemicals, for the fabrication of color film stock, mechanical manufacturing, for cameras and other, optical and mechanical, implements, and construction, of film schools, studios, theaters, etc. Big, multi-functional compounds comparable to Hollywood or Cinecittà would be built across sub-Saharan Africa, preferably in accessible places and relatively mild climates, comprising multi-story studio lots, office buildings, editing suites, processing labs, auditoriums, accommodation for actors and technicians,

gadougou. Cissin, one of these peri-urban compounds, was an urban experiment realised by foreign experts together with native collaborators. Five years after its realisation, the problems seem to be outweighing the benefits: The buildings were designed in accordance with Western standards of habitation and are thus too small for the larger families settled in Cissin; no infrastructure seems to have been provided outside of the residential buildings themselves; the pressed earth used as an alternative to more expensive brick and cement is falling apart. Furthermore, the building works seem to have been used as a pretext in some cases to expropriate the former tenants, who did not own the land they had settled on, replacing their self-made huts with European-style detached housing for a more affluent clientele. The filmmakers interview the people living in this new but already crumbling model "habitat" alongside some of the local architects participating in the project. For a critical discussion of the neoliberal developmentalism undergirding the HABITAT project, see Felicity D. Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity / Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016), 225–282.

[88] Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma," 310.

[89] Sékou Tall , "Comment le cinéma peut présenter les réalités humaines, sociales et culturelles africaines," *Présence Africaine*, no. 90, Le rôle du cinéaste africain dans l'éveil d'une conscience de civilisation noire (1974): 82.

[90] Gaston Kaboré, "L'image de soi, un besoin vital," in *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma*, ed. Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes (Paris & Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1995), 21.

[91] Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma," 308.

classrooms for teaching, and archival facilities.[92] What is more, the opportunities for employment and investment generated by national film industries would extend beyond the field of cinema proper: Requiring both sophisticated equipment and a wide range of technical expertise, film production would incentivise scientific research and the training of technicians—"workers for our march toward progress"[93]—while the spread of movie theaters—"a driving force for a rapid electrification of the continent"[94]—would stimulate the expansion of modern infrastructure in urban areas and into the countryside.

Likening filmmaking to industrial labour, Vieyra's talk in Rome modelled the filmmaker on the figure of the industrial worker.[95] Predicated on a strict division of labor, which aggregated the efforts of "men of all horizons," film production would serve as a rehearsal of the impending rationalization and intensification of labour in other sectors of the economy.[96] Film production would foster, "across studios, schools, and factories," a "solidarity of labour,"[97] contributing to the cohesion of an emergent industrial workforce. Despite the raucous atmosphere and lax safety standards Vieyra found in African movie theatres, he expressed the hope that, if screenings were to start on time and latecomers strictly refused admittance, "cinema may at least give us the notion of punctuality."[98] Throughout these remarks there is the strong suggestion that cinema may serve to discipline labour—a far cry from Sembène's "evening school of the people."[99] The vision of

---

[92] Vieyra, 308. Film production can of course not wait for this work of construction to conclude, as he was quick to add.

[93] Vieyra, 308.

[94] Vieyra, 309. Vieyra pleaded with his audience that "we must ensure every town and every village has its movie theatre as soon as possible"; in the meantime, mobile cinema vans could ensure the free circulation of films.

[95] "The filmmaker must be a worker like any other." Vieyra, 311.

[96] These ideas were informed by Vieyra's experience of working as an extra in the French post-war studio system. See Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Mon itinéraire cinématographique," in *Le cinéma et l'Afrique* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1969). "You cannot imagine what a [film] studio is if you have not practiced it"; "Over the days and the course of the film, I had ended up perfectly assimilating the way of working in this studio"; "Another lesson that I had to take away from my internship is the need for a good understanding between the members of the team on the set, where everyone must make the necessary effort to help create a good moral climate, essential to work in common… Everyone did what they had to do, and only that. In the cinema, more than elsewhere, I believe, it is essential to limit oneself to one's own domain…" Vieyra, "Mon itinéraire," 11, 14, 34.

[97] Vieyra, "Responsabilités," 308. Vieyra was following the Marxist orthodoxy of the time in seeing national economic development and industrialization as necessary preconditions for the formation of a revolutionary proletariat.

[98] Vieyra, 311. Movie theatres were central places of gathering alongside the mosque and the stadium—"not only on the Friday of prayer or the Sunday of the football match, but every day all year long," as one punter in the popular quarters of the Malian capital Bamako told the French anthropologist Pierre Haffner. See Pierre Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain* (Abidjan & Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1978), 26. For a discussion of West African practices of "commented cinema" in the post-independence era, see Vincent Bouchard, "Appropriation de l'œuvre audiovisuelle par le spectateur: le cas du film commenté au Sénégal et au Burkina Faso," in *Regarder des films en Afrique*, ed. Patricia Caillé and Claude Forest (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2017).

[99] Ousmane Sembène quoted in Annett Busch and Max Annas, *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2008), 54.

African cinema Vieyra presented at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome hew closely to the precepts of developmental nationalism. African filmmaking would have to be developed on an "industrial" scale and on the level of the nation-state if it was to develop at all.[100] The creation from scratch of national film industries would require a dirigiste approach: [101] Central planning through national cinema parastatals would prevent a "dispersion of forces" and ensure the "rational" organisation of the sector.[102]

Conceived on the eve of independence, Vieyra's earliest talks and writings bespeak the firm conviction that African cinema would shape up to become a productive force in its own right, contributing substantially and structurally to the development of African national economies while guiding Africa's "integration into technical civilisation."[103] A crucible of industry, technology, and culture, cinema would be a test case for the impending challenges of industrialisation, technological modernisation, and social change. However, this sweeping vision of African cinema as a motor of African development was tempered by the admission that its progress would initially be tentative. Among the obstacles Vieyra foresaw was the rule of functionaries "without initiative," promoted for their seniority rather than their competence.[104] He was also acutely aware of the gap that separated, in his words, the "underdeveloped" and "dependent" nations of the world from their "over-equipped" [*sur-equipé*] and "independent" counterparts.[105] For all his optimism of the will, there was no doubt in Vieyra's mind that filmmaking in Africa was going to be an immense struggle.

For Vieyra, the development of African cinema was of a piece with African development at large. This was its greatest promise. Twenty years on, that promise had not been borne out in reality. If by "cinema" we understand not just filmmakers and films, Guy

---

[100] Vieyra further developed this point later, in a talk given on the occasion of the First World Festival of Black Arts in 1966: "And if the majority of nations have obliged themselves to set up an industrial organisation of cinema, this is because it proved absolutely necessary for a rational production of films and in order for a national cinema to exist. Africa is the only continent not to possess such an industrial organisation. And as long as an industrial complex does not exist in Africa in this domain, one will never be able to speak of [a] veritable African cinema." Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Cinematographic Art: In Search of Its African Expression," in *1st World Festival of Negro Arts: Colloquium on Negro Art*, ed. Society of African Culture (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1968), 540.

[101] "We need economic control. At least in vital sectors, and cinema is one of them." Vieyra, "Responsabilités," 307.

[102] Vieyra, 308. Even on his preferred socialist model, Vieyra would allow, at least initially, for some private sector activity particularly in commercial film distribution, but not without stating the need here, too, for public control. (Such temporary accommodations with capital were a common feature of socialist development policy; see footnote 34.)

[103] Louis Senaïnon Béhanzin, "Responsabilités des Noirs d'Afrique en fait de culture scientifique," *Présence Africaine* 16 (1957): 74, quoted in Vieyra, "Propos," 117. In Béhanzin's view, which Vieyra here quotes approvingly, Africa's integration into technical civilization was a precondition for the "reintegration of Africa among the living civilizations."

[104] Vieyra, 309.

[105] Vieyra, 305.

Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle wrote in 1978, but a whole structure comprising production, distribution, exhibition and financial support, then "African cinema does not exist."[106] African cinema had not managed to give itself an industrial infrastructure, François Kodjo seconded in 1979; it had not "taken root" as an economic and cultural institution that would be capable of responding to the people's needs.[107] No independent "national cinemas" had emerged south of the Sahara, at least not in the sense that we speak of Italian, Japanese or Indian cinema.[108] The overall production volume of African cinema had been weak in the years immediately following the independences; by the end of the 1970s, it was stagnant or in decline.[109] Noting moderate growth from 1970 to 1975, Kodjo argued this was not indication of real structural change but merely the ephemeral outcome of an unspecified "favourable conjuncture"—note the extent to which the growth period indicated here dovetails with the most intense period of engagement, between 1969 to 1977, of the French Ministry of Cooperation's Bureau du cinéma.[110] Borrowing a phrase from the Latin American *dependentistas*, Kodjo designated African cinema a "blocked cinema."[111] This was not merely a case of "slow" development but a constant crisis of reproduction. In an article written that same year, Ki-Zerbo despaired: "African cinema is dying of hunger!"[112]

Much like Vieyra's forward-looking talk at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Rome, these later, retrospective testimonies posit a close mutuality between the development of African national cinemas and the fate of African nations. Although the active role Vieyra envisaged for the medium was everywhere thwarted or constrained, cinema in these accounts remained central to African development. The emphasis, however, was no longer on how cinema may propel development forward, but how it reflected its blockages and failures. Rather than the motor Vieyra hoped it would become, cinema turned into the broken mirror of African development, revealing in exemplary fashion the problems that beset the newly independent nations.[113] Filmmakers, as Vieyra noted in 1971, are not only artists but also technicians and businessmen.[114] As such, they

---

[106] Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Avant-propos," 6. Blaise Senghor, in 1964, was perhaps the first to state that "there are filmmakers but no cinema as it were." Senghor, "Pour un authentique cinéma," 105.
[107] Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 609.
[108] South Africa being the obvious exception.
[109] Kodjo considers Côte d'Ivoire, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger, Senegal and Benin.
[110] Kodjo, 610. See also Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema," 83.
[111] Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 606.
[112] Ki-Zerbo, "Cinema and Development," 73.
[113] Genova describes filmmaking in West Africa as a kind of heuristic: "The instruments of the cinema industrial complex were not the source of oppression, rather, by gaining access to and using them, one was able to locate the structural impediments to development and liberation." *Cinema and Development*, 3.
[114] See Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "La création cinématographique en Afrique," *Présence Africaine*, no. 77 (1971): 225–226.

were more intensely confronted with the material and infrastructural conditionality of their craft and its wider economy than other artists, especially the African and diasporic writers who centrally shaped the agenda of "decolonisation."[115] As filmmakers, they saw that underdevelopment was a "system of communicating vessels" (Cameroonian filmmaker Félix Ewandé in 1967),[116] and that matters of language and representation were grounded in material processes and relations.[117] The resolutions of the 1973 Third World Filmmakers Meeting in Algiers, formulated collectively by the filmmakers and activists in attendance, generalises this point: Cinema, they conclude, "also being an industry, is subjected to the same development as material production within the capitalist system."[118] The practice of filmmaking, as Fernando Birri put it at the same time but in relation to the Latin American context, "places us face to face with common and shared problems of existence."[119] Cinema in Africa and the Third World at large was not merely a mirror, then, but an exemplary struggle:[120] Its development, the resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting concluded, was "linked in a decisive way to the solutions which must be provided to all the problems with which our peoples are confronted."[121]

---

[115] Writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Chinua Achebe, or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, to name but a few. Vieyra writes: "The Black African novel, poetry, music, sculpture, painting—whether of foreign expression or not—have already asserted themselves for the simple reason that these are forms of expression that require few or no technological means." Vieyra, "Propos," 107. Or, as Thierno Monémembo put it more recently: "All one needs to write a novel is a cheap pen and some toilet paper. To make a film requires millions, when the GNP of most African countries barely exceeds the cost of a Hollywood blockbuster." Thierno Monémembo, "Just Like a Film," *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 11.

[116] Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 200.

[117] "Materialism and representation," as Genova rightly emphasises, "went hand in hand in the struggles that defined the field of film production." *Cinema and Development*, 46.

[118] Fernando Birri, Ousmane Sembène, Jorge Silva, Santiago Alvarez, Med Hondo, Jorge Cedron, Moussa Diakite, Flora Gomes, Mohamed Abdelwahad, El Hachmi Cherif, Lamine Merbah, Mache Khaled, Meziani Abdelhakim, Mamadou Sidibe, and Mostefa Bouali, "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting [1973]," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 278. The 1973 Third World Film-Makers Meeting in Algiers rallied North and sub-Saharan African as well as Latin American filmmakers to discuss shared problems and solutions. Med Hondo was present, and so were Fernando Birri (Argentina), and Ousmane Sembène. Also see María Roof, "African and Latin American Cinemas: Contexts and Contacts," in *Focus on African Films*, ed. Françoise Pfaff (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004): 243.

[119] Fernando Birri, "For a Nationalist, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema," *Screen* 26, no. 3–4 ([1984] 1985): 90.

[120] French anthropologist Pierre Haffner, linking the export of African films to that of peanuts or rubber and the import of foreign films to that of cars and television sets, described African cinema as the site of an "exemplary struggle" in the sphere of circulation. "Des écrans à la recherche d'une mémoire, des cultures à la recherche d'un miroir: 1er Festival panafricain de cinéma de Ouagadougou (5–13 février 1983)," *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, no. 35 (1983): 92.

[121] Birri et al., "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting," 280.

2.4 National cinemas with, against, and beyond the developmental state

The newly independent nations were uneasy combinations of ethnically or religiously defined parts, tied by colonial-era borders into regional isolation and global dependency. Vieyra, as we have seen, had high hopes for cinema as a "strategic dispositif to inculcate national aspirations and the national character."[122] The contribution of African cinema to nation-building would be twofold: to rally populations within and assert sovereignty without. For a nation to organise its film production, Vieyra wrote in 1959, "is to affirm its will to independence, to pass from the passive to the active stage of producer countries, to make itself known to the outside world."[123]

The reality was quite different. While African governments paid lip service to the importance of mass communications in the context of nation-building and modernisation, they remained largely inactive in the domain of cinema.[124] In the first decade after the independences, state-funded film production was generally limited to newsreels of political, economic, and cultural life: "'State visits', 'inaugurations,' etc. succeed each other in vain, piling up at the back of corridors," as Ewandé derided the genre.[125] Kodjo's name for this official image production, beholden to political power, was "state visit cinema."[126] Most other kinds of cinema had to procure funding and material support from elsewhere.[127] The holders of power, Ewandé complained in 1967, had not assumed "any constructive attitude whatsoever," nor were they taking steps to elucidate the causes of "African cinematographic underdevelopment."[128] In Francophone West Africa, it was only after filmmakers had started making feature films—usually with support from the French Ministry of Cooperation's Bureau du cinéma—that their governments realised the need for more systematic support and regulation.[129]

The 1970s inaugurated a new era, marked by more concerted efforts by African states to leave behind "neo-colonial dependency"[130]—also in the domain of cinema. The newfound political will to Africanise various sectors of cultural production led governments

---

[122] Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Résolution de la commission des arts: Le cinéma," *Présence Africaine* no. 24–25 Special issue on the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1959): 416.
[123] Vieyra, "Responsabilités du cinéma," 307.
[124] See Ayi-Francisco D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociale au moyen du cinéma: le cas des pays africains," *Tiers-Monde* 24, no. 95 (1983): 583.
[125] Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 200.
[126] For a closer look at "state visit cinema" see my discussion of Moustapha Alassane's *Bon voyage, Sim* (1966), which is an animated parody of the genre (see 6.2).
[127] Although state visit cinema at times also relied on foreign technical and financial assistance (see 2.5).
[128] Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 205.
[129] See Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 608.
[130] Kodjo, 608.

also to reconsider their film policies, prompting many to create their own national film services and some to nationalise film distribution. However, the newly minted cinema parastatals largely retained the information bias. In part an inheritance from colonial film units, official film production, ostensibly devoted to furthering the "civic and political formation of populations," [131] kept veering close to state propaganda. In Gabon, government ministers decided on themes for cinematic treatment;[132] unwelcome political points of view could be censored or suppressed at the production stage. What limited means the developmental state made available were funnelled through deliberately narrow channels.

National film centres were frequently mismanaged, with "heavy equipment" and "excessive personnel for the smallest of tasks,"[133] and compounded by a general lack of co-ordinated policies. Functionaries at Africa's cinema parastatals, as Kodjo was not alone to note, had a preference for prestigious infrastructure projects which ended up underused or abandoned due to lack of funding for actual filmmaking: Large-scale construction, as in other sectors, effectively served as a means of surplus absorption by post-colonial elites. Moreover, even after the nationalisation of film distribution, states exercised little effective regulatory oversight over imports, distribution, and exhibition. African governments generally had little control over what was being shown on African screens. Because governments were loath to fund what they could not control, they denied independent filmmakers access to the production equipment centralised in state organisations.[134] In response to the inactivity, or inefficacy, of the developmental state, African filmmakers shifted towards the demand for a combined organisation of film production by way of public-private partnerships, as evidenced, for instance, in the 1982 "Niamey Manifesto."[135] However, while African merchant capital did make small forays into film production and exhibition, the distribution sector remained firmly out of reach.[136] Private initiative, discouraged by lacking state regulation, failed to fill the gaps in the valorisation chain of African cinema. Despite efforts at nationalisation, independent African filmmakers remained dependent on foreign funding, material, equipment, and facilities, with little prospect of entering into commercial distribution (see 2.7).

---

[131] From a presidential ordinance of 1970 in Upper Volta for the promotion of cinema production, quoted in Kodjo, 610.
[132] Acceptable themes were the rural exodus, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, child education, etc. See Kodjo, 610.
[133] Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 203.
[134] D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 583.
[135] Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes, "Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). See also John D.H. Downing, "Post-Tricolor African Cinema: Toward a Richer Vision," in *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*, ed. Dina Sherzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 191.
[136] See D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 583.

Different explanations have been advanced for the state's behaviour. Some have described it as a failure of the imagination on the part of state actors, who underestimated the true stakes of mass communications or had other development priorities.[137] But cinema also carried political risks for African governments. Instead of recognising African filmmakers as "animators of development," by Ewandé's evocative account, post-colonial elites perceived them as "killjoys" threatening to "rouse a sleeping continent."[138] With Frederick Cooper, we may recognise in all of this the persistence of the colonial "gatekeeper state," designed to allow a relatively weak elite monopolise resources by narrowing channels of trade and communication, ensuring that economic and political relations would pass through nodes under their control.[139] Mass communications were centralised in the hands of a Westernised elite, reflecting their interests and leaving little room for popular participation. It was, in the words of Congolese sociologist Ayi-Francisco D'Almeida, a "normative communication," which imposed a cultural model chosen by the social groups which held political, economic, and cultural power under the influence of foreign interests.[140]

"[T]his wonderful tool," Kodjo lamented, "has always been seized from those who need it most and, what is more, has been made without them";[141] it was time, he declared in 1979, for the cinema of the gatekeeper state to give way to "national and popular cinemas." To reconnect with "the people," he argued, echoing Fernando Birri and other Latin American filmmakers, it was necessary to delink from the infrastructures of national film production and distribution, and to create networks and a base of operations autonomous of the state.[142] Kodjo pleaded for the establishment of autonomous craft associations which could apply pressure on the controlling organisms of the state to implement adequate and equitable film policies. But the state would not willingly cease control over an instrument as powerful as cinema; just as important in his view was the establishment of production units and distribution circuits controlled by the filmmakers themselves, allowing them to produce and distribute the films they wanted, "directly among the African

---

[137] See Almeida, 583.

[138] Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 200. D'Dée called filmmakers the "most dangerous of artists" because their work connected most directly with the masses. D'Dée, "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire," *L'Afrique actuelle*, 15 (1967): 5.

[139] Cooper, "Writing the History of Development," 18.

[140] D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 588. Sidney Sokhona called filmmakers who were lending their talents to the glorification of African rulers the "griots of power"—somewhat ironically, given that Sokhona later took up a position in the Mauritanian government. Sidney Sokhona, "Notre cinéma," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 285 (1978): 55.

[141] Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 614.

[142] See, e.g., Birri, "For a Nationalist, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema." Cf. Sada Niang's discussion, which collapses African nationalism and national cinema. Sada Niang, *African Nationalist Cinema: Legacy and Transformations* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014), EPUB.

masses."[143] National-popular cinemas would re-anchor the *self* of self-determination in the people, as the radical "Algiers Charter on African Cinema" declared in 1975: "The issue is not to try to catch up with the developed capitalist societies, but rather to allow the masses to take control of the means of their own development, giving them back the cultural initiative by drawing on the resources of a fully liberated popular creativity."[144]

Instead of imposing a normative mode of communication in the top-down manner of state-sponsored cinema, filmmakers had to establish contact with the people's understanding of, and ways of being in, the world. Making cinema with the people meant to immerse oneself in their everyday lives, careful not to leave their, albeit mutable, horizon of experience. Filmmakers, said Sembène, may "chew over" or "orient" a given situation, "but the power to decide escapes every artist."[145] Films had to be elaborated in an exchange with the people, breaking with the one-way, sender-receiver model entrenched in industrial cinemas. The industrial model of filmmaking endorsed by Vieyra, with its division of labour and studio enclosure, seemed ill-suited to this task. D'Almeida instead recommended a radical decentralisation and redistribution of the means of communication, "to create an amplification of the cycle, a stronger collective participation and thus a polycentric activity."[146] Against the centralised authority of state cinema, oral culture was posited as the ideal type of a more mutual form of political communication.[147]

Whether filmmakers entered into direct opposition to the state or merely tried to eke out an existence in the absence of state support, many of them ended up having to establish a material base that allowed them to operate independently.[148] Paul Willemen has argued that as a consequence of their "artisanal, relatively low-cost" mode of production, Third Cinema filmmakers were able to eschew not only the economic but also the cultural strictures typical of national film industries. Against the "unifying and homogenising work of mainstream industrial cinemas, this artisanal cinema "allowed […] a more focused address of the 'national', revealing divisions and stratifications within a national

---

[143] Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 613. D'Almeida demanded that all power and knowledge be given to "producers." D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 588. "Functionary cinema," said Ewandé, had to become "functional cinema." Ewandé, "Causes du sous-développement," 204-205.

[144] Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes, "The Algiers Charter on African Cinema [1975]," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 297.

[145] Busch and Annas, *Interviews*, 78. "I live in a capitalist society and I can't go any further than the people." Sembène in *Interviews*, 47.

[146] D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 588.

[147] I will return to the political uses of orality in my discussion of Balogun's work on indigenisation (see 4.2).

[148] This would not have been possible without the concurrent development of smaller, lighter, cheaper, and easier to use image and sound recording equipment.

formation, ranging from regional dialects to class and political antagonisms."[149] While the struggle for liberation had been fought under the banner of the nation, national popular cinemas ended up subverting and displacing monolithic notions of national sovereignty and belonging.

Another response to the lack of state support and regulation was the internationalisation of African cinema. Already in 1959, Vieyra cautioned that the soon-to-be independent nations would not be able to sustain industrial-scale film production each on their own.[150] Lacking an "industrial fabric," D'Almeida seconded, the emergent polities did not individually dispose of sufficient capital or technical personnel to allow for the creation of modern communications systems that would be economically and technologically independent.[151] The technical infrastructure of African cinema was "impossible to be maintained and made profitable on a national level," as the "Niamey Manifesto" restated, and so had to be organised transnationally.[152] In 1969/1970, mirroring parallel efforts at regional and continental integration on the intergovernmental level, the Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes (FEPACI) was created in Ouagadougou, modelled on the OAU, where it held observer status, as an all-African planning body for the development of African cinema. FEPACI's initially radical brief was to unite the continent's filmmakers and upend neo-colonial dependency; its policies were focussed on the sphere of exchange, lobbying for tax reform and the coordination of tariffs on foreign imports, the nationalisation of film distribution, and the creation of regional markets. FEPACI was also the main force behind the establishment of the Festival panafricain de cinéma de Ouagadougou (FESPACO), a main "contact zone"—together with the pioneering Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage in Tunisia—which was not only an important display of African films barred entrance to regular distribution, but also provided a space for filmmakers to see and discuss each other's work and get organised.[153] Not coincidentally, many manifestos of the period cited in this literature review were written in Ouagadougou on this biennial occasion. Few would deny that the founding of FEPACI and FESPACO were major accomplishments, however, their activities have also attracted severe criti-

---

[149] Paul Willemen, "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989), 5.

[150] See Vieyra, "Résolution de la commission des arts," 416.

[151] D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 585.

[152] Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes, "Niamey Manifesto," 306. The manifesto's authors—filmmakers, critics, and officials from several African countries—encouraged the commissioning of joint studies of extant infrastructures. Many such efforts were undertaken, among others by Ola Balogun. See his *Consultancy on African Cinema*.

[153] The term "contact zone" is from Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina, who use it in reference to the Asian-African Film Festival in Tashkent in the former Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. See Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina, "Tashkent '68: A Cinematic Contact Zone," *Slavic Review* 75, no. 2 (2016).

cism from filmmakers and fellow travellers.[154] The French-Tunisian journalist Farida Ayari, writing for *Le Continent*, has described FEPACI as paper tiger "plagued by lack of means" and producing "verbiage and motions which often remain a dead letter."[155] The Tunisian filmmaker and critic Férid Boughedir alleged embezzlement of funds.[156] FESPACO and the festival circuit more generally have likewise been subject to fundamental criticism. While enabling new audiences to see African films, and filmmakers to see and debate each other, festival participation was seen by some as a placebo, failing to generate more sustained visibility.

FEPACI and FESPACO are but the most prominent examples of what we might call the "elective internationalism" of African cinema. They also highlight its limitations. There is now ample research on these and other such networks of support and exchange, tracing "cine-geographies" of international linkage, whether pan-African, socialist, or tricontinental/non-aligned.[157] This important body of research has focussed the transnational in terms of solidarity and connectivity, foregrounding efforts to create a counter-logistics of film production and distribution which would reroute existing unilateral dependencies into more equitable and interdependent relations.[158] Frequently remarked upon, though less thoroughly researched, is the reverse of this elective internationalism—what we might call the "forced internationalisation" of African cinema or its generalised condition of "extraversion."[159] From its inception, sub-Saharan African cinema has been chained to European funding, material provisioning and technical support. Francophone African cinemas were bound to French developmental aid dispensed by the Ministry of Cooperation and the institutions of Francophonie. It is no exaggeration to say that this type of aid,

---

[154] The literature is often laudatory and sometimes apologetic of FEPACI. See., e.g., Patrick G. Ilboudo, *Le FESPACO 1969-1989: les cinéastes africains et leurs œuvres* (Ouagadougou: Editions la Mante, 1988).

[155] "For lack of means, FEPACI has not been able to convene every three years, as foreseen in its statutes; its last congress was in 1975 in Algiers." Farida Ayari, "Vers un renouveau du cinéma africain: faut-il dissoudre la FEPACI?," *Le Continent: quotidien de l'Afrique*, March 9, 1981: 10.

[156] Férid Boughedir quoted in Philippe J. Maarek, ed., *Afrique noire: quel cinéma? Actes du colloque Université Paris X Nanterre, décembre 1981* (Nanterre: Association du Ciné-Club de l'Université Paris X, 1983), 68.

[157] For a programmatic statement of this research perspective, see Eshun and Gray, "The Militant Image: A Ciné-geography."

[158] See, e.g., Roof, "African and Latin American Cinemas"; Josephine Woll, "The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa," in *Focus on African Films*, ed. Françoise Pfaff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Victoria Pasley, "Kuxa Kanema: Third Cinema and Its Transatlantic Crossings," in *Rethinking Third Cinema: The Role of Anti-colonial Media and Aesthetics in Postmodernity*, ed. Frieda Ekotto and Adeline Koh (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009); Mahomed Bamba, "In the Name of 'Cinema Action' and Third World: The Intervention of Foreign Film-Makers in Mozambican Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of African Cinemas* 3, no. 2 (2012); Rasha Salti, ed., *Saving Bruce Lee: African and Arab Cinema in the Era of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2018).

[159] See Paul Willemen, "The National," in *Looks and Frictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 211. See also Paulin J. Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

couched in philanthropic terms like "cooperation" or "technical and cultural assistance," was what made these cinemas possible, however, it also effectively limited their possibilities for growth, while perpetuating itself as a permanent necessity. D'Almeida framed the problem in terms of "dependence": "The industrial methods and structures which fundamentally determine cinematographic activity being few and far between, the cinema as activity, despite recent evolutions, remains a marginal social fact. One observes thus an insufficient integration of a practice whose evolution often depends on institutions outside of African countries, which constitutes the foundation of the dependence of African cinemas."[160] In the next section, complementing and complicating extant scholarship on nation-building and transnational linkage, I offer an overview of these vectors of extraversion.

2.5 Extraversion: African cinema and development aid

African cinema did not begin on African soil. Still under colonial rule, a group around Mamadou Sarr and Paulin Vieyra, who had recently graduated from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in Paris, formed the Groupe africain du cinéma (GAC). It was their intention to make a film documenting the rural exodus that was underway in West Africa, looking at how farmers who had relocated to the cities were adjusting to urban modernity.[161] However, Vieyra and his crew were denied shooting permission under the notorious *décret* Laval—a law issued in 1934 which arrogated French colonial administrators absolute control over all filming activity in the overseas territories—and instead made *Afrique-sur-Seine* (1955), a documentary about African diasporic lives in the French imperial capital. While some consider it the first film of sub-Saharan Africa, others have questioned its "Africanness."[162] Whether *Afrique-sur-Seine* was "African" or not, it was made in France only because the filmmakers were legally prevented from filming in French West Africa. Both sides of this argument miss the larger point: As an early instance of forced internationalisation, this colonial-era film was entirely typical of "African cinema."

Paris remained the extraterritorial capital of Francophone African cinema even after the independences. Since there were no film schools in sub-Saharan Africa (with the ex-

---

[160] D'Almeida, "Les politiques de communication sociales," 584.
[161] See Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 83.
[162] See, e.g., David Murphy, "Francophone West African Cinema, 1955–1969: False Starts and New Beginnings," in *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*, ed. Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy (London: Modern Humanities Research Association/Maney Publishing, 2014).

ception of South Africa) at that time, aspiring filmmakers who were not trained in the context of colonial or ethnographic filmmaking, or by foreign filmmakers who came to support the ongoing liberation struggles in Lusophone Africa, had no choice but to go abroad to get an education.[163] The same was true for other film-related training professions. IDHEC offered bursaries for African students;[164] they also went to Moscow, Rome, Havana, West or East Berlin.[165] Lacking technical training, equipment, and funds, and with little or no support from African governments disinterested in, or wary of, supporting feature film production, African filmmakers relied on financial aid, technical assistance, and facilities—especially for post-production—provided by, and often located in, metropolitan centres, where many ended up spending a considerable part of their lives, if they were not based there entirely. Most aggravating for African filmmakers was their continued reliance on overseas processing facilities. This was more than a mere nuisance, not least because it meant filmmakers were prevented from viewing daily rushes.

Few Africans had been trained as film and cinema technicians in the colonial era. Newsreel production in the aftermath of independence was forced to rely on outside technical support extended, for instance, by the Consortium audio-visuel international (CAI), a private-public partnership set up in 1961 by the French Ministry of Cooperation, formerly the Ministry of the French Colonies, with the explicit brief of maintaining ties to its former colonies. An association of the French moving image news agencies Eclair, Gaumont, Pathé, and Les Actualités françaises, CAI provided what was called "technical cooperation," that is, these French new agencies aided in the production of African newsreels and the training of African technicians in return for a participation in earnings.[166] Timité Bassori described the logic of these partnerships as analogous to the value chain of primary goods production: "It is moreover not uncommon to see in these [CAI] offices enormous dumps of unedited rushes waiting for credits for the finishing work (editing,

[163] See Bassori, "Un cinéma mort-né?," 114.
[164] See Maurice Robin quoted in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 27.
[165] Vieyra, in 1975, suggested that most African filmmakers had received their training outside of Africa. See *Le cinéma africain*, 247. Sembène: "It's true; I learned how to make films in the Soviet Union. I didn't have a choice." Sembène quoted in Busch and Annas, *Interviews*, 58. Fernando Birri founded a school in San Antonio de Los Baños, Cuba, which pursued a policy of tricontinentalist solidarity and educated a number of African students as "filmotelecrafters." See Fernando Birri, "From 'Birth Certificate of the International School of Cinema and Television in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, Nicknamed the School of the Three Worlds,'" in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). For further histories of transnational learning, see Madeleine Bernstorff, "Transnationales Lernen," Archiv der Deutschen Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, Deutsche Kinemathek, https://dffb-archiv.de/editorial/transnationales-lernen; 2018; Gabrielle Chomentowski, "Filmmakers from Africa and the Middle East at VGIK during the Cold War," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 13, no. 2 (2019). In 1976, the Institut africain d'études cinématographiques (INAFEC) was founded in Ouagadougou. See Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 223.
[166] See Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 607.

adding of the soundtrack, lab work)."[167] CAI also sponsored French filmmakers producing ethnographic and "development films" in the region, like Serge Ricci in Upper Volta or Serge Moati in Niger.[168]

In 1963, the Ministry of Cooperation opened the doors of its Paris-based Bureau du cinéma to African filmmakers. Initially just a technical section offering basic 16mm production equipment and editing facilities to French *coopérants* in Francophone West Africa, the Bureau was now also extending technical and financial support for African "cultural filmmaking."[169] Under the direction of its first and long-time director, Jean-René Debrix, the Bureau offered monies, equipment, facilities, and skilled personnel in exchange for the non-commercial distribution rights to the films it co-produced. Though even at the height of its operation the Bureau did not number more than a dozen employees, it soon became the main producer of African films in the region.[170] From 1970 onwards, additional financial aid was made available by the Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique (ACCT), the central organ of Francophonie.

The budgets dispensed by the Bureau were small—not enough to produce "half a film" in France, as Debrix' successor, Jacques Gérard, later admitted[171]—and the assistance offered signally failed to include a salary for filmmakers, who had to support themselves while editing their films in Paris.[172] In some cases, an advance was granted on the purchase of rights, though Claire Andrade-Watkins, in her detailed and nuanced account of the Bureau's activities, has noted a "strong preference for completed films or works in progress," which effectively became a form of direct aid.[173] While it was the Bureau's practice to address African filmmakers individually, completely bypassing African cinema parastatals, funding was not released directly but via an associated French producer, nor were filmmakers free to decide how to spend it. As Andrade-Watkins has shown, the contractual terms ensured that "the allocated amount remained within the Bureau and was applied directly to the costs of the technical services, labs, editors and sound mixing of a

---

[167] Bassori, "Un cinéma mort-né?," 112.

[168] Moati is centrally featured in the chapter on Alassane (see 6.3).

[169] "Coopérants" were engineers, sociologists, geographers, ethnographers, etc. For a concise history of "technical and cultural cooperation" in the age of development, drawing on interviews with administrative and technical personnel of the Bureau du cinéma, see Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema." This also the main account I rely on for the present reconstruction.

[170] Throughout its existence, from 1963 to 1998, the Ministry of Cooperation has offered financial and technical support to three hundred feature films and over five hundred shorts, fictional or documentary works, realised by Francophone West Africans but also by Lusophone Africans and filmmakers in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, etc.). See Teresa Hoefert de Turegano, "Continuité et transition dans la coopération cinématographique française en Afrique," *CinémAction*, no. 106 (2003): 59.

[171] Jacques Gérard in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 56.

[172] Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema," 82. However, "while the filmmaker was in Paris, the Bureau would sometimes provide a small per diem." (ibid.)

project which was billed to the Bureau."[174] A large part of the Bureau's expenses was thus recuperated.

The Bureau interacted directly with filmmakers, who were answerable to French associate producers rather than African cinema parastatals, openly undermining the sovereignty of African "partners." While this granted filmmakers reprieve from political repression at home, it subjected them to French influence. We find very different assertions about the nature of this influence in the literature, but detail is generally lacking. John D.H. Downing has suggested, rather generally, that African filmmakers may have been disinclined to bite the hand that feeds them.[175] Andrade-Watkins, in her historical account of the Bureau's work, emphasises the spontaneous and emergent nature of much of the Bureau's operations throughout the 1960s and 70s. Selection criteria were "casual," she surmises from interviews she conducted with Bureau staff, granting inordinate power to its director, Jean-René Debrix.[176] In James Genova's account, the Bureau was founded when the French realised they could no longer keep Africans from making films.[177] He asserts the colonial bias of French developmental aid by pointing to personal continuities between French colonial agencies and the Ministry of Cooperation, and alleges the French were somehow managing the "image-Africa" in the films they helped make, however, beside a reference to "rural" themes in Bureau-sponsored films, a more sustained discussion of what this "management" may have entailed is sorely missing.[178] With the exception of the Bureau's initial rejection of Sembène's *La noire de…* (France/Senegal, 1966) and its attempted interference in the production of Sembène's *Mandabi* (France/Senegal, 1968), Genova offers little evidence in support of his claims.[179] The Tunisian filmmaker Férid Boughedir, for his part, has always defended Debrix, maintaining that there had been very few cases of censorship during his tenure, and green light for many films opposed to France's political interests.[180] Maurice Robin, a former education secretary at the French Foreign Ministry, was envious of the Ministry of Cooperation's

---

[173] Andrade-Watkins, 82. The Bureau thought of this as a "policy precaution." (ibid.)

[174] Andrade-Watkins, 82.

[175] Downing, "Post-Tricolor African Cinema," 192.

[176] Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema," 82.

[177] "French officials in the Ministère de la coopération, through its Bureau du cinéma, recognized that they could no longer prevent Africans from picking up the camera to make their own films." Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 130.

[178] Genova, 130. On a more cautious note, Teresa Hoefert de Turegano has asserted that the promotion of "African cultural identities" was an abiding concern at the Bureau. Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, "Sub-Saharan African Cinemas: The French Connection," *Modern & Contemporary France* 13, no. 1 (2005): 73.

[179] With *La noire de...* it was less a case of "management" as of outright rejection, though the film's non-commercial screening rights were later acquired by the Bureau, after the films' completion. In light of what Andrade-Watkins relates of the Bureau's selection criteria, this does not strike me as unusual or especially punitive. On the alleged interference in *Mandabi* see Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 140.

[180] See Boughedir in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 32–34.

famously broad and integral remit, which encompassed economic and cultural develop-
ment, education, etc., as well as what he described as the Ministry's "experimental" insti-
tutional culture.[181] Robin's envy attests to the fact that individual administrators had am-
ple scope for informal and discretionary decision-making. As Andrade-Watkins has
shown, Jean-René Debrix personally made the "casual" decisions determining which Af-
rican films were funded and produced from his Paris office. Debrix also helped coordi-
nate efforts by *coopérants* in West Africa. Given his wide range of discretion, it will be of
great interest to look more closely at his ideas about African cinema and his hopes for its
development.[182]

French *coopérants* were genuinely invested in the emergence of "African cinema,"
but their activities at the same time regulated and limited its potential. The Bureau's con-
tractual terms may serve as a case in point, obliging filmmakers to sign away non-
commercial screening rights to the Bureau when non-commercial circuits—community
centres, schools, embassies—were an important alternative to foreign-controlled com-
mercial distribution. The material provided by the Bureau was usually 16mm, which fur-
ther removed films from commercial distribution (run on 35mm). As a consequence, the
first African films were confined to French amateur film festivals and the circuit of eth-
nographic cinema. Managing capital flows and the distribution of finished films, the Bu-
reau thus effectively pulled African cinema back into France's orbit.

Andrade's interviews with Bureau staff are pervaded by patronising attitudes towards
African filmmakers.[183] As I will show in chapter 6, show such attitudes also prevailed
among French *coopérants* "on the ground." However, we do not have to assume bad faith
on the part of individual French actors for the structuralised logic of development aid em-
bedded in its contractual terms to play itself out time and again. The Bureau's interven-
tion enabled individual creation but contributed nothing to the development of more per-
manent, autonomous structures that would enable African filmmakers to reproduce their
practice. It produced *African films* but no *African cinema*, instituting a circle of continued
dependency. Maurice Robin asserts that the true end of cooperation is *the end of coopera-
tion*, but this is manifestly false.[184] At the end of the Bureau's lifetime, the material de-
pendence of African cinema was as great as in the beginning.[185] The continued reliance of

---

[181] Maurice Robin in Maarek, 16.
[182] In chapter 6 on Alassane I will do just that; I also uncover an instance of direct political interference by
Debrix in Alassane's work (see 6.2).
[183] For instance, the editor Bernard Lefèvre refers to a filmmaker as "boy" [*garçon*]. See Andrade-Watkins,
"France's Bureau of Cinema," 86.
[184] Robin in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 43.
[185] See Hoefert de Turegano, "Continuité et transition"; Andrade-Watkins, "France's Bureau of Cinema,"
88.

African cinema on French aid in turn reproduced the need for the Ministry of Cooperation and its Bureau du cinéma: The true end of cooperation, as of all bureaucracies, was to perpetuate its own existence.[186]

In the early eighties, under Debrix' successor Jacques Gérard, the Bureau du cinéma was restructured and its famous latitude of operation severely curtailed. Among the reasons for this change in direction Gérard mentions President François Mitterrand's (1981–1996) new raison d'état, which quite rightly posited that it should not be up to individual French government officials to select which projects are worthy of support. Aid for individual filmmakers was replaced by aid for the development of African film industries at large, to be disbursed to African cinema parastatals. In reality, however, instead of bringing more structural and democratic support, budgets at the Bureau were simply cut back, Mitterrand's policy change acting as a convenient pretext for divestment.[187] In 1998, the Ministry of Cooperation was subsumed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its brief again reformed. The special relationship to the former French colonies in Africa was relinquished and recast in a more global orientation: Cinema aid was now extended to all countries where France was involved in development projects. On paper at least, this new policy was aimed at the development of production and distribution capacities in the countries concerned. Responding to criticism of recuperative aid, it also allowed for up to fifty percent of the awards to be disbursed outside of France. The budget for this much enlarged field of engagement remained the same, however, reflecting the general diminution of French development aid in the 1990s.[188]

It is no exaggeration to say that "cultural and technical cooperation" made early African cinema possible in the first place. That filmmaking took off later in British ex-colonies such as Nigeria was in part due to the fact that the British did offer no such support.[189] However, while Francophone African cinema was made possible by French Cooperation, it was also thereby limited in its possibilities. Cinema relies on a whole infrastructural array—equipment, postproduction facilities, film schools—which filmmakers generally could not access on the continent. Foreign funding and technical assistance did not change that, on the contrary, they perpetuated this generalised state of extraversion.

---

[186] Raphaël Millet makes this point in "(In)dépendance," 160–162.

[187] See Jacques Gérard in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 36.

[188] See Hoefert de Turegano, "Continuité et transition," 60–61.

[189] Ola Balogun, having lived in Paris and published in the French language, was very aware of these differing lineages. As UNDP consultant to the UAO, he identified the absence of a British equivalent to the French Ministry of Cooperation as one of the reasons behind the "relatively slow take-off" of Nigerian and Ghanaian film production. See Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 9. When production finally did take off in Nigeria, production volumes were small even in comparison to Francophone West Africa, and far from meeting demand. A favourable year saw no more than five feature films being produced. See Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 44.

Genova has argued that the first generation of African filmmakers—he mentions Vieyra, Sembène, and Hondo—"engaged with wider global trends while drawing explicitly on local experiences."[190] From the systematic perspective suggested here, we might add that these filmmakers worked within a historical dynamic that *by force* exceeded national confines; that film production in Francophone West Africa was so deeply entangled with French Cooperation that African filmmakers were forced to reckon with their place in the world in other than merely "local" terms. Ousmane Sembène has been exalted as a filmmaker on a quest for "the development of truly African creativity, free of foreign influence."[191] And sure enough Sembène's recommendation was for a consequent delinking from the Bureau. But his practice, too, was affected by the structuralised forms of foreign influence that shaped African cinema after the independences.[192] To say that every film frame was a mediation of economic and cultural dependencies is not to deny Sembène's agency but fully to recognise his struggle.

2.6 The question of technology: indigenisation, poor cinema, and repair

"When the native hears a speech about Western culture, he pulls out his knife," Frantz Fanon wrote in his final work, published in 1961.[193] To which Clyde Taylor replied, some thirty years later: "But does he do so when he sees a moped or a portable tape-recorder?"[194] Taylor's retort to Fanon suggests that it is easy to overlook the biases inherent in technology. Although the uptake of cinematic technology was a hotly contested issue among African filmmakers, there is little sustained engagement with this question in the literature. Where Taylor's caveat is considered at all, it is often to dismiss it out of hand. James Genova, for instance, maintains that the first generation of African filmmakers unanimously welcomed cinema as a "desired technology." Rather than attach "inherent moral attributes" to the tools of their craft, he argues, they saw them as the "patrimo-

[190] Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 74.

[191] Teshome H. Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 25.

[192] Bouchard writes that "it is wrong to think that the French Cooperation did not provide any assistance to Sembène during the filming of *Borom Sarret*. André Zwobada (in charge of French News in Senegal) is listed as co-producer, since he provided the camera and 16-mm film." Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 221. There was a division in the political administration of French cultural cooperation, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of North Africa, and the Ministry of Cooperation in charge of sub-Saharan Africa. The latter commanded much more substantial means. See Maurice Robin in *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 14–15.

[193] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, [1961] 2001), 33. Fanon was paraphrasing Nazi playwright Hanns Johst, who wrote: "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun."

[194] Clyde Taylor, "Black Cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989), 98.

ny of humankind."[195] Teshome Gabriel, likewise, too quickly dismisses the question of technology, which, he says, "does not in itself produce or communicate meaning."[196] It is true that mass media technologies were embraced by some African commentators as a "neutral tool" or even a "panacea" for the problems of underdevelopment, mirroring similar hopes for technological modernisation in general.[197] Such attitudes, abetted by "development communications" (the media studies arm of modernisation theory), were not so different from contemporary dispensations of the "techno-fix," as Zoë Druick points out.[198] But not everybody concurred, and the relationship of African filmmakers to the technology of cinema—including not only cinematic technologies proper but also adjacent and underlying technological infrastructures—was much more complicated than Genova's gloss would suggest.

In the colonial era, cinema had served as an amplifier of colonial propaganda and a disciplinary tool, a powerful and seductive means to "devitalise" autochthonous cultures and entrench Western cultural hegemony, and a shopping window for the promotion of Western commodities and the dissemination of Western patterns of consumption, helping prime the colonies as selling markets.[199] Cinema was exhibited in the colonies as the spectacular invention of technologically advanced industrial societies, awing African audiences and perpetuating ideas of Western superiority.[200] Back in the mother country, cinema was a means to legitimise colonial investment by showing off the colonies' "sights, particularities, industries, products, indigenous populations, so that their beauties

---

[195] Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 3.

[196] Gabriel does acknowledge "the ideological carry-overs that technology imposes" but optimistically thinks these may easily be challenged by creative use of "filmic form." Teshome H. Gabriel, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989), 39.

[197] Eno Belinga, "Audiovisuel et tradition orale," in *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions africaines, 1972), 247.

[198] Druick describes this as "the idea of social improvement through the enlightened application of technology that continues to characterize our own day." Zoë Druick, "UNESCO, Film, and Education: Mediating Postwar Paradigms of Communication," in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Haidee Wasson and Charles R. Acland (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 81.

[199] See Vieyra, "Résolution de la commission des arts," 415. Some films were produced especially for screening to colonised peoples, to propagate the war effort and rally indigenous troops, or to provide a base education—first only in British colonies, later, with the 1949 establishment of the Commission du cinéma d'outre-mer, also in the French colonial territories. See Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 606–7. See also Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, eds., *Empire and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[200] Lee Grieveson has forcefully argued that "exhibition functioned as a performance of modern colonial power, a kind of ritual of state power that started with film itself as the embodiment of the technological modernity that colonial power claimed for itself." Lee Grieveson, "What is the Value of a Technological History of Cinema?," *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 6 (2013): 5. Brian Larkin, in a similar vein, has shown how a crucial function of cinema in the colonial world was to "overwhelm people's senses with the spectacular achievements of science." Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 11.

and resources may be known."[201] For these reasons, cinema has been described as "a more blatantly colonized medium" than most.[202] The various strands of colonial-era filmmaking, spanning propaganda, educational, and ethnographic works, involved Africans in a variety of capacities and with varying degrees of agency: as subjects of colonial pedagogies or objects of study, but also behind the scenes, as "native informants," camera operators, and in other filmmaking capacities. While some of these African trainees went on to become filmmakers in their own right, the structures and practices of colonial cinema did not simply vanish with the end of colonial rule but were merely transfigured:[203] The technological sublime cultivated under colonial rule was replaced by the "technological paternalism" described by Manthia Diawara.[204]

In a report on film education which Ola Balogun drafted for UNESCO in 1975, he argued that "the machines of the technological age are still relative new-comers in Africa, and therefore still to some extent objects of awe," and cautioned that it might take one or more generations before Africans would reach "the stage of being fully at ease with them"[205] But while he diagnosed among his fellow Africans a "pre-technological mentality" and even suggested the "African mind" was unequipped to "cope with the mechanics of the film industry," Balogun also insisted that African culture was not in principle "pre-technological"—that Africa had always been a media environment.[206] African filmmakers sought ways to connect cinema to existing cultural forms and thereby reanimate the potentials inherent in the African media environment, opening new pathways for technological development and. In 1971, Vieyra lamented that "Africa has not yet invented any-

[201] Extraits de la circulaire ministérielle, no. 461, October 22, 1925, *Bulletin officiel France d'outre-mer*, quoted in Marcel L'Herbier, *Intelligence du cinématographe* (Paris: Editions Buchet-Chastel, 1946).

[202] Clyde Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 28 (1983). See also Shaka, *Modernity and the African Cinema*, 19.

[203] An exemplary case is that of French ethnographer Jean Rouch and his many African "pupils." His legacy will be considered in chapter 6 on Moustapha Alassane. Another example is Adama Halilu's *Shehu Umar* (Nigeria, 1976). Halilu maintained that the film had to be cut chronologically and with as few ellipses as possible so that it could be understood by his target audience. This view hew closely to the narratological recommendations expounded by colonial cinema administrators-theorists, based on the supposition of Africans' limited ability to understand montage and other forms of cinematic disjunction. We find related deliberations about African audiences' cognitive capacities in Vieyra's early writings. These lasting denigrations of African audiences—together with "really existing" African cinema culture—will be discussed in more detail in 6.3.

[204] Diawara, "Sub-Saharan African Film Production."

[205] Balogun, "The Education of the Film-Maker," 35.

[206] Balogun, 35. He qualifies his earlier statements, adding that "one would not expect a rural European or Asian, in similar circumstances, to grasp the intricacies of film-making either," and fiercely defends African arts and artists against claims of Western superiority. Interestingly, Balogun argues that technical proficiency is perhaps less important in the training of filmmakers than "constant and prolonged film-going," (36) which poses its own problems of access, especially in rural areas.

thing in matters of cinematographic technology,"[207] but that is not strictly true. To the technological forms and practices of the foreign experts, African filmmakers opposed their own, putting existing technologies to new uses and reinventing cinema in the process. Such were the stakes of indigenisation.[208]

Cinema, as we have seen in 2.3, held the promise of development in part because it was seen as a "technological" art. As such, it would contribute to bringing Africa up to the technological level of the so-called developed world. However, cinema was also seen in the context of the *problems* of technological modernisation. The technological solutions proffered by Western (or Western-trained) experts, notably in agriculture, were often dismissive of local knowledge and practice, and frequently proved ill-suited to the particularities of African climates and soils. Through misinformation or by design, they invariably led to the entrenchment of existing dependencies. Linking cinema to other forms of technological development, some questioned whether modern mass media could be assimilated to African realities or fully express African cultures.[209]

Genova discusses technology mainly in relation to a (poorly defined) "neo-colonial" domination in the economic realm, paying little attention to the wider post-colonial media environment and technological circuits. Filmmakers found that the question of indigenisation was never just about the camera—or moped, or tape-recorder—but the broader infrastructural assemblages and cultural techniques in which these pieces of technology were embedded, together with the path-dependencies inscribed in them. The emergence of cinema as a mass medium had for the better part of the twentieth century been associated with an "industrial" mode of production and trade, based on national industries catering to both national and international markets. Cinema, in this dominant mode, required sophisticated technological equipment, technical know-how, and a whole array of supporting infrastructures, some proper to the cinema, such as the machines and resources involved in shooting a film (studios, post-production facilities, projectors, and so forth), others merely ancillary yet equally necessary for its functioning, such as electric grids, running water, sealed roads, and other infrastructures that in developed societies were standard features of the built environment.[210] The experience of making and showing films in post-independence Africa brought into sharp relief the biases and conditionality

---

[207] "…neither mechanically by the creation of devices, nor chemically as regards emulsions or indeed in the field of physical sciences for the manufacture of camera objectives." Vieyra, "La création cinématographique," 219–220.

[208] I will explore in more details Balogun's thinking on how to "make cinema at home in Africa" (see 4.2).

[209] See, e.g., Doudou Diène, "La création audiovisuelle en Afrique," in *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe*, ed. Mohamed Aziza (Dakar; Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1977), 149–150.

of cinema's pre-established technological apparatus. It made starkly apparent that cinema was not a neutral form indifferent to context and content. Technologies and their underlying infrastructures were unevenly distributed, making painfully clear both the limits of technological penetration and reliance on foreign support.

The uptake of Western technology in the developing world involved adaptations and compromise. Cinema was no exception. African filmmakers were engaged in the creation of a technologically and financially "poor" cinema. Sembène famously theorised his modus operandi, which involved working with leftover film scraps, as a form of *mégotage*—literally, "cigarette-butt-age". Filmmakers all over the Third World, in Paul Willemen's account, were trying to "develop a different kind of mass culture while being denied the financial, technological and institutional support to do so."[211] In Brazil, Glauber Rocha proclaimed his "aesthetics of hunger"; in Cuba, Julio García Espinosa called for an "imperfect cinema"; in Argentina, Fernando Birri reflected on "cinema and underdevelopment"; in Uruguay, Mario Handler published his manifesto, "The Consciousness of a Need," referring both to the need *for* and the needs *of* cinema.[212] Self-consciously "poor" cinemas also emerged in Asia: In the Philippines, Kidlat Tahimik practiced "cups-of-gas filmmaking"; in Taiwan, Kao Chung-li made "anti-films" from discarded technologies.[213] If it was not possible to create and sustain the conditions for fully fledged film industries, these poetics of underdevelopment queried, was it possible to create a different kind of cinema? This was a global conversation based not on some positive commonality but a shared experience of "under-equipment."[214] What these practices did have in common was their defiant espousal of a procedural and (in)operative aesthetics, baring the traces of its process—the struggles and breakdowns of film production—while rejecting Western production values and criteria of accomplishment. Rocha rejected "the cloak of technicolor," Wole Soyinka, the "opulent illusionism" of Western cinema.[215] Kao Chung-li, for his part, used discarded or discontinued consumer technologies "made in Taiwan" to

---

[210] It is important to note that these "standard features" have since been eroded in parts of the Western world.

[211] Willemen, "Third Cinema," 13.

[212] See Glauber Rocha, "The Aesthetics of Hunger" [1965]; Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema" [1969]; Fernando Birri, "Cinema and Underdevelopment" [1962]; Mario Handler, "Consciousness of a Need" [1970]; in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[213] See Kidlat Tahimik, "Cups-of-gas Filmmaking vs. Full Tank-cum-Credit-Card Filmmaking," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2013); Kao Chung-li, "Experiment—My Film History" (unpublished translation from the Chinese original, undated), Microsoft Word file.

[214] The capacity to link situated practices to global interdependencies was a crucial and enduring aspect of Third Cinema's political aesthetics.

[215] Rocha, "Aesthetics of Hunger," 219; Wole Soyinka, "Theatre and the Emergence of the Nigerian Film Industry," in *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, ed. Alfred E. Opubor and

counter prevalent narratives of technological progress while pointing to the intensifying entanglement of this rapidly industrialising nation into the global economy.[216] "Imperfect cinema," wrote Espinosa, "must above all show the process which generates the problems. It is thus the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results, the opposite of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema, the opposite of a cinema which 'beautifully illustrates' ideas or concepts which we already possess."[217] This global conversation was not exclusively about a cinema of little means but also about struggling on a heteronomous field of practice.[218] Filmmakers in the developing world had no choice but to confront the technologies and infrastructures that sustained or, as the case may be, thwarted their efforts. As Clyde Taylor put it so succinctly: "It was not a question of fugitive pursuit after non-western purity (as though the 'populists' were unwilling to wear cloth not woven on hand-controlled looms) but of engagement in struggle with a system of domination."[219] As signs of this struggle, the salient "imperfections" of poor cinema were immediately political.

Although the Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima's gesture of "breaking tools" remained largely rhetorical,[220] the tools of this poor cinema frequently did break, and had to be repaired. Filmmaking in the developing world was not a heroic bringing-forth of sealed artworks into the world, but of necessity foregrounded the everyday making and remaking of that world. From production to storage, cinema was a constant labour that did not end when the work was "done." Constant upkeep and repair made starkly apparent the myriad forms of reproductive labour that sustain production—the labour of care and repair that guarantees, in media scholar Steven Jackson's words, "the ongoing survival of things as objects in the world."[221] If machines break or their functioning is somehow impaired, their secret powers are suddenly revealed, albeit in negative form, as obtrusiveness, obstinacy, and inoperability.[222] By opening otherwise closed systems,

---

Onuora E. Nwuneli (Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979).

[216] Working in close proximity to social movements but in isolation from the Taipei art scene, Kao explicitly identified as a proponent of Third Cinema.

[217] Espinosa, "Imperfect Cinema," 228.

[218] Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 74.

[219] Clyde Taylor, "Eurocentrics vs. New Thought at Edinburgh," *Framework*, no. 34 (1987): 143.

[220] See Haile Gerima, "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs Lucy," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989).

[221] Steven J. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 230.

[222] According to Heidegger, the malfunctioning of tools unconceals their thingness: "When we discover its unusability, the thing becomes conspicuous." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 73. And further on: "The modes of conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy have the function of bringing to the fore the character of objective presence in what is at hand." Heidegger, 74. There is a long philosophical and artistic lineage, artist Martine Syms has argued, of "using

maintenance and repair reveal the teeming life and hidden connections within black-boxed technologies.[223] Grappling with breakdown, filmmakers in the developing world thus confronted their tools as expressions of larger operating systems. Through practices of repair and adaptation, they not only restored technologies but expanded on their usefulness while seeking to escape technological dependencies. Foregrounding the inventiveness of "broken world thinking," Jackson argues against the "productivist bias" of media studies and enjoins us to "take erosion, breakdown, and decay, rather than novelty, growth, and progress, as our starting points."[224] This perspective on media technologies will prove generative in the context of this research (see in particular 4.6 and 6.5).

2.7 African film distribution and forms of circulation

In Paulin Vieyra's optimistic projection, cinema would be the "clearest window through which the nation regards the rest of the world."[225] In reality, African audiences were inundated by a constant stream of third-rate foreign genre films that only gave a very limited view of Western, and later Indian and Chinese, cultures.[226] Anxieties were ripe about cinema as a "Westernising vehicle of acculturation," as Togolese sociologist N'Sougan Ferdinand Agblemagnon wrote in 1965: "Among all the means of cultural penetration of which the West disposes in Africa, cinema is certainly among those which affirm both the West's universality and its force of influence."[227] Med Hondo lamented the "bulimic consumption of foreign films that bear no relation whatsoever to the needs and necessities of the cultural and economic development of our societies," warning that "the African public risks turning away from its own culture, its own history."[228] Their minds and bodies captured by foreign films, Africa cinema-goers were turning into "zombies emptied of all substance, disembodied beings."[229]

---

constraints to reveal the ideology of different mediums and genres." Martine Syms, "Black Vernacular: Reading New Media," on Martine Syms' official website, http://martinesyms.com/black-vernacular-reading-new-media/.

[223] As Jussi Parikka describes the scene: "a seemingly inert system opens up to reveal that objects contain more objects, and actually those numerous objects are composed of relations, histories, and contingencies." Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 149.

[224] Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," 221.

[225] Vieyra, "Résolution de la commission des arts," 416.

[226] The most prominent American genre, by a wide margin, was the Western. For figures, see Pommier, *Cinéma et développement*, 47–54.

[227] Both quotes are from N'Sougan Ferdinand Agblemagnon, "La condition socio-culturelle negro-africaine et le cinéma," *Présence Africaine*, no. 55 (1965): 32.

[228] Med Hondo, "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public: Document du C.A.C.," February 5, 1983, CAC 2–4, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

[229] Hondo quoted in Ibrahima Signaté, *Med Hondo: un cinéaste rebelle* (Paris & Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1994), 33.

In West Africa at independence, the import, distribution, and exhibition of films was de facto monopolised by European and American multinationals.[230] The circulation of African films was severely inhibited by this foreign monopoly, oftentimes limited to a few showings on the non-commercial and festival circuits. Foreign distributors-exhibitors syphoned off local profits but had no interest in the exhibition of African films, let alone the development of local film production. West Africa had the most extensive film distribution and exhibition network on the continent, yet when it came to distributing their own films, West African filmmakers found themselves, in Burkinabe film critic Emmanuel Sama's suggestive phrase, "foreigners in their own countries."[231] In the territories formerly known as French West Africa, two French monopolies, the Compagnie africaine cinématographique et commerciale (COMACICO) and the Société d'exploitation cinématographique africaine (SECMA), divided the market for distribution among themselves. Part-integrated, they not only controlled distribution but also owned a large proportion of movie theatres in the region, including in parts of Anglophone West Africa. Founded in the colonial era, SECMA and COMACICO had initially been headquartered in Casablanca. After the independences, both companies took up tax residence in the Principality of Monaco.[232] SECMA-COMACICO, as Timité Bassori observed in a 1964 article for *Présence Africaine*, were really in the business of extraction: "African cinema does not seem to interest them and they conduct their affairs as if they were trading timber or bananas."[233]

In response to this state of affairs, filmmakers everywhere in West Africa called for the nationalisation of film distribution. National and African quotas would grant African films access to African screens; tariffs on foreign imports and entertainment taxes would provide the financial basis for the establishment of national film funds on the European model. However, even where these calls were heeded, steps taken towards nationalisation remained sporadic and uncoordinated. In Nigeria, film distribution remained under effective foreign control even after the 1972 Indigenisation Decree. Though a few Nigerians managed to insert themselves into exhibition, they still depended for their programming

---

[230] I discuss various exceptions to this general rule in the main chapters of this thesis.

[231] Emmanuel Sama, "African Films Are Foreigners in Their Own Countries," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 148. See also Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 153. For a listing of SECMA and COMACICO cinemas (including seating capacities), see Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 413–420.

[232] The joint circuits of SECMA and COMACICO were later bought up by the French distribution giant Gaumont and eventually became SOPACIA (Société de participation cinématographique africaine), the African branch of the French UGC (Union générale cinématographique).

[233] Bassori, "Un cinéma mort-né?," 111. Sembène called their existence a "permanent scandal": "The first holds eighty-four [movie theatres] and the second fifty-six. The few African cinema owners are forced to bypass [them] to supply themselves." Sembène quoted in Busch and Annas, *Interviews*, 11.

on foreign distributors.[234] Despite a wave of nationalisations in the early to mid-1970s, African production only ever constituted a negligible fraction of the overall volume of films in circulation.[235]

The "Niamey Manifesto" formulated at the Premier colloque sur la production ciné-matographique, which was held in 1982 in the Nigerien capital, recommended the tried strategies of nationalisation and inter-state cooperation to organise and regularise the sector, incentivising both public and private investment in film production. At the same time, the manifesto's signatories expanded on the circulatory issues of African cinema, which in their view transcended the domain of film distribution proper: It was not just films whose circulation was blocked but also monies, assets, personnel. The development of African cinema, it was argued, was contingent upon the free movement of technicians and equipment, together with access to regionally and continentally coordinated production assets and infrastructures.[236] As things stood, even the democratic mechanisms of FEPACI were compromised: Because air travel was so expensive that filmmakers could not afford to buy plane tickets, important votes sometimes failed to reach the necessary quorum.[237] Trying and failing to distribute their work, African filmmakers confronted what we could call Africa's "Verkehrsformen":[238] its wider forms of circulation and exchange, including everything from the logistics of commodity circulation and mass communication (landlines, TV, radio) to roads, railways, waterways, and airlines, but also monetary zones, import tariffs, and trade treaties.

Importantly, the forms of circulation also comprise the languages and concepts used to describe African realities, and arguably the discourse of African cinema itself. The history and theory of African cinema, writes Imruh Bakari, "has been developed primarily outside of the continent itself and has been influenced by Africa's position in the global economies."[239] The first African films, notes Sambolgo Bangré, were revealed to the public only after having garnered critical recognition at festivals in Europe, where they were presented and discussed from an ethnographic point of view.[240] Sudanese filmmaker

---

[234] See Mbye Baboucar Cham, review of *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, ed. A.E. Opubor and O.E. Nwuneli, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1981): 155.
[235] Upper Volta was first to nationalise distribution, followed by Mali and others.
[236] See Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes, "Niamey Manifesto," 305.
[237] See Boughedir in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 66.
[238] "Verkehrsformen" is a term coined by Marx.
[239] Imruh Bakari, "What is the Link between Chosen Genres and Developed Ideologies in African Cinema? Introduction to Chapter 5," in *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, ed. June Givanni (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 107. Sembène sought to counter this tendency, which he saw rooted in the dominance of French as cinematic lingua franca, by contributing to the Wolof-language magazine *Kaddu* (Wolof for letter).
[240] Sambolgo Bangré, "African Cinema in the Tempest of Minor Festivals," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 157.

Gadalla Gubara was disparaging of the many titles on African cinema produced by the publishing industries of the Global North: "They are very expensive to produce, but how many Africans read these books? […] Most of these books were printed in France and America, so the money goes back to their foreign publishers."[241]

For Tahar Cheriaa, the Tunisian film critic and founding director of the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, the key problem for African cinema—"that which principally determines everything else"—was the "circulatory system of films and its consequences."[242] The distributor, in control of circulation and therefore able to impose terms of trade that put both producers and exhibitors who were not part of the distribution cartel at a marked disadvantage, emerges from Cheriaa's analysis as the strongest party in the cinematic value chain. His argument, in short, was that African cinema was being undone in the sphere of film distribution: The principal consequence of the foreign distribution monopoly was the "radical proscription of any regular cinematographic production in our countries."[243] The problems of African film distribution were not merely a "failure" on the part of the developmental state, as Cheriaa pointed out, but part of a "coherent and in no way accidental global politics."[244] Control of inner-African trade had been at the heart of the colonial project, and it both anteceded and outlasted colonial rule: It was pre-colonial European trade intermediaries interceding by ship who initiated the slow but steady break-up of regional economic integration in Africa, and foreign-owned film distribution monopolies which continued this work of intercession and disintegration after the independences.[245] Existing networks and relays of cultural transmission had been eroded, modern ones were being monopolised by foreign interlopers.[246]

Jean-Baptiste Tiémélé has suggested that even the most apolitical of African filmmakers—"who just wants to make a film about the life of ants"—cannot help but be-

---

[241] Gubara quoted in Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 46.

[242] Cheriaa, *Écrans d'abondance*, 9. Cheriaa was also a founding member of FEPACI, a member of the Comité africain de cinéastes (see 5.3), as well as working for the ACCT and UNESCO. *Écrans d'abondance* has the distinction of being the first in-depth study of the issue. The data for Cheriaa's study of African film distribution were collected in 1974, but it took another four years to see the book through publication. While Cheriaa's study focusses on film distribution north of the Sahara, he maintains that his findings are equally applicable to sub-Saharan Africa. Cheriaa here argues along the lines of a shared history of underdevelopment: Though he sees differences arising from historical-cultural and political peculiarities, his conception foregrounds their profound isomorphism as staggered or belated stages [*étapes décalées*] of one and the same process. Cheriaa, 11.

[243] Cheriaa, 7.

[244] Tahar Cheriaa, "Le cinéma africain et les 'réducteurs de têtes': Regard rétrospectif sur une stratégie de libération," *jeune cinéma (hors série)* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 9. See also Arrighi, "African Crisis," 2002.

[245] On the former, see Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Petite histoire*, 92–93.

[246] See Sémou Pathé Guèye, "Fin de l'histoire et perspective de développement: l'Afrique dans le temps du monde," *La Pensée: revue du rationalisme moderne*, no. 309 (1997): 108.

come politicised by the experience of African film distribution.[247] Trying to show their work, filmmakers were made to realise that the struggle over culture was not fought in an autonomous sphere of language or representation. Engaged in the wider struggle over Africa's forms of circulation, filmmakers discovered the close mutuality that existed between economic and cultural forms of domination; that the "monopolisation of the universal"—Senegalese filmmaker Ababacar Samb-Makharam's term for cultural hegemony[248]—and that of African film distribution were two sides of the same coin.

2.8 In conclusion: research aims and perspectives

In the historical introduction (2.1), I have argued the centrality of development as a contested sense- and world-making paradigm in the post-independence era. While there was, as I have shown, a broad policy consensus on African development shared across political divides (import substitution, industrialisation, agricultural modernisation), many warned of the capture of "national development" by geopolitical competition and global trade. Some even questioned the underlying rationalities of development—economic growth and the rationalisation of labour—in the name of "catching up." In the theoretical introduction (2.2), I have traced how thinkers in the Global South, in response to the historical failures of development and the failure of modernisation theory to account for them, elaborated theoretical critiques of the concept which first evolved in (neo-)Marxist terms, as a refutation of modernisation theory, and later led to a more foundational questioning of the very idea of development, which in some instances, though not all, precipitated a turn against Marx. In whichever way these varying critiques conceived of "underdevelopment"—whether in Marxist terms or in those of deconstruction, as in Castoriadis' "symbolic imaginary signification" or Wynter's "framework of rationality"—, they all converge on the understanding that underdevelopment is not an "inherent flaw" but really a product of the modern world-system, leading both neo- and post-Marxist critics to endorse versions of "delinking." Turning to the historical experience of filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa after the independences (2.3-2.7), I have shown that cinema—an industrial and technological art, and a commodity in circulation—was tied in its development to the destiny of the new sovereignties. I have shown that in making films—and sharing and showing them—African filmmakers confronted the promises, risks, and failures of devel-

---

[247] Jean-Baptiste Tiémélé, "Le cinéma africain en circuit fermé," *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 99.
[248] Samb-Makharam in *Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage* (Tunisia, 1982) directed by Férid Boughedir.

opment, its colonial inheritance and neo-colonial entanglements, as well as Africa's position in the capitalist world-system.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been unable to establish and sustain over time conditions conducive to the development of fully fledged national film industries.[249] "There are African filmmakers but no African cinema," Med Hondo famously said: "To talk about 'cinema', you need structures, infrastructures, laboratories, producers, scriptwriters, movie theatres, organised markets… For the moment, we are at the artisanal stage."[250] Where the scholarship on African cinema engages with this apparent "underdevelopment," it tends to do so descriptively, as mere absence of development, or prescriptively, asserting "developed" film industries as implicit norm. But African filmmakers did not simply try to "catch up" with developed film industries: They tampered with the ends and meanings of development, and even tried to break free from them. Relying on a descriptive and affirmative conception of development, I argue, historical scholarship on early African cinema has missed these important agencies. In order move beyond the descriptive approach prevalent in the literature, and rather than impose some critical conception of development in top-down fashion, this thesis asserts the filmmakers' points of view. Following Sylvia Wynter's understanding of underdevelopment as a perspective from which to unhinge and displace the rationality of development, and Felwine Sarr's assertion of an African modernity that is already being elaborated in everyday lives and survivals, I propose to read the struggles of Ola Balogun, Med Hondo, and Moustapha Alassane as practices of anti-systemic worldmaking: shaped by policies and institutions of development while pushing against its framework of rationality. Across and between my three case studies, I want to reappraise West African cinema after the independences as a struggle *with and against* development. In the remainder of this section, I will summarise the main research desiderata I have identified in this literature review and explain how they will be addressed in the main chapters (4–6).

I have argued that historical accounts of early African cinema all too often reproduce the redemption narratives of nation-building and liberation. At the opposite pole we have found a "post-national" dispensation which is generally dismissive of the "moribund national construction discourse" and depicts the demise of the developmental state as a foregone conclusion—another teleological story.[251] Transnational approaches in cinema

---

[249] The more recent rise of Nollywood and other African video industries complicates the picture, but it does not falsify it.

[250] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 27.

[251] "It comes on the heels of a moribund national construction discourse, after scores of national governments in Africa failed to provide for their citizenry, after a spate of unheeded studies on the effects of corruption on local African populations, after the widely decried scourge of adjustment programs, after hor-

and media studies often conceive of the nation as a "privileged site," referring to its importance as a rallying point of cultural identity or imagined community.[252] The historical experience of West African filmmakers calls for a more complex understanding on all of these counts. It is true that filmmakers who were not directly employed by national cinema parastatals received little to no state support and frequently found themselves at odds with the developmental state, however, nation-states were not "privileged" but sites of construction under enormous strain. While the main modality of state regulation of the sector was censorship, filmmakers frequently relied on development aid that sidestepped national sovereignty. In chapter 4 on Ola Balogun's struggle to build a Nigerian national cinema, I will describe the developmental nation not as a monolithic framework to be challenged but a precarious gatekeeper invested with colonial legacies and undermined by neo-colonial forces.

The developmental state was not alone to blame; the "underdevelopment" of African cinema was the result of a "coherent and in no way accidental global politics."[253] Research on African cinema must take seriously the argument made at the Third World Filmmakers Meeting in Algiers, that in order to understand the problems of national cinemas in the developing world, "we must refer to the dialectics of the development of capitalism on a world scale."[254] For a fuller understanding of filmmaking in post-independence West Africa, we must acknowledge not only its fundamentally transnational character but pay closer attention also to coercive aspects of international exchange, in relation to the blockage or capture of what I have characterised as Africa's *forms of circulation*.[255] African filmmakers found themselves engulfed and divided by competing spheres of influence. They were pushed—by state repression, inefficacy, or both—and they were pulled—by training opportunities, funding, and access to technical facilities—across the continent and beyond. They worked within a historical dynamic that exceeded the nation-state by force more often than by choice. Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the elective internationalisms of African cinema. What is missing is a more detailed and nuanced consideration of the forced internationalisation which defined and

rendous genocides in Rwanda, Nigeria, and after much reevaluation of the basic tenets of the FEPACI Charter by a new generation of African filmmakers." Niang, *African Nationalist Cinema*, xi–xii. See Tcheuyap, "African Cinema(s)," 23.

[252] See, e.g., Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies," *Transnational Cinemas* 1, no. 1 (2010): 11.

[253] Cheriaa, "Le cinéma africain," 9.

[254] Birri et al., "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting," 276.

[255] Kay Dickinson provides a model of what this might mean in her essay on the "Palestinian Road Block Movie," detailing how in contemporary Palestine, "roadblocks, curfews, and checkpoints render cinematic production and dissemination uniquely difficult." Kay Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie," in *Cinema at the Periphery*, ed. Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 138.

limited its potential, the extraversion of African cinema across the linked sites of (re)production and circulation. We need a new critical transnationalism that allows us to tell stories of uneven relation and unequal exchange.

In chapter 5 on Med Hondo, I will rethink African cinema in relation to the deep history of the capture of African trade by Western intermediaries. Paying particular attention to Hondo's struggles in the sphere of film distribution, I will displace and re-member "African cinema" within the common history of African and Europe. I will show that what made Paris the inofficial capital of Francophone African cinema were the push and pull factors of labour migration from former French colonies, making of African diasporic filmmakers like Hondo not a mere appendage but a prototypical expression of "African cinema."[256] Following Hondo, I will elaborate a migrant transnationalism—an internationalism of necessity[257]—which allows us to conceive of African cinema *in relation*, as part of the global system of "world-cinema," one but unequal.[258]

Ever since its inception, sub-Saharan African cinema was chained to European funding, know-how, post-production facilities and distribution networks.[259] Couched in neutral or seemingly philanthropic terms like "cooperation" or "technical assistance," such forms of foreign aid/investment inextricably bound African filmmakers to European "partners," thus hindering autonomous development—a hidden, structuralised continuation of the colonial relationship. The reliance of African cinema on foreign funding and personnel is well documented in the literature, yet there is little concrete engagement with the influence these funders, teachers and technicians had on the films they helped make, together with the ways in which African filmmakers challenged and resisted their influ-

---

[256] Paris is one of the birthplaces of African cinema and remains a central node in the production and distribution of African films to this day, though some functions of development assistance that formerly had been centralised in the French state are now shared with Germany and other European states, or organised multilaterally across the European Union, with additional funding disbursed through the European Development Fund. As Madeleine Cottenet-Hage has argued, "the existence of the French 'space' remains, at least for the time being, intricately bound to African cinema." Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, "Images of France in Francophone African Films (1978–1998)," in *Focus on African Films*, ed. Françoise Pfaff (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 121. For Dominic Thomas, this makes necessary "complex reformulations of national and territorial affiliation." Thomas, "Africa/France," 143.

[257] The internationalism of Third Cinema was born of necessity, as Birri explains for the Latin American context: "It was born because in that moment, in the middle of the '50s, in different places in Latin America, a generation of film-makers was growing up who wanted to provide a reply to some of the problems of the moment, and who brought with them more questions than answers. They were questions that came from an historical necessity, a necessity in the history of our peoples […]." Birri, "For a Nationalist, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema," 89.

[258] "World-cinema" (as against "World Cinema") is my coinage. It is derived from Franco Moretti's proposition of a "world-literature" (as against "Weltliteratur" or "world literature"). "One, and unequal: one literature (Weltliteratur, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or, perhaps better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal." Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1, no. 4 (2000): 56.

ence.[260] Where foreign aid to African cinema is discussed in the literature, it is either as unavoidable and largely benign, or as purposely malicious, designed to curb and limit the efforts of African filmmakers. We need more supple appreciations of these relationships. The challenge is to recognise the "productivity" of this system without losing sight of the constraints it placed on African cinema—and of the struggles African filmmakers waged inside.

As part of the Ministry of Cooperation, which dispatched foreign specialists to "assist" development efforts everywhere in Francophone West Africa, the Bureau du cinéma not only provided funding and equipment to filmmakers through their Paris office but was also involved in "developing" African cinema on the ground. The French *coopérants* in Niger, Mali, and Upper Volta were often filmmakers themselves. Their activities are an important but under-researched link in the chain of French support for African cinema.[261] As I will show in chapter 6 on Moustapha Alassane, French filmmaking in the region, whether of ethnographic or "development" films, co-evolved with the "native filmmakers" whose works it co-produced, supported by the institutions and infrastructures of anthropological research. Dating back to the colonial era, these institutions remained under the direction of non-Africans well into the post-independence period. I will provide a detailed discussion of the activities of French Cooperation on the ground in Niger, and suggest a more complex interpretation of these relationships, acknowledging the "productivity" of French Cooperation without denying the limitations imposed on the development of African cinemas. I will demonstrate that French Cooperation not only co-produced filmmaking efforts on the ground but also channelled the film's distribution and shaped the discourse of African cinema. I will describe the production of African cinema by foreign aid and investment as a form of dependent development, paying close attention to the ways in which filmmakers leveraged and resisted this system.

This thesis understands itself as a contribution to ongoing work on the precarious archive of sub-Saharan African cinema.[262] It seeks to recover works that threaten to disappear as

---

[259] Only relatively recently has this changed—in Nollywood, but also with the South African television channel "Africa Magic."

[260] "The number of camera operators, electricians, sound-engineers, and editors is not increasing proportionally with that of directors. For the most part, after the directorial duties, French manpower is used to finish the films." Diawara, *African Cinema*, 49.

[261] Bouchard has suggested that "each national audiovisual production was centered on a single French director: Jean Rouch in Niger; Serge Ricci in Upper Volta, Rouquier in Chad; Cheminal in Gabon; and so on." Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 221.

[262] The World Cinema Fund is currently working on an ambitious restoration project of one hundred African films. See Aboubakar Sanogo, "Africa in the World of Moving Image Archiving: Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century," *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 99 (2018). On a smaller scale, Arsenal Institute of Film and Video Art in Berlin has recently overseen the restoration and digitisation of Adamu

matter and as memory. In the conclusions I will argue that my emphasis on extraversion is timely also because it allows us to address persistent inequities that affect the memory of African cinema to this day.

Halilu's *Shehu Umar* (1976) alongside works by Sudanese filmmakers Gadalla Gubara and Hussein Shariffe as well as by the Sudanese Film Group. There are also a number of artists currently working to salvage and reactivate the precarious archives of African cinema, notably Filipa César (working with the INCA archive of Guinea-Bissau, again in collaboration with Arsenal in Berlin), Didi Cheeka, Mati Diop, Raphaël Grisey, Onyeka Igwe, and Mathieu Klebeye Abonnenc. I will return to questions of the archive in the concluding chapter of this thesis (see 7.1).

Chapter 3
Methods

This thesis is a comparative study of the practices of three West African filmmakers: Ola Balogun, Med Hondo, and Moustapha Alassane. It sets out to reappraise the history of West African cinema in the aftermath of independence through the critical lens of "development," and, conversely, to reappraise development through the experience of West African post-independence filmmaking, its processes and forms, in light of the research questions and desiderata I have identified above (see 1.2 & 2.8). To this end, I will deploy a mixed methodology mobilising production, distribution, and exhibition histories alongside film analysis and critical theory. I do not purport to give an exhaustive account of these filmmakers' respective oeuvres, however, drawing on both extant histories of African cinema and original archival research (see 3.2), I offer the most complete account yet of their works as situated within the wider field of what I call their "moving image practice"—the making, sharing, and showing of films.[1]

I draw on filmmakers' theoretical reflections to show how these inform their practice but I also show how their understanding was in turn informed and oriented by historically specific practices of making, sharing, and showing, which I reconstruct as a form of "thought in the making" (Castoriadis). Although the three main chapters (4–6) are organised around individual filmmakers, I do not take an auteurist approach. I do not psychologise, nor do I look to biography for explanation of the work. And while I make assumptions about intentionality, the filmmakers' intentions are not the ultimate arbiter of my interpretation. The filmmakers are focal points where networks actualise themselves in a person with some agency, but they are not the only actors in this history. There are also national governments and international development organisations; trade associations and foreign monopolies; production and distribution companies; the networks of French Cooperation, Francophonie, and ethnographic research; families, tribes, and ancestors; natural and historical forces.

Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane elaborated a materialist analysis of their situation which grasped media not as discreet object but as process and relation. Following their understanding, I approach their respective practices as engagements with their immediate material environments and entanglements with the wider world. While the sections of each chapter are generally organised around individual films, these are not viewed as self-enclosed works but as material mediations of the world around them. They function as the "eye of the needle through which the whole effort has to pass, " lending focus to my analysis while also allowing me to extend my discussion into the films' material, economic, and infrastructural conditions of (im-)possibility. I look to the moving image not merely

---

[1] For a complete filmography, see References.

as a representation of the world but also as a part of it. Questions of representation will therefore be grounded in an analysis of the economies, logistics, and technological infrastructures of West African post-independence film production and distribution.

The conditions of African cinema, as both Balogun and Hondo saw clearly, undermined the coherence of African films.[2] Taylor, in a similar vein, insists that the African filmmaker's situation makes it problematic to approach the work in auteurist terms, as a finished product expressive of its maker's sovereign intentions. Conditions of underdevelopment opened African films up to their immediate environments; relations of neo-colonial dependency tied them to the wider world. I will follow this spiralling movement from frame to hors-champ, text to context, from the individual film to the entire life cycle of film(ing) and cinema, including its circulation and reproduction, emphasising both the films' situatedness and entanglements. My readings instead centre the historical realities that made filmmaking difficult and often impossible in the newly independent nations of West Africa; the structural and slow forms of violence nestled deep within the global spacetime of combined and uneven development. Following Férid Boughedir, I conceive of African films made in the absence of African film industries as problems or provocations.[3] As material objects to think with, they are of interest not merely in their "finished form" but also in how they failed to come together or fell apart. If filmmaking both forms *a* world and is formed by *the* world, the laborious separation of these worlds which is a typical feature of industrial film production here threatened to collapse, reminding us of the Yoruba proverb, "Where one thing stands, another stands beside it." Considering both the works that were *done* and those *undone* by circumstance, however, my account is never determinist, and I do not present African filmmakers as victims. Rather, I propose to read their films as traces of the struggle of filmmaking, showing how the image, too, "struggles."

3.1 Selection of case studies

The three filmmakers who are my main interlocutors, were chosen as salient examples of different contexts and tendencies within sub-Saharan African cinema. They each elaborate a different approach to, and understanding of, development. Every chapter is devoted to a specific struggle—and a specific lesson. From Balogun's national-popular cinema, I

---

[2] Ola Balogun: "One of the most easily perceptible contradictions lay in the absence of technical infrastructure such as film laboratories and studios on the African continent itself, with a result that each single production had to be tackled under extremely adverse and complex technical conditions, with inevitably negative effects on the quality and coherence of films made under such conditions." See Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 10.

learn how African filmmakers participated in the project of nation-building while struggling against the developmental state, revealing tensions and contradictions within the national project. From Hondo's migrant cinema, I learn about the distribution of film as an exemplary struggle for Africa's forms of circulation, against the backdrop of the uneven and combined development of world-cinema. From Alassane, I learn about the workings of development aid programmes that animated African cinema while also limiting its potential.

Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane hail from Nigeria, Mauritania, and Niger respectively. All three countries gained independence in 1960, the former from Britain and the latter two from France. The British and French empires differed considerably in their mode of rule. These different legacies, as well as the different policies the two receding colonial powers adopted in the aftermath of the independences, shaped the emerging nations in profound ways. This is especially true when it comes to cinema. While France was invested in continued technical and cultural cooperation, buttressed by the assimilationist ideal of a shared "Francophone" culture, the British approach was "strictly business,"[4] offering little in the way of continued material support or cultural affiliation. This thesis offers a comparative reading of Anglophone and Francophone African cinemas that, while careful to note differences, also foregrounds intersections and commonalities. I will draw comparisons among African filmmakers on the continent and outside, but also to filmmakers elsewhere in the "developing world," arguing that my findings resonate more widely. Each chapter stands on its own, but they also enter into dialogue, enabling a comparative view of their different works and contexts. Spanning all three chapters, a web of connections and contacts will be forming between the three. Kwame Nkrumah argued that a comparative study on neo-colonialism in its African context promises to provide "examples of every type of the system."[5] While this thesis may not cover "every type," its aim is to triangulate, through a focus on three particular situations, the "system" common to all.[6]

If, as I have suggested, we approach African cinema as material practice and distributed process rather than a canon of works, its history cannot simply be told as a history of national cinemas, which complicates questions of localisation. All three filmmakers engaged in forms of international co-production. Their practice was variously tied to "for-

---

[3] Boughedir in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 43.
[4] Boughedir quoted in Diawara, "Sub-Saharan African Film Production."
[5] Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 20.
[6] See also Lindiwe Dovey's contention that a comparative approach to different cinematic experiences within the African continent is "essential to the project of interrogating African cinema as a whole." Lindi-

eign" contexts of production and distribution in other ways as well. Next to Nigeria, Mauritania, and Niger, Paris will emerge as a central coordinate in the process of sub-Saharan African cinema. The inclusion of Med Hondo, a Mauritanian filmmaker based in Paris, is a double methodological provocation. A crossroads of North and sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritania belongs to both the Maghreb and Sahel regions. It has been a major hub of trans-Saharan trade across the ages, and in the colonial era formed part of French West Africa. Hondo was part-Senegalese; he left Mauritania in his teens, migrating first to Morocco and then to France. Hondo's migrant practice is but the most obvious example of what I have discussed as the "extraversion" of African cinema. As I will argue throughout, the migrant experience is not a side-show or addition to African cinema but constitutive of it. My findings in the chapter on Hondo will thus be pertinent also to those who stayed—"foreigners in their own country."

My discussion focusses on works made during the age of development, which extends from the independences into the 1980s. Even within this limited period, there are important histories that remain outside the purview of this study. The thesis covers only part of the expansive terrain of post-independence West Africa, notably bracketing the Portuguese colonies Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which yet had to gain independence, both because of language restrictions and because my focus is on the entangled aftermath of independence. I should also point out that "sub-Saharan Africa" in my usage generally excludes South Africa and Rhodesia. There are other important stories I could not include. The Soviet connection and international socialist solidarities enter the frame only ambiently, as the geopolitical backdrop to much of the history recounted herein.

Owing to political and material restrictions, much of early film production in West Africa was made up of short and documentary forms, yet my discussion generally focusses on feature filmmaking.[7] This may seem like a counter-intuitive choice. Vincent Bouchard has argued that early African cinema was "characterized by a diversified production of less glamorous cinematographic projects"—useful films, fundamental education, and ethnographic works—which have not received the scholarly attention they deserve.[8] I agree with Bouchard, and will touch on some such works in chapter 6, however, my main focus lies elsewhere. The commercial feature film was the commodity around which national film industries have been organised historically, and it is how African filmmakers hoped to develop national film industries on the continent. Feature filmmaking, furthermore,

---

we Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 5.
[7] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 230.
[8] Bouchard, "Appropriation de l'œuvre audiovisuelle par le spectateur," 214.

was where the struggle for African audiences was being fought—against American Westerns, French "adventure films," and Bollywood melodrama, all of which were seen to transmit foreign values and models of behaviour.[9] Feature film production was where the filmmakers' own focus lay, certainly in Hondo's and Balogun's cases. And while Alassane's practice differed slightly in that he mainly produced shorter works, his films frequently allied themselves to popular cinema cultures shaped more by foreign fare in commercial exhibition than by documentary or ethnographic forms.[10]

3.2 Sources and archives

Historical research on African cinema is confronted with a difficult archival situation.[11] Little data have been collected by inexistent or ineffective regulatory bodies.[12] Reliable sources are lacking especially when it comes to African audiences and their experience. Throughout this thesis, I piece together reception histories from various sources (newspaper articles, interviews, archival documents). However, African film historiography also has to be attuned to absences and silences in the historical record. Resisting the tyranny of "positive history," I will pay attention to what is lost or never came to be. This work of reconstruction will sometimes require an effort of the historical imagination. Wherever I speculate or depart from the record, this is clearly indicated.

While Balogun and Hondo were both prolific commentators and rapporteurs, Alassane has left few written traces of his practice. My historical reconstruction is bound to look at him through the eyes of various Frenchmen who styled themselves his discoverers and supporters, obliging me to read their testimonies against the grain. I read my sources critically, providing historical context and reflecting on their point of view. In addition, in particular in the chapters on Hondo and Alassane, I pay attention to how "African cinema" and its history were—and still are—produced as discursive objects by Western critics and researchers, myself included.

I do not speak any African languages and so am limited to English and French sources. The bulk of the films I discuss have either French or English dialogue. English and French also served as linguae francae for inter-African dialogue among filmmakers,

---

[9] See, e.g., Ola Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," working document for the Symposium on Black Civilization and Education at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria, 15 January–12 February 1977 (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), 15.

[10] In his own sketch of a history of African cinema, Balogun discusses mainly feature film production. See Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*.

[11] See Lelièvre, "Les cinémas africains dans l'histoire," 141.

critics, activists, and theorists. Most of the relevant sources are in these languages. At the same time, the dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone research on African cinema has been halting for various reasons. For one, it has been hampered on linguistic grounds.[13] But there are also differences in perspective and approach. In this thesis, I seek to build on and bring together these often parallel debates.[14]

African filmmakers were participants in a larger conversation on "cinema and underdevelopment."[15] The militant poetics of "Third Cinema," together with related formulations such as "imperfect cinema," were the ferment of a radical critique of developed cinemas from an "underdeveloped" point of view.[16] Throughout this thesis, I will therefore also draw on practices of radical filmmaking in the wider "developing" world.

I have conducted original archival research at the Cinémathèque française in St. Cyr, the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC) in Bois d'Arcy, Ciné-Archives/Cinémathèque du Parti Communiste français in Paris, the French National Archives in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, and the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive in London. I have also had the opportunity to visit the former headquarters of the Nigerian Film

---

[12] As Balogun, Hondo and others have argued, the failure of African regulatory bodies to collect data on cinema was another impediment to the development of African cinema.

[13] As June Givanni notes with reference to the "Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas" conference she co-organised at the BFI in 1995: "A noteworthy characteristic of the conference was that it was conducted in English and French with simultaneous translation. While the translation was very competent, the fact of translation made debate around sensitive issues very difficult to conduct." June Givanni, "Preface and Acknowledgements," in *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, ed. June Givanni (London: British Film Institute, 2000), xiv.

[14] The work of *Black Camera,* which regularly publishes French activists and scholars in English translation, is exemplary in this regard. See, e.g., Olivier Barlet, "Africultures Dossier," *Black Camera* 1, no. 2 (2010).

[15] See Birri, "Cinema and Underdevelopment."

[16] "Third Cinema" was coined in 1969 by Argentinean filmmakers Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino. The term was devised to comprehend a wide range of radical cinemas emerging alongside the anti- and de-colonial struggles of the period. Aligned with neither Hollywood nor European auteur cinema, theirs was a militant, agitprop political aesthetics aiming to stir audiences to political action. See Getino and Solanas, "Towards a Third Cinema." The mobile idea of Third Cinema was seen by many to include filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa, even if filmmakers there rarely self-identified as part of that movement. See, e.g., Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World*. In the 1980s, at events such as the 1982 Black Film Festival and the 1983 Third Eye Festival, both in London, or the Third Cinema conference held as part of the 1986 Edinburgh Film Festival, Third Cinema theory was brought to bear on filmmaking in the African diaspora, in particular Black British cinema and the L.A. Rebellion group of filmmakers, members of which convened a regular Third World film club at UCLA. For a report on the Edinburgh conference, see Kobena Mercer, "Third Cinema at Edinburgh: Reflections on a Pioneering Event," *Screen* 27, no. 6 (1986). The conference contributions were later published in a seminal volume on "questions of Third Cinema." See Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI, 1989). For connections between African and Latin American cinemas of the period, see Roof, "African and Latin American Cinemas." On "imperfect cinema," see Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema" and "Meditations on Imperfect Cinema… Fifteen Years Later," *Screen* 26, no. 3–4 (1985). For a consideration of the historical and theoretical links between Espinosa's cinema and radical African cinematic practice, see Allyson Nadia Field, "To Journey Imperfectly: Black Cinema Aesthetics and the Filmic Language of Sankofa," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (2014).

Corporation in Ikoyi, Lagos.[17] This work on a part of African film history could not have been accomplished without access to European film archives. It also presupposed the researcher's freedom and means to travel. The majority of the prints I examined at the Cinémathèque française had been donated by the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique (ACCT), which later became the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, one of the main European funders of sub-Saharan African cinema. Extant holdings of African cinema, and the archival infrastructures that sustain them, are unevenly developed and distributed across the world. Where film archives do exist in Africa they often rely on foreign aid.[18] African films and African film history are predominantly held in Western archives, with Paris again acting as a main hub. For the overwhelming majority of Africans, this history—*their* history—remains inaccessible.[19] My research is thus directly implicated in the persistent structural inequalities I seek critically to address: The archive of African cinema is but the most recent chapter of the histories I salvage from it. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, in the section titled "What is to be done?" (7.2), I will return to the question of the archive and consider pathways towards restitution.

3.3 A note on writing African film history

The most important challenge to my historical method stems from the subject itself of this research. The experience of African cinema, as I argue throughout, challenges teleologies of development, giving the lie to the redemptive horizons of history as progress and ever greater freedom. But such ideas retain a powerful hold over the historical imagination. Which is to say: If the histories recounted in this thesis upend how we commonly make sense of history, then I have to be especially mindful of my own historiographic method.

---

[17] Both the Cinémathèque française and CNC have sizeable holdings of African films on 16mm and 35mm. The Cinémathèque also holds Ola Balogun's extant feature films as well as several of his documentaries, most of them unique prints. Ciné-Archives holds Med Hondo's paper archive and films. At Archives nationales, I consulted the paper archive of the French Ministry of Cooperation, particularly in relation to Moustapha Alassane. In the context of a placement at the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive, I benefitted from Ms. Givanni's profound knowledge of African cinema. At the former Nigerian Film Corporation, I was granted a look at a cache of badly damaged films produced (or developed) by the Nigerian Film Unit between the 1960s and 1980s. I have also consulted viewing databases at Forum des images and the Bibliothèque nationale française (BnF), both in Paris. The latter provides access to a significant part of the holdings of the Cinémathèque Afrique, a subsidiary of the Institut français. Many of the films I was able to view at the Cinémathèque française were only rudimentarily catalogued. Med Hondo's paper archive at Ciné-Archives had not previously been consulted.

[18] The F4 million construction costs of the Cinémathèque africaine in Ouagadougou were financed by France, Denmark, and the European Union. The project received technical aid from the CNC (France) and the British Film Institute. See Millet, "(In)dépendance des cinémas du Sud &/vs France," 153.

[19] It is often said that with digitalisation, this dismal state of affairs surely must be changing. But I am not so sure. A Nigerian film critic and curator based in Lagos complains that he frequently finds himself reliant on European contacts to provide digital screeners of central works of Nigerian (and African) cinema. Didi Cheeka, personal communication.

While the main chapters of this thesis are told as roughly chronological stories, I will resist telling a linear history and avoid presupposing its outcomes. And while I offer the narrative arc of the "age of development," I also continually deconstruct this periodisation, both at its beginning and end points, heeding Achille Mbembe's insight that the post-independence era was an "entanglement" enclosing "multiple durées made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another."[20] Though my historical narration deploys the past tense, I seek to render the histories of Balogun, Hondo and Alassane in the present tense of engagement, restituting their time as the open and ongoing horizon of "occurring history." I want to tell their stories in their time and on their terms.

The practices of all three filmmakers are in some sense "transnational," each posing specific challenges to the work of historical reconstruction. The struggles of Balogun and Alassane may be framed in relation to the emergence (and demise) of Nigerian and Nigerien cinema respectively. Hondo's practice, on the other hand, which straddles Africa and Europe, is harder to place, its historical "background" more difficult to define. Following Hondo's lead, my discussion will unfold as a quarrel with his French critics.

My first point of call are the filmmakers' own contemporaneous testimonies: their practice-grounded, ad-hoc theorisations, preserved as pamphlets, interviews, policy reports (written for national governments and international organisations), correspondence, company records, etc. Quoting extensively from their writings, I try to inhabit their conceptual worlds and convey their situated points of view. My approach takes inspiration from Edouard Glissant's "errant," who "plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access" but is at the same time connected to the whole world.[21] The errant "discards the universal"—"this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny"[22]—but retains a sense of the whole, which is revealed not in "lightning flashes" but by the slow "accumulation of sediments."[23] Plunging with these three West African filmmakers into that part of the world to which they had access, I resist teleology and generalisation without losing a sense—*their* sense—of the whole, revealed in the sedimentation of their lifelong struggles. While this thesis aims to address the whole, it does so from below, departing from the particular.

---

[20] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14.
[21] The landscape of the errant's world is "the world's landscape"; "its frontier is open." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1990] 1997), 20, 33.
[22] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 20.
[23] Glissant, 33.

The English social historian E.P. Thompson famously warned of positive history: "Only the successful (in the sense of those whose aspirations anticipated subsequent evolution) are remembered. The blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves are forgotten."[24] This is especially pertinent in the context of African cinema, where development was frequently blocked or constrained. Something crucial of early African filmmaking is missed when it is measured by its results only—by finished works, successful exchanges, and the few filmmakers whose aspirations resulted in more than just one or two films in their lifetime. If we only look at finished works, we miss something of the struggle of African filmmakers, which is at the heart of this thesis. Special attention must be paid to the fragment, the unfinished effort, the works undone or never embarked upon. Efforts must be made to restitute, where possible, what Sanogo calls "the absent image"[25]—together with the reasons for its absence. Such fragments centre the historical realities that made filmmaking difficult and often impossible in the newly independent nations of West Africa; the dispossessions, blockages, and breakdowns of African cinema. To foreground instances of "failure" is not to be defeatist. It is to insist on history's unkept promises.

---

[24] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, [1963] 1966), 12.
[25] Aboubakar Sanogo, "The Indocile Image: Cinema and History in Med Hondo's Soleil O and Les Bicots-Nègres, Vos Voisins," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 19, no. 4 (2015): 560.

Chapter 4
Communication: Ola Balogun

In 1972, Ola Balogun directed what is considered by many the first Nigerian feature-length film.[1] In the decade thereafter, coinciding with the "oil boom years" that brought unprecedented wealth to Nigeria, Balogun was able to realise ten more fiction feature films—in addition to ten documentary and promotional works. Balogun's productivity was unrivalled not only in Nigeria: He is one of the most prolific African feature filmmakers of all time.[2] Heralded as the single-most important figure of Nigerian cinema, Balogun helped "pave the way for a commercial cinema,"[3] yet his films are hardly seen and largely forgotten in Nigeria today.

Nigerian cinema was looking for a path for development in the 1970s, and it is no exaggeration to say that Balogun led the way. Having initially sought employ with Nigeria's film parastatals, Balogun soon became disillusioned with bureaucratic, mismanaged, and ineffective state institutions and instead pursued an entrepreneurial approach. His feature films were made in a fiercely independent mode relying on private patronage, bank loans, and returns on investment. For Balogun to be able to sustain his practice, every film had to individually and immediately turn a profit.[4] To make up for lacking state support, Balogun became an early adapter of a small-scale mode of film production that in many ways anticipated the survival strategies of today's West African video-makers. His collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, a collective filmmaking practice based in African popular culture, were direct precursors of contemporary Yoruba videos.[5] Struggling with the same distribution problems as his Francophone peers, Balogun elaborated an itinerant and completely self-reliant mode of film distribution and exhibition.[6] Grafted onto the Yoruba Travelling Theatre's existing circuit, Balogun's travelling cinema for a time successfully challenged the foreign domination of commercial film distribution and exhibition in Nigeria. No sub-Saharan African filmmaker of the post-independence era came closer than Balogun to developing a popular moving image practice: seen by the

[1] See, e.g., Kenneth W. Harrow, "Introduction," in *African Filmmaking: Five Formations*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017), 15. I will qualify this claim in 4.1.
[2] Françoise Balogun counts roughly twenty feature-length film productions in Nigeria between 1970 and 1980; seven of them, that is, about a third, made by Balogun, who has realised 39 films overall. For a full filmography, see References.
[3] Françoise Pfaff, "Ola Balogun," in *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmography and Bio-Bibliography* (New York, Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 23. See also, e.g., Connor Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic: Ola Balogun's Commercial Films and Cultural Politics," in *The Magic of Nigeria: On the Cinema of Ola Balogun*, ed. Filmkollektiv Frankfurt (Frankfurt am Main: Filmkollektiv Frankfurt, 2016), 164.
[4] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 22.
[5] Those who emulate Balogun today, like his erstwhile second assistant cameraman and fellow Yoruba Tunde Kelani, are among the most accomplished videographers of their generation. See Nikolaus Perneczky, "Continual Re-enchantment: Tunde Kelani's Village Films and the Spectres of Early African Cinema," *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 6 (2014).
[6] Balogun's films were also distributed by Hondo's Soleil O and later by the Comité africain de cinéastes (see 5.3).

African masses and capable of reproducing itself on that basis. Balogun's career trajectory, though abortive, was an important proof of concept of a Nigerian film industry to come.[7]

Balogun saw cinema as a means for post-colonial Africa to reconquer its own image after the "long night of subjection," and for Nigeria to seize its "national destiny" as sub-Saharan Africa's most populous, culturally diverse and geopolitically influential country—the model of a great Black nation.[8] In the wake of the Nigerian Civil War (or "Biafran War," 1967–1970), which made Balogun's mother a refugee, he became a vocal public advocate of internal coherence and mobilization. Cinema, in Balogun's view, had a crucial role to play in welding together this sprawling and divided nation into a "united and purposeful community."[9] Unity was a condition for economic recovery: "Only a united Nigeria," Balogun wrote in a 1969 editorial for *Jeune Afrique*, "can offer to its populace the hope of breaking with the vicious circle of underdevelopment."[10] Balogun was fully subscribed to the doxa of developmental nationalism; even so, as a filmmaker his relationship to the Nigeria state was complicated. In occasional advisory functions to the Nigerian government, he railed against the industrial and productivist bias of government policies, castigating state bureaucrats tantalised by eternally undelivered promises of industrial-scale studio production. The reality of Balogun's practice, as of all Nigerian feature filmmakers, was of a constant struggle for survival. As he saw it, the dream of a "developed" film industry, epitomised in government plans for a "Black Hollywood" near Jos, had become an impediment to the development of really existing Nigerian cinema. Jonathan Haynes has likened Balogun to Cassandra: Though he was always right, nobody would ever listen.[11] His relationship to the Nigerian state, too, compares to Cassandra, foretelling the fall of Troy.

In addition to a filmmaker, Balogun was a playwright, a civil servant, and a policy rapporteur for international development agencies, as well as a trained anthropologist and practising historian.[12] Born to Nigerian elites and Western-educated, he was not exactly a

---

[7] Built on the infrastructure of video piracy, Nollywood would later solve the problem of production because it solved the problem of distribution.

[8] Ola Balogun, *Cultural Policies as an Instrument of External Image-Building: A Blueprint for Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1986), 3–4.

[9] Balogun, *Cultural Policies*, 14. Nigeria's "national destiny," as Balogun understood it, signally included support for the MPLA-led government in Angola (1975–present) and military opposition to Ian Smith's rule in Rhodesia (1964–1979). The horizon of nation-building thus clearly exceeded the nation.

[10] Ola Balogun, "Le Nigéria doit-il continuer à exister?," *Jeune Afrique*, no. 458 (1969): 3.

[11] Jonathan Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (1995).

[12] Balogun wrote a book on the Biafran war of secession and another on Nigerian history, culture, and ways of life. See Ola Balogun, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Crisis, 1966-1970* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope

son of the people, yet he was convinced that the development of African film industries had to be based in popular culture and ceaselessly worked to undo what Okome Onookome has described as the "isolation of an African film culture cut off from the masses."[13] In all of the above roles, he was engaged in a search for forms of popular communication based in mutual and equitable forms of exchange across social and cultural divides, within the nation and beyond. Drawing on the formal inventory of African popular culture and the procedures of African traditional arts, Balogun elaborated a commercially viable practice that he hoped would serve as a model for the indigenisation of mass communications in Africa more generally. Yet his efforts in this vein faced strong opposition: While his Yoruba films enjoyed considerable popular and commercial success among Nigerian and African audiences, African intellectuals frequently resisted their allure, denouncing both the films' technical shortcomings and what was widely perceived as their "folkloristic" and dangerously anti-modern populism.[14]

Balogun's collaboration with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre marked the invention of a new and distinctive cinematic form, a version of which remains with us today, but it would be misleading to characterise him as a Yoruba filmmaker. He directed the first film ever made in the Igbo language spoken in his native Eastern Nigeria, and also made feature films in Naijá (Nigerian Pidgin), standard English, and Portuguese. While his own business model largely relied on Nigeria's internal market and his films were little seen outside the country, Balogun also embarked on a number of transnational co-productions, amplifying his communication struggle to pan-African and even trans-Atlantic dimensions. Balogun was among the very few Anglophone filmmakers with ties to the institutional networks of Francophone African cinema, and consulted on the development of African cinema for UNESCO, UNDP, and UAO, touching on subjects ranging from the education of filmmakers to film infrastructures, a continent-wide survey of which took him to countries in all parts of Africa.[15] The critically neglected writings Balogun produced as

---

Publishing Corporation, 1973); Ola Balogun, *Nigeria: Magic of a Land* (Paris: Éditions J.A., 1978). Today Balogun earns a living as music performer and promoter.

[13] Onookome Okome, "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," *CinémAction*, no. 106 (2003): 161. Balogun: "It's fine to shoot intellectual films so astonishing in their formal manipulations that they receive the approbation of film critics in Europe and the US but does this permit the creation of a film industry in Africa?" Balogun quoted in Catherine Ruelle, "Balogun Ola," *jeune cinéma (hors série)* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978), 23.

[14] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 22.

[15] The Secretariat of the Organization of African Unity had recourse to Balogun's services as a consultant under the terms of UNDP project RAF 82/003.

rapporteur and policy analyst for these organisations contributed to introducing the question of indigenisation to the discourse of international development.[16]

After a decade of extraordinary productivity, roughly coinciding with the oil boom years of the First Junta (1966–1977) and the Nigerian Second Republic (1979–1983), Balogun's feature film career ended amidst the economic crisis that gripped Nigeria in the 1980s. The crisis had been precipitated by a disastrous decline of the national currency, and was exacerbated by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed on sub-Saharan Africa by the World Bank. It led to the collapse not only of Balogun's business model but put an end to celluloid feature film production in Nigeria more generally and eventually to the institution of "cinema" itself—though alternative spaces of consumption have proliferated in its wake. Balogun struggled on, realising a further nineteen films between 1984 and 1998, "useful films" or commercials all, including an advertisement for a Nigerian producer of animal feed, commissions by various international agencies of aid and development from UNESCO to the Red Cross, and a piece of propaganda for the Nigerian military government of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993), as well as a number of independent documentaries, most of them on video. While Nollywood was taking off, Balogun's career as a feature filmmaker petered out. As far as he is concerned, the popular Nigerian cinema he struggled to create never actually came into existence.[17] And yet, Balogun and Nollywood are intimately linked in an open-ended and contradictory dynamic initiated by Balogun but soon escaping his control, which I will trace throughout this chapter.

4.1 Returns and beginnings (Alpha, 1972)

Balogun was born in 1945, in Aba, Eastern Nigeria, to a lawyer of Yoruba extraction.[18] In 1963, after brief stints at the universities of Lagos—then the capital of Nigeria—and Dakar, Balogun's studies brought him to Paris.[19] He studied direction at IDHEC, where a number of African filmmakers, most of them from Francophone countries, were enrolled at the time, while also doing research for a doctoral degree in anthropology under the supervision of French ethnographer Jean Rouch at the university of Nanterre—ground zero

---

[16] While the impact of French cultural policies on African cinema is often noted in the literature, there is little research on other, especially international, development actors in this period. Noah Tsika's work on corporate sponsorship in West Africa is an exception. See Tsika, "Soft Power Cinema."
[17] See Okome, "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," 158.
[18] See Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," *Frauen und Film*, no. 60 (1997): 56.
[19] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 19.

of the civil unrest in May 1968.[20] In Nanterre, Balogun met his future wife Françoise, who was to become a close collaborator and one of the first historians of Nigerian cinema.[21] In January 1966, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister of independent Nigeria, was ousted and killed in a military coup; the following year, Eastern Nigeria seceded as the Republic of Biafra, spawning a three-year civil war which saw the Balogun family estate in Igboland abandoned and Balogun's mother seek refuge in Lagos. Balogun, then in his early twenties, returned to Lagos at the outset of the war, where for a brief period he was employed as scriptwriter at the Nigerian Federal Film Unit.

While the British departure from its former colonies had not, as in the French case, inaugurated a new regime of "technical and cultural cooperation," Nigeria did inherit the remnant technical infrastructure of the British Colonial Film Unit. (This, for its part, had no direct equivalent in former French West Africa.[22]) The Colonial Film Unit had been a transregional entity, a functional whole stretching across British Africa; after the independences, its various subsidiaries fell to separate sovereignties, effectively interrupting functional exchanges among its branches. The truncated Nigerian Film Unit, in keeping with its colonial predecessor's documentary orientation, mainly produced useful films and newsreels.[23] It was officially tasked with fundamental education, and to disseminate among the Nigerian populace information pertaining to projects of modernisation and national development, but was in practice commandeered by successive governments as an expedient tool of political legitimisation and propaganda.[24] Like in the colonial era, the films produced by the Film Unit were circulated and screened by way of mobile cinema vans. This mobile circuit is alleged to have penetrated deeply into rural Nigeria.[25] (For lack of reliable record-keeping, it is impossible today to ascertain the true reach of the

---

[20] See Okome, "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," 160. Balogun's doctoral dissertation, finished in 1970, was on documentary film. Jean Rouch is prominently featured in chapter 6 on Moustapha Alassane. He also makes a small appearance in chapter 5 on Med Hondo. This is no coincidence: In the context of early African cinema, the French ethnographer was an unavoidable figure.

[21] Françoise Balogun's scholarly monograph on the beginnings of Nigerian cinema is an important source for the historical reconstruction undertaken in this chapter, and so are her personal testimonies of working with Ola.

[22] As I will show in chapter 6, the French bequeathed their own infrastructural legacy to the development of African cinema.

[23] Sean Graham's *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952), produced by the Colonial Film Unit of the Gold Coast, was a notable exception. See Emma Sandon, "Cinema and Highlife in the Gold Coast: The Boy Kumasenu (1952)," *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 3 (2013).

[24] "The Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Information, has almost a complete monopoly of the production, distribution and exhibition of documentary films," according to Alfred E. Opubor, Onuora E. Nwuneli, and Onuma O. Oreh, "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," in *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria: Proceedings of a Seminar on the Film Industry and Cultural Identity in Nigeria*, ed. Alfred E. Opubor and Onuora E. Nwuneli (Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979), 3.

[25] See Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, "Cinéma et télévision au Nigéria," *Présence Africaine*, no. 58 (1966): 92.

Nigerian Film Unit's mobile cinema, or its actual output, for that matter.[26]) In addition to the Nigerian Federal Film Unit, ministries of information in Nigeria's main regions were entertaining their own, regional film units. Though there was little exchange among its parts, this "network" held a de facto monopoly on the production, distribution and exhibition of documentary films in Nigeria. Through a regionally variable entertainment tax, it also had an—albeit purely absorptive—stake in the exhibition of feature films.[27]

Balogun's employment at the Nigerian Film Unit, according to his wife Françoise, proved an experience of "indescribable frustration."[28] He spent most of his time drafting scripts for films that, owing to lack of funds or his superiors' narrow and overly cautious interpretation of the Film Unit's commission, never got made.[29] In 1968, Balogun quit his position at the Federal Film Unit when he was appointed press attaché at the Nigerian Embassy in Paris, a post he held until 1971.[30] In 1972, he again returned to Nigeria, this time as Research Fellow in Cinematography at the Institute of African Studies at Ife University. The institute disposed of very limited means, just enough to buy and develop film. Between 1973 and 1974, Balogun was charged with creating an audio-visual unit at the Nigerian National Museum. He again felt constrained by parochialism and bureaucratic inertia.[31] Though Balogun held post-graduate degrees in anthropology and filmmaking, his salary was substantially lower than that of other graduate entrants into administration.[32] This is indicative of the low priority accorded to film by the Nigerian state.

It was in these various institutional contexts, close to the Nigerian state, that Balogun made his first steps as a filmmaker, realising three documentary shorts with himself on the camera and Françoise recording sound.[33] His first directorial credit came courtesy of the Nigerian Film Unit: *One Nigeria* (1968) is a message film in defence of Nigerian unity. As state employee, Balogun was compelled to toe the official line of the emergency military government, which at the time was trying to regain control over oil-rich Eastern Nigeria, but he also saw it as his calling to combat the spectre of tribalisation and national disintegration. Two years after the end of the war, Balogun followed up on *One Nigeria*

---

[26] The Nigerian Film Unit, whether on the national or federal level, did not collect statistical data. See Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 5–6.

[27] See Opubor et al, 3–6.

[28] Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 54.

[29] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 59.

[30] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 20.

[31] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 59.

[32] See Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, "A National Film Industry: Assessment of Problems and Suggested Solutions," in *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, ed. Alfred E. Opubor and Onuora E. Nwuneli (Lagos; New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979), 41.

[33] See Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 54.

with *Eastern Nigeria Revisited* (1973). In this optimistic travelogue, again sticking close to the version of events endorsed by the now triumphant central government, re-unification is a foregone conclusion. The conflict, we are told, is but a distant memory; in its stead, Balogun gives us the booming present of oil refineries, railroads, and bustling market towns. Next to the spectacle of national development, however, *Eastern Nigeria Revisited* also includes empathetic images of Igbo custom and popular culture, the world of Balogun's upbringing, intended to show Nigerians in the North and West of the country how the peoples of the defeated East lived. "One of the most acute problems of contemporary African societies," Balogun wrote in a working document for the Symposium on Black Civilization and Education at FESTAC 77, was "uneven access to information among various segments of the nation, with the resultant ill-integration of collective national perception of wider issues."[34] Mass media, and film in particular, could be deployed to counter the "disintegrative impact of the colonial experience," and even to foster an "increasing uniformity of outlook."[35] *One Nigeria* and *Eastern Nigeria Revisited* were first demonstrations of the utility of film as a medium of national integration.[36] However, as I have shown, despite pressure to comply with the Film Unit's propaganda mandate—and despite Balogun's own talk of "uniformity"—his practice even then was grounded in an ideal of communication as empathetic and mutually enriching exchange.

<div align="center">⁂</div>

Feature film production in Nigeria was even more "belated" than elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Françoise Balogun traces its beginnings to the founding, in 1965, of Calpenny Productions, a Nigerian-American joint venture orchestrated by the Nigerian producer Francis Oladele. Delayed by the civil war and political unrest, Calpenny Productions only really took off in the 1970s and went bankrupt soon thereafter.[37] The first films produced by Oladele's company were *Kongi's Harvest* (1970), based on Wole Soyinka's eponymous play, and *Bullfrog in the Sun* (1972), a film version of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.[38] Neither was helmed by a Nigerian filmmaker. Distrustful of Nigerian technical personnel and unduly concerned with foreign perceptions, Oladele preferred foreign hires to direct his productions. In 1970, the Lebanese-Nigerian company Fedfilms

---

[34] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 12.
[35] Balogun, 2; Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 1.
[36] "So long as the villager living in Sokoto or Maiduguri has no access to information about the way of life of his counterpart in Calabar or Nsukka […] so long will the ideal of a truly united Nigeria continue to elude us." Balogun, *Cultural Policies*, 6.
[37] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 46.

produced *Son of Africa*. A contemporary critic in the Nigerian *Daily Times* called for the film to be renamed "Daughters of Lebanon," for it was made by a Lebanese crew and entirely with Lebanese capital. The film's plot, which parachutes an international secret agent into Lagos to investigate a local counterfeit ring, reflects these circumstances. However, *Son of Africa* was also among the very first commercial productions to prominently feature Nigerian actors; indeed, this was by most accounts the reason behind its commercial success.[39] Whatever the film's defects, it demonstrated the popular appeal and commercial viability of Nigerian on-screen talent.

Sometime in the early 1970s, Balogun met John and Dominique de Ménil, a French-American couple of art patrons and collectors who professed an interest in sponsoring the development of African arts.[40] The Ménils were won over by his proposal of a film on the Yoruba creation myth, to which Balogun had been inspired while shooting a series of documentaries on Yoruba and Nupe festivals, *Fire in the Afternoon* (1971), *Thundergod* (1972), and *Nupe Masquerade* (1973).[41] Funded by the Menil Foundation, the short *In the Beginning...* (1972) takes place in a minimalist open-air setting reducing the natural environment to its basic elements earth, water, and sky.[42] Looming over a cliff, musician and performance artist Jimi Solanke narrates and re-enacts the mythical deeds of creator deity Olodumare, sky father Obatala, Shango, the irascible god of thunder, and of the deified emperor Oduduwa, who unified the communities of Ife into a single state.[43] In 1972, with remaining funding by the Menil Foundation, a private donation from the Nigerien [sic] diplomat Lambert Massan,[44] and technical support from the Comité du film ethnographique, Jean Rouch's film division at the Musée de l'Homme, Balogun was finally in a position to tackle his first feature film project, the felicitously titled *Alpha*.[45]

If the first feature films produced in post-independence Nigeria were in some important senses "foreign-made," the first feature film directed by a Nigerian was made in a foreign country. Shot and edited in Paris during Balogun's tenure at the Nigerian embassy, *Alpha* is the rare Anglophone entry in the corpus of Paris-set African films marking

---

[38] The latter was co-produced by Film Three (Germany) and Nigram Corporation (US).

[39] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 46.

[40] For more on the Menil Foundation, see Kristina Van Dyke, "The Menil Collection: Houston, Texas," *African Arts* 40, no. 3 (2007).

[41] Françoise Balogun, "It was Before Nollywood!," in *The Magic of Nigeria: On the Cinema of Ola Balogun*, ed. Filmkollektiv Frankfurt (Frankfurt am Main: Filmkollektiv Frankfurt, 2016), 59.

[42] These are the basic ingredients of most creation myths.

[43] "Shango" was also the name of Med Hondo's theatre company (see 5.1).

[44] Messan was a personal friend of Balogun's, and the subject of his short *Vivre!* (1974), a moving portrait of Messan, whom a car accident in France had left hemiplegic, aiming to change perceptions about disability in West Africa. In the film, Messan's wheelchair is shown as a piece of enabling technology.

[45] See Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 55. Balogun was on friendly terms with Rouch, who had supervised his thesis (see above).

the extraterritorial beginnings of African cinema, alongside Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's *Afrique-sur-Seine*, Désiré Écarée *Concerto pour un exil*, and many others.[46] *Alpha* typifies this tendency insofar as it portrays a diasporic milieu of relative privilege, at some remove from the African migrant workers who are the focus of Med Hondo's practice. Much like Hondo's debut feature, *Soleil Ô*, *Alpha* attempts to capture on film its director's profound sense of alienation. Almost twenty years have passed since Vieyra's pioneering *Afrique-sur-Seine* and the optimism of that film, made in the year of Bandung Conference, has given way to *Alpha*'s altogether more melancholic outlook, redolent of the political crises of the post-independence era. Solemn and meandering, the film is, in Françoise Pfaff's description, an "experimental and somewhat hermetic work,"[47] bearing little resemblance to anything else in Balogun's oeuvre, or indeed in the history of African cinema—and yet a film that variously prefigures Balogun's popular turn. It also anticipates his definitive return to the continent: Turning its back on Europe, *Alpha* looks out towards African futures.

The titular hero, played by Senegalese-Gambian actor James Campbell-Badiane, is a sombre man of few words living in a minimalist attic flat somewhere in Paris. Painters, musicians, and writers drop in and out of Alpha's sparsely furnished studio through an always open door to discuss, usually in the same breath, politics, art, and philosophy. In between conversations, the film follows Alpha's guests, African exiles all, on a series of Parisian *derives* as they drift from parks to cafés to cellar bars. They are played by Balogun's friends playing versions of themselves: Jimi Solanke (the protagonist of *In the Beginning…*), the Cameroonian filmmaker Daniel Kamwa, the African American painter Bill Hutson, the Jamaican-born writer Lindsay Eseoghene Barrett, and others.[48] Their exchanges, improvised on the spot on the basis of Balogun's prompts, are heated but markedly removed from everyday concerns, which only seems appropriate given their elevated perch in Alpha's stage-like attic flat. "All our art is communication," announces Jimi, the musician and performer, though this means different things to each of the group. *Alpha* moves to and fro among different art forms, different sensory registers, and modes of address, staging conversations—and confrontations—between them. The writer Lindsay tries to connect with the people in the medium of the written word but is rendered power-

---

[46] To my knowledge it is the only Anglophone film in this corpus. For a more thorough discussion of these works and their relation to "African cinema," see 5.1.

[47] Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 24.

[48] Kamwa's appearance is brief but mentioned here because of the affinities between his and Balogun's vision of a popular African cinema. Kamwa's first film, *Boubou-cravate* (1972), is also an experimental deconstruction of Europeanisation, while his later work, like Balogun's, turns to popular forms. Kamwa's *Pousse-pousse* (1976) and *Notre fille* (1981) were unprecedented commercial successes in the context of

less by illiteracy and censorship at home. Meanwhile, Jimi strives for a mystical communion, singing and dancing, as he says, "in a movement to the gods." Jimi's dance in the park precipitates a multiplication of the world: By way of an optical trick the monocular image fractures into a kaleidoscopic array. Alpha himself appears as some kind of political figure, an exiled revolutionary perhaps—but he resolutely rejects this role: "I am not a leader." Alpha's politics never take the form of direct action. It is his Weltanschauung which is revolutionary. Gesturing at what is clearly the drawing of a bird, he refuses to call it that. Rather, as he solemnly declares, "it is form, colour, light, movement!" Alpha meets the named and known world with a radical scepticism which extends to his own person: "Don't ever put a name on me!" "Alpha," as he explains, precisely marks a refusal to be named and thereby contained. Nameless, he becomes one with the cosmos: "I am the sea, the moon, the sun, the idea." Alpha's refusal represents a challenge to the written word—to the way it divides the world into subjects and objects, colonisers and colonised. Form, colour, light, movement: Through these, it is implied, the medium of film may contribute to a process of un-naming. "That is what we have to give to our people," Alpha concludes, giving voice to Balogun's own nascent poetics.[49]

The optical trick using a diffracted lens would be redeployed in Balogun's later works, both in documentaries like *Owuama, a New Year Festival* (1973) and in popular fiction films like *Ajani-Ogun* (see 4.3), and always in order to invoke animist cosmologies.[50] In *Owuama*, which documents the traditional New Year celebrations in an Ikwerre village, young men dressed in colourful garments become vessels for spirits emanating from the "other world." Their whirling dance, chasing after scared children and bemused grown-ups, makes the image fracture exactly as it does during Jimi's self-described "movement to the gods," inviting us to "share directly a mystical experience," as Pfaff describes *Owuama's* peculiar mode of address, without the "overbearing and omniscient rigid explanatory narration" prevalent in Western ethnographic cinema.[51] A main relay of this wordless invitation, the diffracted lens approximates animist forms of intuition, open-

---

African post-independence cinema, and subject to similar criticisms from other African filmmakers and pundits.

[49] Before he was able to make his first films, Balogun had attempted something similar in a different medium. *Shango* (1968) is a royal drama straddling history and mythology; *Le Roi-Éléphant* (The Elephant King, 1968) draws on animal fable to tell a political parable about the broken promises of independence and the descent into military rule. Both plays interpose elements of oral tradition into the European cultural technology of literary drama. Oral storytelling not only provides his plays' themes but also shapes their textual operations. By combining two versions of Shango's origin story, for instance, Balogun sought to retain some of the variability of orality. But he was still bound by the written word. (Neither play was staged at the time.) See Ola Balogun, *Shango suivi de Le Roi-Éléphant* (Honfleur: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1968).

[50] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 24.

[51] Pfaff, 24.

ing a line of communication with the spirit world.[52] It is important to note that this contact with the spirits, rather than recover some lost totality, fractures and multiplies the real. Balogun's films do not purport to make the world whole again.

In Françoise Balogun's recollection, *Alpha* was a "gift." Though Rouch is credited in an advisory capacity, the Menils gave Balogun free reign to do as he pleased with the funds they put at his disposal. Owing perhaps to this rather unusual lack of restriction, budgetary limitations notwithstanding, *Alpha* is beholden to an auteurist conception of film as the director's personal expression. But it also already shows Balogun en route to what described as his conversion, "which consists in considering it [film] a means of communication." *Alpha* aims to initiate a process of unlearning—of the precepts of literacy and perhaps of Balogun's European training more generally. We may think of Alpha's refusal to be named as an internal challenge to the film's auteurist imprimatur. Jimi's dance to the gods, which fractures and multiplies the world, prefigures Balogun's later efforts to communicate with the spirits. The film concludes with Alpha taking off on a plane journey for his unnamed home country, but there is no mistaking this return for a romantic return to the source. The "real struggle in Africa," Balogun maintained in a conversation with Catherine Ruelle, "consists in regaining ways of thinking and ways to approach our problems that rely on a confidence found within ourselves, in our civilisation and traditions: not in the sense of a return to the past but in the sense of a continuity."[53] *Alpha* was a rehearsal of Balogun's return to Nigeria. But when he showed the film in Lagos, only five spectators showed up at the screening.[54] In the following chapters (4.2–4.5), we will see how Balogun, motivated by a desire to connect with local audiences and the worlds they inhabited, moved past the deconstruction of his European training and auteurist signature towards a search for alternative continuities.

4.2 Continuities: mass media and indigenous development (Amadi, 1975)

Balogun's earliest documentaries proposed film as a medium to rally the nation and orient national perceptions—a task that imposed itself with particular urgency amidst Nigeria's prolonged political crisis. The "gift" of *Alpha* was a theoretical and practical rehearsal of Balogun's definitive return to Nigeria, where he found himself, in 1972, without means to

---

[52] In the film's dedication, taken from the *Teachings of Don Juan* (1968) by American anthropologist-turned-cult leader Carlos Castaneda, there is mention of another world accessible through "cracks" in the fabric of this one.
[53] Balogun quoted in Ruelle, "Balogun Ola," 23.
[54] See Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 55.

definitive feature film production. Neither the Nigerian Film Unit nor the Nigerian government saw it within their remit to support the production of feature films.[55] Balogun was forced to change strategy. He took out a bank loan and, in November 1974, registered his own company, Afrocult Foundation.[56] Afrocult was primarily a production and distribution company but in an attempt to diversify operations and create additional income streams also made forays into publishing and musical recording.[57] The company disposed of its own 16mm and 35mm cameras, sound recording and lighting equipment, and editing table.[58] Equipment rentals and service provisions for other production companies brought in further revenue; Afrocult even furnished exhibition venues with 16mm projectors and generators. On this material and financial basis, Balogun was able to produce films independently and with relatively little means.

The first feature film produced by Afrocult, Balogun's *Amadi* (1975), was also the first Nigerian feature film in a Nigerian language.[59] It tells the story of a young Igbo man who after an education in the city returns to his native village to introduce modern agricultural techniques.[60] Pfaff characterises *Amadi* as a "didactic film belonging to the socio-realistic vein."[61] While expounding the importance of fundamental education and agricultural development, emblematised in the communal purchase of a tractor, *Amadi* also revels in Igbo ritual and performance, in particular the worship of the goddess Ala and her son, Amadi-Oha.[62]

In Balogun's view, one major cause of the non-implementation of past development plans was the "failure to involve and motivate grassroots populations."[63] What is more, as Nigerian media scholar Frank Ugboajah seconded, "the link between economy and culture has to be rediscovered or re-established in order to avoid incessant errors in the domain of economic planning and social development."[64] For Balogun, the developmental potential of cinema lay in its "communicative capacity"[65] to inform, sensitise and mobilise African peoples. It would, as he wrote in a 1986 report for OAU, "open up the hori-

---

[55] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 9. A notable exception to this general rule was the historical epic *Shaihu Umar* (1976) by Adamu Halilu.
[56] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 153.
[57] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 43. Remi Kabaka's Afro-jazz score for Ola Balogun's *A deusa negra* (see 4.5) was released and sold separately by Afrocult as an LP record in the same year as the film.
[58] See Françoise Balogun, 43.
[59] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 6. *Amadi* is presumed lost.
[60] The basic plot resembles that of Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's *Môl* (1966), about the son of a Senegalese fishing village who brings back a boat engine after having spent some time in Dakar.
[61] Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 24.
[62] See Pfaff, 24.
[63] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 18.
[64] Frank Ugboajah, "Implications culturelles de la communication en Afrique," *Revue Tiers Monde* 28, no. 111 (1987): 595.

zons of rural populations in African societies" while also "accelerating the pace at which mass urban populations are able to integrate the present day technological age."[66] In *Amadi*, a son of the people returns from the city with modern tools and techniques, but "modernity" and "modernisation" are not something that can be brought to the village from outside. Rather than impose a model of development from without, the film captures the Igbo villagers' rhythm and their cosmos to elaborate from within a "modernising" trajectory integral to their world. In this way, *Amadi* seeks to establish a continuity between technological modernisation and the living cultures of the people, the real subjects of development. And while African critics complained that the film fell short of what "sophisticated audiences" had come to expect of a film in terms of acting and technical command, the locals reportedly flocked to the screen: For audiences in Eastern Nigeria, the first Igbo-language fiction film featuring "familiar scenes and ways of life," as noted by Alfred E. Opubor et al., exerted a "dynamic attraction."[67] The phrasing is suggestive here: Balogun's aim was not to woo sophisticates but to find the *dynamic attraction* inherent in *familiar ways of life*, that is, to animate a developmental dynamic continuous with Africa's living cultures.

The introduction and indigenisation of modern knowledges and technologies is a main preoccupation of *Amadi*—and of the film's making. During the process of filming, Balogun took pains to explain to the villagers the workings of cinema, its technical apparatus and procedures. The villagers, like their fictional counterparts, were introduced to the use of a tractor, on loan from the Nigerian state,[68] however, unlike the villagers in the film, they could not afford to purchase it. *Amadi* demonstrated that the developmental potential of cinema was a double one: on screen—whether in Sembène's consciousness-raising evening school, in the mode of useful films or, as in the hybrid *Amadi*, somewhere in between—and off, by bringing Nigerians into contact with the operations of this technological art. At the same time, the shoot in rural Igboland, far from urban infrastructure and amenities, put to the test the modern apparatus of cinema. Making *Amadi*, on a tiny budget of approximately $19,000[69] and with limited crew, Balogun sought to contribute to wider efforts to "integrate modern technology [...] into the fabric of social life in African countries."[70] Filmmaking was for him a model practice of technological indigenisation.

---

[65] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 20.
[66] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 13.
[67] Opubor et al., 7.
[68] The state also provided for transport and accommodation of the crew during the shoot.
[69] Or ₦30,000. See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 41.
[70] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 3.

A film both *about* and *operative as* indigenous development, *Amadi* at the same time contributes to Balogun's ongoing struggle for Nigerian unification. From where he stood, these were not separate concerns: There could be no Nigerian development, Balogun was convinced, without a unified people.[71] After *Eastern Nigeria Revisited*, *Amadi* took another empathetic look at Igbo culture so that the rest of the nation may know their Eastern neighbours both in their particularity and as fellow Nigerians. A Yoruba born and raised in Igboland, Balogun was himself an, albeit informed, outsider to the culture portrayed in the film. The making itself of *Amadi* actualised the kind of cultural exchange which the finished film aims to convey. But *Amadi* was denied the chance to do its part in reuniting the divided nation. Though the film was well-received in Igboland, distributing it elsewhere in Nigeria proved extraordinarily difficult. Some say it was boycotted in the aftermath of the Biafran War; it was certainly perceived as politically risqué to make a film in Igboland at the time. Balogun eventually came to an arrangement with the Bendel State theatres chain in the Mid-Western Region and personally took the film to the college and university circuit, as Opubor et al. report, "in addition to screening it in any night club, auditorium or anywhere he felt the audience was large enough to warrant a screening."[72] Despite Balogun's best efforts, box office earnings were insufficient to regain costs. He had to find another way to make ends meet.

⁂

With *Amadi*, Balogun had first posed the question of technological indigenisation and indigenous development. How should Africa and African cinema develop? What use of technology—and what role for the returned son? As advisor to UAO, UNESCO and the Nigerian government, Balogun embraced the developmental potential of mass media, but his enthusiasm was more qualified than Vieyra's (see 2.3). Modern mass media, in his view, were both "a source of danger and a source of hope."[73] This ambivalence shows that African filmmakers did not, as James E. Genova claims, uniformly perceive cinema as the "patrimony of humankind."[74] The question of indigenisation was for Balogun a matter of great urgency, to which he devoted serious attention: "[D]o the mass media necessarily vehicle a cultural mold that is native to the Western world, to the exclusion of other cultural perspectives, or can they be successfully harnessed to the needs of the new-

[71] See Balogun, "Le Nigéria doit-il continuer à exister?"
[72] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 10.
[73] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 2.
[74] Genova, *Cinema and Development*, 3.

ly emergent Third World countries?"[75] In the following, complementing the necessarily incomplete discussion of the lost *Amadi*, I look to Balogun's writings of the period for further instruction on his understanding of the role of film in relation to indigenous development.

Balogun posited a dialectical relationship between the development of technology and that of communication, arguing that "technological progress leads to greater perfection in modes of cultural transmission, which in turn help to accelerate man's growing mastery of technology."[76] The technological means of communication were themselves subject to change, which in the case of Western-imported mass media technologies such as cinema and television, had taken shape within a Western cultural matrix. Culture, in turn, was reshaped by technological development: The West had not only reached a certain level of technological sophistication but concurrently elaborated a "technological culture." However, "the cultural forms of the West are by no means necessary appendages of technological progress."[77] African culture, conversely, "both in its traditional forms and in its constantly evolving manifestations,"[78] was not, as modernisation theorists believed, opposed to technological "progress" and "development." Indigenisation as Balogun understood it was more than the appropriation of pieces of technology or the "acquisition of new techniques";[79] it involved a rerouting and rewiring of hegemonic technological culture. Cinema could not simply be imported, it had to be "developed" in a two-way dialectical exchange with Africa's living cultures.[80] Africa would develop its own technological culture, from within an African framework, activating alternative genealogies—alternative continuities—of technological transformation and cultural change. To further this African technological culture in the making, Balogun believed, the practice of making films—and sharing and watching them—would be of central importance.

Balogun's thinking evolved against the backdrop of a "revivalist" cultural retrenchment on the part of African elites, which was reflected in a self-limiting understanding of African culture that began and ended with displays of traditional dance. This "spurious revival," as Balogun called it, was one of the reasons why African state actors generally accorded such a low priority to the development of cinema.[81] Against the raison d'état of successive governments whose cultural policies constructed African culture as innately

[75] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 3.
[76] Balogun, 1.
[77] Ola Balogun, "Ethnology and Its Ideologies," *Consequence: Journal of the Inter-African Council for Philosophy*, no. 1 (1974): 119-120.
[78] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 19.
[79] Balogun, 1.
[80] Balogun, 18.
[81] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 3–4.

"pre-technological," Balogun asserted that Africa had always been a media environment.[82] The encounter of cinema with existing cultures not only promised to engender a new developmental dialectic continuous with local cultures, much as it had in the West. Entering into new productive constellations, old and new media might also reactivate technological genealogies that had been eroded, suppressed, or expropriated in the imperial encounter. Indigenisation, by unlocking developmental potentials in modern media technologies that could not have been anticipated by their Western inventors, was not merely the adaptation of existing inventions but a contestation of the "originality" of Western invention itself.

Balogun's search for African genealogies of cinematic development and technological culture was articulated to a more fundamental reflection on "development." In a 1974 essay on "ethnology and its ideologies" for the journal *Consequence* of the Inter-African Council for Philosophy, Balogun disputed the notion that all change in human society occurred "along the lines of some preestablished internal determinism," and argued change was really shaped by political, economic, and cultural circumstance.[83] Technological change was not synonymous with progress: "A society with better technical skills than another does not necessarily have better social institutions…"[84] In fact, the whole idea of "continuing progress towards perfection in man's social and cultural institutions"[85] was a sham, an impermissible grafting onto the social realm of Darwin's evolutionary model; the bastard child of modern natural science and the "speculations of eighteenth century philosophers."[86]

The integration of modern media technology into the fabric of African societies was for Balogun "a necessary part of the social and cultural growth of our peoples."[87] However, as noted previously, mass media also represented a "source of danger." They were "a means of easy ingress to ideas and values originating from the technologically advanced nations."[88] They could unify Nigeria and strengthen its links to the rest of the continent, or subject it to cultural imperialism and further its disintegration. Lacking media infrastructure, organisation, and know-how, developing nations risked remaining "on the receiving end as passive recipients of products manufactured elsewhere."[89] Cinema was a singularly powerful tool to influence social attitudes and behaviours but, unless appropri-

---

[82] The phrase ("media environment") is Diène's. See "La création audiovisuelle en Afrique," 154.
[83] Balogun, "Ethnology and Its Ideologies," 115.
[84] Balogun, 114.
[85] Balogun, 113.
[86] Balogun, 114.
[87] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 4.
[88] Balogun, 2.
[89] Balogun, 2.

ated by African producers, could end up leading audiences astray. To illustrate this point, Balogun cited the "many thousands of African youths who leave cinema houses emulating the behaviour of cowboys or gangsters, or who are influenced in their choice of clothes by screen heroes."[90] Film posed dangers also to their African makers. Because the relationship between culture and technology was dialectical, resulting in a "technological culture," there always remained the risk that "in the process of assimilating the one [Western technology] a little of the other [Western technological culture] is inevitably being swallowed at the same time."[91] The West knew this, too, and exploited it by way of seemingly selfless technology transfers or, as in the French case, "technical and cultural cooperation." But Balogun was no technological determinist. He disputed the view that "the spread of modern technology necessarily implies a negation of traditional cultural perspectives."[92] Still, friction and contradictions were to be expected. The indigenisation of cinema had to be a careful mediation of social change and "cultural continuity."[93] The task, as Balogun conceived it, was to "find a way of doing things that would allow it [cinema] to be 'at home' in Africa."[94] In what follows, I turn to Balogun's anthropological writings on African traditional arts alongside a host of other African filmmakers and theorists, to help me think holistically about the place that "cinema," as technological practice, aesthetic object, or viewing experience, might come to occupy in African societies—how cinema might interact with African culture and how it might be reinvented in the process.

Balogun proclaimed cinema the "inheritor of previous visual and oral traditions."[95] He was not the first, nor the last, to do so: The impact of orality on narrative form is a common theme in the literature, often discussed in terms of heterogeneity, digression, and repetition.[96] For Balogun, orality also was a pedagogic paradigm: Treading in the footsteps of African storytellers, filmmakers should aim to provide "useful knowledge" and "moral lessons."[97] He anticipated a "true renaissance of African storytelling traditions

---

[90] Balogun, 15. I will return to this widespread anxiety about the susceptibility of African cinema spectators, especially to the Western genre, in 6.3.

[91] Balogun, "Ethnology and Its Ideologies," 122.

[92] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 4.

[93] Balogun, 9.

[94] Balogun quoted in Ruelle, "Balogun Ola."

[95] Ola Balogun, "Cinema, Reality and the Dream World: Film Language as the Inheritor of Visual and Oral Tradition," in *Cinema and Society*, ed. International Film and Television Council (IFTC) under the auspices of UNESCO (Brussels: OCIC/IFTC, 1981), 46.

[96] See, e.g., Keyan G. Tomaselli, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke, "Towards a Theory of Orality in African Cinema," *Research in African Literature* 26, no. 3 (1995).

[97] Ola Balogun, "Decoding the Message of African Sculpture," *The UNESCO Courier*, no. 5 (1977): 12. Balogun also wrote that cinema was "the perfect realization of the age-old desire of societies to teach man more through stories and fables than by direct instruction." Balogun, "Cinema, Reality and the Dream World," 46.

through the cinema medium."[98] But in describing the link between African cinema and oral cultures as an "inheritance," Balogun's writings suggest an even more transformational relationship. Cinematography was a form of writing that could not only preserve otherwise ephemeral oral cultures but would also expand their uses and reach. By amplifying and extending into the present these oral pedagogies, cinema would not only help integrate modern knowledges and techniques into the African cultural fabric but moreover consolidate orality as medium for the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, thus guaranteeing, in a medium that is not in the narrow sense "writing," the "preservation and development of the spiritual and material conquests of civilisation."[99]

African traditional arts, as Doudou Diène has pointed out, are a "total art" mixing verbal messages with gestural, musical, and rhythmic elements.[100] The separation customary in the modern European aesthetic tradition into the distinct genres of sculpture, dance, drama, and musical performance, does not apply, as Balogun makes clear: "Although there are instances of dance displays or music performances that are practised in isolation, music, dance and ritual are often linked in a single framework related to a specific religious or social ceremony."[101] Sang-Amin Kapalanga Gazungil and Daniel Peraya have theorised this communal, improvisational, and, as they say, "global" or "synthetic" form whose purpose may be festive, ludic, or ceremonial, as "African spectacle." In the way it incorporates different arts and genres, they argue, African spectacle comes close to a "festival."[102] For Balogun, cinema, a total art itself, would animate the entirety of this moving spectacle, and in turn be animated by it. Masks and masquerade dances, as central components of the moving totality of African spectacle, had to be seen, Balogun insisted, not as they were encountered in Western museums, that is, not as reified objects abstracted from their living environment, but in context and in motion:[103] "The total effect is […] one of a moving sculpture unravelling strips of colour and mass as it dances in rhythm to

[98] Balogun, Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 17.

[99] Balogun, 1. At the same time, like many African commentators, Balogun hoped cinema would help overcome the limitations of illiteracy by helping those unable to read or write achieve greater levels of education: "Film and television production also have a vital role to play in development projects in general, because of the crucial ability of audio-visual media to convey information in a direct manner to grassroots populations that are unable to read and write." Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 19. But fundamental education projects targeting illiteracy as main impediment to African development, however well intended, risked putting oral forms of communication under erasure, obliterating existing cultural bonds.

[100] Diène, "La création audiovisuelle en Afrique," 155.

[101] Ola Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," in *Introduction to African Culture: General Aspects*, ed. Alpha I. Sow, Ola Balogun, Honorat Aguessy, and Pathé Diagne (Paris: UNESCO, 1979), 39.

[102] Sang-Amin Kapalanga Gazungil and Daniel Peraya, "Le groupe, essence du spectacle africain?," in *Camera nigra: le discours du film africain*, ed. Centre d'Etude sur la Communication en Afrique (CESCA) (Brussels: OCIC/L'Harmattan, 1984), 103.

music and runs to and fro across the visual field covered by the onlooker […]."[104] Cinema would restitute the mask's rightful place in Africa's living and moving culture while also expanding its capacity to signify: "What better extension […] to the art of the masquerade dancer than the cinema or television camera that isolates and amplifies different aspects of this dance and creates a new, dynamic synthesis from the whole."[105] Elsewhere, Balogun described masquerade performance as the "material manifestation of an intangible element"; "designed to invoke such gods or to establish the communion of a community with them, as well as to remind members of the community of their relationship with non-human forces in the universe," which suggests yet another, more speculative link between the mask and the cinema.[106] "Perceived like reality, and experienced as a dream," the filmic image, like the mask, constitutes a threshold to another world, which it simultaneously discloses and conceals.[107] The modern masquerade dance of cinema, or so Balogun's writings seem to suggest, could bring an accommodation between technological practice and the animist imagination.

African debates around the indigenisation of cinema moved beyond the focus on filmic form we find in the research literature, touching on cinematic experience, spaces of reception, and practices of consumption. Balogun and other African filmmakers turned to ritual spaces like the village square, the carnival parade, and other, not necessarily "traditional," stages of African cultural life as fulcrum for a reconceptualisation of audience functions and positions.[108] In African spectacle, audience exclamations and expressions produce an effect on the performer, inflecting the performance. The audience is very close to the performers, often arranged in a circle around them, allowing for fluid changes in position: Spectators frequently turn into participants. Against the Western invention of cinema as a centralised "parole sans reponse," African filmmakers and media theorists speculated that the event of cinematic projection might take on some of the reciprocal and dialogical characteristics of African spectacle.[109] Might the dispositif of the village square undo the one-to-many mode entrenched in Western exhibition spaces and practices? Ba-

---

[103] This criticism of the reification of African arts in Western collections was a common theme at the time. It is echoed, for instance, in Resnais and Marker's *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953) to Sembène's *La Noire de…* (1966).

[104] Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," 52.

[105] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 5.

[106] Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," 42.

[107] Balogun, "Cinema, Reality and the Dream World," 44.

[108] Important films engaging with this question are Balogun's *Owuama* (1973) and his later *River Niger, Black Mother* (1989); Inoussa Ousseïni Sountalma's *Ganga* (Niger, 1975), *Lutte saharienne* (Niger, 1977), *Wasan Kara* (Niger, 1980), and *Le Soro* (Niger, 1980); Ruy Guerra's *Mueda, memoria e massacre* (Mozambique, 1979); Sanou Kollo's *Les Dodos* (Burkina Faso, 1980); Sarah Maldoror's *Cap Vert, un carneval dans le Sahel* (France, 1979) and *A Bissau, le carnaval* (Guinea-Bissau, 1980).

logun hoped that, captured on film, the moving forms of African spectacle would get a new lease of life—and that cinema might in turn be imbued with new life in the process. We can see why African filmmakers thought that cinema exhibition in Africa should be reshaped by African performance cultures. This, after all, is how moving images were indigenised elsewhere. In Europe, European theatrical traditions had shaped everything from the basic spatial dispositif of cinematic projection, to audience behaviours and the architecture of exhibition venues, up to and including the filmic text and its mode of address. The moving form of African spectacle, modulated by audience reactions and often disregarding the separation of actors and spectators, would now become the template for a radical reinvention of the frontal, one-way dispositif of Western cinema. By connecting cinema to Africa's pre-existing media environments, African filmmakers hope to reshape and reinvent what we mean when we say "cinema." As we will see in 4.4, the alternative forms of film distribution and exhibition Balogun invented in collaboration with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre were informed by popular performance practices and dispositifs of spectatorship. Balogun's "Yoruba Travelling Cinema" (my coinage) will serve as a practical example of indigenisation in this encompassing sense.

But there were also limits to indigenisation. Firstly, it involved adaptations to African economic realities. Balogun advocated a low-capital mode of production with little, lightweight equipment and a reduced crew.[110] In a 1985 newspaper article for the Nigerian *Guardian*, he argued for filming outside of film studios and at authentic locales, "especially as film equipment is now so compact and lightweight that filming on location does not pose as many challenges as in the past."[111] Balogun recommends shooting on 16mm, which is not only much more affordable than 35mm but also less inhibiting for actors and thus better suited to working with non-professionals in a natural environment.[112] At the same time, Balogun was very aware that cinema was more than just a camera: "Film is a cultural medium which is inextricably grounded into an industrial, technological and commercial framework," requiring "the mobilization of considerable capital" and "by

---

[109] See Diène, "La création audiovisuelle en Afrique," 150. Also see Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*, 62.

[110] Ola Balogun, "Pathways to the Establishment of a Nigerian Film Industry [1985]," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 186. As precedents for this "new approach to filmmaking," Balogun adduces Peter Fonda's *Easy Rider*, Lindsay Anderson's *If*, John Cassavetes' *Shadows*, Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir*, and Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World*—Free Cinema, Direct Cinema, Cinéma vérité. See Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 8.

[111] Balogun, "Pathways to the Establishment of a Nigerian Film Industry," 186.

[112] See Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 9. Two of his feature-length films were shot on 16mm with only five crew members (a camera assistant, sound engineer, sound assistant, lighting assistant, and a production executive/script assistant—his wife Françoise), the others were filmed on 35mm.

force an object of commercial exchange."[113] Like Vieyra, Balogun was optimistic about the economic benefits that could potentially accrue to African countries if they cared to invest in the development of national film industries, including, in Balogun's reckoning, not just direct revenue and taxes but also job creation—technicians, actors, and other industry personnel—and the reduction of foreign exchange expenditure for the import of foreign films.[114] For these wider economic benefits to materialise, however, production had to attain an industrial level.[115] Without state support, this seemed increasingly unlikely. "Indigenisation" also had to entail necessary adjustments to this unfortunate reality.

Others worried that the encounter of cinema and African culture would not lead to the "dynamic attraction" Balogun hoped to bring about but might instead favour or even amplify regressive tendencies, thus harming the prospects of African development. Kapalanga Gazungil and Peraya have argued that traditional cultures, rather than liberate new potentials for cinema, in fact ended up constraining the medium's efflorescence in Africa.[116] Social behaviours in "traditional" settings were being modelled by the "history of the group," they suggest, leading social actors to "obey a pragmatism that pushes them to prefer the gains of the past over new solutions."[117] Where cinema and African "tradition" actually met, the "inertia" of tradition produced direct and ungenerative translations whereby "traditional representations are transferred into the domain of cinema without major modification."[118] This same criticism, as we will see in the next section, was frequently levelled at Balogun's films, too.

Many of Balogun's writings on cinema, African culture, and traditional arts were commissioned and published by UNESCO. They may have influenced the policy shift at the UN's cultural agency traced by Zoë Druick: away from the universalist techno-utopianism of modernisation theory-inspired "development communication," towards questions of indigenisation and local adaptation.[119] In these texts, Balogun made the argument that modern mass media were not only commensurable with "the African cultural perspective,"[120] but much was to be gained for all sides from the integration of cinema

---

[113] Balogun in a talk at the 1982 African Studies Association Conference, quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 22.
[114] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 18–19. Balogun lamented that neither the Lagos Plan of Action for Economic Development in Africa nor the UN Programme for the Industrial Development Decade for Africa (both 1980) made any mention of "the economic and commercial potential of cultural industries such as handicrafts and clothes and textile manufacture based on traditional techniques, as well as the production and marketing of musical recordings, books, films and television programmes." Balogun, 18.
[115] Balogun, 20.
[116] Their argument is a variation on the themes of modernisation theory (see 2.1).
[117] Kapalanga Gazungil and Peraya, "Le groupe, essence du spectacle africain?," 104–105.
[118] Kapalanga Gazungil and Peraya, 105.
[119] See Druick, "UNESCO, Film, and Education."
[120] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 5.

with the fabric of African life. Cinema would grant African spectacle and orality a new lease of life; and it would in turn glean from African "tradition" new uses and modalities, fully transforming cinema into an African art form. Western cinematic cultures, technologies, and modes of production had brought with them certain path-dependencies that African filmmakers now had to navigate and, if need be, resist—or risk reworking the social fabric according to Western designs. Indigenising cinema meant to wrest it away from its Western "inventors," adapt it to African realities, and establish continuity with Africa's living cultures. Balogun was aware of the limitations to that process, chief among them the economy of the film commodity, and therefore envisioned indigenous development as a holistic process: Cinema had to be integrated on the cultural, technical, and economic levels all at once.

In the next two sections, I will discuss Balogun's collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre as case studies of indigenisation, its conditionality, and limitations. As a practice predicated on mutual exchange, Balogun's indigenous cinema had a lot to live up to. How to ensure this was an equal encounter? How to animate, rather than capture, tradition? What about the alleged conservatism of African popular culture, which as we shall see shortly was a constant refrain of Balogun's critics? How to agree on a path for self-determined development? Balogun's Yoruba films, as I will argue, were an attempt to give some preliminary answers, and they did so for all dimensions of cinema simultaneously. I first turn to production (4.3) and then to distribution and exhibition (4.4). The developmental dynamic Balogun initiated soon took its own, unpredictable course, with consequences nobody, least of all Balogun, had foreseen or intended. It was not a smooth process. There were tensions, contradictions, and discord. But there can be no doubt as to the immense generativity of this pioneering practice, a model in its time that lives on today, productive in ways that are still being figured out.

4.3 Living tradition: Balogun with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre (Ajani-Ogun, 1975/76)

Both in historical sources and in recent scholarship, it has been argued that the militant African cinema of the 1960s and 1970s only really reached those militant minorities who were already radicalised and somewhat disengaged from "tradition."[121] The work of filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène, Sarah Maldoror, or Med Hondo, we are told, did not reach the popular masses because it frustrated their desire to be entertained. In chapter 5,

---

[121] See, e.g., Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*, 85.

in conversation with Med Hondo, I will offer a systematic rebuttal of this assertion. What matters for now is that it was shared by Balogun, who noted "a somewhat unfortunate tendency among the first generation of African film makers to place far too much emphasis on ideological and politically oriented statements in their work, often to the detriment of entertainment value." Though "some of the African films have won high praise from foreign critics and local intellectual circles," Balogun went on to say, "audience response in Africa itself has not always been as enthusiastic as might have been expected."[122] If African cinema was a cinema without the people, Balogun suggested, this was not only because it was being sequestered by foreign distribution monopolies but also because of social and cultural stratifications internal to African filmmaking. The urban centres of film production were separated from the peasantry both socially and geographically. African filmmakers, Balogun wrote, "will probably be to some extent cut off from the traditional African cultural and sociological environment"; they "will tend to be urban, to have become familiar with technology in one form or another, and to have received some measure of Western-type education."[123] To call African filmmakers modern "griots" is to cover up the real social divide that existed between these traditional storytellers and artisans, and Western-educated filmmakers like Balogun himself. It is important to note that the conflict between "modernity" and "tradition" was just one dimension of this separation. Balogun had been an outsider to the communities he filmed in *Owuama* or *Amadi* in more ways than one: as an urbanite in the countryside, an entrepreneur with, however limited, access to capital opposite poor farmers who could not afford to buy a tractor, and a Yoruba among Ekwerre and Igbo. In 1972, at a UNESCO meeting in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, on the "Education of the Film-Maker for Tomorrow's Cinema," Balogun warned that a filmmaker "who knows little or nothing of the culture and traditions of a people can scarcely hope to make authentic films about them."[124] In training African filmmakers, Balogun argued, every effort ought to be made to counter these intersecting separations. An African cinema education must centrally include preparations for filmmakers to re-establish contact with the popular masses.

In 1975, Balogun turned to Duro Ladipo, the head of a famed company of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. Together they made *Ajani-Ogun* (1976), the first Yoruba feature film. It was the invention of a prodigious genre but also and at the same time, a distinctive

---

[122] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 13.
[123] Ola Balogun, "Education of the Film-Maker in Africa," talk presented at Education of the Film-Maker for Tomorrow's Cinema: Meeting of Experts, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 22–26 May 1972. The quotation is from a revised version of Balogun's paper, published as Balogun, "The Education of the Film-Maker: Africa," 36.
[124] Balogun, 37–38.

model of film production and distribution, which for a brief period in the history of Nigerian cinema proved commercially viable. Some core features both of the genre and its mode of production and distribution were later absorbed—one might say, re-indigenised—by the rise of Nollywood. The Yoruba travelling theatre was a hybrid art form that had germinated at the intersection of African orality and European drama—introduced among the Yoruba by nineteenth century missionaries—while also harking back to Yoruba court drama or *Alarinjo*. In keeping with the Travelling Theatre's hybrid origins, its performativity merged African oral arts such as praise poetry and incantation with performative modes gleaned from elsewhere, for instance, the television sitcom, resulting in a heterogenous amalgam of forms and genres. It was seen as a spontaneous and popular art form, in opposition to the supposedly more refined English-language literary theatre represented by Wole Soyinka and others. *Ajani-Ogun* was the first of several collaborations between Balogun and members of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. Pace its detractors , it was not merely "filmed theatre" but a real encounter—between a technological mass medium of Western vintage and a hybrid African performance tradition. Françoise Balogun describes the film as the result of a process of "osmosis":[125] Through an exchange with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, *Ajani-Ogun* imbued the medium with a host of new possibilities, but the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, too, was changed in the encounter—and eventually subsumed by it, though Balogun could not have foreseen these later developments. The Yoruba Travelling Theatre saw its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, before being absorbed first by cinema and television and then by the ascending video industry.

Balogun characterised his career itinerary from *Alpha* to *Amadi* as a path from expression to communication,[126] but thus far his return to Nigeria had not brought the desired returns. The often fraught attempt to balance the imperative of communication with the exigencies of economic survival, *Ajani-Ogun* was an "imperfect attempt on a new path," as Françoise Balogun writes.[127] I will describe what did and did not work, highlighting both potentials and limitations of this and later collaborative efforts. Balogun's collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre were a stress test for his practice of indigenisation. They were difficult, and Balogun was not content with the results. His authorship retreated behind a collective author, but there were technical, aesthetic, and epistemic ten-

---

[125] Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 57.
[126] See Azzedine Mabrouki, "Cry Freedom! de O. Balogun," *Les 2 Écrans*, no. 35 (1981), 32.
[127] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 51.

sions within.[128] Balogun did direct them, though in some accounts he is merely credited with "assisting significantly" in their production.[129] It is significant that the films were marketed and subsequently became known as "Hubert Ogunde's *Aiye*," "Baba Sala's *Orun Mooru*" and so forth. In Françoise Balogun's account, these cross-media collaborations were experienced by Balogun as a progressive loss of control, finally slipping out of his hands entirely.[130] Balogun's Yoruba films were subject to often fierce criticism: on grounds of their technical insufficiencies, their "mimetic" qualities (that is, their borrowings from non-African popular cinemas and other popular forms), their unsafe immersion in popular affect, and their possibly reactionary evocation of animist cosmology. These criticisms, levelled at Balogun especially by Nigerian critics, will provide instructive challenges along the way.[131]

"Ajani-Ogun! Return home and fulfil your destiny," a singing voice intones as a young man in hunting garb is seen striding through leafy woods. *Ajani-Ogun* revolves around this, the titular, hero played by popular Yoruba actor Ade Folayan aka Ade Love. Ajani is put on a quest to recuperate his late father's land, which has been seized by the corrupt official Abayomi, played by company head Duro Ladipo. The hero of the tale is introduced in song, yet he is by no means the sole centre of attention. *Ajani-Ogun* is populated by a large and varied cast of side characters, people and spirits alike, who are afforded as much screen time as the nominal lead and have as much of a hand in propelling the narrative forward. In fact, Ajani's journey, which has him and his allies battle the twin evils of corruption and traditional authority, is the foil for an entire community to emerge. While the basic storyline of the film is easily summarised, its emplotment is convoluted, baring in the process various strands of the social tapestry. There is Ajani's love interest, the beautiful Ajoke, and his dwarf sidekick Ojo; the Machiavellian Chief Abayomi and his equally thuggish and inept henchmen; the comically corrupt civil servant Somoye ("You'll be helped, but there ought to be a gift"), and many more. At a crucial junction, the god Ogun intervenes in the otherwise this-worldly universe of the film, instigating a series of events that lead to the restitution of the misappropriated land to its rightful owner, Ajani-Ogun.[132] Roused by Ajani's example, soon the entire community is up in arms against the corrupt chief. Ajani's struggle resonates with that of his community, culminat-

---

[128] Balogun stood out among the Yoruba filmmakers following in his footsteps who, unlike him, "generally [were] not alienated intellectuals trying to recapture their roots." Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 107.
[129] See Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic," 161.
[130] See Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 61.
[131] The historical reviews I will be quoting from anticipate many of the complaints directed at Nollywood by African pundits today.

ing in a fight, an arrest and a happy resolution.[133] In the film's optimistic but strained finale, when a headline in the national newspaper promises "Total War on Corruption!," the story is subsumed by the struggle of an entire nation. Though the penultimate scene belongs to the reunited lovers, the last shot returns us to the people merrily singing and dancing into the credit roll.

Balogun's Yoruba films were sometimes based to existing stage plays, but they all were extensively reworked by Balogun for the screen; *Ajani-Ogun*'s was an original script co-written by Balogun and company leader Duro Ladipo. In practice however, scripts were considered pliable and non-binding. The Yoruba Travelling Theatre did not in fact require a written framework: A basic narrative thread was sufficient basis for the actors' improvisations.[134] While this caused Balogun considerable frustration, he also welcomed the generativity of oral performance. It was important for Balogun that the actors "played" with the story rather than be "imprisoned" by it.[135] Their performances promised to open cinema to the indeterminate horizon of oral transmission, the multiplicity and potentiality of stories told and untold.[136] The creative partnerships Balogun formed with Ladipo and other company leaders of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre—Hubert Ogunde in *Aiye* (1979), Moses Olaiya Adejumo aka Baba Sala in *Orun Mooru* (1982), Ade Afolayan in *Ija Ominira* (1979)—offered a chance to overcome divisions between "modern" and "traditional" creators. With Diène, we may describe them as forms of "collective" authorship on the model of African traditional artmaking.[137] This collective authorship included not just the company heads but extended to the performers. Theirs was a mode of performance inspired by and improvised in close proximity to the masses, with actors and directors commonly recruited from low-ranking castes. Their improvisations were not just stories but enactments of their own experience and that of their audience. When amateur actress Mope Ilori, in the role of Ajani's love interest Ajoke, performs her own introductory song at the beginning of *Ajani-Ogun*, she continually alternates between first and third

---

[132] The misappropriation of ancestral land that serves as the film's organising metaphor is a recurrent theme also in today's Yoruba films, which constitute a niche of their own within the larger context of Nigerian video production.

[133] During an encounter between Ajani and a helpful government official, who like Ajani is bent on eradicating the scourge of corruption, the villagers' song of resistance is echoing on the soundtrack as if to remind us that the individuals we see on screen are really figurations of an underlying collective agency.

[134] See Moncef S. Badday, "Que sera le théâtre africain? Entretien avec Ola Balogun, auteur nigerian," *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, no. 15 (1971): 59.

[135] Balogun quoted in Ruelle, "Balogun, Ola," 23.

[136] Vieyra described the interference of a written script as a hindrance to African expression in feature film production. Not only did it restrict the flow of oral performativity, it also necessitated the intermediate transliteration into a foreign language, as most African languages were still lacking a regular notation. Vieyra cites the example of Sembène's *Mandabi* (1968), performed in Wolof but based on a French script. See Vieyra, "La création cinématographique en Afrique," 228.

[137] Diène, "La création audiovisuelle en Afrique," 153–154.

persons. Crossing the line between presentation and embodiment, Ilori fluidly navigates competing conceptions of personhood: between "Ajoke" as seen from a communal point of view on the one hand, and the "I" of the individual on the other. In her authoritative study of the Travelling Theatre, Karin Barber emphasises how, "in the absence of written scripts, training schools, or guild traditions, there is a peculiarly direct and immediate channel between the actors' own social experience and the plays they generate. They embody the text and tap into their experience to produce character and dialogue."[138] By doing justice to the performativity of the Yoruba Travelling Theater, Balogun hoped to tap into this "direct and immediate channel" to the changing social experience and lifeworlds of the popular masses.

Mindful not to inhibit his performers, Balogun filmed with a relatively small technical crew of eight,[139] and generally tried to put his abilities as filmmaker at the service of the actors' improvisational nous. This turned out to be more challenging than anticipated. Like in the filming of *Amadi*, Balogun did his best to familiarise the performers of *Ajani-Ogun* with the workings of cinema. He explained the particulars of the monocular camera lens and its field of vision so that actors would not stray outside the frame or block each other out. But his efforts to capture the generativity of oral performance within the parameters of cinematic technique were frequently foiled. It was nearly impossible, remembers Françoise Balogun, to get performers who were unaccustomed to the "discipline of repetition" to remain consistent between takes (or different shot sizes), causing problems for continuity editing.[140] Balogun resorted to covering entire scenes with a full shot first and then picking out details in close-up, but because performances were so unpredictable, the detail shots were often hard to integrate with the master. Absent locally accessible film labs, Balogun had no recourse to rushes which would have allowed him to spot problematic transitions in time for a reshoot. The technical difficulties and compromise involved in this balancing act are plainly visible in the finished film; many scenes are little more than serviceably framed conversations, punctuated by disconnected close-ups.

The spirit world, as we have seen, was present in Balogun's previous films, but nowhere was it so spectacularly visible as in his collaborations with the Travelling Theatre. In addition to the diffracted lens already used in *Alpha* and *Owuama*, Balogun invented a number of other ingenious special effects using colour filters and superimpositions to picture ghostly apparitions. He also found more subtle means: When Ajani's right to the land

---

[138] *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theater* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 422.
[139] See Françoise Balogun, "It was Before Nollywood," 67.
[140] Françoise Balogun, "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos," 59.

is reinstated by messenger, Balogun frames the scene from above to suggest a non-human presence, perhaps of the god Ogun who intervened on Ajani's behalf. For Balogun's co-author, company head Duro Ladipo, the main attraction of cinema was as a means to expand the audience of the Travelling Theatre, though he was also interested in how the technology of cinema could be used to represent or even amplify a sense of the magical and the sacred.[141] Balogun's subsequent Yoruba films, especially *Aiye* and *Ija Ominira*, which are both set in a mythical past, lean even deeper into the spirit realm, often beyond Balogun's own comfort zone. Shooting *Aiye*, Balogun "found himself in the paradoxical position of making a film about witchcraft thereby giving visual representation, and to a sometimes naive audience, confirmation of beliefs he did not share."[142] Among the many agencies with a stake in Balogun's Yoruba films, in addition to the director, the company leader, the performers, and of course the audience, there was "aiye"—the Yoruba word for the other world. A polysemic term, *aiye* translates as "the world," "the earth," "life," or simply "existence," all of which suggest that it is not simply "other" but very much a part of *this* world. According to the Nigerian poet and critic Niyi Osundare, in his review of Balogun's film of the same name, *aiye* is sometimes seen as a "negating energy, the collective ill will of inimical forces," which however "can, through invocation, appeasement, and sacrifice, be re-harnessed, neutralised, and even put to positive use, an operation which requires a counter-force, a benevolent medium whose powers are large enough to tame the wild malevolence of 'aiye.'"[143] Osundare here explains the plot of Balogun's films but his description is suggestive also of Balogun's wrestling with the various parties involved in his collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. Would the filmmaker's powers of invocation be sufficient to "tame" the many agencies unbound in the encounter of cinema with African popular culture?

<p style="text-align:center">⁂</p>

Balogun believed that the "aesthetic appreciation of African art forms should be fundamentally linked to an understanding of their purpose."[144] African traditional arts, "are not made to be contemplated as works of art per se, but for use in connection with religious or social rituals or ceremonies."[145] The style of the mask carver, for instance, was not autonomous but "imposed by the system of beliefs and the conceptual framework within

---

[141] See Françoise Balogun, 57.
[142] Niyi Osundare, "A Grand Escape Into Metaphysics," *West Africa*, no. 3277 (May 12, 1980): 828.
[143] Osundare, "A Grand Escape," 828.
[144] Balogun, "Decoding the Message of African Sculpture," 13.

which he lives and works."[146] While the work of the African traditional artist was therefore "closely dependent on the entire social and cultural context in which it is created," masks produced on a commercial basis and for Western mass consumption often only preserved the "mere external characteristics of their style."[147] Balogun thought the African filmmaker should learn from the art of the mask carver, and to develop from within the life-world of his collaborators an indigenous form of communication. In this way, he hoped to "use tradition as a means to progress,"[148] not reiterate stereotypes of a static "traditional Africa"[149]—but this is just what his critics accused him of. To many of them, the product of Balogun's labours more closely resembled mass-produced masks: marred by technical infidelities and commercial pressures, caving in to both African revivalism and foreign influence.

Balogun's Yoruba films were not particularly well-received by African commentators. Vieyra called *Ajani-Ogun* a "failure" on account of its "formal inadequacies,"[150] while the Nigerian-born cinema scholar Frank N. Ukadike, in his well-known study of *Black African Cinema*, knocked Balogun's films for their perceived dearth of "cinematic qualities."[151] Niyi Osundare took *Aiye* to task for its "technical infirmities," and submitted the film as evidence that Nigerian cinema was "still plagued by the kind of pedestrian amateurishness that reminds one of a third-rate Indian movie in the sixties."[152] The dances, songs, and special effects of *Ajani-Ogun* put critics in mind of Bollywood melodrama, but while Willy Bozimbo, writing in the Nigerian *Daily Times*, was delighted by the "singing and dancing in the true fashion of Indian film lovers,"[153] Opubor et al. lamented the foreign influence of Indian films—all the while applauding the "French surrealism" of the jungle scenes.[154] All agreed that Balogun was mimicking foreign popular cinemas in a bid to win over Nigerian audiences; for some, this was tantamount to a relinquishing of African authenticity for the sake of profit. One Nigerian critic called Balogun's attitude oppo-

---

[145] Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," 38.
[146] Balogun, "Decoding the Message of African Sculpture," 14.
[147] Balogun, 20.
[148] There is a tension between this qualified assertion of "progress" and Balogun's wholesale rejection of the term in his essay for *Consequence*. Different contexts of utterance may have required different critical emphases, but this example also goes to show how difficult it is to extract ourselves from the logic of development.
[149] Balogun paraphrased in Osundare, "A Grand Escape," 828.
[150] Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Xe anniversaire des Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage," *Présence Africaine*, no. 101–102 (1977): 232.
[151] Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1994).
[152] Niyi Osundare, "The King of Laughter," *West Africa*, no. 3388 (July 12, 1982): 1821; Osundare, "A Grand Escape," 827.
[153] The film's "action-packed events" also reminded Bozimbo of Hong Kong martial arts cinema. See Willy Bozimbo, "Ajani-Ogun Can Pull a Crowd," *Daily Times*, May 17, 1976: 8.
[154] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 7–8.

site his collaborators "patronising," another suggested that his relation to the popular was exploitative.[155] Nigerian critics were especially dismissive of what they viewed as the innate political conservatism of Yoruba cinema, meeting some of Balogun's later films with outright opprobrium. Hyginus Ekwuazi accused Yoruba films of betraying the same impoverished notion of African culture that Balogun himself rejected as "spurious revivalism": In this "African folklorist cinema," Ekwuazi wrote, "culture takes the form of dance, of festivals."[156] More recently, Jonathan Haynes has restated this reproach in accusing *Aiye* of nostalgia—"aiming at restoring a pre-existing stasis"—and contrasting the film's "whole and intact" world-view to the "dialogized, fragmented, and multiple consciousness that goes with modern urban life."[157] Ogunde's films in particular, Haynes argues, are tinged with a nostalgia that addresses the "crisis that modernity has brought to the traditional Yoruba world by denying it."[158] What riled Nigerian critics above all else was Balogun's "grand escape into metaphysics"[159]—his endorsement of *aiye*, which for Osundare and many others represented a "reinforcement of the destructive illogicalities and collective paranoia that rule Nigerian life."[160] Balogun never denied that in making these films, he was in part impelled by economic necessity. While he admitted to a certain shallowness of the Travelling Theatre, he defended his tactical aim of creating an African cinema for the masses.[161] Even if Balogun was not always content with the outcome, there is something irrepressibly exuberant about these theatre-film-composites owing to the performers' "conjunctive" and "fluid" style.[162] Against Balogun's critics, I will argue that his Yoruba films ought to be judged not by the exacting standards of "cinematic" or "African" specificity but as impure, hybrid forms in the making.

Balogun always resisted the accusation of foreign influence, stating that the components of his Yoruba films were all derived from the Travelling Theatre itself and the even older theatrical tradition of Alarinjo, which like Bollywood melodrama feature song and dance. However, Balogun's defensiveness in this matter obscures the fact that the Travel-

---

[155] Aig-Imoukhuede, "A National Film Industry," 42. Another critic—and, it should be noted, a personal friend of Balogun's—however asserted that "he [Balogun] has used the stars and the conventions of this popular form without the slightest hint of condescension." Eseoghene Barrett, "Ajani-Ogun: A Film for All Seasons," *New Nigerian*, June 19, 1976: 2.

[156] Hyginus Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2018). Onookome Okome has drawn parallels to the essentialism of Negritude. See "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," 163.

[157] Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 106.

[158] Haynes, 106.

[159] Osundare, "A Grand Escape Into Metaphysics."

[160] Osundare, 828, about *Aiye*: "The film takes us back several years, lures us into metaphysical chaos, and injects us with a dose of anaesthesia at a time when we should stay alert and ready to fight the myriad problems that besiege our existence."

[161] See Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic."

[162] Onookome Okome, "The Character of Popular Indigenous Cinema in Nigeria," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1995): 100.

ling Theatre was itself a thoroughly hybrid and modern form "deliberately differentiated from older genres such as masquerade theatre," as Karin Barber observes.[163] There was no "original" state of the genre anterior to foreign influence. The alleged "conservatism" of Balogun's films likewise needs to be qualified. It is true that in the plays of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre the status quo is usually reinstated. At the same time, as Barber remarks, the "highly digressional plot systems" deployed by the Yoruba Travelling Theatre made it "possible to include a wide spectrum of social facts and cultural debates."[164]At the end of *Ajani-Ogun*, Ajani breaks into song: "What was lost has been regained!" But in telling this simple story—of harmony disturbed and recovered—the film weaves an intricate web of relations and thus gives rise to a storyworld that is not whole and intact but dialogised, fragmented, multiple. *Ajani-Ogun* candidly deals with the crises of the present, and while the film does not develop a systematic political analysis of abuses of power and corruption, it does offer up allegorical figurations of the social totality. Balogun's "great escape into metaphysics," on the other hand, was shot through with secular concerns. He tried to employ the animist imagination of "aiye" which bridges the physical/material and the spiritual/magical realms as an epistemic resource that could be harnessed for critical ends, for instance, by invoking magical objects and supernatural agencies as oblique expressions of a collective will.

Barber argues that appreciations of African popular culture are commonly subject to the "gravitational pull" of a European model of development from "tradition" to "modernity."[165] The public sphere constituted by the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, however, was "resistant to assimilation to any universalistic before-and-after account of 'the transition to modernity.'"[166] The oscillation of Mope Ilori's performance between a communal and a more individualist point of view gives a good sense of the theatre's resistant temporality. Simply to dismiss Balogun's Yoruba cinema as technically insufficient, populist, and essentialist misses the rich, messy, and contradictory reality of this encounter. The "people" are an entity subject to change; they are emergent, not given. Their "tradition" is always already hybrid and impure—an unstable compound. *Ajani-Ogun* elaborates a practice of collective authorship from within this living, changing performance tradition, conceptualising "tradition" as a field while also inhabiting it. But it is important also to acknowledge the extent to which Balogun "lost control"—the ways in which the genre's later development belied his ideal of indigenous cinema as an equal and mutually beneficial exchange.

---

[163] Karin Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 424.
[164] Okome, "The Character of Popular Indigenous Cinema in Nigeria," 106.
[165] Karin Barber, "Popular Arts in Africa," *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 6.
[166] Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 425.

The Travelling Theatre became a conduit for the indigenisation of cinema, but cinema ended up gentrifying the Travelling Theatre. Coming into contact with the medium of film—and later television—changed the theatre-makers' social world, for instance, by uncoupling the genre from the need to travel, and with it the worlds inhabited by their plays. Staying in urban production centres, performers lost contact to rural publics. The influence of cinema and television was reflected in an increase of naturalistic dialogue and the use of more detailed, realist settings.[167] Performers thought TV appearances were a good advertisement for their live performances; instead, the living tradition of the Travelling Theatre was eventually absorbed by television in its entirety. "As time went on," company leader Oyin Adejobi told Barber, "enlightenment increased."[168] By the late 1980s, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre had ceased to exist as an independent art form.

4.4 The Yoruba Travelling Cinema: distribution, exhibition, and mode of address

Like elsewhere in West Africa, the commercial cinema circuit was dominated in Nigeria by foreign capital and commodities. Nigerian independence saw a flourishing of commercial movie theatres, but this efflorescence was captured by American and Lebanese distributors who flooded cinema halls with US B-movies, Hindu musicals, and Hong Kong action films.[169] Film distribution circuits had first been developed by Lebanese and Indian businessmen; the West African Film Company (WAFCO), which dates back to 1930, was founded by a Lebanese. While Lebanese and Indian-owned companies controlled the importation and distribution of Asian-produced films,[170] the distribution of US and continental European feature films in Nigeria was controlled by COMACICO-SECMA. This French-owned distribution-cum-exhibition chain (which is discussed in 2.6) was later bought up by the American Motion Pictures Exporters and Cinema Association (AMPECA). Foreign films that had already recouped costs elsewhere were dumped at low prices, disincentivising exhibitors to programme Nigerian fare. Having to recover all of their expenses on the home market, Nigerian filmmakers were hard pressed to compete.[171] In 1972, the Nigerian government issued an "Indigenisation Decree," but foreign influence on film distribution prevailed. The Decree, as Opubor et al. attest, "gave

---

[167] Barber, 248.
[168] Adejobi quoted in Barber, 248.
[169] See Harrow, "Introduction," 15.
[170] Opubor, Nwuneli, and Oreh, 1979: 9.
[171] Haynes notes that "imported films cost the exhibitor around a fifth to a tenth of the daily rental Nigerian films must demand." Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 99.

exclusive monopoly for the distribution and exhibition of feature films to Nigerians with the capital and business contacts, but left the question of distribution open."[172] The Nigerian government did little to enforce the Indigenisation Decree; where it was implemented, it more often than not merely resulted in the acquisition of Nigerian fronts. Balogun's verdict on the policy in this regard was damning: It had merely replaced "white capitalists by Black ones."[173] It did not help that the National Film Distribution Company, a state-run distribution monopoly which absorbed the "indigenised" AMPECA, kept circulating mostly American films. The company was also in charge of Screen 1 at the prestigious National Theatre—"the fortress of Nigerian culture"[174]—as well as a number of cinemas in and around Lagos. By 1984, not a single Nigerian film had been shown on that screen.

Independent Nigerian filmmakers who were usually their own producers and distributors were not completely excluded from the commercial circuit. Balogun and others did at times manage to exhibit their films at commercial venues, usually based on a negotiable percentage or sometimes an agreed fixed sum. *Ajani-Ogun* saw its crowded premier at Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos in May 1976;[175] a version with English subtitles was simultaneously screened at Plaza Cinema.[176] Balogun took to the road to screen his films in universities, schools, and community centres, and he made inroads into the foreign-run non-commercial distribution circuit of Lagos, a patchwork of embassies and cultural centres that put up regular screenings, but these hardly touched the broader Nigerian public.[177] Balogun even managed to gain entry to the "fortress of Nigerian culture," but only through foreign intervention: *Ajani-Ogun* was shown at the National Theatre's Screen 1 as part of a week on Nigerian cinema organised by the Goethe-Institut in Lagos.[178] Where Nigerian filmmakers were granted access to Nigerian cinemas, the terms were severely restricting. Many films had a very limited run both in time and in space, and exhibitors paid less for new Nigerian films than for the third and fourth runs of foreign films. Though they gained limited access to commercial distribution, Nigerian films would still frequently "catch mould on the shelves of production companies."[179] The net effect was

---

[172] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 9.
[173] Balogun quoted in Ruelle, "Balogun Ola," 24.
[174] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 29.
[175] See Bozimbo, "Ajani-Ogun Can Pull a Crowd," 8. Balogun claims 10,000 people were present. See Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic," 164. Glover Hall, as Ryan notes, is also where the first recorded colonial film exhibition took place in Nigeria in 1903, however, the venue had since been rebuilt elsewhere (163).
[176] See Barrett, "Ajani-Ogun," 3.
[177] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 28. This circuit included the French embassy, whose cinematheque also served neighbouring countries, alongside the Goethe-Institut, the Italian Cultural Centre, as well as the Chinese, Japanese, American, and British embassies. The Cuban embassy organised a Cuban film week in 1983.
[178] Returns of the event directly benefitted filmmakers. See Françoise Balogun, 28.
[179] Françoise Balogun, 39.

to make it extremely challenging for Nigerian filmmakers to recoup costs, killing many Nigerian feature films at the box office, among them *Kongi's Harvest*.[180] Where Nigerian films did succeed, as in Balogun's case, it frequently took many years to amortise expenditures.

The Indigenisation Decree failed to deliver also because it did not reform taxation, nor did it institute regulatory oversight and accountability. Film exhibition was regulated by a law carried over from the colonial era,[181] which included no provisions whatsoever for the regulation of film production and import/distribution. There was no unified system, very little data collection—hence no reliable data. Connor Ryan speaks of "licit and illicit networks of merchants that linked up major cities across the region and the world, and largely ignored or sidestepped government regulators, customs houses, and censors boards."[182] Unsupervised by the Nigerian state, lacking a binding legal and regulatory framework, the distribution sector was ripe with fraud and corruption. A solution based on percentage share of box office earnings, like the one Francophone African filmmakers were advocating, was not attractive for Nigerian filmmakers, "since there can be no guarantee that accounts will be truthfully rendered."[183] Corruption was frequent, with the tax collector coming to an "arrangement" with the exhibitor; there are also accounts of identity theft.[184] Thin profit margins were further diminished by heavy local entertainment taxes, varying substantially from state to state.[185] On balance, the absence of a binding legal and regulatory framework for the distribution of films also discouraged investment in film production.

<p style="text-align:center">⁂</p>

Distribution problems blocked the proliferation of films and eroded the economic base of the nascent Nigerian film industry. But Balogun's collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre were commercially successful, for a time allowing him to reproduce his practice on the basis of making and showing films alone. *Ajani-Ogun* cost $250,000.[186] It was

---

180 See Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 9.
181 See Onookome Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria: The Colonial Heritage," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (1996): 47.
182 Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic," 163.
183 Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 14.
184 Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 44.
185 Françoise Balogun gives the figure of sixteen percent on receipts in Lagos versus forty in Kano. See *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 44.
186 See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 20.

a box office success. *Aiye* had a budget of $300,000 budget[187] and "scored a rather significant commercial hit in Nigeria."[188] *Ija Ominira* was an immense success, regaining costs after only one year.[189] How did Balogun do it? As hinted in the preceding section, Balogun's collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre also spawned an original, autonomous mode of distribution—not merely "Yoruba films" but also what we might call a "travelling cinema." Latching onto the existing circuit of the Travelling Theatre, this indigenous form of film distribution was one of the main reasons why Yoruba filmmaking was an economically viable proposition. Balogun realised at an artisanal level the vertical integration found in some film industries. The genre invented with *Ajani-Ogun* was a cross-media hybrid also in its mode of distribution; its model of distribution and exhibition, as Haynes has noted, carried over from the theatre. In the following, I will reconstruct the workings of the Yoruba Travelling Cinema. Because this practice is poorly documented, I will rely for my sometimes speculative rendering on Karin Barber's account of the Travelling Theatre.

Players and filmmakers travelled the country together with a projector and film reels. This meant they could personally act as mediators of the experience; it also ensured they would not be cheated out of their ticket share.[190] Town halls, hotels conference rooms, and village squares would double as cinemas. The exhibition itself, mostly promoted by word-of-mouth,[191] resembled a small festival: Exhibition, for this audience, was a "total" experience, "like a veritable carnival."[192] Touring companies, in trying to capitalise on this atmosphere, would often schedule screenings in larger cities to coincide with public holidays.[193] A distribution practice completely autonomous from the commercial circuit, elaborated in response to the regulatory failures of the Nigerian state, this was a take-over not only of the existing circuit of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre but also its exhibition practices and modes of reception.[194] In her first-hand account of the "generation of plays" in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, Karin Barber describes the responses of spectators as

---

[187] See Jide Osikomaiya, "Ogunde's Film 'Aiye' Explains African Science," *Daily Times*, 1979: 1. ₦500,000, according to the conversion table on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_naira.
[188] Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 21.
[189] Okome, "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," 162.
[190] See Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 101.
[191] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 39.
[192] Okome, "The Character of Popular Indigenous Cinema in Nigeria," 95.
[193] See Okome, 95.
[194] There were other players in this field of mobile cinemas which roamed the countryside with "a van, a 16mm projector, a reel of 16mm film, and a collapsible screen," most importantly government film units. But we also find itinerant advertisers of patent medicine and women's cosmetics. The first to advance this method were missionaries before the end of colonial rule. See Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 3.

"the oxygen which sustains the growth process."[195] Spectators were co-constitutive parts of these dramatic performances, which "arise from the common experience of the performers and audiences."[196] For Barber, there was thus a dialectical relationship between the generation of plays and their reception. The emergent, unfolding agencies of African spectacle, blurring divisions between "spectators" and "performers," may at first glance appear far removed from the dispositive of cinema. But although Yoruba films could not be as immediately responsive to their context of reception as live stage performances, I will suggest that the "generation" of Yoruba films was similarly linked to their popular audiences.

The Yoruba made up only twenty percent of the Nigerian population, however, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre was popular beyond Yorubaland, crossing into neighbouring countries and regions. This was no small feat: Outside the Travelling Cinema, Nigerian feature films made in one region generally travelled little and often remained unknown outside of their local context of production.[197] Proletarianised Yoruba audiences in larger cities, "expanded by the increase in waged work, incomes from cash crops, and primary school education," were addressed on the basis of a "shared pan-Yoruba identity and morality."[198] On the wings of the Travelling Theatre, following the same routes and addressing the same, pan-ethnic audience, Yoruba films travelled across all of Nigeria, including Igbo- and Hausa-dominated parts of the country, and further still, as far as Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin.[199] It was a much more inclusive mode of address than the term "Yoruba films" may suggest. Nigerian critic Willy Bozimbo wrote in a contemporary review: "Even to the non-Yoruba speakers, Ajani-Ogun easily yields up its plot because of the simplicity of the theme based on traditional Yoruba folk-drama."[200] It was thus possible for a contemporary critic to state, seemingly without contradiction, that "the hope of a truly national cinema lies with Ethnic cinema."[201] And while it was virtually impossible for other Nigerian filmmakers to break out of Nigeria and into the African market, Yoruba Travelling Cinema achieved this in modest but significant ways.

Writing about the inclusivity of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, Barber emphasises the importance of "linguistic confidence," which she relates to the "early establishment of Yoruba-language print culture, rivaling Anglophone official culture."[202] In the context of

---

[195] Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 423.
[196] Barber, 423.
[197] See Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 6.
[198] Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 424.
[199] See Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 101.
[200] Bozimbo, "Ajani-Ogun Can Pull a Crowd," 8.
[201] Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria," 62.
[202] Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 424.

Yoruba films, however, language also acted as a barrier to circulation, which was tackled by various practices of translation—involving both creators and audiences. Some Yoruba films, especially in urban settings, were shot in an urbanised Yoruba interlaced with Pidgin English.[203] Others, such as Ladi Ladebo's *Eewo*, have English voice-overs, however, as subtitling was unaffordable, very few were subtitled in English.[204] There were also local narrators who would synthesise and translate the action for local audiences. Okome refers to these translators, which existed until the late 1970s, as *compere*—African relatives of the Japanese *benshi*—and traces their lineage back to the local informants recruited by colonial-era mobile cinema missionaries as well as village catechists and schoolteachers.[205] Rather than represent some official discourse, however, the local translators of the Yoruba Travelling Cinema emerged spontaneously from the audience. Audiences were central actors in the spectacle of the Yoruba Travelling Cinema in other ways as well. In Okome's recollection, they responded to the films as if standing before an oral performer: "It [the audience] sings with the actors, dies with them just as it happens in the oral folktales, eats with them, and sometimes criticizes them loudly whenever they think there has been a deviation in the narrative."[206] The films' point of view was informed by the, affective and conceptual, forms of intuition of performers who were often themselves recruited from the common folk, and whose performance was elaborated in conversation with the people. Travelling the country with his films also brought Balogun himself in contact with the popular masses. In this way, the indigenisation of film distribution and exhibition entailed a reinvention: On the itinerant circuit of Balogun's Yoruba Travelling Cinema, cinema ceased to be a one-way communication.

The plays of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre contributed to the creation of a new kind of public transcending tribal and religious affiliation, which first emerged in the colonial period.[207] According to Barber, they "both explore and help to constitute new kinds of social being—new ways of being social."[208] Seizing on this emergent public and its sociality, Balogun's Travelling Cinema, though anchored in Yoruba culture, reached as far as director and company could travel.[209] However, while this public transcended tribes and

---

[203] See Okome, "The Character of Popular Indigenous Cinema in Nigeria," 95.
[204] As Haynes notes, "unlike francophone filmmakers, who may get their films subtitled in French at the expense of the French Ministry of Cooperation and Development, thereby giving them access to a much larger market, the Yoruba filmmakers get no help with subtitling and find it prohibitively expensive." "Nigerian Cinema," 101.
[205] See Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria," 52.
[206] Okome, 94–95.
[207] See Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 423.
[208] Barber, 423.
[209] Balogun sees the tribe as a unit that is neither impermeable nor "exclusive of other similar units," and that contains within itself a "multiplicity of styles." Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," 37.

languages, it was also intensely local and (as Barber writes about the theatre) commonly "uninterested in the other components of the multi-ethnic nation-state."[210] This was the inherent contradiction that Balogun could not resolve: People all over Nigeria recognised themselves in his Yoruba films, but not as the nationally unified Nigerian public he hoped to bring into existence. Balogun's Travelling Cinema, anchored in a multiple and changing—non-identical—Yoruba "tradition," but also through travel and translation, pioneered a minor trans-regional practice that, rather than contribute to the emergence of a "national cinema," signally escaped the writ and remit of the Nigerian nation-state. This practice anticipates what Arjun Appadurai has called "vernacular globalization." A reconfiguration "from below" of post-colonial aesthetics that runs counter to both "large-scale national and international policies,"[211] the Yoruba Travelling Cinema laid the foundations for a transnational-popular moving image culture to come. Though not without with its contradictions, it was arguably the most successful aspect of Balogun's attempt at indigenising cinema—and an inadvertent first step on the path that would lead to Nollywood.

4.5 Globalising Nigerian cinema: co-production and entanglement (A deusa negra, 1978 and Cry Freedom!, 1981)

On the itinerant circuit of the Yoruba Travelling Cinema, Balogun traced the outlines of a transnational-popular common sense. This common sense was propagated by travel, but also limited by it, and so was its commercial potential. Nigerian cinema was otherwise isolated from African markets outside the country. Export of Nigerian films was "insignificant," and Nigerian cinema utterly marginal to pan-African circuits and contact zones dominated by Francophone filmmakers.[212] Other African cinemas, conversely, were rarely able to penetrate the Nigerian market.[213] Balogun was exceptional in this regard. Ever since his training in France, and cultivated at FESPACO, which he attended regularly, Balogun entertained close ties to fellow filmmakers in all parts of Africa. His films were more widely seen outside of Nigeria than those of any other Nigerian filmmaker. He in turn purchased the distribution rights for a number of African films which he distributed through his company, Afrocult. Nigerian cinema was isolated also from non-African mar-

---

[210] See Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 425.
[211] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 10.
[212] A fact deplored by Vieyra. See his "Xe anniversaire," 232.
[213] See Haynes, 98.

kets; unlike Francophone African filmmakers, Nigerians had to make do "with very little influence or participation from outside."[214] Balogun wanted to break through this isolation, which had been stunting the growth of filmmaking in Nigeria. Like many Francophone West African filmmakers but uniquely among his Nigerian peers, Balogun turned to international co-production as a survival strategy in the absence of state support. With his international co-productions *A deusa negra* (1978) and *Cry Freedom!* (1981), he expanded his communication struggle to a pan-African and global diasporic scale,[215] while also and at the same time making a bid for access to new markets, hoping these films would open a door to inter-African, European, and even trans-Atlantic distribution. As Balogun stated in a 1980 interview with *Screen International*, "after making a series of pictures designed solely for African audiences I have now decided to make one with an international cast which will get a wider showing […] This is another step forward in my plan to put Africa on the moviegoing map."[216]

Balogun was intensely critical of the foreign aid that made possible Francophone African cinema. The subvention model of French Cooperation in his view introduced vested interests. What is more, the appeal to Western funders tended further to alienate filmmakers from their audiences. Balogun exhorted filmmakers to stay in control of the terms of co-production so that it would counter, not exacerbate, the cultural and economic Balkanisation of Africa. Foreign financing was acceptable only "if the filmmaker himself [!] is so strong that he can impose his will on the source of finance or if he has a strong financial base which can lead to a co-production arrangement that gives him artistic freedom."[217] Unlike filmmaking in Francophone West Africa, which usually included a foreign, generally non-African, financial component, Nigerian films were financed almost exclusively by Nigerian capital.[218] The question, virulent in discussions of Francophone West African cinema, of the effects of foreign funding on content and form did not strictly

---

[214] Haynes, 98.

[215] While cinema may have failed in bringing about national unification, it might yet serve pan-African integration by helping African peoples to learn about each other and their shared past. By showing to Nigerian audiences the "condition and life" of Black peoples outside of Africa, it might instil a properly global sense of belonging. See Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 14. Balogun endorsed Cheikh Anta Diop's historical work on "Black Africa," which to him suggested a conceptual framework common to all African peoples, while at the same time cautioning that "the cultures of different African peoples are not exactly similar." Balogun, "Form and Expression in African Arts," 40.

[216] Balogun quoted in Peter Noble, "Balogun: I Just Go from Film to Film," *Screen International*, no. 256 (August 30, 1980).

[217] Balogun at the 1982 African Studies Association Conference quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 23.

[218] For a detailed discussion of foreign aid to West African cinemas, see 2.5 and especially chapter 6 on Alassane.

apply.[219] Nigerians had been involved in international co-productions as producers and actors, but these films were helmed by foreigners (see, for instance, the early productions of Francis Oladele discussed in 4.1). *A deusa negra* and *Cry Freedom*, therefore, are noteworthy not only as historical epics of, respectively, trans-Atlantic and pan-African struggles for liberation, but also as rare encounters of Nigerian cinema with foreign capital, showing Balogun negotiate the demands and pressures of foreign investment. They are model instances of the often conflicted double necessity that structured Balogun's mould of popular cinema, transposed to an international stage. In what follows, I will show how international co-production enabled Balogun to tell stories of Black liberation while also variously compromising his freedom.

<center>⁂</center>

Balogun's first attempt at making a film of international—in this case, pan-African—appeal was *Muzik-Man* (1977), which has a struggling musician overcome corruption and adversity to become a famous singer.[220] Shot in Nigerian Pidgin with a pan-African cast, including Cameroonian crooner Georges Anderson in the titular role, *Muzik-Man* was designed for broad appeal and wide comprehension.[221] The original soundtrack, released as a stand-alone record by Afrocult, stood to circulate even more widely. In terms of financing, however, it was purely a Nigerian production. *A deusa negra* and *Cry Freedom!*, Balogun's follow-up co-productions, on the other hand, were transnational films not only in their narrative design and audience appeal but also in terms of their financial composition, on-screen talent, and technical personnel.

A deusa negra opens onto a lush hillside vista, which a party of warriors riding across the green expanse. A skirmish ensues between two warring factions, captured by the handheld camera in abrupt, jerky movements. The camera sags down to the ground repeatedly, one among the fallen bodies that litter the ground. Caught up in the carnage, the image becomes unmoored and is stood upon its head: Things fall apart. This opening scene of a slave raid is Balogun's first foray into the pre-colonial past. It is not remotely nostalgic: This is a moving world, ripe with conflict. When the dust settles, a prince has been captured. Together with dozens of others, he is brought to an immaculate white beach. In the waters off the coast, a slave ship lies in wait, ready to take on its live cargo. From this

---

[219] See Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 98.
[220] *Muzik Man* is presumed lost.
[221] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 26. Anderson also makes an appearance in Med Hondo's *Soleil Ô* (see 5.1).

image, *A deusa negra* cuts to the urban panorama of present-day Lagos, imbued with a joyful exuberance by Remi Kabaka's electronic score. The film now centres on Babatunde, a young Yoruba. On his deathbed, Babatunde's father reveals to his son that their ancestor, Babatunde's great-great-grandfather, had been a slave in the New World.[222] Babatunde's ancestor was helped in his crossing by the Yoruba goddess Yemoja. To show his gratitude, he promised he would one day send back one of his offspring, and so Babatunde embarks on a vision quest across the Atlantic. In the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, guided by a statue of Yemoja entrusted to him by his dying father, Babatunde seeks out a Candomblé temple, where during a ritual dance he is approached by the goddess through the mortal vessel of the beautiful Elisa. Yemoja urges Babatunde to move deeper into the country, to a remote Bahia village—a journey that will also lead him deeper into his ancestral past.[223] In front of a dilapidated hut in the middle of an abandoned village deep in the Brazilian hinterlands, Babatunde encounters a strange old lady, really the spirit of Yemoja in disguise. With the aid of the magical wood carving, Yemoja sends Babatunde into a trance, transporting him—and the viewer—back to the time when his forebears were forced to work as slaves on a Portuguese plantation. Halfway into its runtime, *A deusa negra* thus turns into a realist historical epic in the mode of *Roots*, the hugely popular American television miniseries based on Alex Haley's eponymous novel, which had premiered the previous year, in 1977, and may have acted as inspiration. This second half of the film details the plight of Babatunde's progenitor, the captured prince Oluyole, but also his resistance and ultimate escape. The Brazilian actor Sonia Santos, who plays Elisa in the present of the diegesis, reappears in this extended historical flashback as Amanda, a slave woman with whom Oluyole falls in love. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion that Elisa is Amanda's reincarnation. In the chaos of an attack on the estate by a band of robbers, Oluyole and Amanda risk death to free themselves, but only he manages to escape alive and at the dawn of a new day reaches the coast, their baby in his arms.

A deusa negra was a co-production of Balogun's Afrocult Foundation together with the Brazilian state-funded production and distribution company Embrafilme and Magnus Filmes, a private production company led by the Brazilian actor Jece Valadão, who doubled as director and producer of comedies and softcore sex films.[224] Interested by Balogun's script and previous work, Valadão invited him to make a film in Brazil but soon

---

[222] Balogun himself descends on his mother's side from Afro-Brazilian "returnees": former slaves who returned to Nigeria after gaining freedom. See Roof, "African and Latin American Cinemas," 253.

[223] Yemoja's prophecy is complemented in true syncretistic fashion by Babatunde's research at the Biblioteca Nacional, though this avenue turns out a dead end.

[224] See Roof, "African and Latin American Cinemas," 252. Magnus Filmes also produced Ruy Guerra's *Os cafajestes* (1962), starring Valadão himself.

disappeared from the scene. This was but the first of many difficulties that plagued this Nigerian-Brazilian co-production. *A deusa negra* was the first film directed by a Black filmmaker in Brazil; María Roof, citing a personal communication with Françoise Balogun, alleges "certain tensions" on set and off related to the fact of Balogun's Blackness.[225] Balogun nonetheless managed to carry the project through. More than that, it was the first time he was able to work with sufficient means[226]—and it shows. *A deusa negra* is much more tightly scripted and staged than Balogun's previous feature films. Duration is employed more discriminately, and modulated for emphasis. His gaze, aided by Brazilian cinematographer Edson Batista and a crew of Brazilian technicians, is freed from some of the constraints of his previous productions with the Travelling Theatre. It is more agile, more curious about its environments and, as we have seen in the film's opening scene, more responsive to them.

Following Babatunde along the routes of the Black Atlantic, *A deusa negra* weaves together mythical and historical temporalities. Balogun found a way to narrate the complex genealogies of Nigerian tradition and Brazilian adaptation as a "mystical story of reincarnation," in a cyclical movement spanning two hundred years.[227] Ethnographic images of Candomblé rites are taken as a point of departure for more speculative renderings of the spirit world, including possession, divination, and visionary trance. When the old woman reveals herself as the spirit Yemoja, a hypnotic travelling shot slowly draws us closer to her now young and beautiful figure, transforming the interior of the tiny hut into an echo chamber of centuries past. Balogun maintained that making *La deusa negra* had opened him up to "certain mysteries."[228] The acting in the extended historical flashback, on the other hand, is realist and reminiscent of Western drama; the performers were well-known Brazilian screen and stage actors. Behind this mesh of realist and magical rationalities was also an economic calculation. Compelled to appeal to wide and variegated—Nigerian, African, and Black as well as Brazilian, Western, and white—audiences, *A deusa negra* is under commercial pressure to diversify. In exploring the dehumanising conditions of the plantation system, Balogun emphasises the relationship between slaves and masters, singling out the plantation owner's son, who is lusting after Babatunde's great-great-grandmother, as a case in point. He is played by Roberto Pirillo, one of Brazil's most popular actors at the time, who was trained as a stage actor in classical theatre; his performance plays on a principle of identification—and not exemplification, as I suggest

---

[225] See Roof, 252.
[226] Balogun paraphrased in Noble, "Balogun."
[227] *Daily Times* quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 24–25.
[228] Balogun quoted in Osundare, "The King of Laughter."

may have been Balogun's true intention. Giving Pirillo ample screen time promised to increase the film's draw at the box office; it also incorporated into the film another mode of address, which may appeal to white audiences who, it was broadly believed, otherwise took little interest in "Black" cinemas. There are two different films—different registers, attentions, modes of address—at work in *A deusa negra*, which sometimes complement, sometimes undermine each other: an internalised struggle with foreign investment.

For Balogun, this transatlantic co-production was an exemplary struggle: He was hoping his example would inspire imitators all over the continent, envisioning such joint efforts as an opportunity for mutual exchange between African and Latin American cinemas. At the same time, he cautioned that measures had to be taken to guarantee the terms of exchange would be mutually beneficial. In a public lecture given in 1985 at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, later published by the institute as a policy blueprint, Balogun insisted that foreign production companies should only be invited to operate in Africa under clearly defined and regulated terms and conditions, "so as to ensure that the country benefits in terms of training of local technicians and employment opportunities for indigenous actors and technicians, as well as in terms of direct economic benefit to the host country."[229]

Two years on, despite the difficult production history of *A deusa negra* and its divided attentions, Balogun took on another international co-production, the Nigerian-Ghanaian-British *Cry Freedom!*, based on Kenyan writer Meja Mwangi's novel *Carcass for the Hounds*, which is itself modelled on the Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960).[230] From this historically and geographically specific template, Balogun abstracts a bare-bones tale of anticolonial struggle with pan-African and even global resonance, featuring a cast of African American, Brazilian, British, and African actors. Some of the bonds Balogun had formed in Brazil were lasting. He again used Brazilian technicians, among them cinematographer José Medeiros, and again cast Pirillo in a leading role. Despite the three-way production participation, Balogun had to take out a bank loan to assemble a budget adequate to his ambition—estimated at only $300,000.[231]

The story of the film pits the guerrilla leader Haraka (Albert Hall) against the British officer Kingsley (Pirillo), a sombre Englishman who is tasked with suppressing the armed uprising. Improbably, the opponents grew up as friends in the same household, Haraka the formerly docile servant—or so it is implied—to Kingsley's benevolent master. Ba-

---

229 See Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 26.
230 Mwangi had worked for film and television: for the French Broadcasting Corporation and later as Visual Aids Officer for the British Council, both in Nairobi.

logun stuck close to the basic plot of the novel but took poetic licence with some details: In the novel, Haraka is not Kingsley's former childhood companion but used to be his colonial government chief. This substitution is typical of the film's overall approach, which is to personalise the political. This allows Balogun to focus our attention on his international cast. His actors' name recognition in Brazil and in the US promised to confer access to markets otherwise completely beyond the reach of Nigerian filmmakers. The casting carried a message also for Nigerian audiences. Balogun had first seen Albert Hall in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (USA, 1979); casting him as the lead signalled that his work was on par with Hollywood and other national cinemas—that Nigeria was not merely invaded by foreign film productions but could meet them on an equal footing. This was a long way from Balogun's Yoruba films, an act of defiance against the ghettoisation of "Third World cinema." Nigerian audiences readily picked up on this message: "The Lagos audience, habituated to the great Hollywood machine, marked their astonishment, their surprise, and responded well to the film."[232] *Cry Freedom!* was well received also by African critics, who lauded its "extremely elaborate" form—its craftsmanlike mise-en-scene, vivid colour, and professional acting. One critic singled out the "beautiful decors" of the Kingsleys' swimming pool: Alongside "the great American actress" Prunella Gee (as Kingsley's wife), he opined, such production values surely boded well for the film's international box office appeal.[233]

Like *A deusa negra*, *Cry Freedom!* divides its attention between the two sides of a struggle for liberation. We are with the guerrilla when they breach the deep jungle, rally around their leader to plan the next strike, or tend to their wounded. However, the film also shares the perspective of the strangely unperturbed Brit, struggling in his own, tortured way to make sense of his childhood companion's political awakening. Kingsley is at a loss: To his unreconstructed colonialist sensibility, there is nothing wrong with the status quo. His wife's outlook is more ambivalent. While abhorring the destruction wrought by the combatants, she sympathises with Haraka's struggle. Living in close quarters with her servants, she fancies herself one of them: "This is my country, too!" Are we invited to empathise with the officer and his wife, or merely comprehend their point of view? Either way, the extent to which *Cry Freedom!* indulges the colonial rulers' point of view is noteworthy, starkly contrasting with other, roughly contemporaneous, films about the armed liberation struggle such as Sarah Maldoror's *Monangambee* (1968) and *Sambi-*

---

231 Or ₦500,000. Balogun quoted in Osundare, "A Grand Escape," 828. The loan is mentioned in Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 42.
232 Mabrouki, "Cry Freedom!," 32. Pfaff, by contrast, alleges that the film was unpopular with Nigerian audiences. Cf. Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 21.

zanga (1972), Ruy Guerra's *Mueda, memoria y massacre* (Mueda, Memory and Massacre, 1979) or Flora Gomes' *Mortu nega* (*Death Denied*, 1988). Unlike these films, all of which come with impeccable militant credentials, *Cry Freedom!* is compelled to play both sides, which, while giving us a sense of how the colonial relationship is reproduced on a personal level, also puts a strain on the film's political purpose.

Connor Ryan has described *A deusa negra* and *Cry Freedom!* as "politically committed cinema in the mode of Africa's other great film auteurs," and contrasts them to Balogun's willingness at other times "to concede to the popular audience's call for entertaining cinema."[234] I have argued that Balogun's international co-productions should instead be seen on a continuum with his previous practice, seeking to establish continuity and communication now on a global level, mainly along the routes of transatlantic and pan-African kinship and solidarity. To live up to this ambition, *A deusa negra* and *Cry Freedom!* had to be seen widely; the films were palpably shaped also by economic exigencies, particularly the promise of international distribution, which compelled Balogun to broaden and diversify their appeal. They are subject to the same "double necessity" that structured the rest of Balogun's practice. Historical epics of liberation crossed by entanglement and compromise, they betray the tensions and pressures of Balogun's communication struggle on the international stage, much like his previous films had done in the Nigerian context. To overlook these entanglements is to misconstrue Balogun's struggle.

While his own attempts at making films for pan-African consumption fell back on the colonial languages of Portuguese and standard English with a notable British inflection, Balogun was also, as OAU policy consultant in the early 1980s, surveying available facilities for the dubbing of African films into African languages. His primary task on "Mission RAF 82/003" was "to help identify and analyze existing obstacles to the successful dissemination of African films within the African continent," seeking "practical solutions for the utilization of major African languages to facilitate access to African films by populations unfamiliar with European languages."[235] He visited North, West, East, Central, and Southern Africa, treated as five distinct zones, with the aim of "collating an inventory of technical facilities and language resources [...] for the production of local language versions of films from various African countries as well as a review of the existing legislative, administrative and commercial framework concerning film distribution in the

---

[233] Mabrouki, "Cry Freedom!," 32. Gee is in fact British.
[234] Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic," 162.
[235] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 2.

countries visited."[236] In Lagos, Balogun conferred with Hausa and Yoruba language specialists to assist in future dubbing efforts. In Paris, he inquired into low-cost dubbing equipment.[237] He promoted regional integration on the infrastructural level, specifying that film labs in Conakry, Harare, and Tunis "have a potential for serving regional needs and for reducing Africa's dependence on overseas facilities in the field."[238] Balogun also had plans for dubbing his own films into African languages, but these never came to fruition.

Like many filmmakers in Francophone West Africa, Balogun believed that the solution to the problems of African cinema lay in the realm of distribution and taxation. He turned to intergovernmental organisations for assistance that the state did not provide, recommending the OAU devise a "model framework for film industry legislation" which could be used in various African countries;[239] elsewhere, he argued for a unified African market and free passage of films between African countries to be guaranteed by OAU or UNESCO.[240] Balogun hoped for "a continent-wide distribution network that would be capable of systematically exploring and exploiting outlets for African films in each African country," but after the disappointment that was the CIDC (see 5.3), added that such a network "would need to be both non-governmental and commercially motivated"—"ideally […] a joint venture between the film makers themselves and a private business group"[241] *Cry Freedom* was one of the first films released by the CIDC; it was also distributed by the private West African Film Corporation (WAFCO), a regional consortium for the production and distribution of African films of which Balogun was a founding member.[242] I will return to the all-important question of film distribution and the struggle over Africa's forms of circulation in chapter 5 on Med Hondo.

---

[236] Balogun, 4. Balogun's itinerary during the first phase of the consultancy, between March 11 and April 27, 1986 was Addis Ababa–Lagos–Rome–Algiers–Paris–Conakry–Dakar–Ouagadougou–Abidjan–Lagos. The second phase, from May 25 to June 14, 1986, took him to Southern and East Africa: Lagos–Harare–Nairobi–Addis Ababa–Lagos.
[237] Balogun, 4–5.
[238] Balogun, 18–19.
[239] Balogun, 20.
[240] See Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 18.
[241] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 15.
[242] Founded in 1985, together with Ousmane Sembène, Souleymane Cissé, and others. See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 23.

4.6 Things fall apart: state failure, structural adjustment and the crisis of Nigerian cinema (Money Power, 1982)

The editors of a 1979 volume of seminar proceedings on the "development and growth of the film industry in Nigeria" lamented that the economic, technical, and social infrastructures that would sustain the growth of a national film industry had "so far not emerged in any significant form in Nigeria."[243] Government officials were adamant about their commitment to developing Nigerian arts and culture, declaring that national modernisation called for a fully-fledged mass media infrastructure. But their projections mostly remained just that, as successive governments failed to live up to their promises.[244] Jonathan Haynes' more recent verdict is equally damning: "The initiatives undertaken by the government to foster an indigenous film industry are a history of failures."[245]

In Balogun's diagnosis, it was difficult, if not impossible, "to convince functionaries […] that […] investing in the film industry beyond the level required for newsreel films glorifying the leaders in power is necessary and justified."[246] The Nigerian state invested little in the training of technical personnel—camera operators, sound engineers, editors—, leading to what Françoise Balogun describes as "a low level of competence."[247] The state provided neither material nor financial support to feature film producers, nor did it exercise any effective regulatory role in film distribution. The Nigerian Indigenisation Decree was even less effective than nationalisation efforts in Francophone West Africa. "Heavily bureaucratized and inefficiently managed," Nigeria's cinema parastatals crucially failed to establish a binding legal framework.[248] As a consequence, film exhibition in Nigeria was ripe with fraud and corruption, discouraging private investors (Nigerian or otherwise). Cinema owners frequently underreported earnings or bribed NFC comptrollers. Falsification of box office receipts was common.[249] Private-sector filmmaking was "hampered by lack of financial means, technical facilities, and the slowness of certain administrative procedures, and finally by a general lack of practical knowledge in the domain of cinema as a technology, art form and commercial product."[250]

---

[243] Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 2.
[244] See Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic," 164–165.
[245] Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 99.
[246] Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 17.
[247] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 44.
[248] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 11.
[249] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 38.
[250] Françoise Balogun, 13.

Balogun's production company Afrocult was compelled to take on functions that in other film-producing countries would be coordinated by the state, for instance, by employing foreign technicians which also trained local manpower (4.5) or—the most obvious example—by distributing and exhibiting his films on a completely self-organised circuit (4.3). These measures were strategies of survival, not solutions to the underlying structural problems. While elaborating a material base—and accompanying modes of production, distribution, and exhibition—which to a large extent functioned autonomously from the Nigerian state, Balogun was at the same time engaged in a continual struggle with the Nigerian authorities. Whether in an advisory capacity for the Nigerian government or in angry op-eds for the *Guardian* and *Daily Times*, Balogun indicted the failures of the developmental state and kept pushing for policy reform. His writings both presage and seek to avert the demise of Nigerian cinema which by the mid-1980s seemed a foregone conclusion. In this section, I relate Balogun's critical commentary and policy recommendations to the unravelling of Nigerian cinema in the early to mid-1980s, informing my subsequent discussion of *Money Power* (1982), Balogun's last production as a feature filmmaker, which came together as Nigerian cinema was falling apart.

One of the last actions of General Olusegun Obasanjo, the interim military ruler who managed the civilian transition at the end of the First Junta (1976–1979), was to convene, on initiative of his minister of the interior, Muhammadu Dikko Yusufu, and under Balogun's direction, a committee for the revision of the Cinematographic Act of 1963. Balogun's committee recommended the creation of a national censorship board. Subject to censorship would be matters of national security, the encouragement of corruption, violence or illegal acts, the disparagement of Africa, and the incitement to ethnic discrimination and conflicts. To ensure its independence, this board was to be staffed with delegates from each of Nigeria's (then) nineteen states representing the arts and culture, mass media, education, religious communities, and youth as well as women's organisations. Beyond its censorship function, the board would also constitute a first step towards greater regulatory oversight of film distribution and exhibition in Nigeria. It would be concerned with the collection of data on extant exhibition infrastructures and all films in circulation, importantly noting their country of origin so as to allow for the introduction of a quota to curtail imports and favour Nigerian productions. The committee also recommended the creation of a government body to enforce such measures—a "Department for the Development of Nigerian Cinema".[251]

---

[251] See Françoise Balogun, 15–16

Balogun professed to having seen filmmakers employed at Nigerian cinema parastatals—presumably himself included—"fall into inextricable contradictions."[252] The role of the board as envisioned by Balogun's committee was strictly regulatory: Wary of centralised power, and with fresh memories of political censorship, he balked at the nationalisation of film production.[253] In his work for Obasanjo's committee, Balogun endorsed market dynamics as a means to eschew political pressure and influence, allowing film production to evade the controlling influence of the state. Instead, he recommended the creation of a permanent state fund, "using monies derived from entertainment taxes," in support of private film production—the same position Francophone West African filmmakers had arrived at in the preceding years. The year 1979 saw the initiation by decree of the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC). While some of Balogun's recommendations were implemented in the organisation's brief, most were disregarded in practice. Most egregiously, the NFC was designed not as the autonomous regulatory body envisioned by Balogun's committee but a state monopoly for the *production* of films—exactly what Balogun had sought to prevent.[254]

In the years immediately following its creation, the NFC was preoccupied mainly with an ambitious construction project for a "Black Hollywood," a vast studio complex covering an area of three hundred hectare to be built in the Shere Hills east of Jos.[255] This project bespoke the industrial bias of developmental nationalism: If cinema was to develop as an industry, it needed factories. Government officials were partial to large-scale construction projects as visible, dramatic markers of developmental modernisation, motivated more by political and bureaucratic interests than by any systematic assessment of what filmmakers really needed. Most importantly perhaps, such projects were also a prime means for the absorption of oil revenues. The construction took years to finish, providing nothing in the way of immediate support for filmmakers. Some facilities were never completed; others, like a colour processing lab in Port Harcourt inaugurated "with considerable pomp and fanfare" (Balogun) sometime in the early 1980s, were mismanaged and abandoned not long after they became operational. In an opinion piece published in 1985 in the Nigerian *Guardian*, Balogun wrote: "Anyone who has been exposed to the realities of government-run technical infrastructures in the field of film in this

---

[252] Balogun at the 1982 African Studies Association Conference quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 23.
[253] See Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 2. Elsewhere, Balogun noted that "direct government subvention of the film industry may not therefore be the ideal solution to the problems currently confronting prospective film makers in Africa." Balogun, "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives," 18.
[254] Inaugurated in 1979, the NFC became operational only in 1982.
[255] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 23.

country will know that it is nothing but an idle pipe dream to hope that such facilities can ever be efficiently managed and maintained within a civil service set-up."[256]

Balogun understandably had little patience with grand schemes of this sort which Nigerian policymakers would draw up time and again but reliably fail to see through. What the NFC should really be focussed on, as Balogun never tired of arguing, was to create economic conditions that would encourage independent commercial production, mainly by assuming a regulatory role in the sphere of distribution and taxation. In reality, the monies levied by the NFC, rather than benefit Nigerian cinema, were invested in white elephant projects or absorbed by other state sectors. The main regulatory modality of the Nigerian state remained censorship—and even that was ineffective and frequently side-stepped.[257] By 1984, the NFC had not produced a single film. That same year, after the military again seized state power, it was disbanded. In the midst of the economic crisis that was now unfolding in Nigeria, the new government saw it as an unsustainable luxury.[258]

Without state support, every film could mean ruin. As Françoise Balogun recalled, "in the case of failure, there is no way out."[259] And yet, during the oil boom years of the 1970s, a handful of Nigerian filmmakers working on celluloid had managed to turn a profit. But Nigeria's cinema faltered not only because of chronic political instability and lacking state support—which filmmakers had been contending with for some time—but also because of a prolonged economic crisis that started in the early 1980s and persisted throughout the decade. The disastrous decline of the Nigerian naira in the wake of the crisis completely annihilated the precarious ecology of Nigerian celluloid production. Imports of materials and equipment, and, crucially, foreign processing, were suddenly astronomically expensive, rendering independent feature film production well-nigh impossible.[260] This crisis was exacerbated by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which were at the time imposed on Africa by the World Bank. Instead of reforming mismanaged state bodies, Structural Adjustment further eroded African government. Parastatals were privatised, as Colin Leys has noted, "without thereby becoming more effective."[261] Indeed, it has been argued that SAPs were vanguard policies of global neoliberalism. As Haynes wrote in 1995, looking back at the previous decade in Nigerian filmmaking, "SAP has, across the board, collapsed industries and stimulated petty infor-

[256] Balogun, "Pathways to the Establishment of a Nigerian Film Industry," 187.
[257] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 30.
[258] See Onyero Mgbejume, *Film in Nigeria: Development, Problems and Promise* (Nairobi: African Council on Communication Education, 1989), 32.
[259] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 43.
[260] Françoise Balogun, 43.

mal sector activities. Strategies of import substitution become impossible, let alone manu-facturing for export. A real film industry is farther than ever from realization."[262]

The erosion of the state in turn affected public security: Lagos became a dangerous place. Wealthier patrons stopped frequenting movie theatres and retired into a private "world of VCRs and satellite dishes." The business brought in by working and lower class audiences alone did not afford the foreign exchange required for celluloid film pro-duction.[263] When the import of foreign films finally decreased in the early 1980s, it was not the outcome of success of nationalisation policies but another sign of crisis, expres-sive not of an actual increase in Nigerian film production or distribution, but of an abso-lute decrease in foreign imports.[264] This was not only a decline of Nigerian filmmaking but the disintegration of the institution of cinema itself. Faced with these ever mounting pressures, the autonomous—licit and illicit—reproductive strategies of Nigerian filmmakers could not keep up. Feature film production on 35mm was first to go bust. By the mid-1980s, Nigeria's celluloid cinema was a thing of the past.

<p style="text-align:center">⁂</p>

"Money Power": This could easily be the title of a contemporary Nigerian video feature in the vein of Chris Obi Rapu's pioneering *Living in Bondage* (1992). Though Balogun has always rejected this suggestion, it is hard not to see in his eponymous feature film—his last, released in 1982—a direct precursor to the cautionary tales of present-day Nol-lywood. Another collaboration with players of the Travelling Theatre, *Money Power* shares with contemporary Nigerian video productions both aesthetic properties and the-matic preoccupations: from the film's three-hour runtime and soap-operatic unfolding to its abiding concern with corruption and acquisitiveness in Nigerian society. Like many Nollywood franchises today, *Money Power* was meant to be released as the first instal-ment in a series, though these plans, according to Françoise Balogun, eventually came to nought because Nigerian audiences at the time resisted this piecemeal release strategy.[265] There are also personal continuities that connect *Money Power* to Nollywood. Billed as second assistant cameraman is contemporary Yoruba video-maker Tunde Kelani, whose video features such as *Saworoide* (1999) and its sequel, *Agogo Ewo* (2002), transparently

[261] Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*, 24.
[262] Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 116.
[263] See Haynes, 116.
[264] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 30.
[265] See Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill, "Money, Power and Cinema," *West Africa*, no. 3255 (1982): 2094.

take Balogun's Yoruba films, especially *Aiye* and *Ija Ominira*, as their template.[266] But the relationship between Balogun's last feature films and Nollywood, I will argue, both runs deeper and cannot simply be described in terms of continuity. Rather, based on the infrastructures of video piracy, Nollywood arose on the back of Balogun's practice, depriving him of what was left of his means of reproduction.

Money Power cost ₦350,000 to make—the equivalent of $235,000. Some of the budget came from previous earnings. For the remainder, Balogun had to take out another bank loan.[267] On its nineteen day run at the National Theatre, the film took only ₦61,544.[268] After the box office failure of *Money Power*, Balogun found himself incapacitated, no longer able to sustain feature film production. Critics of the film frequently complained about its technical and aesthetic standards, which they saw as lacking. Instead of deeming *Money Power* as simply lacking in this regard, its failures a foregone conclusion, I propose to read the film as an ongoing struggle with economic crisis, infrastructural breakdown, and political disintegration.

The first images of *Money Power* are establishing shots of Lagos' modern high-rises and heavy port infrastructure. Jide Durojaiye, a young journalist, is interviewing commuters on a ferry about their opinions on public transport. "The government needs to do more," he is invariably told. Jide pleads with his editor at a national newspaper to let him pursue further his investigation into Nigeria's transport infrastructure, saying he wants to tackle the road system and bus network next. But he is put on a different assignment: to report on the upcoming general elections, which pit the incumbent Chief B.C. Ade of the African Peoples' Party—nicknamed "Money Power" for his notoriously corrupt conduct—against the idealist opposition leader Mr. Akinwale, whose Youth Action Party is campaigning on a programme of infrastructural expansion and renewal. Thus, with the figure of the investigative journalist leading the charge, a sprawling enquiry into Nigeria's political system is set into motion.

Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill, in his review of the film for *West Africa*, noted with a certain hauteur that *Money Power* was "designed to please the normal Nigerian (and especially Yoruba) audience."[269] It is true that the film maps out Nigeria's woes in terms that would strike a chord with audiences familiar with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, from where Balogun once again recruited his cast, colouring the actors' performances. As in *Ajani-*

---

[266] See Perneczky, "Continual Re-enchantment."

[267] See Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 42. Pfaff gives a different figure, $650,000. See *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 21.

[268] 45 screenings averaging 391 viewers per screening, with 17,614 tickets sold overall. See Françoise Balogun, 26.

[269] Bentsi-Enchill, "Money, Power and Cinema," 2093.

Ogun, questions of national import are reduced to the more manageable scale of communal relationships. Jide falls in love with a young woman, Yemi, who is also coveted by the corrupt Chief Ade. Numerous obstacles must be braved, and temptations resisted, before the lovers—and with them the nation as a whole—may finally be reunited. Romance and political parable are punctuated by moments of comic relief, often revolving around Yemi's inept father, for instance, when he mistakenly intercepts and succumbs to a love potion destined for his daughter by the lecherous chief. The vices of officialdom, too, are mined for comic effect. On a visit to the local Pentecostal church Chief Ade does a little dance in front of the congregation and then produces a well-thumbed bundle of banknotes—a familiar sight in *Money Power*—from underneath his gown. "You will have a lot of contracts," the pastor exclaims, feigning religious epiphany: "I see millions coming your way." Flagrant nepotism and endemic corruption, the self-interest and self-importance of state authority, all are fair game. But the bundles of money also serve a storytelling purpose. In following their movement from one corrupt official to another, Balogun seeks to expose the deep networks of power undergirding Nigerian society.

The purported subject of *Money Power*, quoting from Balogun's press release, was "the overpowering role of the almighty naira in contemporary Nigerian society." Balogun deplored "the dominance in Nigeria of money as the sole criterion of value, of profitability as the major motivation."[270] Bentsi-Enchill, by contrast, pondering the money spent on *Money Power* and its expected revenue, insinuates that the film may itself have been corrupted by "money power."[271] Though Balogun's investment inspired in Bentsi-Enchill optimism regarding the economic prospects of Nigerian cinema, the film also gave cause for concern. Its projected box office success (which never materialised) came at the price of political and aesthetic populism, "diluting the cinematic treatment of a society in crisis."[272] A film about the power of money that is itself "diluted" by money power: This very suggestive image, positing a negative reciprocity between the film's subject matter and its conditions of possibility, may also be applied to the film's treatment of infrastructural failure and lack. Filmed while the infrastructure of Nigerian cinema was coming apart, *Money Power* was itself profoundly affected by the unfolding crisis it meant to portray.

In Nigeria at the beginning of the 1980s, infrastructure was not the invisible grounding of the everyday as which it is often theorised. Nigerian infrastructure—streets, power

---

[270] Balogun paraphrased in Osundare, "A Grand Escape," 828.
[271] "Having seen a preview of the film in London recently, there is also a question to answer about the role money and ignorance play in how successfully any work of art deals with contemporary society." Bentsi-Enchill, "Money, Power and Cinema," 2093.

grids, waste disposal, and communications networks—was fragile and precarious, with frequent breakdowns a constant source of worry or irritation.[273] Following the Youth Action Party on their campaign trail, the journalist Jide is returned to his original investigation into Nigeria's faltering infrastructure. The demands of protesters at an opposition rally are simple: access to water and electricity, health care, farm implements, better roads and public transport. Emblazoned on their posters and banners is "TAP WATER FOR ALL." The failures of urban infrastructure are put to dramatic use, for instance, when a power cut—a regular occurrence that also frequently interfered with Balogun's filmmaking—allows the rich businesswoman Alhaja to embroil the hapless Jide in a game of candlelight seduction.[274] Balogun's practice, too, was impacted by the compound effects of infrastructural lack and breakdown, of insufficient maintenance and dereliction of equipment.[275] After the decline of the naira, when overseas processing became unaffordable for Balogun and his peers, the government-owned colour processing lab in Port Harcourt would have been a lifesaver if not for the chronic shortage of chemicals and "frequent breakdown of machinery and equipment," which meant that the lab was unable to process any films at all.[276] Infrastructural breakdown also exacerbated the ongoing security crisis that is commonly discussed as the death-knell of Nigerian cinema.

For Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, infrastructure once acted as an "integrator" of urban space, delivering "broadly similar, essential, services to (virtually) everyone at similar cost across cities and regions."[277] Before the historical "splintering" of urbanism that is the subject of Graham and Marvin's influential account, infrastructure not only helped integrate regions and nations into "functioning geographical or political wholes;" run or regulated by the state "in the name of some public interest," they also presupposed the efficacy and accountability of the state.[278] For Adriana Michele Campos Johnson, infrastructure is the "connective tissue" that binds "people, things, institutions, and bits of territory into a set of equal, standardized, and coherent relations."[279] Infrastructure, on this broader view, underwrites the cohesion of the nation-state, a national public sphere

---

[272] Bentsi-Enchill, 2094.

[273] As Adriana Michele Campos Johnson has argued, "the relationship to the infrastructure of everydayness is interrupted when infrastructure falters." See her "Visuality as Infrastructure," *Social Text* 36, no. 3 (2018): 72.

[274] Françoise Balogun reports that the production of Balogun's films was regularly interrupted by power cuts, and so were film projections. See *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 36.

[275] See Balogun, "Pathways to the Establishment of a Nigerian Film Industry," 186. See also Françoise Balogun, 38.

[276] Balogun, 187.

[277] Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London: Routledge, 2001), 8.

[278] Graham and Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism*, 8.

[279] Campos Johnson, "Visuality as Infrastructure," 74.

and, national citizenship—in short, it is the material substrate of "modern" forms of political life.[280] In Nigeria by the mid-1980s, post-independence optimism regarding the state's ability and political will to provide these indispensable services had fallen to an all-time low. Only now do the real stakes of Jide's investigation come into view: Infrastructural breakdown becomes in *Money Power* a metonymic allegory of the wider breakdown of "coherent relations" within the Nigerian polity.

The film not only marked the end of Balogun's feature career but also prefigured the imminent demise of Nigerian celluloid film production as a whole. At the end of the age of development, Nigerian cinema had not only failed to develop, it was coming apart. In the following years, it joined the fold of other West African cinemas whose development, as Balogun wrote in 1986, "essentially turned out to be a momentary flowering."[281] What Pierre Haffner has said about the roughly contemporaneous *Certificat d'indigence* (1983), a Senegalese film which follows a mother's wanderings through Dakar as she tries in vain to secure urgent medical care for her infant child, equally applies to Jide's searching trajectory in *Money Power*: Both reveal in their unfolding "not what constitutes society but that which destroys it."[282] Alternatively, as I have hinted, we may see *Money Power* as the intimation of yet further "returns and beginnings" (see 4.1). From amidst economic crisis and structural adjustment, in the wake of eroding cinema parastatals and faltering mass media, something new emerged, absorbing and adapting—we may even say: re-indigenising—elements of Balogun's practice. Haynes has an evocative line for this transformation. It was, in his words, a "pervasive structural adjustment towards video production."[283]

Released in the same year as *Money Power* but made one year previously, the Yoruba comedy *Orun Mooru* (1982) was a considerable commercial success and formed the beginning of an important lineage of Yoruba film comedy.[284] Based on a play by the popular comedian Moses Olaiya Adejume (better known by his stage name, Baba Sala) who is also the film's star, *Orun Mooru* was yet another promising cinematic model pioneered by Balogun that for a brief time would allow him independently to reproduce his practice. The film had been shot on 16mm but for lack of funds and lab access was transferred not to film but onto video for processing.[285] A copy of the film was bootlegged and circulated on video, the illegal sale of which directly contributed to the development of the emergent

---

[280] See Campos Johnson, 74.
[281] Balogun, *Consultancy on African Cinema*, 11.
[282] Haffner, "Des écrans à la recherche d'une mémoire," 97.
[283] Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 98.
[284] See Haynes, 98.
[285] See Okome, "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian," 163.

video industry while effectively eroding what little was left of Balogun's shrinking commercial base. Recently *Orun Mooru* has re-emerged online. For a time, it was available as a VHS rip on YouTube. This copy of a copy of a copy, distorted beyond recognition by several generations' worth of loss and noise, is all that appears to be left of that film.[286] To the visual artefacts accrued to the 35mm theatrical print over the course of its circulation, projection and likely inadequate storage are added those of video transferral and, most recently, digital encoding. It could be argued that these distortions are not external to Balogun's practice but an intrinsic part of its history: the material index of a wider breakdown with which he was wrestling at the time of the film's making, but also of the survival and continuation of his struggle in a different form—though Balogun might not acknowledge it as such. The corrupted and disfigured state of the pirated copy by way of which *Orun Mooru* is clinging to life points from that film's original release in the early 1980s to the rise of Nollywood one decade later: Initially grafted onto the makeshift infrastructures of VHS pirating, its capital base, equipment, and distribution networks, the earliest productions of Nollywood were marked, in Brian Larkin's memorable phrasing, by "degraded images" and "distorted sounds."[287] Balogun recognised the potential of video but refused to believe it could replace cinema as a place of secular worship to unify the nation. To him, video and its less "public" modes of consumption spelt further social disintegration. Balogun wanted to create a cinema of national communication and unification, but his practice ultimately failed to live up to this ambition and eventually begot a sprawling popular video culture that expresses and even abets existing divisions within the nation.[288] From Balogun's point of view, it is impossible to see this story as a history of progress. For him, Nollywood was not the continuation of his struggle but a further, final, loss of control.

4.7 Communication struggles: chapter conclusion

Nigerian cinema was falling apart but filmmaking was not over for Balogun. Forced to abandon feature film production, he was compelled to direct a number of commercial and "public service" commissions.[289] The television commercial *Sanders Feeds* (1984), which

---

[286] Another print of *Orun Mooru* is held by a British processing lab who refuse to release it. The same is true of *A deusa negra*. The YouTube upload has since been taken down due to a copyright claim.
[287] Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 217.
[288] The rise of Nollywood is often said to have led to a disintegration into numerous smaller publics, and even to incite "religious polarization." See, for instance, Barber, *The Generation of Plays*, 424.
[289] For a discussion of the "degradation of means" and "contraction of artistic imagination" in the wake of structural adjustment, and the incursion of advertisement into the filmic text, see Haynes, "Nigerian Cinema," 110.

highlights the crucial role of animal feeds in furthering agricultural modernisation, demonstrates the need to industrialise agriculture. With *Iron Eagles* (1988), a propaganda film for the Nigerian Air Force, Balogun re-joined the griots of power.[290] Accompanied by a synth soundtrack reminiscent of *Top Gun* (USA, 1986), the short film features images of military leader Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) as he attends an airfield demonstration. Views from the cockpit of the fighter jet during take-off as it leaves the world behind, invite identification with the military's sweeping powers. The phantasmatic image of a rocket-like ascent is also clearly compensatory: a substitution of the Nigerian crisis.[291] Balogun's connections with UNESCO and international aid organisations brought further commissions. *Destination Paix* (Switzerland, 1988) follows Red Cross and Red Crescent workers on various missions around the world; the latter third of the film is devoted entirely to Red Cross involvement in the secessionist civil war in Biafra. Balogun retells the story of the conflict through a dissonant dialogue between former Nigerian head of state General Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975) and Chukwuemeka "Emeka" Odumegwu-Ojukwu, the leader of the secession and first president of Biafra (1967–1970). Both men laud the Red Cross for its assistance to suffering civilians during the conflict, but they also voice reservations. While Gowon complains about undue interference in Nigeria's sovereignty, Odumegwu-Ojukwu argues that the Red Cross, owing to its legal structure, was in fact incapable of effectively supporting the Biafran side.[292] In the end, the agonistic encounter is flattened out in favour of the one-nation ideology that served to quell the uprising and became official doctrine in its wake. In 1992, Balogun told Okome that he had given up on making films in Nigeria, though he kept working on a series of documentaries until at least 1996. *Le Retour* AKA *The Return* (1988) captures a PoW exchange between Somalia and Ethiopia carried out in the late 1980s, when the two countries were engaged in a modern border conflict which from its origins in the 16th century has been "mediated" by European powers. Balogun's emphasis is on the plane that transports the prisoners, among them many women and children, across the contested border: an image of conflict that holds a promise of unity. *PANA—Une voix pour l'Afrique* (1989) documents the operation of the Pan-African News Agency PANA, founded in 1979 to provide alternative newscasts on current events from an African and non-aligned perspective. The camera is enamoured with the communications technologies at PANA's disposal and the connections they make possible across the continent's different time zones, epit-

---

[290] See Sokhona, "Notre cinéma," 55.
[291] The image of the "take-off" as a metaphor of development will reappear, and be considered in more detail, in the chapter on Alassane (see 6.2).

omised by an array of clocks on the studio wall.[293] The documentary *River Niger Black Mother* (1989) writes African history through a complex array of oral transmissions, featuring several African languages and framed by an English voice-over. The centrepiece of *River Niger* is a ballet of the life of Sundiata Keïta, the founder of the Mali Empire. Like Oedipus, the young Sundiata is part-paralysed but eventually overcomes his disadvantage and builds a proud African "nation." A griot in front of an empty black backdrop tells the story of Keïta's rise to power, accompanied by a series of narrative choreographies unfolding on a village square. Keïta's story, belonging half to the realm of myth and half to that of history, is not the only one being told. The griot's voice communicates with the voices of modern African historians. Along the course of the River Niger, tracing a transnational space of fluid political boundaries, they tell of the rise and fall of many an African empire. From the griot and the village square, to the rise of African nations in the face of paralysis and adversity, to the trans-regional geography following the bend of a river, *River Niger* presents a summa of Balogun's lifelong communication struggle.

<center>⁂</center>

Nigerian commentators have emphasised the role of film in the development of the newly independent nation.[294] In Africa's most populous country, cinema was seen as a means to "enter into direct communication with the masses of the people," which "can reach the nooks and corners of our country."[295] A visual, universal medium, film would help unite the nation against a backdrop of "tribal" divisions and wide-spread illiteracy.[296] Balogun, likewise, was drawn to the "communicative capacity" of mass media, in particular film and television, to sensitise and mobilise populations for the task of national development.[297] His filmmaking, as I have argued, was itself a practice of development, seeking to establish "the sense of a continuity" between Africa's living tradition and the productive forces of modernisation. I have shown how in recovering African media environments through the medium of film, Balogun reinvented both.

---

[292] There could be only one Red Cross in each Geneva convention country, which had to be recognised by the central state.

[293] At the time of filming, PANA had working English and French services and was about to set up Arabic and Lusophone newsrooms, in Addis Ababa and Luanda respectively.

[294] See, e.g., Mgbejume, *Film in Nigeria*, vii.

[295] Adegboyega Arulogun, "The Role of Film in Cultural Identity," in *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, ed. Alfred E. Opubor and Onuora E. Nwuneli (Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979), 31.

[296] See Opubor et al., "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria," 1.

[297] "To support development projects with information campaigns aimed at sensitizing and mobilizing the populations involved." Balogun, *Consultacy on African Cinema*, 20.

Balogun believed that "the emergence of films made in Africa, by Africans, for African audiences […] represented a major step forward in Africa's quest for emancipation from mass media tutelage by foreign production centres."[298] By reengineering on the level of his individual practice the vertical integration of production-distribution-exhibition, Balogun managed to create a temporary economic base for Nigerian cinema to supply itself in the absence of state support and an "industry" proper. But Balogun was not just trying to reproduce his own practice, he *was* struggling to create an industry.[299] Despite his efforts, Nigerian film production remained artisanal, informal, and sporadic. "The history of film production in Nigeria," wrote Françoise Balogun in her 1984 study of Nigerian cinema, "is a painful experience."[300] In my discussion of Balogun's practice, I have foregrounded internal tensions and external limitations of his ambitious project. I have argued that what has variously been described as Balogun's "populism" was both economically motivated and grounded in a broader struggle to address, or *communicate* with, the Nigerian "people." I have shown how, compelled by this double necessity, Balogun found himself negotiating modes of the popular underneath and beyond the threshold of the nation: In his collaborations with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, he elaborated a "vernacular" discourse of modernisation to rival and criticise the official one; in his international co-productions, he struggled to globalise Nigerian cinema. The doyen on Nigerian film historiography Hyginus Ekwuazi has stated that "to make a film in Nigeria is to walk an uncharted path."[301] As I have shown throughout this chapter, Balogun charted a new path for the development of Nigerian cinemas with nearly every one of his films, all in varying degrees and on different levels "autonomous" from the developmental state, leading him, though Balogun himself would reject this conclusion, directly to Nollywood.

---

[298] Balogun, 8.
[299] "The production of African film must evolve from the level of artisanal output to that of a properly organized industrial activity." Balogun, 20.
[300] Françoise Balogun, *Le cinéma au Nigéria*, 44.
[301] Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*.

Chapter 5
Circulation: Med Hondo

Many among the first generation of African filmmakers, as we have seen in 2.5, found themselves pushed and pulled towards Europe, whether to obtain a professional education, gain access to important facilities, or to sidestep legal restrictions such as the colonial-era Laval Decree. Their films, too, were subject to a forced migration: The monopolisation of African film distribution by foreign capital conspired with foreign funding to expel the work of local filmmakers from local movie theatres, making of African filmmakers "foreigners in their own countries."[1] The development of African cinema was thus complicated from the start by what I have called the "extraversion" of African cinema—a function of the extraversion of the young African nations. In 2.6, I have argued the centrality of circulation to critical understandings of development in general and the development of African cinema in particular, which cannot properly be appreciated apart from the circulatory regimes that regulated and confined its precarious possibility—and from the struggles of African filmmakers to make their images circulate. The site of these struggles stretches beyond the purview of African nation-states, whose sovereignty was everywhere undermined, into the sphere of international exchange. Francophone West African cinemas were systematically disarticulated from their "national" base, and subsumed by the international circuits of French Cooperation and Francophonie. The central hub of this international articulation was Paris, which I have characterised as the "extraterritorial capital" of African cinema.

The present history of West African cinema, therefore, centrally features "an African filmmaker in Paris":[2] the Mauritanian-born Mohamed Medoun Abid Hondo, called "Med," who arrived in France in 1959 as part of the first wave of African labour migration to what was still, but would not remain for long, the "mother country." Hondo's films were among the very first to give a voice to displaced workers from all over West Africa and the Maghreb.[3] He documented their struggles against workplace exploitation and exclusion, cramped and unsanitary living conditions in migrant "hostels" [*foyers*], and repressive and collusive regimes at home, and he struggled alongside them. Of all the African filmmakers who either lived in or passed through Paris at the time, Hondo most systematically developed the theme of migration. Uniquely, his treatment articulated an existential or phenomenological to a structural and materialist perspective. Today, Hondo is

---

[1] See Sama, "African Films Are Foreigners," 148.
[2] This is the title of a 1986 profile of the director. See Françoise Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 31 (1986).
[3] Together with Senegal and Mali, Mauritania was among the main contributors of migration to France after "accords de main d'oeuvre" had been signed with these countries in 1963 and 1964. See Bernard Granotier, *Les travailleurs immigrés en France* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979).

widely acknowledged as "one of the great postcolonial chroniclers of the lives of the unrecognized and unrepresented masses in the various waves of the African diaspora."[4]

From his Paris base of operations, between 1967 and 2004, Hondo realised eight feature films, three shorts, and three documentaries. His production company, Soleil O, also functioned as a distribution arm, disseminating his own films alongside those of fellow African and diasporic filmmakers. A tireless activist with strong pan-African convictions, Hondo frequently toured North and West Africa, sharing what he described as the African filmmaker's lot of having to "travel up and down the continent with reels under their arms."[5] Looking for ways to sustain the production and distribution of African films on the continent and outside, Hondo participated in the creation of a number of pan-African institutions and organisations. A regular contributor to FESPACO, he left his imprint on many a manifesto of the period.[6] As co-founder and chief coordinator of the Comité africain de cinéastes (CAC), a transnational distribution outfit and pressure group that ceaselessly lobbied for policy change in African film distribution, Hondo was, however, also intensely critical of the institutions he had helped build. One of the Comité's first actions was an entryist intervention into the CIDC, the ambitious inter-African distribution consortium inaugurated in 1979, whose failure to live up to its official brief was exemplary of a wider inability of African nations to assert control over their forms of circulation. In a number of widely read tracts, Hondo disparaged both the foreign stranglehold on African film distribution and what he saw as the gravely insufficient response to this state of affairs by the pan-African umbrella organisations of African cinema. He was consistently scathing also of African festival culture, which he saw as a mere placebo for the blockages of inter-African exchange. Hondo held other, mostly informal, advisory positions, notably at the Mauritanian Office national du cinéma (ONC).[7] In all these roles, he put questions of circulation and exchange front and centre.

---

[4] David Murphy and Patrick Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 71. Yet for the longest time, Hondo's films have been little seen and hard to come by. This is now changing. Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation, in partnership with UNESCO and FEPACI, has sponsored the restoration, digitisation, and DCP transfer of *Soleil Ô*, overseen by Cineteca di Bologna, in Italy. A restoration and DVD release of *West Indies* is in the works at Ciné-Archives in Paris, who hope to release Hondo's entire oeuvre on DVD in the coming years (status: September 2019).

[5] Hondo in a letter to the secretary-general of the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (ACCT), now the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, May 10, 1993, reprinted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 123.

[6] See, e.g., Birri et al., "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting."

[7] Despite the fact that Hondo was, by his own account, persona non grata in his country of birth (see 5.3).

Hondo's films bear the traces of his circulation struggles as filmmaker and lifelong "migrant worker" in Paris.[8] They reflect the determinations and conditions of his practice in the sphere of circulation—the circulation of images, goods, and peoples—and their entanglement in the globalising drive of capitalist modernity. Following in Hondo's tracks, this chapter weaves together migrant struggles around representation and political recognition with those of production and reproduction, considering Hondo's films both as representations and as commodities—as images of and in circulation. Hondo is frequently cited as questioning the existence of "African cinema," arguing that "African films" more accurately captured the scattered and irregular character of African film production.[9] Less remarked upon is the fact that he also, on several occasions, endorsed "African cinema"—that is, as the name of his own migrant practice. Histories of African cinema give Hondo pride of place as a foundational figure, but his contemporaries variously questioned his Africanness and that of his films, calling him "the most alienated of African filmmakers."[10] In foregrounding Hondo's migrancy my purpose is not to present him as an outlier. Rather, my account of his many labours, centred in the usually hidden sphere of circulation, will portray his migrant practice as an intrinsic part of the struggle of African cinema. A radical questioner, Hondo famously asked: "What is cinema for us—the underdeveloped, the wageless, the disposable?" This question, I will argue, has to be seen holistically, in the context of Hondo's struggle to create and sustain an "African cinema" in France. The answers he gave throughout his career will lead us to a radical decentring of cinema as practice, form, and institution.[11]

5.1 Wandering object: an African filmmaker in Paris (Soleil Ô, 1969)

Med Hondo was born on May 4, 1936, to a Mauritanian mother and a Senegalese father. In 1955, upon finishing his elementary education at a madrasa, he left his native Mauritania for neighbouring Morocco.[12] At a hotel school in Rabat he received training as a cook, to be deployed in French colonial encampments throughout the Sahel region. Work

---

[8] As far as Hondo was concerned, he never became a Frenchman and always remained an African migrant worker. See Férid Boughedir, "Ancien cuisinier et débardeur, l'émigré Med Hondo exprime sa vérité de l'exil," *Jeune Afrique*, no. 725 (November 30, 1974): 60.

[9] See, e.g., Dura, "Entretien," 27.

[10] Farida Ayari quoted in Maarek, *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*

[11] "I believe that it is fundamentally impossible for a filmmaker of the Third World to make cinema without asking themselves questions about cinema." Hondo quoted in Noureddine Ghali, "Med Hondo: Je suis un immigré," *Jeune cinéma*, no. 81 (1974): 29.

placements, which took Hondo to Europe for the first time, suggested an escape from direct subservience to the French colonial empire.[13] In 1958, he managed to reach Marseille in the hold of a freighter, one among many thousands who made that same journey around this time. In Marseille, Hondo found employment as waiter, chef, and farmhand.[14] For a while, like Ousmane Sembène before him, he worked as a longshoreman at the city's busy port. It was here that both men were first introduced to the idea of communism.[15] Hondo's involvement with a group of cooks affiliated with the French federation of trade unions, the Confédération générale du travail unitaire (CGT), who held regular meetings in a waterfront bar, was a formative experience, catalysing what he would later describe as a political awakening.[16] In 1962, Hondo relocated to Paris, where he was a food delivery man at Les Halles and a line cook at the celebrated Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque. A Black man working in French gastronomy, Hondo experienced frequent humiliation and abuse, but he also found the experience instructive: "I learned a lot about the French bourgeoisie just by watching them eat."[17]

Hondo's paltry income and spare time were spent honing his acting skills. He took lessons from the French actor Françoise Rosay who, in his own words, "adopted, understood and supported me."[18] Hondo was drawn to the theatre by a desire "to tell what I had been enduring and what I felt": The actors on stage reminded him—naively, as he later conceded—"of the griots and of the palaver trees under which African people debate their problems."[19] In 1965, he was cast as the lead in *Dutchman* by the African-American playwright Amiri Baraka.[20] He also played in Aimé Césaire's *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and in Bertolt Brecht's teaching play *The Exception and the*

---

[12] According to Françoise Pfaff, this was in 1954. See *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmography and Bio-Bibliography* (New York; Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 157. For a discussion of the confusion regarding Hondo's place of birth, see 5.5.

[13] Hondo first wound up in Nice, then in the Swiss city Lausanne, and finally the French spa town of Vittel, where he clashed with his superior. See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 157. In a 1974 article in *Jeune Afrique*, the caption under a photograph of the young Hondo posing in full chef's regalia next to his line manager in Vittel reads: "I nearly beat up the chef who humiliated me." See Boughedir, "Ancien cuisinier," 62.

[14] See Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, "Decolonizing Images: Soleil O and the Cinema of Med Hondo," in *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*, ed. Dina Sherzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 173.

[15] *Le Docker noir* (1956) is the title of the novel Sembène wrote based on his experience working as a docker in Marseille.

[16] Hondo in Hugues Perrot, "Entretien avec Med Hondo," unpublished audiovisual recording, Ciné-Archives (2018).

[17] Hondo in a personal communication to Pfaff, quoted in *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 157. This motif will be taken up again in several of Hondo's films.

[18] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 16.

[19] Hondo quoted in Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris."

[20] Amiri Baraka was then known as LeRoi Jones. Translated into French as *Le Métro fantôme*, *Dutchman* was directed by Antoine Bourseiller at the Théâtre de Poche-Montparnasse. Hondo later had plans (possibly a film project) for a play by Baraka.

Rule, in the role of the coolie.[21] In reality, the Paris stage was inimical to the palaver tree. In order to find employment as actor, Hondo had to unlearn his African accent, while in a number of appearances on French television he found himself relegated to demeaning stereotypes of otherness. In the episode "Le Tigre des lagunes" of the French adventure serial *Bob Morane* (1965), Hondo plays the subservient "Indian guide" to an intrepid French explorer. In the television movie *La petite hutte* (1965), he is simply "the Negro." Hondo later recalled being selected "like livestock" for the colour of his skin, of which he either had too much or too little, depending on the requirements of the role.[22] He likened the experience of working under the stage direction of white Frenchmen to the "sensation of being a kind of wandering object."[23] Time and again, Hondo's hope of using theatre as a means to make his condition known was dashed. Made to unlearn his African accent, he had been recast as a Black man.

Not only was the repertoire for African and Black actors extremely limited both in classical and contemporary drama, but their experience was almost completely absent from the French stage.[24] Les Griots, a group of African and diasporic theatre performers founded in 1957, was a notable exception.[25] Its founders—Robert Liensol, Toto Bissainthe, and the later filmmakers Timité Bassori, Ababacar Samb-Makharam, and Sarah Maldoror[26]—realised they would have to create their own structures or forever be confined to subaltern roles.[27] Inspired by their example, Hondo founded his own company, Shango, which in 1966, with participation of Les Griots co-founder Liensol, merged into Griot-Shango.[28] In theatres and cultural centres all over France, Hondo and Liensol put on plays by Antillean writers such as René Depestre and Daniel Boukman.[29] Hondo's first directorial credit, *L'Oracle* by Congolese playwright and journalist Guy Menga, dating from 1969, was by his own account the first play on the Paris stage to be written, acted,

---

[21] For more on Hondo's relation to Brecht, see 4.4.

[22] Hondo quoted in Guy Hennebelle, "Entretien avec Med Hondo," *Cinéma 70*, no. 147 (1970): 41.

[23] Hondo quoted in Hennebelle, "Entretien," 41.

[24] The same was true of cinema and television: "I decided to make films to bring some black faces to the lily-white French screens, which have been ignoring us and the black contribution to the world for years." Hondo quoted in Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris."

[25] Timité Bassori gives this account of the group's beginnings: "Un théâtre nègre à Paris: La compagnie Les Griots," *Africultures*, accessed April 20, 2019, http://africultures.com/un-theatre-negre-a-paris-la-compagnie-les-griots-13855/.

[26] They hailed from Guadeloupe, Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Guadeloupe respectively. One of the Griots' first performances, under the direction of Roger Blin, was a staging of Jean Genet's *Les Nègres*, a 1958 play whose allegorical mode was inspired by Jean Rouch's controversial ethnographic film *Les maîtres fous* (1955).

[27] This is how Hondo described the Griots' objective, quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 19.

[28] Shango was named after the Yoruba god of thunder whose fascination with magic wrought great havoc.

[29] See Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris." Hondo later made a play of Boukman's into a film (see 5.4).

and directed entirely by "Africans."[30] "Beautifully staged (by Med Hondo) and very well acted […], this play which was very favourably received by the critics should have attracted a much larger audience," a French reviewer in *Présence africaine* wrote at the time. "Unfortunately, Parisians stick to the idea that a Negro [*Nègre*] on the stage can only make people laugh, or at least dance."[31] Even as he was making theatre in France, Hondo kept looking for ways to bring his work to Africa, but an attempt to take *L'Oracle* to the continent proved unfeasible: The play—a comedic indictment of the traditional system of marriage against the background of the ongoing European exploitation of Africa—was "too real" in Hondo's telling to pass muster with the censor board.[32] "It is definitely not easy," the reviewer in *Présence africaine* concludes, "to 'get across' the message from Africa to the world and to herself."[33]

Hondo's work with Griot-Shango was a first attempt to meet what he called "Africa's hunger for images," which to his mind—in his lived experience—naturally extended into the metropolitan diaspora.[34] These early struggles on the Paris stage, as we will see throughout this chapter but particularly in 5.4, were another formative experience, shaping both his aesthetic sensibility and his understanding of African cultural activism and labour in France. Eventually, Hondo's work towards the creation of an African theatre in France left him feeling invisibilised and constrained. His ultimate dissatisfaction with the form, however, stemmed from its ephemeral nature and relatively limited scope for dissemination. To these problems of storage and transmission, the technically reproducible mass medium of film, as "an art that leaves traces,"[35] presented itself as a solution. Ever since his arrival to France, Hondo had been an avid cinema-goer. Still in Marseille, he was briefly enrolled on a correspondence course in filmmaking, but he never received formal training.[36] It was by careful observation of the film and television directors with whom he worked as an actor that Hondo gleaned his first insights into the practical side of filmmaking.[37] This informal "school of stolen glimpses" was complemented by voracious film-viewing, which he pursued with systematic intent and an analytical eye, often

---

[30] Hondo quoted in Hennebelle, "Entretien," 41. The theatre was the Studio des Champs-Elysées. See also Murphy and Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema*, 73.

[31] Michel Ligny, "'L'Oracle,' de Guy Menga," *Présence Africaine*, no. 70 (1969): 193.

[32] Hennebelle, "Entretien."

[33] Ligny, "'L'Oracle,'" 194.

[34] "What creates their impact? This hunger to be, this hunger for themselves and their culture that Africans have. They need to see themselves, to hear their languages, to see films that concern them."

[35] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 19–20. See also Marie-Clémence Andriamonta-Paes, "Discutons: Le cinéma de Med Hondo," audiovisual recording, Französische Filmtage Tübingen (2018), accessed August 9, 2020, https://vimeo.com/302025974.

[36] The correspondence course was at the Conservatoire indépendant du cinéma français. See Perrot, "Entretien."

watching the same film "two or three times in a row."[38] Hondo's first films, the short *Ballade aux sources* (1967) and *Partout ailleurs peut-être nulle part* (1969), were conceived as autodidactic exercises. In making them, he taught himself how to use a camera.[39]

<center>⁂</center>

In 1969, Hondo released his debut feature film: a cry of pain unlike anything else in the history of cinema.[40] *Soleil Ô*—the title refers to an Antillean song evoking the anguish and alienation of African slaves[41]—follows a nameless African migrant worker (Robert Liensol) who is drawn to Paris in search of work but finds there nothing but abasement. The migrant's story is told in a loose series of vignettes, stations of the cross of everyday racism inspired by the personal experience of Hondo and his circle. The Black man's perambulations through the French capital, compelled by the need for a wage, form the film's narrative baseline, which is disrupted time and again by increasingly apocalyptic visions—a procession of historical forms of domination, ranging from the slave trade to Christian proselytisation to colonial rule and on to the neo-colonial depredations of the post-independence era, presented in allegorical tableaux that borrow freely from the agit-prop repertoire of placards, puppetry, and caricature. Some of these visions have the intensity of fever dreams, others employ charts and diagrams: The protagonist, we are told, was trained as an accountant. *Soleil Ô* culminates in the accountant's mental breakdown and subsequent flight into the woods outside of Paris. Evoking both histories of maroonage and the armed liberation struggles of the day, this utterly unreconciled ending gestures towards the possibility of an escape.

---

[37] From the mid-1960s onwards, in addition to his work for French television, Hondo acted in films by John Huston, Costa-Gavras, Robert Enrico, and others.

[38] "I did not go to any film school. I used to go to see films two or three times in a row in my leisure time and I would do my own critique." Hondo quoted in Guy Hennebelle, "Soleil Ô de Med Hondo," *CinémAction*, no. 8 (1979).

[39] *Ballade aux sources*, Hondo's first film, is the story of an African returnee who finds himself a tourist in his country of birth, wrestling with a profound sense of alienation. The plot closely resembles Ababacar Samb-Makharam's *Et la neige n'était plus*. *Partout ailleurs peut-être nulle part*, Hondo's second short, looks and sounds like a French New Wave film, until the bickering white couple in their beautiful country house are suddenly confronted by a third figure, a spirit-like, allegorical character played by Hondo himself, whose presence on the scene instigates a deconstruction of the couple's whiteness as their relationship comes apart. Hondo's early shorts were not released at the time.

[40] Other sources give 1968 as the date of completion. See, e.g. ,Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 20. Originally shot on 16mm and blown up to 35mm for theatrical release, the film has been restored in 2017 as part of the African Film Heritage Project.

[41] "Soleil O moi je ne suis pas né ici / Moi je suis nègre d'Afrique." See Michel Ciment and Paul Louis Thirard, "Interview with Med Hondo [1970]," in *1970–2018: Interviews with Med Hondo*, ed. Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and Brigitta Kuster (Berlin: Arsenal—Institut für Film und Videokunst/Archive Books, 2021), 49.

The very restrictive initial budget of *Soleil Ô*, amounting to approximately $30,000, was made up in part of Hondo's personal savings from a year and a half's worth of dubbing work.[42] He was receiving a small salary from the Office de coopération radiophonique (OCORA), a French record label issuing ethnographic field recordings for commercial release, and previously had worked as a voice actor for radio commercials.[43] This was also when Hondo first took up dubbing foreign-language films for commercial distribution, which was to become his main source of income for most of his working life.[44] Hondo's dubbing work was an important source of cross-financing, but it was never enough.[45] To make up the difference, he had to be inventive—and to incur debt. Raw film was given on loan by various processing companies on Hondo's pleading, to be reimbursed once the film was in distribution; lab costs were advanced on the same terms.[46] Unlike Balogun, Hondo did not own any equipment. Malagasy filmmaker Jean-Claude Rahaga, one of *Soleil Ô*'s two cameramen,[47] occasionally managed to sneak a camera out of the Parisian secondary school where he was employed at the time. Hondo may have been able to obtain a portable audio recorder from OCORA but was otherwise obliged to hire his tools. Besides the two cameramen, the film crew included a sound engineer and about sixty actors, most of them African or of African descent. To assemble such a cast would have been impossible, Hondo later reflected, if not for his work with Griot-Shango and his connections on the Paris stage; even so, it took him six months to accomplish this feat. In lieu of wages, the actors were offered a share of eventual profits, while Hondo himself received no compensation. Since all parties involved had to work day jobs, shooting had to be accomplished on weekends and in their spare time, "in small pieces, tinkering [*en bricolant*]," over a period of one year at an average rate of ten shots per week.[48] Developing *Soleil O* turned into a nightmare when the lab lost the original negatives,

---

[42] See Mark Reid, "Working Abroad: Interview with Med Hondo," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 31 (1986).

[43] Ciné-Archives hold a recording of a radio commercial Hondo did for Colgate (not catalogued).

[44] Many of Hondo's over 250 voice roles since then were African American actors such as Danny Glover, Richard Pryor, Amiri Baraka (in Warren Beatty's *Bulworth*), and, most famously, Eddie Murphy. See Philippe Rège, *Encyclopedia of French Film Directors* (Lanham, Maryland; Toronto & Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 507. Hondo's day job, as he himself suggested, placed him "at the centre of a movement that evokes the triangular trade of yore, which departing from Africa touched on the Americas before terminating in Europe." Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 98.

[45] See Dura, "Entretien," 22. The film's eventual costs amounted to $230,000 (18 million ancien francs) for lab work alone—$770,000 (60 million ancien francs) including charges. See Hennebelle, "Entretien," 45.

[46] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 159; Hennebelle, "Entretien," 42.

[47] The other was French cinematographer François Catonné, who was to become a regular collaborator of Hondo's.

[48] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 22. See also Hondo in Cecilia Cenciarelli and Aboubakar Sanogo, "Lezione di cinema: Il cinema secondo Med Hondo," audiovisual recording, Il Cinema ritrovato (Bologna, 2017).

forcing Hondo to edit the film based on contact prints he took off the rushes.[49] A tentative and protracted process rife with compromise, the production eventually stretched over a duration of five years.[50] The script, in contrast, had been written in just half a year, the urgent, emetic expression of Hondo's lived experience as an African filmmaker in Paris, "vomiting" the things he had at heart. "You can write that," he told the French critic Guy Hennebelle, "*Soleil Ô* is a throwing up."[51]

French critics, pointing to the film's disjunctive and composite style, placed *Soleil Ô* in the context of European New Wave and avant-garde auteurism, but Hondo fiercely resisted this attribution. Auteur cinema, as he saw it, was a form of product differentiation internal to national film industries, which could meaningfully be elaborated only against a baseline of regular production. For auteurism even to become an option for an "African filmmaker" like himself, African film production would have to be abundant.[52] The formal properties of *Soleil Ô,* Hondo argued further, owed nothing to auteurist whim and everything to the precarious conditions of the film's production, which rendered impossible strict adherence to the "rules of cinema."[53] Formal unity and integration—the aesthetic valences of classical cinema which the New Wave sought to explode—were predicated on a precise, "Cartesian" mode of production characterised by fixed schedules, a clear division of labour, and the controlled space of the studio, none of which were within reach of Hondo's migrant practice.[54] Mocking the French debate about the "politics of form," with its post-1968 bias towards transgression and rule-breaking, Hondo declared there was nothing wrong with the rules of cinema other than the fact that he did not have the means to abide by them: "We do not have them today and without a doubt will not have them tomorrow."[55]

More recent appraisals of *Soleil Ô* have been more attuned to the "thousand difficulties" under which Hondo was labouring. Max Nelson, in a review on occasion of the film's 2017 restoration, describes its style as "taut, anxious, and forged under pressure."[56] The scholarly literature recognises this, too, however, there is a marked tendency to relativise Hondo's travails through what might be characterised as an analytic of "redemption." Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, for instance, has argued that the precarious conditions under which *Soleil Ô* was made ultimately yielded to Hondo's purpose. The film's trun-

---

[49] See Hennebelle, "Entretien," 42.
[50] See Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris."
[51] See Hennebelle, "Entretien," 41–42.
[52] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste* rebelle, 43.
[53] "It was materially impossible for us to make this film following the rules of cinema." Hondo quoted in Jean Delmas, "Soleil O: Entretien avec Med Hondo et Robert Liensol," *jeune cinéma*, no. 48 (1970): 32.
[54] Hondo quoted in Delmas, "Soleil O," 32.
[55] Delmas, 32.

cated, fragmentary narrative, which she acknowledges owes much to the difficult circumstances of production, in her view also serves as a visual approximation of the "inability of the African immigrant to account for his own existence in toto in the White world."[57] Similarly, when the Black cameraman was denied access to a shooting location on racist grounds, in Cottenet-Hage's account this real experience of social exclusion takes on a figurative meaning, emphasising the "*social* exteriority" of the film's protagonist on his search for a room, as he, too, is denied entrance.[58] On this redemptive reading, the filmmaker emerges triumphant: Hondo everywhere succeeded in turning "liabilities" into "aesthetic assets."[59] Redemptive readings of this sort are pervasive in Third Cinema scholarship more generally. There is no denying that this is a very generative critical strategy. We even may construct our own examples. Hondo's casting of the same actor as both curé and psychologist, for instance, was necessitated by a lack of available actors on that day but also serves a purpose, as Hondo himself maintained, in illustrating that these two figures represent "different aspects of the same system, of which they are the guard dogs."[60] While this is certainly not a wrong description, it mischaracterises the outcome as a triumph over adversity—against Hondo's pleading to instead understand it as a sign of struggle.

What does it mean to read *Soleil Ô* as a sign of struggle? Teshome Gabriel has suggested that a common feature of the films of Third Cinema were "the adjustments they had to make in response to the extremely repressive environments from which they originate," frequently "to the detriment of technical quality and aesthetic control."[61] He writes that these "technical or aesthetic compromises" provide an "index of urgency," inscribing "the repressive conditions under which the filmmakers are forced to operate." I will further develop this perspective by bringing *Soleil Ô* into conversation with Clyde Taylor's writing on US Black filmmaking in the 1970s, and placing both alongside the work of self-declared "Third World filmmaker" Kidlat Tahimik. Instead of reifying Hondo's difficulties as radical "style," or redeeming them as a form of "planned poverty" (Trinh T. Minh-ha), Taylor's observations on the L.A. Rebellion group of filmmakers, especially the films of Haile Gerima (another African migrant filmmaker and a close friend of Hondo's), together with Tahimik's reflections on his own "cups-of-gas filmmaking," will suggest a different reading of Hondo's practice insisting on the moment of negation and the

---

[56] Max Nelson, "First-World Problems," *Film Comment* 53, no. 5 (2017): 11.
[57] Cottenet-Hage, "Decolonizing Images," 178.
[58] Cottenet-Hage, 178.
[59] Cottenet-Hage, 178.
[60] Hondo quoted in Hennebelle, "Entretien," 45.
[61] Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World*, 95–96.

movement of escape.[62] This "negative" analytic will allow us to see *Soleil Ô* not as a settling-into but an unsettling of form, not an arrival but a departure. The film's production history, rather than a story of empowerment and the overcoming of adversity, will become legible as a struggle within a system of domination, looking for a way out.

When members of Haile Gerima's crew were stopped and searched by police during the filming of *Bush Mama* (USA, 1976), Gerima managed to capture the incident on camera. Filmed in a palpably clandestine manner, the image shows the men spread-eagled against a car while being frisked by armed officers of the LAPD.[63] These images under threat of confiscation were later "interwoven into the text of the film,"[64] a furtive index of anti-Black police violence in Watts, South Central Los Angeles. According to Taylor, such violent infringements of the frame were the order of the day for Black independent filmmakers in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the US.[65] Taylor generalises Gerima's example, arguing that the space of independent Black cinema differed radically from the "predictable unpredictability" of a US movie set.[66] While the film studio orders and controls reality, the experience of Black filmmakers is of a reality that "arranges itself" before them. Spatial perception is tempered by "social paranoia, volatility, and contingency"; it is the experience of being surrounded, invaded, and made disposable.[67]

When the protagonist of *Soleil Ô* takes a stroll with a white French date, what the camera (surreptitiously) recorded were the real, unscripted reactions of bystanders and passers-by to the interracial couple kissing and holding hands on the Champs Elysées.[68] The situation was a set-up: Hondo knew he could count on this gaze to follow him and his crew at every turn. But it is important to note that he had no hand in creating, nor could he hope to control, it. Rather, a sense of constant exposure which intruded on Hondo's

---

[62] Hondo's company, Soleil O, distributed *Bush Mama* and other films of Gerima's. The film later also formed part of CAC's distribution catalogue (see 5.3).
[63] "Did they mistake the cameras for weapons," asks Taylor, "did they sense a robbery in progress, a misappropriation of evidence?" Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema."
[64] Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema."
[65] There were only very few "dependent" ones, that is, African American filmmakers who like Jamaa Fanaka worked as directors in the US film industry. While Taylor's argument targets all of US Black filmmaking, most of his examples are taken from the L.A. Rebellion group of filmmakers.
[66] It will be instructive to see how Hondo later approached the space of the film studio, notably in *West Indies* (see 5.4).
[67] Taylor emphasises the social environs' continual and contingent encroachment upon the act of filmmaking: "The social space of many new black films is saturated with contingency. Simply, it is the contingency of on-location shooting. But what a location. It is a space in which invasion is immanent. A street scene in these films is a place where anything can happen, any bizarre or brutal picaresque eventuality […]. An interior location attracts the feeling of prison, or refuge. A door is a venue through which an intruder may suddenly burst, either police or madman. The folklore surrounding this school of adventuresome filmmaking is replete with art/life ironies: a film about a black man trying to live his life without going to jail is interrupted when the actor interpreting the role is put in jail for nonsupport." Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema."
[68] Sanogo conceptualises this as "a fictional scene [that] becomes documentary through the gaze of the spectators within the diegesis itself." Sanogo, "The Indocile Image," 554.

practice whether he wanted it to or not, is here allowed to take centre stage.[69] Aboubakar Sanogo describes in some detail the porosity of *Soleil Ô* towards its social environs but too readily qualifies this as an "openness" by choice. The film, he writes, "*chooses* to open parentheses, to look outside the frame, to interrogate figures outside the narrative, to include direct camera addresses of 'intruders' into the narrative, to abruptly pause the narrative and explore other issues before returning to it."[70] This is all very true, but why bracket in scare quotes the very real intrusions that were infringing on Hondo's practice, thereby rendering them harmless? Taylor, on a similar note, describes the contingent space of US Black cinema as "a space *open to* wide-ranging possibilities," but in the same breath reminds us that this "openness" stemmed from a place of precarity and disposability.[71] If filming in the industrial mode seeks to control its environment, the minor, migrant mode of *Soleil Ô* remains vulnerable to its surroundings, registering the violence that permeated its making. Sanogo's point, that this vulnerability also makes for a sort of openness to the unfolding present, is well taken, but this present is a time of struggle, not redemption. Hondo's contemporaries labelled him *un écorché vif*, literally, "a flayed man," denoting a person of extreme sensitivity to real or perceived violence.[72] *Soleil Ô* is a flayed film: a film without skin, if that is not a contradiction in terms,[73] unreconciled to its wounds.

Pursuing this argument further, we may productively compare Hondo's practice to that, roughly contemporaneous, of Filipino filmmaker and former OECD economist Kidlat Tahimik. Tahimik's "cups-of-gas filmmaking" revolves around small quantities of energy—cups of gas—that render impossible long-term, goal-oriented planning. Cups-of-gas filmmaking is a stuttering, intermittent, and open-ended exchange with the world—

---

[69] There are other African diasporic films of the time that self-consciously include images carrying the imprint of their racist environs. In Safi Faye's *La Passante* (France, 1972), an essay film about interracial sexual desire in the mode of speculative ethnography, a Black woman, played by the director herself, passes by two men squatting on the railing of a bridge, one of them Black, the other white. The film then makes us privy to the onlookers' fantasies, with the white man enjoying, or in any case imagining he would, the alternately envious, disapproving, and bemused reactions of the real passersby whose gaze the interracial couple is seen to attract while seated outside a Paris café. Frankie Dymon Junior's *Death May Be Your Santa Claus* (UK, 1969), released in the same year as *Soleil Ô*, in one scene places an African man on Hyde Park Corner where from the soap box he offers a firm rebuttal of European superiority—until his sermon is interrupted by the slurs and insults of actual bystanders: "If all you coloured people got out of Brixton there would be four more hours of daylight!"

[70] Sanogo, "The Indocile Image," 555 (emphasis mine).

[71] Though his examples are specific to the US, Taylor argues that aesthetically, US Black cinema is therefore closer to Italian neo-realism and "Third world cinema": "The focus of its attention is wider, more open to diverse, competing, even accidental impressions. The basic palette of the indigenous Afro screen is closer to that of Italian neorealism and Third World cinema than to Southern California." Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema."

[72] See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 10.

[73] The word "film" is derived from the Middle English *filme* (and Old English *filmen*), for membrane, thin skin, foreskin. It is also related to the Proto-Germanic *felma*, meaning skin or hide.

"an interaction between me and the cosmos," as Tahimik writes.[74] To the spectacular and accomplished production values of developed industrial cinemas—what he calls "fillmaking" [sic] with a "full tank-cum-credit card"[75]—Tahimik opposes a "cosmic" production ethics located not in the image but its creation. Contrary to industrial cinema's wilful imposition on nature, Tahimik's cinema suffers nature's consequences. A porous, open-ended process given to "cosmic interference," his practice is not all happy accidents—like the typo that produced "fillmaking"—but also includes things that fail to come together and things that fall apart. It is a practice that paradoxically embraces both its enabling conditions and that which thwarts and frustrates Tahimik's efforts. When both the negative and rough cut of a film he had been working on for years fell prey to an aggressive mould, he simply accepted the destruction of his labours as the effect of "too many typhoon seasons," and then proceeded to insert the decomposed material into the "finished" film, *Balikbayan #1: Memories of Overdevelopment*.[76] While Tahimik's insertion of entropic forces in some ways resembles the irruption of violence in *Bush Mama*, the susceptibility of *Balikbayan #1* to its volatile surroundings is unique in that it transcends the moment of exposure to include long-term damage sustained over years of problematic storage. These are the conditions from which Tahimik's work emerges, and under which it persists or perishes as an object in the world. To reject them is not an option. They have to be let in, and worked through.

Both *Soleil Ô* and *Balikbayan #1* are "image-events" in Susan Schuppli's definition: They do not merely record history but are themselves the object of historical forces, pointing us to a zone of conceptual instability where violence breaches the bounds of representation.[77] However, there is a Third Worldist redemptive streak running through Tahimik's ethics and poetics which is notably absent from Hondo's work. For all the violence Tahimik's films must suffer, cups-of-gas filmmaking, in its open, permeable relationship to the environment, is also and at the same time proffered as a prefigurative paradigm of non-alienated labour. Hondo's version of cups-of-gas-filmmaking, while simi-

---

[74] Tahimik, "Cups-of gas Filmmaking," 83.

[75] Tahimik's manifesto is prefaced by an author's note: "While writing this paper, I made a typographical error: instead of 'filmmaker', it came out 'fillmaker'. A cosmic message—perhaps the core of this paper." Tahimik, "Cups-of-gas Filmmaking," 80. That the core concept itself was conceived by way of an error which the author, rather than correct, embraced for its cosmic resonances, prefigures the poetics delineated in the manifesto. Also see Aily Nash, "Kidlat Tahimik," in *Speaking Directly: Oral Histories of the Moving Image*, ed. Federico Windhausen (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque Books, 2013).

[76] The film is an ongoing work in progress. It exists in many iterations. See also 5.2, where I will draw further comparisons between Hondo's practice and Tahimik's.

[77] See Susan Schuppli, "Material Malfeasance: Trace Evidence of Violence in Three Image-Acts," *Photoworks*, no. 17 (2011): 28.

larly stuttering and vulnerable, makes no such claims. His practice is a paradigm only of the present struggle.

Clyde Taylor's description of Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (USA, 1971) as an allegory of "the furious ordeal of a black person trying to make a mentally independent film against the resistances that the society will mount in reaction," equally applies to *Soleil Ô*.[78] The film's diegetic movement, following a Black man who follows work, mirrors the pressured, non-linear itinerary of its production. Charting a route through the city, Hondo's feature debut gives form to the frustrating and meandering process of making a film as an African filmmaker in Paris.[79] However, as Hondo also noted, this process was instrumental in shaping a "political perception of my environment."[80] The director and his protagonist, "wandering objects" both, pass through a space constructed by others and through this passage arrive at a new, political understanding of their situation. Both Van Peebles' film and Hondo's end with a flight to the woods. Unlike Tahimik, who embraces the conditionality of his work as the basis for an alternative practice, Hondo and Van Peebles reject their historically linked conditions as irredeemable. With Fred Moten, we may describe their shared trajectory as a "fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure."[81] Resisting the teleology of redemption, we may thus begin to discern in the radical openness of *Soleil Ô* not merely the mark of domination but also the possibility of an escape.

---

[78] Taylor, "New U.S. Black Cinema." Sanogo: "One can hear a conversation between the hero of *Soleil Ô* and that of Van Peebles *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971)." The Griots' last performance, in 1964, was a stage adaptation of Melvin Van Peebles' French language novel *La fête à Harlem* directed by Van Peebles himself. See Sylvie Chalaye, "La compagnie des Griots ou l'ambition d'un 'véritable théâtre noir moderne,'" *Africultures* 2–3, no. 92–93 (2013).

[79] The first decade of African cinema saw a host of films that made use of this same ambulatory trope. The city in these films is usually Dakar, owing to Senegal's status as the political and cultural capital of Françafrique in the first decades after the independences. In *Borom Sarret* (1963) a cart driver feeds his family by inserting himself into the Senegalese capital's circulatory system. The boy protagonist of *Badou Boy* (1970) is chased through the city by an overweight policeman, while the couple's itinerary in *Touki Bouki* (1973) is shaped by their desire to leave Dakar behind for Paris. In *Certificat d'indigence* (1983), the mother's peregrinations by foot between various government agencies is driven by her quest to obtain a certificate attesting to her "indigence," which she must produce so that her ailing child may receive urgently needed medical care.

[80] Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 24.

[81] Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 179.

5.2 History in the making (Les Bicots-nègres vos voisins, 1974)

Soleil Ô was not the first film to confront the experience of African migrants in France. In the wake of *Afrique-sur-Seine*, a large number of African filmmakers in Paris explored themes of diasporic existence: Alpha Adama in *L'Imprévu* (1965), Urbain Dia-Moukori in *Point de vue* (1965) and *La Fleur dans le sang* (1966), Désiré Écaré in *À nous deux France* (1965) and *Concerto pour un exil* (1968), and of course Ola Balogun in *Alpha* (see 4.1). While *Afrique-sur-Seine*, the first in this body of works, conveys a marked sense of optimism, the mood shifts in later Paris-set films, veering towards alienation and despair. In my discussion of Balogun's *Alpha*, I have related this shift to political crisis at home. Here, I want to argue that it was also reflective of a wider demographic shift in the African migrant population. The filmmakers listed above, as I have noted earlier, were students, artists, or intellectuals. Only with *Soleil Ô* did the growing population of African labour migrants of lesser means come into view, of which Hondo himself was a part.[82] Many would follow in his steps: from Inoussa Ousseïni (*Paris c'est joli*, 1974)[83] to Ben Diogaye Bèye (*Les princes noirs de Saint-Germain des Prés,* 1975) to fellow Mauritanian filmmaker Sidney Sokhona (*Nationalité: immigré*, 1976, and *Safrana ou le droit à la parole*, 1978), to name but a few.

After *Soleil Ô*, which Hondo had conceived and written alone in a desperate outburst, he decided that his next project should be a collective effort. In 1974, he followed up with his second feature film, *Les Bicots-nègres vos voisins*. Hondo spent three years filming in and around migrant hostels, mainly at a foyer at rue de Croix-Nivert: "I filmed everything that related to their concerns: strikes, demonstrations, meetings etc."[84] He engaged migrants in conversation about their struggles at work, but also filmed their living conditions and reproductive struggles. Hondo wanted to give this emergent social group its proper image through a process of co-research,[85] reviewing the rushes with migrants and activists and modifying the film in response to their concerns. In 1971, in order to obtain

---

[82] Before *Soleil Ô*, there was Sembène's *La Noire de…* (1966), and before that Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1957), which portrays the inner-African migrations that often were the first step on a "forced journey" towards Europe—the title of migrant activist Sally N'Dongo's memoir, *Voyage forcée: itinéraire d'un militant* (Paris: François Maspero, 1975). N'Dongo will make an appearance later in this section.

[83] Ousseini's short film gives a miserable vision of the French capital populated by construction sites, dingy cafés, and even dingier brothels. Its protagonist is robbed, betrayed, and exploited several times over; no human encounter is without eventual disappointment. In the end, the migrant sends a postcard to his family back in Côte d'Ivoire which reads "Paris, c'est joli!"

[84] Hondo quoted in Abdou Achouba Delati, "Entretien avec Med Hondo," *Écran*, no. 30 (1974): 80. Hondo mentions one hostel in particular, situated in the rue de la Croix-Nivert in the 15th arrondissement.

more precise feedback and to attract further participants, he consolidated some of the material he had filmed thus far into a provisional short with the title *Vos voisins*.[86] Hondo hoped to continue shooting new material as the migrants' struggle wore on, in lockstep with their social and political maturation. This was his vision of filmmaking "with the people": "You have to speak with those who can perceive or not perceive and only their opinion can decide which way to go."[87]

The production history of *Les Bicots-nègres* in many ways resembles that of its predecessor. The film was realised, as Hondo said, "by hook or by crook,"[88] that is, with scarce means and in a situation of sustained precarity. Aided this time by five different camera operators, Hondo again shot little by little, mostly on weekends. The running costs of the production were again cross-financed by Hondo's dubbing work, on which he also relied for his day-to-day survival. As there was not enough money at the outset to cover overall expenditure, Hondo, like Tahimik's cups-of-gas filmmaker, was reduced to buying one reel of film at a time.[89]

In an effort to tell "a long, long story," state the opening credits, *Les Bicots-nègres* became "a long, long, long film"—two and a half hours in the original release version. For one, it had to be this long in order to convey, through a relational lens, a long and expansive history. Onto interviews and documentary footage, filmed at Rue Croix Nivert and other locations of the migrants' struggle, Hondo grafted a variety of short fictional forms: re-enactments, comedy sketches, photographic collages, and even bits of animation. Departing from the migrants' lived experience—of racialised oppression at the hands of French landlords, employers, and fellow workers—the film opens onto the shared past of Africa and France, focussing on uneven exchange between France and its former colonies and articulating the migrants' experience to a broader view of Africa's circulation struggles, signally including the distribution of films. But *Les Bicots-nègres* is a "long, long, long film" also in another sense: It took a long time to get made, and this duration impacts its form in important ways. Responding to an evolving situation and to the migrants' variable feedback, the film continually changed shape over the three years of filming. It kept shapeshifting even after completion: Further endings were added as late as 1981,

---

[85] *Conricerca*, or "co-research," was theorised as a political research methodology in the context of Italian workerism. See, e.g., Gigi Roggero, "Notes on Framing and Re-inventing Co-research," *Ephemera* 14, no. 3 (2014).

[86] *Vos voisins* is missing from most filmographies. Hondo later appears to have forgotten it was ever made and was surprised when told of its rediscovery among his possessions donated to Ciné-Archives. At the time, the short was shown to migrant workers in France and in Belgium. See Delati, "Entretien," 80.

[87] Hondo quoted in Mimi Maziz, "Interview de Med Hondo," *Revolution Africaine*, no. 498 (1973).

[88] *Au forceps*, that is, "with a crowbar." Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 24.

[89] Hondo quoted in Signaté, 107.

seven years after the film's initial release.[90] The only extant prints of *Les Bicots-nègres* are of this later iteration, which is relatively short, clocking in at just under one hour and forty minutes,[91] however, we may safely assume there were other versions still. Historical duration makes its own demands on filmic form, straining the finite and bounded shape of the film commodity.[92] Hondo wanted to make a "film of a new type,"[93] with a hybrid and modular structure whose parts have no fixed position, each enjoying a degree of autonomy. The length of these individual segments varies, but none takes up more than one reel. Through the recombination of existing segments and the addition of new ones, the film's "message" and mode of address changed over time, keeping up with the unfolding of history.

When *Les Bicots-nègres* was first released, initially only to French screens (see also 5.3), the film's experimental, open-ended form again drew New Wave comparisons from the French press. The influence of Jean-Luc Godard in particular was said to be palpable.[94] Inoussa Ousseïni instead likened Hondo's aesthetic to that of the African storyteller, both approaching a given totality—here, the whole of French-African relations—in heterogenous, non-linear fashion. Like the African storyteller, Hondo constantly shifts his attention, creating a moving frame that may at any time jump from the protagonist's actions to details of their immediate surroundings or wider situation. Hondo himself at times endorsed this view, saying he wanted to tell a story as it would have been told in an African village, full of repetitions, digressions, and flashbacks, and mixing various genres.[95] The ongoing versioning of *Les Bicots-nègres* may well be related to the open-ended variety and iterability of African storytelling. Hondo, we might say, transplanted onto the terrain of political filmmaking the storyteller's capacity to model, structure, and thereby enrich a tale, varying it in response to audience reactions.[96] But what both the New Wave and African storytelling comparisons obscure is that style is a function of filmmaking, as Hondo would insist. I will argue that the form of *Les Bicots-nègres* has to be seen in the context of its precarious, halting production history, and of the ongoing migrant struggles of which it formed a part. Hondo, in his own words, conceived of *Les Bicots-nègres* as "a

---

[90] Sanogo maintains there were at least three endings. See "The Indocile Image," 559.
[91] In response to complaints about the film's length, Hondo cut another, shorter version for cinema release. Clément Lafite (Ciné-Archives), personal communication, April 2019.
[92] Like all of Hondo's films, *Les Bicots-nègres* was destined in theory for a wide commercial release.
[93] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 109.
[94] See Mohand Ben Salama, "Les chants viendront d'eux-mêmes (Les Bicôts-nègres, vos voisins)," *Positif—Revue mensuelle de cinéma*, no. 165 (1975): 62.
[95] See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 109. In the longer initial version of the film, there were many repetitions, which in response to complaints among critics and audiences were later edited out. See Ghali, "Je suis un immigré," 30. See also Med Hondo, "The Cinema of Exile," in *Film & Politics in the Third World*, ed. John D.H. Downing (New York: Autonomedia, 1987), 71.
[96] See Diène, "La creation audiovisuelle," 150.

dialectical film whose various stages were assessed by all those involved in its making."[97] The film took and changed shape in accordance with the migrants' ongoing struggle, which it documents and of which it bears the traces. Its composite form is a function of this open-ended process. Sanogo writes that Hondo kept adding more endings to "keep pace with the development of working class consciousness,"[98] but he does not tell us where this development was headed, nor how it impacted the film. It will therefore be instructive to look at the different parts of *Les Bicots-nègres* in some detail and then trace their permutation across multiple versions. In the following synopsis, to convey the film's modular and disjointed character, and for ease of reference in the subsequent analysis, the different segments are numbered and discussed separately.

1. The prologue is a self-reflexive primer on the distribution of film, the commodity that forms the basis of Hondo's practice, explaining how Western governments and corporations have monopolised the circulation of images in and of Africa.[99] Standing with his back against a wall plastered with European and American film posters, a man dressed in a boubou—Senegalese actor and Griots alumnus Bachir Touré, transparently a mouthpiece for the director—directly addresses the audience. In a mode of bitter irony, he intones: "So you have come to the cinema… But what is 'cinema' for us, peoples of Africa, of the Third World, so-called underdeveloped peoples, peasants, the wageless?" In response to this question— *what is cinema for us?*—which is also the title of a 1979 essay by Hondo,[100] Touré gives a potted history of the Western invention of cinema and its subsequent introduction and development in the rest of the world. He conjures the stereotypical images of Africa circulated by Western cinemas, from Tarzan and Bosambo to Jungle Princess Hula and Negro King Bouboule, and argues that the French economic dominion over the circulation of images in Africa locked audiences into a vicious circle of alienation and cultural dependency.[101] Touré is surrounded by film posters; montage further amplifies our sense of encroachment, with images of guns, scantily clad women, and dead Indians suddenly popping into the frame, an-

---

[97] *Cinéma-Québec*, April 1975, quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 160.

[98] Sanogo, "The Indocile Image," 559.

[99] Sanogo gives an excellent account of this scene (559).

[100] See Med Hondo, "What is Cinema for Us? [1979]," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[101] This is how Hondo—qua Touré—describes the situation. In chapter 6 on Moustapha Alassane, I will argue for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Western cinemas and African audiences (see 6.3). Touré also mentions the propaganda function of cinema during the Second World War. The tiralleurs sénégalais and other French colonial troops drafted into "this occidental war against an occidental tyranny" are here mobilised as a recent historical paradigm for the forced dislocation and metropolitan deployment of colonised populations. Standing at attention, Touré sings the song of "Coulibaly the soldier," then breaks into laughter: "We've been had. But rest assured, it hasn't changed all that much."

imated by frantic zooms and pans.[102] The prologue then moves to a second scene: In front of a map of Africa, a young man (Sidney Sokhona) gives a didactic exposition of trade relations between France and its former colonies.[103] The distribution of African films is thus linked to the trade of African peanuts, iron, petrol, and fishery—and of the commodity of migrant labour.[104] This movement from Touré's lament to Sokhona's lecture anticipates the resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting held in Algiers one year after the film's initial release. Co-signed by Hondo, the document argued that "to understand the problem of the circulation of African cinema, we have to turn to the dynamic of capitalism on a global scale."[105]

2. Documentary footage of African labourers is accompanied on the soundtrack by an incantatory poem on colonial rule, independence, and the ruses of neo-colonialism, voiced by Hondo himself and set to the rhythm of the Islamic praise song "Alhamdulillah."

3. In this fictional scene, the global geopolitical manoeuvring that attended the dawn of the post-colonial era is shrunk to the dimensions of a garden party. At a gathering inside a heavily guarded château somewhere in the French countryside, functionaries of the state and captains of industry scheme to capture the independences while eagerly smiling African compradors, splendid in their smokings and military regalia, are enjoying cocktails in the garden. The conspirators agree that Algeria is a lost cause; France's allies, coveting market access to her overseas possessions, are pressing for an end to colonial rule, while the last-ditch effort to reform the French empire into a proposed "Communauté française" is fast losing ground. A new formula has to be found. The safest guarantee of their influence in the long term, the conspirators decide, is the "neo-colonial treaty of Cooperation" under-

---

[102] The prologue culminates in the ritual destruction of the foreign film posters by Hondo and his crew. A similarly defiant gesture appears in Férid Boughedir's 1982 documentary on the Journées Ciné-matographiques de Carthage. In the film's opening shots, Western and Egyptian commercial film posters are triumphantly plastered over with Carthage festival ads—only to eventually disappear again behind a new batch of movie posters, including for Roger Spottiswoode's eighties slasher *Terror Train* (USA, 1980); a melancholy image, but also a stab at the limited and ephemeral nature of festival culture. Boughedir's film also features an interview with Cheriaa, in which the Journées' founder and erstwhile director complains about the glam and glitz that have since taken hold of the festival.
[103] This lesson on global capitalism is intercut with a brief animated sequence showing a dollar note devouring other currencies, alongside a recurring portrait shot of the bearded Tahar Cheriaa, who is meant to stand in for Karl Marx, listening in on, and laughing at, what is being said.
[104] In an interview, Hondo emphasised that cinema is not only a "means of culture" but also a "raw material such as iron, copper, or fish." Quoted in Lazhar Esseghaier, "Vous avez la parole: Mohamed Abid Hondo," in *Cinémas des pays arabes*, exhibition catalogue (Cinémathèque française and Cinémathèque algerienne, 1977). See also Delati, "Entretien," 81.
[105] Birri et al., "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting," 276.

written by the promise of a shared cultural destiny: "'La Francophonie', that's brilliant!"

4. An empty theatre stage doubles as an unnamed country where a repressive regime has seized power after independence. Faces, clothing, and Arabic dialogue suggest a North African setting. The players, some of them professionals, others amateur actors recruited from among African migrants, enact a series of typical situations. The first scene shows a cadre of the ruling *parti unique* as he tries to intimidate and blackmail a group of peasants into supporting his side in the upcoming elections. The second scene shows that same cadre, now comfortably behind an office desk, as he extracts bribes from petitioners while brushing off their legitimate demands. A prospective migrant, who has come to apply for a passport, is indignant at this treatment and resolves to stay: "Let's settle the score in this country!" He is immediately seized by guards and led to a torture chamber.

5. A montage of documentary footage shows African migrants at work: car workers at the Renault factory gates in Boulogne-Billancourt, construction workers on the building site of the Centre des nouvelles industries et technologies in la Défense, street sweepers going about their work somewhere in central Paris.

6. Sidna, a worker at Renault who came to France from Mauritania in 1962, gives an interview detailing his experience of workplace discrimination at the hands of both bosses and colleagues, and his effective exclusion from both organised labour and welfare provisioning by the French state.

7. We enter a derelict migrant hostel on the outskirts of Paris. A song, co-written by Hondo with French singer-songwriter Catherine Le Forestier, presciently frames the migrants' crammed and insanitary housing conditions as an instance of the Third World in the First.[106] Le Forestier, a white Frenchwoman, sings: "You talk of faraway countries / where people die of hunger and misery / Come and see my neighbours / right at my doorstep."[107]

8. A man in front of a blackboard explains the logic of foreign investment in Africa. It is geared not towards growth and development but the extraction and export of primary materials, to be re-imported and sold as refined, value-added commodities. We are given to understand that this same dynamic pushes African peasants to migrate first to African cities and from there to France. This brief demonstration is interspersed with images of uprooted masses in an unnamed African city. Ar-

---

[106] See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 108–109.
[107] "Si vous voulez parler de ces pays lointains / ou l'on meurt de misère et de faim / des enfants de Biafra et de petits indiens / à deux pas de chez moi / allez voir mes voisins."

chival footage depicting a well-fed white man peering through the viewfinder of his camera as he steps off a boat links the taking of images to the wider logic of neo-colonial extraction.[108]

9. This animated segment uses caricature and photo-collage in the style of John Heartfield to allegorise the political rationality of international development. A photograph of Richard Nixon doing his "V for victory" pose pops into the frame, his outstretched arms raining dollar notes to one side and missiles to the other. Nixon is tailed by a parade of French and African politicians: French president Georges Pompidou (1969–1974), Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor (1960–1980), Beninois president Coutoucou Hubert Maga (1960–1963; 1970–1972), and Jacques "Monsieur Afrique" Foccart, chief advisor to successive French presidents and co-founder of the Service d'action civique (1959–1982), a Gaullist militia specialising in covert operations in Africa. Alternating in fast succession like the two sides of a thaumatrope, this cast of characters merges into the single image of "Françafrique."

10. This comedy sketch pits a disgruntled *cadre moyen* (a member of the French professional-managerial class) against a radical African migrant worker who suddenly materialises in the Frenchman's living room. The stop-motion trick that puts him there signals that this encounter is a fabrication. Further emphasising this point, both men are transparently "character masks." The scene seems to know something of its unlikeliness: The sudden appearance of the African worker in the French petty bourgeois' living room conveys the incongruity of their encounter. Interspersed documentary footage of a demonstration for migrant rights creates the impression that while this unlikely double act is unfolding indoors, protesters are marching on the street outside. Improbably, the migrant eventually manages to persuade the irate middle manager, whom we saw cursing at protesters from his balcony only moments ago,[109] of the need for a socialist revolution. The sketch is bookended by the menacing shot of an endless line of police vans filing past the camera.

11. Back at the migrant hostel first introduced in segment 7, a renters' strike is underway, during which strikers successfully resist attempts by French "technical assistants" to divide them along tribal lines. From this scene of the migrants' reproduc-

---

[108] Ariella Azoulay has described the self-arrogation of the right to film as a colonial act in its own right. See her "Unlearning the Origins of Photography," *Unlearning Decisive Moments of Photography*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, accessed April 13, 2019 , https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155239_unlearning_the_origins_of_photography.

tive struggle, we move seamlessly to a fictionalised segment which details their sexual desire and frustration. We follow a migrant on his nightly walk, eyeing female sales staff in department stores and window-shopping in the red-light district of Pigalle. The fast-paced montage, together with camera zooms that isolate breasts and buttocks, treats as interchangeable real women, shop window mannequins, and pornographic pictures. Though it is without a doubt the migrant who is looking, he is not strictly the bearer of the look. Rather, he is overwhelmed by an external, reified gaze, the commodification of the female body in capitalist society, which appears almost as a function of the social environment. When the migrant finally approaches a sex worker, he is told she does not fancy "coloured people."[110]

12. A series of still photographs depicting migrants, workers, and various political activists of the anti-imperialist left, who were murdered by police, right-wing paramilitaries, or national intelligence agencies.[111]

13. The film's epilogue, like its prologue, is set in a room plastered to the ceiling with film posters, only this time the posters advertise exclusively African films. In the middle of the room a group of migrant activists are seated around a table, headed by Sally N'Dongo, head of the Union générale de travailleurs sénégalaises en France (UGTSF) and author of an important treatise on French-African "cooperation."[112] Taking a leaf from N'Dongo's activist writings, the group discusses contemporary migration as a facet of neo-colonialism: "The pillage continues, even if its form and method have changed." At the end of the segment, Ivorian actor Sidiki Bakaba rises from the group and, turning to the camera, addresses a poem to "you who have come from the land of the sun," which implores the migrants to return. Illustrated with drawings, still photographs, and brief bursts of animation, the

---

[109] Echoing the film's title, he calls them a bunch of "niggers, wogs, hippies, and queers."
[110] The migrant's walk through the red light district is accompanied by a Creole song in which a male voice is pleading with a second, female voice to give up prostitution. But the woman stands her own: "I have no use for your pity / Make your mother a gift instead."
[111] They are: Malika Yazid, an eight-year-old Algerian girl living in a "cité de transit" outside of Paris who was beaten to death by two policemen looking for her fourteen-year-old brother; Michel Labroche, a PCF member killed by associates of the Gaullist Comités pour la défense de la République; Mohamed Diab, a migrant worker gunned down by police officer Robert Marquet with a machine pistol in the middle of a Versailles police station after having been beaten and subject to racist abuse; Outel Bono, a Chadian doctor and politician with communist leanings who was killed under mysterious circumstances in Paris (a legal inquiry into the murder was eventually suspended); the Cambodian Maoist student Suk Kim Huot; Pierre Overnay, a worker at Renault shot by a security guard; Marc Lanvin, an eighteen-year-old communist activist shot by Gaullist stooges with a weapon provided by the Service d'action civique; and Mahmoud Hamshari and Bassil al-Koubaissi, assassinated in Paris by Mossad agents as part of operation "Wrath of God."
[112] The scare quotes are N'Dongo's. See his La "coopération" franco-africaine (Paris: François Maspero, 1972).

poem echoes one of the key "propositions" that conclude the UGTSF's 1970 *Handbook of African Workers in France*: "The true solutions are in Africa."[113]

On its original theatrical release, in 1974, *Les Bicots-nègres* ended with segment 10, that is, on an image of the possibility of mutual recognition and, as Hondo said in an interview at the time, "common struggle."[114] A later version of the film, the only one in existence, on which the above synopsis is based, instead ends on segment 13: a collective assertion of African solidarity and the case for return. While the earlier ending addressed French and African audiences alike, the later ending expressly addresses the peoples of Africa ("the land of the sun"). The film's title has changed, too, from "Les Bicots nègres nos voisins" in the original release version to "Les Bicots-nègres vos voisins"—Hondo added a hyphen and changed "nos" to "vos." The African film posters in the background of segment 13 allow us to date this later addition as shot sometime in the early to mid-1980s.[115] A lot had happened since 1971, when Hondo first began filming. Almost a decade after the film's initial release, the "expatriate's illusions" had turned into the "immigrant's sufferings."[116] The new ending, including the poem and the changes made to the title, all responded to these changes.

While the earlier *nos voisins* ("our neighbours") emphasised what "we" have in common, the later *vos voisins* ("your neighbours") suggests a more marginal position, looking at and speaking to French mainstream society from without. But the changes to the title also responded to emerging rifts within the movement. Though the migrants successfully resisted the French authorities' attempts at sowing division (as witnessed in segment 11), divisions did appear between North and sub-Saharan Africans after filming had been concluded. The added hyphen between *bicots* ("wogs") and *nègres* ("niggers") was to reassert their unity.[117] The differential treatment of African migrant workers—their surplus exploitation by bosses, exclusion from syndicalist forms of struggle around the workplace, and limited eligibility, as non-citizens, for health insurance and welfare provi-

---

[113] Union générale des travailleurs sénégalais en France, *Le livre des travailleurs africains en France* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970), 72. The handbook, published by UGTSF, gathers testimonies and data pertaining to the daily lives of the first wave of African migrants.

[114] Hondo quoted in Delati, "Entretien," 81.

[115] Sanogo maintains new endings were added as late as 1981. The film posters in segment 13 suggest it may have been as late as 1982. They advertise Hondo's own films (*Soleil Ô*; *Les Bicots-nègres*; *Nous aurons tout la mort pour dormir*, 1977; *West Indies*, 1979) and *La faim du monde* (1975), directed by Theo Robichet and produced by Hondo, alongside a number of other African films: *La femme au couteau* (1969), *Baks* (1974), *Ceddo* (1977), *Nuages noirs* (1979), *Djéli* (1981), *En résidence surveillée* (1981), *Finye* (1982), *Jom* (1982), and others.

[116] See Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

[117] See Delati, "Entretien," 81.

sions—meant that they frequently found themselves reduced to struggles around their immediate survival, concerning housing, freedom of movement, or basic health care. Though the strike was still their main form of protest, their struggle was pushed from the workplace into the space of reproduction.[118] While Hondo was making and remaking *Les Bicots-nègres*, migrant activists were increasingly theorising their condition in relation to African underdevelopment and global exchange. This analytic is present throughout the film (see segments 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9) and so will have been central also in earlier versions, however, the prominent placement of Sally N'Dongo, a main thinker of French-African relations, in the final scene of the later version serves to underline this general orientation.[119] Many had come to France thinking of their migration as temporary; Hondo himself thought he would not stay for good.[120] The question of return, already present in earlier versions (segment 4), now imposed itself with even greater urgency. The concluding poem was written by the Mauritanian migrant worker Amadou Niokane alongside and in response to the filming of *Les Bicots-nègres*.[121] It is the cumulative expression of these various changes, which together contribute to shifting the film's emphasis from political inclusion within France to political self-determination and a return to Africa.

The same French critics who would insist on bringing up Godard complained that the political analysis of *Les Bicôts-nègres* was somewhat "confused." The revolutionary alliance proposed in the film's original ending (segment 10), between the African migrant worker and the French middle manager, irritated critics on the left to no end, for it so obviously went against what they saw as the objective class antagonism. But perhaps this "political naiveté" is precisely where the force of this work resides, as the Algerian filmmaker Mohand Ben Salama has suggested in his review of the film for *Positif*.[122] Though the figure of the African worker is a character mask rather than a fully-fledged character, his intentions remain his own: He was written, according to Hondo, as a "synthesis of everything that had been said and done" by the migrants he encountered during the making of *Les Bicots-nègres*, in hopes that they would "recognise themselves histori-

---

[118] See Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot. The New Era of Uprisings* (London & New York: Verso, 2016).
[119] Sally N'Dongo also acts in the earlier version of the film, for instance, as an African general at the garden party in segment 3. He also has a role in Sokhona's *Nationalité: immigré*. Born and raised in a village in the valley of the Senegal River, N'Dongo left the country for Marseille when he was almost thirty. In 1961, he founded the UGTSF, the first African workers' organisation in France. N'Dongo died March 4, 2001, in M'Bour Senegal. See Jean-Pierre Langellier, "Sally N'Dongo (obit)," *Le Monde*, March 10, 2001.
[120] See Boughedir, "Ancien cuisinier," 63. See also Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 71. A 1965 census counts one in three migrants as returning. See Granotier, *Les travailleurs immigrés*, 164. As late as 1978, a survey among Algerian and Portuguese migrants found that only 25 percent wished to stay (165).
[121] See Amadou Niokane, "Retour au pays du soleil," undated, uncatalogued, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France. See also Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 109.
[122] Ben Salama, "Les chants viendront," 62.

cally in their struggles."[123] In the stageist imaginary of the time, *Soleil Ô* was to *Les Bicôts-nègres* what the alienated individual is to the militant collective, what mere consciousness is to political action.[124] But *Les Bicots-nègres* really escapes these stageist terms. It is a transitional film, including errors, divisions, and wrong turns—a film that changes its collective mind. What Hondo's French critics misunderstood is that, rather than offer an accomplished political analysis, his aim was to accompany the historical becoming of the migrants' consciousness—to orient the evolution, while sticking close to the horizon, of their own understanding.

I want to suggest that the modular, disjunctive form of *Les Bicots-nègres* is a function of the migrants' ongoing struggle and evolving understanding; a function of the moving target which the film attempts to capture. This form allows the film to speak many languages—French, Arabic, Wolof, Soninke, Fula, Bambara—while not centering its expression in any one of them; to combine different modalities of speaking to the migrants' experience, from direct cinema and interview segments that respect their languages and integrity (5, 6, 7), to fictionalisations (segments 3, 4, 10, 11) and didactic exposés (segments 1, 8) that synthesise debates and orient the struggle.[125] The film's modular form also serves to elaborate a relational view, in conversation with the critical perspectives that were being articulated by migrant activists at the time. Sally N'Dongo's work—his activism with the UGTSF, but also his book on French Cooperation, which was written while Hondo was making his film—is of central importance here. There are direct loans, such as N'Dongo's list of the "masters of Senegal," which is taken up by Hondo in the garden party sketch.[126] There are thematic inspirations: N'Dongo and the UGTSF insisted on a shared history, a shared responsibility for migrants, which contested national boundaries. They criticised the conditionality of social security on French residency and citizenship, for instance, or the legal exclusion of African migrants from labour struggles and informal discrimination in the workplace. As noted above, they also argued for a return. And there are structural parallels: N'Dongo's activist writings of the period are similarly modular and reiterative, presenting compilations of data and analysis in heterogeneous formats comprising lengthy quotations, reproductions of letters and work contracts, case studies, charts, and figures that N'Dongo and his collaborators had collected over several years.

---

[123] Hondo quoted in Delati, "Entretien," 82.
[124] Hennebelle draws this analogy in "Soleil Ô," 81.
[125] See Delati, "Entretien," 81. When Hondo interviews his Mauritanian compatriot Sidna (segment 6), the man's speech is first heard uninterrupted before the image freezes to allow for the French voice-over to catch up.
[126] N'Dongo, *La "coopération"*, 27–30.

The film's unique shape allows *Les Bicots-nègres* to depict the "Third World" from the migrants' point of view: not as a distinct space but a pervasive relation. The modular form allows for the drawing of ever-widening circles, moving outward from the migrants' lived experience in France to political regimes in Africa, French Cooperation, and global trade. "Underdevelopment," in this view, is not the absence of development but its proximate, *neighbouring*, supplement.[127] *Les Bicots-nègres* draws a circle also around cinema, its own condition of possibility. The resulting work not only thwarts Western precepts of dramatic structure and narrative progression; it breaks up the fixed and centralised form of the film commodity into so many movable pieces, which circulate and enter into new constellations.

Les Bicots-nègres is a conditional, programmatically unfinished speech act, inscribing an ongoing process of historical becoming. Sanogo has called it a "provisional film," suggesting that it is the "untamability of history itself" which calls for the "break-up of form."[128] But Sanogo's acknowledgement of history's "untamability" is—once again—folded into a redemptive horizon: "The concept of a provisional film takes as a prerequisite the notion that history is still unfolding […] and seeks to give to the film the form of history (time) itself (openness to change, to the future, to that which has not yet come into being)." According to Sanogo, *Les Bicots-nègres* is "like a chameleon," attempting to "take the color of air, while being aware of its need to comment on history, to analyze history, to deconstruct history."[129] The metaphor of the chameleon is revealing. For Sanogo, the film's "radical open-endedness" is a wilful rejection of closure, a happy merger with historical duration: "the film itself becomes part and parcel of history. It invests trust in historical becoming."[130] If Sanogo's metaphoric language is suggestive of a certain adaptability of the image, a retooling of filmic form that breaks with industrial cinema's controlled frame and fixed duration, it also re-anchors these adaptations in the chameleon's stealthy agency to "take the color of air." In proposing that *Les Bicots-nègres* "opens the windows […] to let the fresh air of history in," Sanogo's reading makes of the film's openness a matter of choice.[131]

Hondo would always insist that it was the "objective" historical situation which had brought him to France, like hundreds of thousands of other Africans. N'Dongo called migration "a forced journey" (*voyage force*). To counter the redemptive tendency, as Hondo

---

[127] The curators of a 2017 retrospective of Hondo's work at Arsenal in Berlin placed *Les Bicots-nègres* under the rubric of *voisinage* or "neighbour-ship."
[128] Sanogo, "The Indocile Image," 559.
[129] Sanogo, 559.
[130] Sanogo, 559.
[131] Sanogo, 559.

challenges us to, and suggest a different reading, we may again usefully compare his practice to that of Kidlat Tahimik. *Balikbayan # 1*, like *Les Bicots-nègres*, is a long, long, long film both on screen and in historical time. It took almost thirty years to finish and exists across a variety of formats and technologies, incorporating 16mm, analogue, and digital video footage accumulated since the late 1970s, without any effort to hide the quite stark differences between types and generations of images. Across analogue and digital fragments, which are looped and layered in a non-chronological, non-linear sequence, Tahimik unfolds the argument that it was not Fernando Magellan who first sailed around the world but his Filipino slave Enrique of Malacca—the first *balikbayan*, Tagalog for "migrant worker." Relating contemporary migrations to European colonial expansion, *Balikbayan #1* is also a counter-history of the present, positing the slave/migrant (played by Tahimik himself) as the foundational figure of global modernity.[132] Like *Les Bicots-nègres*, the film exists in many versions and iterations. At the time of writing, the versioning of *Balikbayan #1* is on-going: Tahimik is still producing new edits and "performances" of the film—he would like us to see it in his presence, accompanied by a live performance to re-actualise the film into the present of occurring history.[133] *Balikbayan #1* is not a finished product, a stable text fixed once and for all in its meaning, but an on-going material-semiotic process, mutating with every new edit and performance. The film does not thereby become any "better" nor does it ever bring Tahimik closer to a finished product: The ongoing versioning of *Balikbayan #1* does not unfold along a trajectory of increasing perfectibility but in an errant movement around the world, recycling and recirculating Tahimik's struggle as ongoing and interminable. Indeed, Tahimik thinks of the film as an ongoing "failure." *Balikbayan #1* inscribes not only the conditions of filming, it also accumulates damages wrought over time by forces of "slow" violence which affect the entire life cycle of Tahimik's practice. Some of the earliest footage, shot in the 1980s, is now in a rather damaged state—due to decades of inadequate storage and insufficient protection against the tropical climate and weather events, particularly tropical cyclones. In this way, the film inscribes the traces of Tahimik's wider reproductive struggle.

This is also the temporality of *Les Bicots-nègres*. The film's production was a similarly halting and reiterative process, which became part of the film's form. The film does not

---

[132] This is exactly the argument Med Hondo unfolds in *West Indies* (see 5.4).

[133] I saw the film at Berlin Film Festival in 2015. After the screening, Tahimik walked up to the stage in full academic dress and mockingly awarded himself a "master's degree" in filmmaking. He then proceeded to tear off his gown, revealing nothing underneath but a piece of loincloth, like Enrique's in the film. All of this occurred in a very fancy cinema in the West Berlin district of Charlottenburg. The irony and incongruity of showing his type of film in this kind of setting was certainly not lost on Tahimik, who remarked that the high-fidelity sound system had done his sound mix no favours. The moderator Tobias Hering's response: "German technology is brutal."

"trust" in historical becoming, it inscribes Hondo's and the migrants' struggle as ongoing. Hondo's versioning, like Tahimik's, points not to a final version but to the fact that the history inscribed in the film was profoundly unreconciled. The struggles of African migrants in France in the 1970s, like those of Magellan's Filipino slave in the sixteenth century, are not over yet. History, in *Les Bicots-nègres*, is not sealed in amber but connected to an evolving present, pointing to the possibility of liberation. As Jean Edmond, one of Hondo's actors, wrote to him in a letter in 1991: "Soleil Ô was made—yesterday? No, today! Les Bicots-nègres? Today! Or "nowadays," as they say. The sequel? Tomorrow!"[134]

5.3 Distribution, that many-headed monster: Hondo at Soleil O, the Comité africain de cinéastes, and the Mauritanian Film Office

Chief among the films which exerted a formative influence on Hondo's practice was Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*; Argentina, 1968). In Argentina, under the military dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966–1973), *La hora* and other militant films of the period made necessary the self-organisation of an underground distribution system. As an image that was distributed far and wide at the time, *La hora* contributed to the establishment of alternative distribution networks also outside of Argentina.[135] The experience of distributing and exhibiting *La hora* through clandestine channels informed the Solanas and Getino's ongoing conceptualisation of "Third Cinema"—a term they coined one year after the film's completion.[136] The problem of distribution and exhibition was thus not an afterthought their conception of Third Cinema. Rather, Third Cinema evolved around that question and from within that struggle: How to make images circulate? While the film is a central political text of Peronism, it is important also to consider its impact as an image in circulation.

Distributing *Soleil Ô* and *Les Bicots-nègres* was for Hondo, albeit in a commercial mode, what the clandestine distribution of *La hora* was for Solanas and Getino: an eye-

---

[134] Edmond in a letter to Hondo, March 16, 1991, reprinted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 126.

[135] A 1979 survey on Third Cinema in the *Revue Tiers Monde* asked filmmakers from Chile, Venezuela, Brazil, the US, Québec, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Turkey, Tunisia, and France: "Did the film [*La hora de los hornos*] contribute to the establishment of an alternative distribution network for militant cinema in your country?" See CinémAction, "L'influence du 'troisième cinéma' dans le monde: dossier réuni par CinémAction," *Revue Tiers Monde* 20, no. 79 (1979): 618.

[136] See Jonathan Buchsbaum, "A Closer Look at Third Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21, no. 2 (2010); Mariano Mestman, "Third Cinema/Militant Cinema: At the Origins of the Argentinian Experience (1968–1971)," *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011). In Solanas and Getino's own taxonomy,

opening experience that profoundly shaped his understanding of cinema. For the first time, Hondo was confronted with the challenges facing an African filmmaker trying to circulate their work in France, and the blockages and forms of capture affecting the distribution of African films on the continent. "It is in this way that I understood that the distribution [*l'exploitation*] of films is an unbelievable system—a system of exploitation." In this section, I discuss the distribution histories of *Soleil Ô* and *Les Bicots-nègres* as entry points into Hondo's engagement with the struggle for Africa's forms of circulation, first through his production and distribution company Soleil O, then through the Comité africain de cinéastes (CAC), of which he was a co-founder and leading figure, and finally in relation to Hondo's informal advisory capacity to the Mauritanian Film Office.

Soleil Ô screened to great acclaim on the festival circuit, but none of the awards the film garnered there did much to further its wider distribution.[137] A French distributor promised a wide release but placed the film in only one, sixty-four-seat theatre in Paris, where it ran for three and a half months.[138] Box office takings were meagre. To make matters worse, Hondo and his distributor were defrauded by the cinema's owner.[139] *Les Bicots-nègres* was released in two Paris cinemas, the Studio de la Harpe in the Latin Quarter and La Scala, a movie theatre on the right bank of the Seine specialising in sex films.[140] In either case, the exhibition contract stipulated that the film would be taken off the billboard after week one if it failed to attract a set minimum of paying customers, two thousand viewers in one case, four and a half thousand in the other. In a statement published in the French newspaper *Libération*, Hondo warned that *Les Bicots-nègres* "risks being muzzled, asphyxiated by cinema exhibitors."[141] As we have seen in 5.1, it was film's potential for mass reproduction and dissemination which drew Hondo to the medium in the first place. Distributing *Soleil Ô* and later *Les Bicots-nègres*, however, he found this potential severely curtailed.

If getting his films to circulate was an uphill struggle in France, trying to find distribution in Africa proved positively Sisyphean. Though *Les Bicots-nègres* won the Tanit d'or at the 1974 Journées Cinématographiques in Carthage, the film struggled to find regular distribution in Tunisia, succeeding only five years later, and only on a single screen

---

the film is an example of "militant cinema"—an "internal category" of Third Cinema and also its most radical expression. See Jonathan Buchsbaum, "One, Two… Third Cinemas," *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011).

[137] *Soleil Ô* was selected for the prestigious Semaine de la critique at the 1970 Cannes Film Festival. That same year, the film was also awarded the Golden Leopard, the top prize at Locarno International Film Festival. At the third edition of FESPACO, held in 1971, *Soleil Ô* garnered the International Critics' Prize.

[138] See Hondo, "The Cinema of Exile," 73.

[139] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 23.

[140] See Ben Salama, "Les chants viendront," 61.

[141] Med Hondo, "Les Bicots-nègres, un film menacé: Quand un étranger parle aux français," *Libération*, December 17, 1974: 9.

in Tunis.[142] Individual screenings of the film were held in the Senegalese capital of Dakar, by the national film centres of Mozambique and Angola, and in Cameroon as part of a cultural week.[143] Travelling up and down the continent with reels under his arms, Hondo's situation mirrored that of other African filmmakers. Regular African distribution remained elusive. African filmmakers had to fight on a "double front" to reach the people: with the multinationals monopolising African film distribution, but also with African governments. Though Hondo's metropolitan position afforded him greater leeway in criticising collusive, corrupt, and repressive African regimes, this also meant that his films faced political censorship on the continent. When the Algerian government under president Houari Boumédiène (1965–1976) bought the broadcasting rights for *Les Bicots-nègres* for Algerian national television*,* heads of state all over North and West Africa voiced strong objections. Hondo endured intense pressure, included physical intimidation and threats to his life, to edit out certain scenes judged "troublesome" by African governments.[144]

Where Hondo's films were actually seen by migrant audiences, they appear to have elicited generally favourable responses. Mohand Ben Salama mentions a special screening of *Les Bicots-nègres* for local migrants at Toulon Film Festival—the only time the main festival theatre was filled up to the rafters.[145] According to Hondo, the film was well received also when he showed it to a group of Mauritanian migrants in France.[146] African audiences who got a chance to see Hondo's films concurred. According to Louis Marcorelles writing in *Le Monde*, the reception of *Les Bicots-nègres* in Tunis, in the city's largest cinema in front of an audience numbering in the thousands, was "triumphant."[147] African audiences, moreover, had no trouble understanding the films' alleged "difficulty" and formal sophistication. Hondo claimed that when *Soleil Ô* was shown in the Algerian town of Oran, it was the illiterate workers who, recognising themselves in the film, ended up explaining it to the intellectuals in the audience.[148]

---

[142] See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 26.

[143] See Signaté, 26.

[144] Hondo in Perrot, "Entretien."

[145] See Mohand Ben Salama, "Les Bicots-Nègres, nos voisins," *France-Pays Arabes*, no. 47 (1974). The film won the Toulon Critics' Prize.

[146] See Hondo, "The Cinema of Exile," 74. D'Dée mentions the existence of ciné-clubs of African workers in Paris. See "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire," 35.

[147] Louis Marcorelles, "Le pari de Carthage: Un front commun des cinémas afro-arabes," *Le Monde*, November 7, 1974: 19. Cf. the account of French-Tunisian critic Farida Ayari, who went to see the film when it came out in Tunis in regular distribution. She reports of an 8pm screening attended by no more than thirty people, half of whom left before the film was over. See Ayari in *Afrique noire: quel cinéma?*, 93.

[148] Hondo in a personal communication to Pfaff. See *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 159. It is unimportant whether the workers' explanations were "accurate." What mattered to Hondo was that they felt invited by the film to engage in critical reflection and conversation.

Despite this apparent appeal, *Soleil Ô* failed to recover costs.[149] As a result it became the property of its legal producer,[150] a Frenchman nominated after the fact who had had no hand in actually producing the film.[151] It was in response to this sobering experience that Hondo decided to become his own producer. The film production company he founded in 1969 was named Soleil O after his sequestered debut feature, without the circumflex diacritic. Allowing Hondo to leverage his metropolitan position, Soleil O was for him an "indispensable tool inside the monster's head."[152] Hondo was now eligible for an advance on earnings [*avance sur recettes*] allocated to French film productions by the Centre nationale du cinéma (CNC), unlike his continental African peers who at the time still had to get by on the limited funds and technical support made available through the Ministry of Cooperation. Though Soleil O was founded as a production company, company records reveal that a great part of its tireless activity was taken up by the hidden labours of distribution. This was a monster with many heads—not for nothing, Thomas Mpoyi-Buatu calls it the "distribution-hydra."[153] Soleil O distributed not only Hondo's own films but also a significant number of films by other African and diasporic filmmakers. The company records, which contain a trove of day-to-day correspondence—with distributors and exhibitors, filmmakers and critics, politicians and administrators, activists and academics—show that for an African filmmaker in Paris, securing even niche exposure was a matter of intense and incessant effort.

From the company records, we can reconstruct how Hondo managed the circulation of his and fellow African filmmakers' works. For a number of reasons, he would also frequently limit the circulation of the films in his care. Hondo fought tooth and nail over unauthorised screenings of, and borrowings from, his films, which in his view diminished his films' prospects for regular commercial distribution.[154] His screening fees were gener-

---

[149] *Les Bicots-nègres* had a different fate. Despite its very limited initial run, Hondo was able eventually to recover some of the film's costs, estimated at around $350,000. It took Hondo a total of four years to pay all outstanding expenses; some participants were never paid, and neither was Hondo. Pfaff gives the figure of $155,000 (F400,000), see "An African Filmmaker in Paris."

[150] Hondo later bought back the distribution rights.

[151] To exhibit a film in France, an exhibition certificate (*visa d'exploitation*) is required, which is issued only to a film's legal producer.

[152] Hondo in a letter to the Mauritanian minister of culture. See correspondence from Med Hondo to Mahmoud Ba, May 4, 1981, MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

[153] This was Mpoyi-Buatu's name for the distribution giant Gaumont, a French cinema chain that also had significant stakes in West Africa (see 2.6).

[154] In the early 1980s, Hondo was in negotiations with SATPEC, Tunisia's central film distribution agency, when he learnt that Tunisian television had obtained a print of one of his films without his authorisation from a third party. He tried to stop the broadcast, which he knew would render the SATPEC distribution agreement null and void, issuing a barrage of telex messages to all parties involved wherein he explained to the Tunisian TV executives that their actions were undermining his efforts as a distributor of African films. Hondo's pleading fell on deaf ears, however, and the deal with SATPEC promptly unravelled, exactly as he had foreseen. See telex exchange, February 3–10, 1981, WEST-INDIES 3–6, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

ally unnegotiable. No exemptions were granted for charitable or political purposes.[155] Suspecting exhibitors of underreporting attendance, Hondo would at times assume an informal regulatory role, personally authorising and keeping book of every single projection, while closely monitoring box office proceeds even from afar.[156] Where he could not be physically present himself, he relied on informants to verify attendance figures. A screening request for *Soleil Ô* from Pretoria was rejected on political grounds. Festival participations were carefully considered: Hondo refused to be "blinded by festival lights, awesome prizes and glowing reviews."[157] The spectacle of the festival failed to address the structural problems of African film distribution, and sometimes even added to them. Rare prints which were prohibitively expensive to produce would often return from festival runs in a much deteriorated state, if they were returned at all.[158] Thus, while Hondo maintained a continuous presence at FESPACO and at the Journées Cinématographiques in Carthage, he also asked, provocatively: "Should we all stop going?"[159]

In March 1981, together with other African and African diasporic filmmakers, Hondo founded the Comité africain de cinéastes (CAC), an advocacy group dedicated to the "promotion of African films inside and outside of Africa," which operated out of Hondo's Paris office, effectively as a division of Soleil O.[160] The idea for CAC was hatched in Ouagadougou, at the seventh FESPACO, and concretised in Niamey at an homage to Nigerien filmmaker Oumarou Ganda, who had died of a heart attack earlier that year. The Comité's brief was originally defined as the "conception and production" of films, and to "inject dynamism" into African cinema by coordinating the actions of African filmmak-

---

[155] The sole exception to this iron rule was a print of *Nous aurons toute la mort pour dormir…* which he gifted to the Sahrawi nation "for militant ends." See documentation in NOUS AURONS TOUTE LA MORT POUR DORMIR 1-3, Med Hondo personal archive, Cinéarchives, Paris, France.

[156] In a letter to a cinema owner in Réunion, Hondo alleged box office fraud. See correspondence from Med Hondo to Alain Gili, January 21, 1980, WEST INDIES 5–8, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

[157] As Hondo remarked in a talk delivered at the 1983 edition of FESPACO. See Med Hondo, "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public," 2.

[158] Hondo's correspondence records several occasions when loaned prints were not returned as scheduled. Soleil O physically held only a small number of the films it distributed and of those usually only one single print. Hondo regularly had to borrow films for screenings from the cultural organisations of French Cooperation and Francophonie, who were entitled—as per the co-production agreement—to a print of every African film in return for their support. Unfortunately, these institutions did not always agree to part with their prints. The holdings of African cinema by the Ministry of Cooperation and the Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique also formed the basis of the archive of African cinema as it exists in and around Paris today—at the Cinémathèque française, the Cinémathèque Afrique at the Institut française, and the CNC. I will return to these archival entanglements in the concluding chapter (see 7.1).

[159] Hondo quoted in Haffner, "Des écrans à la recherche d'une mémoire," 93. About FESPACO Hondo elsewhere said: "We have built a stronghold for films, but when the festival is over, you have to go home with your print, and very few films are shown afterwards." Quoted in James Leahy, "CinemaScope South of the Sahara: Med Hondo Talks About Making a New Cinema in Africa," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 55, no. 648 (1988): 10.

[160] Comité africain de cinéastes, "Lettre ouverte aux directeurs des festivals internationaux de films," 5.

ers.[161] In effect, as was the case of Soleil O, a great part of the organisation's day-to-day activities was taken up by the struggle to make African films circulate. Wrote Hondo (together with his assistant Abdoul War): "Rather than roam countless festivals, CAC was totally committed on the promotional front of African cinema, that is: distribution and sales."[162] Hondo and War produced a lavish distribution catalogue showcasing the works of Vieyra, Sembène, Balogun, and many others—twenty-three films from nine African countries overall—alongside African diasporic filmmakers such as Haile Gerima, Julie Dash, and, of course, Hondo himself.[163] The Comité africain de cinéastes was a minor global institution, creating its own networks across French West Africa and in the rest of the world. CAC reached out to the Nigerian Film Corporation, then headed by Adamu Halilu, stayed in close contact with the Association africaine de coopération cinématographique (AAAC) in Maputo, and was asked to represent Mozambique and Madagascar "as regards the purchase of film."[164] Hondo recruited CAC affiliates all over the world. Alongside Hondo as its main coordinator—a position he held for ten years[165]—the core team included filmmakers Timité Bassori, Jean-Michel Tchissoukou, and Mustapha Diop. Ola Balogun was a card-carrying member—the only one from Anglophone Africa—and so were Haile Gerima, who oversaw a branch in Washington, DC, Tahar Cheriaa, the founder and former director of the Journées Cinématographiques and now Assistant Director of Culture at the Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique, and Ousmane Sembène, albeit in an honorary position on the company board.

CAC's practical engagement in film distribution was complemented by intense lobbying activities. The Comité would offer advice and manpower to African cinema parastatals and pan-African NGOs while trying to renegotiate the terms of international investment and development aid. In Hondo's view, carrying echoes of Fanon and Diop, "for unity to become a reality requires solid shared infrastructures, working communications networks and intense exchanges in all domains."[166] CAC pushed for the creation of more permanent institutional structures and the regularisation of distribution and sales[167] as preconditions for the integration of African cinema into regional common markets. More

---

[161] Quoted by Ilboudo, *Le FESPACO*, 148.
[162] Med Hondo and Abdoul War, "Le cinéma et l'Afrique noire," 1983, CAC 2–4, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.
[163] See Comité africain de cinéastes, "Liste des films sélectionnnés par le Comité africain de cinéastes," *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, brochure (1981), 10–11.
[164] See correspondence from Med Hondo to Mahmoud Ba. The letter to the Nigerian Film Corporation was sent from CAC's Paris office. It was likely written by Hondo. See correspondence to Adamu Halilu, December 19, 1983, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.
[165] See "Ni riche, ni heureux, mais fier… Entretien avec Med Hondo," *El Watan*, June 21, 2015.
[166] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 84.
[167] See Med Hondo and Abdoul War, "Le cinéma et l'Afrique noire," 3.

than simply a distributor, CAC acted as a pressure group with the aim of regaining control over cinema's forms of circulation.

Filmmakers had in fact long been demanding the creation of an African common market for film distribution. On August 12, 1974, after a series of conferences, a convention was signed under FEPACI's auspices in Ouagadougou between eight OCAM member states creating a pan-African purchasing co-operative for African films.[168] The supranational twin structure comprised a distribution arm, the Consortium interafricain de distribution cinematographique or CIDC, and a production arm, the Centre interafricain de production de films or CIPROFILM.[169] When, five years on, CIDC finally became operational, now officially with the participation of fourteen African states, the organisation struggled to enforce adherence to its policies by member states. Inoussa Ousseïni, then the CIDC's director, asked the organisation's member states to regularise their national box office systems, lower the tax burden for private exhibitors, and install an "avance sur recettes" on the French model, all measures that required significant state intervention. Only five countries complied. As Catherine Humblot noted in a 1982 article for *Le Monde*, the CIDC "does not stop experiencing difficulties on every level." CIPROFILM, the organisation's production arm, had yet to produce a single film.[170] Having failed to provide the "dreamed-of ideal instrument finally to resolve the question of the production and distribution of African films in Africa," as Hondo wrote in 1983, the CIDC was a bitter disappointment.[171]

While Hondo's writings for CAC are fiercely critical of African states, condemning their "hesitant attitude" and "mistrust of efficient and dynamic organisation," they simultaneously target the "paralysis," "administrative inertia," and "inefficacy" of FEPACI.[172] At the 1981 Journées de réflexion sur le cinéma africain, organised by FEPACI in conjunction with CIDC-CIPROFILM in Ouagadougou, Hondo staged an important intervention into the CIDC's management.[173] For all its flaws, the CIDC had been the result of

---

[168] See Millet, "(In)dépendance des cinémas du Sud &/vs France," 155. FEPACI was originally affiliated with OAU, where it enjoyed observer status, but later came to focus its lobbying efforts on OCAM, which it deemed more open to supra-national coordination. OCAM's aims were economic, technical, and cultural cooperation. One of its signal achievements was the creation of the pan-African airline Air Afrique.

[169] Upper Volta, Senegal, and Benin all joined their nationalised distribution circuits to CIDC, but others were more reticent.

[170] Catherine Humblot, "Le cinéma africain et les ministres: conférence à Ouagadougou," *Le Monde*, May 6, 1982.

[171] Med Hondo, "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public," 3. See also Djingarey Maïga quoted in Gani Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," *Sahel Hebdo*, no. 197 (1979): 20–21.

[172] Comité africain de cinéastes, "Communiqué du C.A.C.," 5; Med Hondo, "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public." On a more diplomatic note, CAC's founding communiqué also maintains that the Comité was not oppositional to FEPACI nor any other existing institutions—a nod to CIDC-CIPROFILM—but "a dynamic and complementary action." Comité africain de cinéastes, 6.

[173] The Journées were held on February 23 and 24, 1981.

fifteen years of relentless struggle on the part of African filmmakers, and so, rather than abandon the organisation, Hondo pursued an entryist stratagem. At the conference, the CIDC presented a budget report and the balance of its activities so far. Humblot, in her report from the conference for *Le Monde*, speaks of tense meetings from nine in the morning until late in the afternoon[174]—due in no small part, I would suggest, to Hondo's polemical intervention, which came in the form of a paper bearing the diplomatic title, "Contribution to a Positive Development of the CIDC." Hondo's diagnosis was that while the inter-African NGO had transferred power into African hands, state policies vis-à-vis foreign distributors had remained virtually unchanged. But the CIDC's problems were not just a matter of national policy. They also concerned the organisation's internal manage-ment and organisation.[175] Hondo proposed that he should from this point on "counsel" the CIDC's purchasing bureau in Paris and, through Soleil O, act as an intermediary opposite potential buyers. This interposition of Soleil O would enable CIDC to cut out European intermediaries in the purchase of African (but also Latin American and Indian) films for African markets.[176] The CIDC's head office in Paris should be relocated to a less expen-sive site, existing staff restructured, and new staff hired—all measures with the ulterior motive of replacing CIDC functionaries with CAC cadres or reliable sympathisers, and thereby reforming the organisation from within.

I have not been able to reconstruct how the CIDC's management responded to Hon-do's intervention, but the archive does reveal that CAC's lobbying activity in general riled many and made Hondo and his comrades the target of much animosity. Those who found themselves at the receiving end of CAC's interventionism would seek to discredit the or-ganisation as a "foreign" agency, citing Hondo's and Cheriaa's residence in Paris as well as Gerima's in the US as evidence of their remoteness from the true struggle of African cinema. One only needs to consider the fact that the CIDC's buying office was in Paris to see that this reproach was manifestly absurd, but I quote it here nonetheless for it illus-trates that the question of whether or not one could make "African cinema" in Paris was more than a conceptual conundrum.

Hondo was fiercely critical also of Western support for African cinema, which he linked to the circulatory logic of foreign aid. French development aid for African cinema was a cunning system: The filmmakers were accorded "breadcrumbs" and then obliged to

---

[174] See Humblot, "Le cinéma africain et les ministres."
[175] Hondo received evidence of negligence in a letter from Victor Bachy mentioning print requests ad-dressed to the CIDC which after several months were still unanswered. See correspondence from Victor Bachy to Med Hondo, September 15, 1983, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.
[176] Med Hondo, "Contribution pour une evolution positive du CIDC," 1984, CAC 2–4, Med Hondo person-al archive, Ciné–Archives, Paris, France.

spend this modest contribution on lab costs and technical industries in France: "The investment is never lost," while Africa itself remains without filmmaking resources.[177] This logic, moreover, made of African filmmakers "supplicants on the model of our heads of state."[178] However, as a filmmaker Hondo did at times rely on the mechanisms of French aid, for instance, as we will see in 5.4, through the ACCT. CAC's policy on foreign aid, developed by Hondo in a number of position papers, did not therefore suggest a strategy of delinking—the position of honorary CAC member Ousmane Sembène—but instead took the form of an immanent critique, internal to a common sphere of uneven exchange, targeting not co-production itself but the inequitable terms imposed on co-funded films by the agencies of foreign aid. In a letter addressed to ACCT on behalf of CAC, Hondo deplored the organisation's standard form co-production contracts, by which it arrogated itself distribution rights for the French television channel TV5 and elsewhere in the "Francophone" world, effectively co-opting main avenues of distribution for African films outside of Africa, while French private capital controlled distribution within.[179] Hondo also sought support from outside of France, for instance, with his "International Appeal for Concrete Cinematographic 'South-North' Solidarity" (1985) placed on behalf of CAC in various international trade publications.[180]

<p style="text-align:center">⁎⁎</p>

Hondo claimed that a return to Mauritania was impossible for political reasons; that if he ever were to come back, he would in all likelihood be prevented from practicing his profession.[181] In reality, the situation was more complicated. Hondo was for a time plotting a "definitive return," though his plans would eventually come to naught.[182] Hondo's personal archive reveals that he was in continuous correspondence with the head of distribution at the Mauritanian Office national du cinéma (ONC) and the Mauritanian Ministry of

---

[177] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 28.

[178] "We hold out our hands to Germany, Belgium, France, etc." Hondo quoted in Signaté, 28.

[179] In a letter dated May 10, 1993, Hondo reminded the ACCT's Secretary General that African filmmakers had for now thirty years "pushed for the creation of distribution networks in Africa." The letter is reproduced in Signaté, 121–124. At the same time, Hondo kept lobbying French public television to programme more African films. See Louis Marcorelles, "Le point de vue de l'Afrique: rencontre avec Med Hondo," *Le Monde*, May 15, 1982.

[180] I have found the ad published in 1985 issues of *Variety* (May 8) and *Screen International* (February 16).

[181] See, e.g., Maurice Botbol, "'West Indies', les nègres marrons de la liberté: une autre histoire des Antilles," *Le Quotidien*, November 17, 1979: 9. Hondo maintained that he was forced to stay in France because he would not have enjoyed freedom of expression in Mauritania: "If I had stayed at home, I probably wouldn't have made any films. […] I might have made a film about peasants or I might well have been tamed or muzzled like so many of my brothers who are frustrated in our countries and don't manage to make films." Quoted in Ghali, "Je suis un immigré," 30. See also Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 68.

Culture. At one point, he even was approached by the Mauritian government to act as the ONC's director. Hondo rejected the offer but through backchannels began to involve himself in the development of Mauritanian cinema. In a policy paper, "For a Better Planification of Mauritanian Cinema," which Hondo wrote sometime around 1980 on invitation of the ONC, he laid out a two-year plan for reform that, if "carried out by honest and conscientious people" would lead to "auto-centric cinematographic development."[183]

The first item on the agenda was tax reform. Hondo argued that heavy taxation inherited from the colonial era was hindering the development of exhibition venues, whose number had hardly augmented since the independences. The income generated through taxation, furthermore, was being absorbed by purposes entirely unrelated to the development of Mauritanian cinema. Tax exemptions should be granted to private companies investing in film production and in the construction of exhibition infrastructure in Mauritania, and income generated from entertainment taxes channelled back into the development of Mauritanian cinema. The second item on the agenda was to undo the "economic and cultural stranglehold" of foreign distribution monopolies in Mauritania, which, like elsewhere in West Africa, had "grave and multiform consequences on the development—economic as much as socio-cultural—of our countries."[184] To take back control, Hondo argued for the centralisation of film distribution. Currently, no more than a "transmission belt" for foreign goods, the Mauritanian Film Office should assume the role of "unique intermediary" for the circulation—the import and distribution—of films in Mauritania.[185] Through taxation of imports and regulation of distribution, the ONC would be able to exercise a controlling influence over the flow of films into the country. Compelling cinema owners to go through this central instance for provisioning, the ONC would be in a position to stem the tide of Westerns and B-movies, finally allowing for a "true opening to the

---

[182] See correspondence from Med Hondo to Mohamed Ould Babetta, undated, MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France. See also Perrot, "Entretien."

[183] Med Hondo, "Pour une meilleure planification des structures de diffusion et de production cinématographiques en Mauritanie," undated, uncatalogued, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, 28. Although this unpublished manuscript does not bear Hondo's name, there is strong indication that he is indeed the author. For one, it is written in Hondo's familiar idiolect and combative style. Elsewhere, Hondo mentioned that he wrote a policy paper for the Mauritanian government, allowing us to narrow down the date of the document. See Hamada O. Mohamed Saleh, "Entretien avec Med Hondo: 'Un homme qui essaie de combler sa conscience,'" *Chaab*, September 30, 1987: 4. It is possible, however, that the document was authored collectively. In a letter to the ONC's Director General, Hondo mentioned a projected "Plaidoyer [sic] pour un cinéma national" on which he was working together with Deyda [Ahmed Salem Deida] and Abdoul [War], which paper he anticipated would be accomplished by the end of June [1980]. See correspondence to Mohamed Ould Babetta, undated. In another letter to Babetta, Hondo reported that work on this project had almost been completed. See correspondence to Mohamed Ould Babetta, May 5, 1980, MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France. Hondo's paper archive also holds hand-drawn architectural sketches for an unrealised "Centre of Cinema and Culture" in the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott [uncatalogued]. It was never built.

[184] Hondo, "Pour une meilleure planification."

[185] Ibid.

world."[186] Hondo was also concerned with the regularisation of the distribution sector. ONC comptrollers in the field should check that tickets were correctly counted and screening conditions (including the print) adequate. In so doing, they would be gathering data which could then serve as the basis for more reliable statistics on cinema-going in Mauritania, which was crucial not merely for taxation purposes but also better to understand audiences and to install a feedback mechanism that would enable the ONC to self-adjust to changing realities. In imagining a reform of the Mauritanian box-office system, Hondo sought to transform the ONC into a future-proof regulatory body of Mauritanian cinema, capable also of regulating itself.[187]

The nationalisation and regulation of distribution, however, was but a first step; ultimately, as Hondo's policy paper reminded its readers in the Mauritanian government, the problem of distribution could only be resolved on a pan-African level, by the creation of regional common markets and inter-African purchasing co-ops on the model of the CIDC, providing the basis for "auto-centric" pan-African collaborations also in the sphere of film production.[188] Hondo's policy for the development of Mauritanian cinema emphasises the responsibility of individual African states in furthering pan-African integration, for instance, by unifying and regularising tax rates and allocations, which currently differed vastly from one country to another. Given the CIDC's recent failures, Hondo foregrounded the need for strict adherence to mutually agreed terms and commitments on the part of African state actors. Cinema, he argued further, required a "rational organisation and scientific method of administration/management"—his way of saying that the ONC had to rid itself of entrenched bureaucrats. As in the case of CAC's intervention into the CIDC, Hondo again tried to insinuate Soleil O into the reform process by recommending it should act as an intermediary on behalf of the Mauritanian Film Office in negotiations with African filmmakers. Hondo's policy paper was intended to prod the Mauritanian authorities into action. But there was a carrot at the end of this stick: Itemising the ONC's current balance sheet, Hondo showed that, while the organisation was currently producing a net deficit, strict adherence to his reform plans would make it not only self-sustaining but profitable, thus contributing to, rather than weighing on, the national budget. In his

---

[186] Ibid.

[187] Some of Hondo's policy proposals were immensely unpopular among African cinema-goers elsewhere. For instance, he recommended the current practice of triple and double bills be curbed, and the overall number of films in circulation diminished by half. This same policy, when implemented by the Nigerien state in the 1970s, caused major discontent among Niamey cinema patrons. See Issaka Garba, "La colère des cinéphiles," *Sahel Hebdo* no. 135 (1978).

[188] Hondo hoped the OUA would take measures to organise a pan-African film culture and industry, thus far thwarted by the impasse of "micro-nationalism" on the one hand, and failed nationalisations on the other. (His example is Algeria, where control of cinemas was devolved to *wilayas*, or provinces, which had no special competence in the operation of cinemas.) See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 32.

appeal to the Mauritanian government to spend more on cinema, Hondo thus invoked what he elsewhere called the "developmental factor" of national film industries.[189]

Through Soleil O and CAC, Hondo was engaged in a comprehensive effort to aid the circulation of African cinema on the continent and globally as the "only living means to defend film production and African cultures."[190] Whether dealing with the CIDC, foreign aid agencies, or in his advisory function to the Mauritanian government, Hondo pursued an entryist strategy, based on a critique internal to the global circulation of images. "The filmmaker is part of a social totality, economic and historical," he wrote in a CAC position paper: "One only has to organise all links in the chain."[191] The image of the chain goes both ways, however, conveying interconnectedness as much as bondage and constriction. Hondo's capacity to speak was hedged and curtailed not only by the muzzle of political censorship but also by the impersonal mechanisms of the market: "This cinema, because of a total lack of technical structures for the fabrication of films, an absolute absence of market organisation for the regional or continental distribution of images, is *objectively censored*."[192] Whatever film policies African states might adopt on a national level, Hondo everywhere emphasised that the development of African cinema was chained to a global economy: "Today Africa is more than ever inserted into the global capitalist market. If North-South exchanges are unequal, then the cinema, despite its specificity, hardly escapes these power relations."[193] From Hondo's point of view, furthering African film distribution was as much about restricting circulation as enabling it; as much about the creation of new networks as the undoing of existing entanglements.

5.4 Calico world (West Indies, 1979)

The slave ship at the centre of Hondo's *West Indies… Les nègres marrons de la liberté* (*West Indies*, Algeria/France/Mauritania, 1979) is revealed in the film's opening shot, at the end of a long, lateral travelling across the vast empty space of a shut-down factory.

---

[189] Hondo quoted in Saleh, "Entretien," 4. Relations between Hondo and the Mauritanian ONC soured again a short time later. I have not been able to ascertain the reasons for this, nor what became of Hondo's policy prescriptions. Did the Mauritanian ONC take on any of Hondo's recommendations? In a letter dated March 2, 1981, Mohamed Ould Babetta, the ONC's Director General, informed Hondo his policy paper had been discussed with the minister of culture, and that an agreement had been reached to adopt it entirely as the basis for future policies. Some measures had already been implemented, according to Babetta: A system of ticket inspection had been put in place, "karate films" outlawed, and an ordonnance concerning the selection of "acceptable" films was underway. See correspondence from Mohamed Ould Babetta to Med Hondo, March 2, 1981, MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.
[190] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 123.
[191] Med Hondo, "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public," 2.
[192] Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 120 (my emphasis).
[193] Comité africain de cinéastes, "Le cinéma et l'Afrique: quelques points d'histoire," *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, brochure (1981), 9.

Though the factory is no longer in use, we hear metallic clangs and the whirr of heavy machinery as the camera inches closer, past a group of rough sleepers warming their hands against a fire. Competing with the phantom production noise, an African chant grows louder and louder until finally the ship enters the frame and the clamour suddenly subsides, yielding to the controlled, ceremonious pacing of the film's minuet leitmotif. The ship is made of a light wood, its bow adorned by the monstrous figurehead of a lion. Plainly visible around its hull are spotlights and reflector panels together with the studio scaffoldings that hold them in place.

Cut to a close-up of an ornate Louis XIV armchair, its lush upholstery embroidered with the initials "RF," for "République française." This is the captain's quarter, unmistakably the seat of power, but it is also the scene of a projection. A spark lights up the dark and moving images start to roll. Grasslands rush past to the fast beat of tam-tams. Then, against a backdrop of banana stacks, a smiling, sweating white man gestures jovially towards someone off camera. Now we are descending a mountain slope, overlooking a shantytown in the valley below: Men and women in straw hats and torn shirts, their machetes hewing into sugar cane reeds. To the still relentless drumbeat, they are loading the harvest onto a sugar cane train. These documentary images are projected in front of a shadowy audience, silhouetted against the projector ray. Neatly arranged to either side of the imperial armchair, we can make out a row of spectators pointing their forks at nearby plates of food. Behind them hangs a world map, illuminated by some unseen light source, bearing the caption "Empire Colonial Français."

On deck, an election is under way. The people of this ship-bound nation—"it could be Martinique, Guadeloupe, or some other island"[194]—are voting in a referendum on their independence from France. First in line are the landowners and traders, trailed by a host of middle-class dignitaries—a nun, a pharmacist, a teacher. Each is introduced by name and a string of honorifics that seems to grow longer as the electoral procession wears on. Behind them a queue has formed winding from the polling station down to the hold, home to the popular masses. But the vote is rigged. For every ballot submitted, another is slipped through a hidden opening in the back of the ballot box. In the distance a banner is unfurled: "AUTONOMIE = DICTATURE"—French loyalists spreading their propaganda. With a hand sign from the loyalist deputy (Griot-Shango co-founder Robert Liensol), the election suddenly grinds to a halt: "Le soleil est couché / donc trop tard pour voter."[195]

[194] Hondo quoted in Moune de Rivel, "Un mauritanien tourne l'histoire des Antilles: Med Hondo parle de son film 'West Indians Stories,'" *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 36.
[195] "The sun has set / [it is] thus too late to vote."

The people are turned away and freedom is once again deferred: "Citoyens, citoyennes / aux élections prochaines!"[196]

West Indies recounts the common history of Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean from the transatlantic slave trade to the mass migrations of the 1970s all aboard the life-size mock-up of a slave ship.[197] After the modern-day independence referendum, the film takes us on a tour of this long and wide history: from the introduction of sugar cane in the West Indies (1640) and the abduction and sale of Africans as slaves to work on French plantations (ca. seventeenth century[198]) to the abolition of slavery during the French Revolution (1794), its re-introduction by Napoleon (1802), and re-abolition by the February Revolution of 1848, and on to the massive mobilisation of West Indian labour by France during the French Fifth Republic (1958–present). Though not necessarily in that order: *West Indies* renders this expansive history, spanning three continents and four centuries, in a non-linear, episodic movement that seesaws between countries and epochs, disrupting the narrative continuity of history.[199] The dramaturgy of these transportations across time and space is one of violent dislocation, a ceaseless churning of people and goods, displacing ends and origins. Hondo's ambition, as stated in a letter to the editors of *La Revue du cinéma*, was "not merely to tell a story [*une histoire*], but also to propose a different reading of History [*l'Histoire*]."[200] *West Indies* tells the story of global modernity from the point of view of racialised labour—from the point of view of a commodity in circulation. It is history as seen from the hold. From this perspective, I will argue, the film deconstructs the idea of history as progress.

The slave ship is a built allegory of the "routes" that, in Paul Gilroy's memorable phrase, are the diaspora's movable "roots."[201] Its place is not this or that country but the commerce between them. Crisscrossing the Atlantic, the ship traces an uneven geography of relation. But it is a time machine as much as a means of transport, its temporality as far-flung and heterogeneous as its geography. It not merely superimposes different periods of slavery and migration but compresses, reverses, and re-members historical se-

---

[196] "Citizens / until the next election!"
[197] Created by French production designer Jacques Saulnier, who famously worked on Alain Resnais' hyperrealist film sets, the ship was sixty-five by twenty-five metres in size. See Marcel Martin, "Brève rencontre… avec Med Hondo," *Écran 79*, no. 81 (1979): 26.
[198] A large proportion of the early French slave trade was clandestine. Its exact beginnings are therefore difficult to date. See David Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 119–120.
[199] As Kobena Mercer has argued in his "Third Cinema at Edinburgh," 100.
[200] Med Hondo, "À propos de West Indies… Les Nègres marrons de la liberté: Critique d'un critique," *La Revue du cinéma: Image et son*, no. 345 (1979): 25.
[201] See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19.

quence.[202] Finally, the ship serves as a persistent frame, a common heuristic that makes visible the deep continuities of expropriation, exploitation, and disenfranchisement across historical time. The same actors embody different iterations of what, it is suggested, are analogous functions: The king changes into the costume of the president, the slave trader becomes a cultural attaché, the traditional African ruler a loyalist deputy—only the clergyman is wearing the same dress throughout. Decors may change, such as the Air France ticket counter that turns the hold into an airport, but the stage remains structurally unchanged. Transporting us across time and space, the ship never comes loose from its moorings in the abandoned car factory, reminding us that "in every monument of this country, in every factory, there is a part of the profit born from the traffic of slaves."[203] Across the ages, the ship is draped in different flags bearing the watchwords of the day: "DIEU ET LE ROI PROTÈGENT LE ROYAUME" turns into "LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ"—and back again. On one occasion the slogan gets ungrammatically stuck between liberal and feudal signifiers: "LIBERTÉ EGALITÈGENT LE ROYAUME."

A draft press release for *West Indies* describes migration as analogous to a process of extraction: "Gradually, the Antilles are being emptied of their vital force to furnish the European work world with labour."[204] In the film, a French social worker's slip of the tongue—"exportation… pardon, immigration"—illustrates this broader point. Migration was a biopolitical extension of the African "trading economy" [*économie de traite*] coercing African nations into producing and selling primary materials in exchange for manufactured goods, which itself had been conditioned by the trade in Black slaves as the property of white men. French critics lambasted *West Indies* for likening migration to slavery, but the film does not posit their identity. It merely replaces the consoling fictions of progress and freedom for a long view of the global management of mobility and circulation at the heart of capitalist modernity. The French government's Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'Outre-mer (BUMIDOM), which encouraged and even advertised migration from the West Indies in the 1970s, when there was an acute labour shortage in France, simply reversed its brief once labour demand had been met and economic growth was stalling.[205] In *West Indies*, the acronym of that government agency is bowdlerised into "MUBIDOM" and later renamed "BOMMIDU," in-

---

[202] One French critic describes it as a "crash" [*télescopage*] of different historical times. See Pouillade, "West Indies," 76.

[203] Hondo quoted in Signaté, 98–99.

[204] Med Hondo, "West Indies Story: A Black Opera," undated promotional material, WEST INDIES 1–6, Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

dicating its flexible purpose as a "floodgate to regulate the flow," as the French president of the film puts it bluntly. The production of wealth under capitalism, as Achille Mbembe has argued, is "inseparable from the problems specific to life and population, the regulation of movement and displacement—in short, the processes of circulation and capture."[206] It was the need for disposable labour which fuelled French biopolitical strategy in the latter half of the twentieth century, much as it had the slave trade in the preceding three centuries. The invention of race, again with Mbembe, was a response to the question of "how to deploy large numbers of laborers within a commercial enterprise that spanned great distances."[207] Racial subordination, as Cedric J. Robinson argues in *Black Marxism*, is integral to the processes of capitalist development and modernisation. Indeed, it serves an ongoing purpose to this day in the development of what Robinson therefore calls "racial capitalism."

The immense, planetary-scale accumulation of capital through the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the New World, Robinson argues, was integral to the development of the modern world economy.[208] The triangular trade produced both direct profits from slave labour and boosts to adjacent trades and manufactures, from agricultural products and forestry to metallurgy, shipbuilding, and outfitting.[209] It also spawned a number of important logistical and administrative innovations, in cartography, insurance, accounting, banking, and finance. The trade in slaves enabled the creation of the plantation system and with it a "formula for smooth expansion"[210] that prefigured the characteristic scalability of industrial production. It was a first model of intensified labour, and, as Mbembe seconds, "one of the period's most effective forms of wealth accumulation," accelerating the "integration of merchant capitalism with technology and the control of subordinated labor."[211] Reversing and re-membering history, *West Indies* anticipates Robinson's argument that the colonies were in many ways ahead of European development.[212]

First published in 1983, not long after the initial release of *West Indies*, Robinson framed *Black Marxism* as a critique of the residues of "progressive historicism" in Marx,

---

[205] See, e.g., Sylvain Pattieu, "Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer: le BUMIDOM (1963–1982) et ses ambiguïtés," *Politix* 29, no. 116 (2016).

[206] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2017), 36.

[207] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 20.

[208] Marx agreed that the slave trade was one of the main sources of accumulation fuelling the English Industrial Revolution. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 82.

[209] For a discussion of the problems with specifying the numerical significance of African slave labour to capitalist development, see Robinson, 82.

[210] This phrase is taken from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 38–39.

[211] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 20.

[212] See also Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 100.

argued centrally by the example of slavery. The abolition of slavery in the West, after the institution had outlived its economic usefulness, did not put an end to racial capitalism. Capitalist expansion had not everywhere replaced forms of direct domination by the impersonal and abstract compulsion of free exchange. While capitalist development brought limited freedom for some, it also, continually, relied on expanding fields of direct coercion and expropriation. *West Indies* retells the history of the slave trade, this massive, global mobilisation of disposable labour power, as the origin story of global capitalism, thereby putting into question the neat opposition and historical sequence of "feudal" and "modern" forms of domination/exploitation—sovereignty and biopolitics—showing instead how they, with Nikhil Pal Sing, "have been perdurably braided together […] through the conquest/commodification of black bodies."[213] In Ken McMullen's *1871*, Hondo makes a rare on-screen appearance as a Black Karl Marx, reminding Napoleon III that "men make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves."[214] *West Indies* is a Black Marxist film: It recasts Marx's and our history of progress as an ongoing struggle against continued and expanding forms of unfreedom.[215]

<div align="center">⁂</div>

When Siegfried Kracauer first visited the Babelsberg film studios in Potsdam on the periphery of Berlin, he was stunned by the capaciousness of this world of canvassed scaffoldings and papier-mâché. The present and the past, near and distant lands were all jumbled together in this "new ark," which appeared to gather "the entire macrocosm." At the same time, however, Kracauer was struck by the disenchanting material reality of the sets and props that undergird cinematic world-making. His name for this unsettling, dark space, which contains and profanes the world at one and the same time, was "calico world."[216]

---

[213] Singh, "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation," 41.

[214] Paraphrasing Marx' *Eighteenth Brumaire*.

[215] Travels in Soviet Russia and throughout the Eastern Block were a sobering experience for the self-declared socialist, yet Hondo held onto Marxism as a "tool for thinking about economic and political theory." Quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 89. Hondo thought Marxism relevant to economic planning in the Third World, while also pointing out that Marxist thought had been elaborated in the specific context of European development and might therefore not be entirely applicable (92).

[216] Siegfried Kracauer, "Kalikowelt [1926]," in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). Calico is named after the Keralan city of Kozhikode, corrupted into "Calicut," where the plain-woven textile from unbleached cotton originated during the eleventh century. In the nineteenth century, British gunboats bent on enforcing a British monopoly on textile production broke up the far advanced production of cotton fabrics on the Indian subcontinent. Instead, an "empire of cotton" was built on the backs of Black slaves in the New World.

Built inside a disused Citroën factory at quay du Javel (now Quai André-Citroën) in central Paris, the slave ship of *West Indies* is a piece of calico world stranded amidst industrial ruins. Conjuring centuries of global history, its powers of invocation are formidable, yet it is also transparently a film set. The opening shot, which traces a continuous passage from the world outside to the world of the film, makes this abundantly clear: A liminal object, situated at the threshold of profilmic and diegetic space, the studio set of *West Indies* challenges us to consider the finished film in relation to its mode and means of production. Hondo himself has described the calico world of *West Indies* as a kind of "super-realism," from the Latin *super*: above, beyond, opening a passage between the world of the film and the reality "beyond." Above I have argue that *West Indies* deconstructs the teleology of history-as-progress; in the remainder of this section, I will demonstrate that this "message" cannot be considered apart from the film's conditions of production, which in themselves carry meaning. So, what argument does the making of *West Indies* make?

Making *West Indies*, Hondo for the first time engaged with the procedures and production values of popular commercial cinema in the "industrial" mode—a heretofore unattainable "level of development."[217] It was the first feature film production of Hondo's with initial funding other than his personal savings.[218] What is more, with a budget estimated at $1.35 million, comprised in large part of inter-African funding, it was at the time the most expensive African film ever made.[219] The film's production value was an "event in itself,"[220] and so was Hondo's mastery—aesthetically, technically, and logistically—of these expanded means. *West Indies* engages industrial cinema also on the level of form: Incorporating both song and dance numbers, the film approximates the musical genre. Ignoring the power of "Euro-American" industrial cinema, as Hondo argued in an essay published in the year of the film's release, was not an option: "It would be dangerous (and impossible) to reject this cinema as simply alien—the damage is done."[221] With *West Indies*, Hondo once again enters the monster's head. By working through the forms and procedures of industrial or "developed" cinema, his aim was to create a "spectacle against Hollywood," which would appropriate its tools and undo its damage.[222] For the first time

---

[217] "Our historical level of development means we can't make films like Europeans." Hondo quoted in Reid, "Working Abroad."
[218] See Reid, "Working Abroad."
[219] F5.5 million. This number is corroborated by Pfaff in *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 160. F5 million according to Martin, "Brève rencontre," 25. For the first time, all participants—safe the director—were remunerated for their work. Technicians were paid the union minimum. See Hondo, "À propos de West Indies," 24.
[220] Hondo, "À propos de West Indies," 24.
[221] Hondo, "What Is Cinema For Us?," 300.
[222] Hondo quoted in Martin, "Brève rencontre," 25–26.

as a director, Hondo entered the world of the film studio with its controlled environment, strict division of labour, and precise schedule, leaving behind both the volatile, invasive space of *Soleil Ô* and the open-ended temporality of *Les Bicots-nègres.* The construction of the set alone ate up a fifth of the film's budget, but Hondo did not conceive of it primarily as a space that he could master or control.[223] The film's super-realism anticipates the set design of Lars von Trier's unfinished "Land of Opportunities" trilogy (*Dogville*, 2003, and *Manderlay*, 2005) but Hondo's calico world is not sealed off from its surroundings; it exists in—is continuous with—this world, this factory. I will show how Hondo approached the studio as a space which imposed its own set of determinations, which he and his team had to depart from, and which they sought to escape. Hondo's circumstances may have changed, but he was still the flayed man. *West Indies* is yet another flayed film, its style a function of the—now industrial—conditions of filming. How Hondo seized and retooled the means of industrial cinema, I will argue, is intrinsic to the film's argument.

In her review of the film for *Demain l'Afrique*, Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé exalted both Hondo's technical command and his great expenses. *West Indies*, Condé argued, had once and for all dispelled the preconception that African cinema was a "poor cinema, an almost-cinema [*cinéma de l'à-peu-près*], where technique does not measure up to the idea and means are inadequate to the intelligence of the subject."[224] *West Indies* demonstrated that an African filmmaker was able confidently to deploy "capitalist means," by which Condé meant the scale of the production, its relatively large budget, and the use of a studio set. However, as she hastened to add, these "capitalist" means were here "put to the service of a resolutely anticapitalist and irrecuperable/unreclaimable subject": "Thus militant cinema can be rich and beautiful."[225] Françoise Pfaff has elaborated on this idea, suggesting that "Hondo sought to use capitalist film production and distribution to establish an anti-capitalist dialectic within his film."[226] Yet the expanded means of *West Indies* did not liberate the director's practice. Hondo did not in fact emerge triumphant: "My debts mount inexorably as my cinematographic ambitions increase."[227]

For Hondo, "militancy" was the mark of a stealthy, structuralised mode of censorship in so-called liberal societies. To call an African filmmaker "militant," he maintained, was to ghettoise their practice, putting it in a category of its own, ostensibly politicising the

---

[223] The set cost $250,000. See Cottenet Hage, "Decolonizing Images," 175. In Pfaff's account, it was only $200,000. Cf. "An African Filmmaker in Paris."

[224] Maryse Condé, "Med Hondo ouvre une ère nouvelle: Quand le cinéma militant devient beau et riche…," *Demain l'Afrique*, no. 33–34 (1979): 72.

[225] Condé, "Med Hondo ouvre une ère nouvelle," 73.

[226] Pfaff, "An African Filmmaker in Paris."

[227] Hondo quoted in Howard Schissel, "Focus on Third World Film Maker," *8 Days: Middle East Business* 2, no. 44 (1980): 56.

work but really placing it at a distance from the "affairs of the polis."[228] The "marginali-
ty" of African filmmakers was not in Hondo's view a positive fact but a negative determi-
nation: "We are marginalized—not marginals. I don't wish to work on the margins."[229]
Though it was important to ask, "what is cinema for us?" (see 5.2), Hondo also argued
that African films ought to be considered in relation to "cinema" tout court, on the same
plane with filmmaking in the "developed" countries, within a world-system that was one,
but uneven. It was therefore necessary "that Africans demonstrate they are capable de-
spite the modesty of their means to make big [*grands*] films."[230] Hondo wished to bring
into existence an African popular cinema also for developmental reasons. Though he saw
the potential of small gauge and video filmmaking, he was convinced that the 35mm fic-
tion feature film, the basic commodity of all developed film industries, was the privileged
means also for the development of African film industries.[231] After all, 35mm fiction
filmmaking was where the battle for the audience was raging; this format alone would
allow African filmmakers to rival the "costly" and "attractive" product of other film-
producing nations where it mattered, at the African box office. But feature filmmaking
also posited particular challenges for African filmmakers. Financial, material, and logisti-
cal requirements weighed and infringed on the building and sustaining of fictional worlds.
West Indies is Hondo's exemplary engagement with the forms and procedures of industri-
al cinema, not as a prefigurative paradigm, whether of industrial or "independent"
filmmaking, but an ongoing struggle. *West Indies* was neither the successful appropriation
of industrial cinema nor its militant abdication. Rather, as I will show in my reconstruc-
tion of its making, the film exists in an "uneven and combined" relation to industrial cin-
ema, with which it competes but which at the same time it seeks to escape. This is why
Hondo insisted on calling himself a "dependent" filmmaker, and proudly so.

In 1975, a year after the release of *Les Bicots-nègres*, Hondo received a script devel-
opment grant worth F200,000 awarded by the Agence de cooperation culturelle et tech-
nique for the encouragement of global Francophone filmmaking.[232] Having finished work
on the script of *West Indies,* he managed to obtain an advance on earnings from the CNC
(F500,000), to be recovered at the box office. A French distributor, the Paris-based Socié-
tié nouvelle de diffusion, advanced another F200,000 in reimbursable funds. To assemble
the rest of the F5 million budget of *West Indies*, Hondo roamed across borders in search

[228] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 103.
[229] Hondo quoted in Reid, "Working Abroad."
[230] Hondo quoted in Saleh, "Entretien," 4.
[231] "You cannot build an industry with super 8 films, which does not mean that super 8 will not have a role
to play." Hondo quoted in Marcorelles, "Le point de vue de l'Afrique."
[232] The "prix d'encouragement cinématographique."

of pan-African solidarities. The African cinema parastatals he approached were generally reluctant, but the Mauritanian ONC made a small financial contribution and Radio-Télévision Algérienne placed the equivalent of F500,000 in technical means and services (camera, film material, lab work) at Hondo's disposal.[233] Hondo also appealed to African entrepreneurs for investment, generally a difficult undertaking, as we have seen in the chapter on Balogun, also in Francophone West Africa. Hondo wanted African producers "not because they would be more aware or more motivated… but so that they would produce images [for their own people].'"[234] Absent concerted state support, Hondo thought that the only way to catalyse a developmental dynamic for African cinema was to encourage production and investment by private capital. In the end, some funds were raised in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mauritania. Hondo was wary of foreign investment from other sources, refusing an offer by an American producer who demanded that he employ well-known African American actors instead of his unknown French-Antillean cast.[235] All in all it took Hondo seven years to assemble the film's budget.[236] It was worth it: Less than a fifth of the costs of this most expensive African film ever made came from French sources.

West Indies inaugurated the Venice Film Festival and was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the Journées Cinématographiques in Carthage. The scale of the production and "musical" packaging opened up new pathways of circulation. It not only screened in France, where it was first released on eight screens by Gaumont, but was the first "African" film to insert itself into commercial distribution in Montreal. It was also shown in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritania, and the Antilles.[237] *West Indies* was a powerful demonstration of these possibilities but it also showed up the limitations and contingencies of such an approach. Archival records reveal that the budget was not fully assembled until the very last moment, putting the entire project in jeopardy more than once. Because Hondo missed a production deadline, he ended up having to repay the CNC's advance (limited to two years) before the shoot was completed, causing considerable financial strain.[238] Hondo wrote desperate letters to friends and acquaintances mid-filming,

---

[233] See Schissel, "Focus on Third World Film Maker," 56.
[234] Hondo quoted in Martin, "Brève rencontre," 25–26.
[235] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 160.
[236] See de Rivel, "Un mauritanien tourne l'histoire des Antilles," 36.
[237] Hondo was in negotiations also with SOPACIA but could not arrive at an agreement when it came to signing the contract. See "Debout, les temps sont propices!," *Notre pays*, 5–6 January 1980; C.T., "La saga des peuples antillais: 'West Indies' s'insère dans les salles commerciales," *Le Devoir*, April 8, 1980: 19.
[238] See Dura, "Entretien," 23. In a letter dated June 24, 1977, Hondo pleaded with Louis Capelle, then ACCT's secrétaire général adjoint, asking for an additional F200,000 to allow for the shoot to continue. Hondo's request was denied, as was a similar request to the CNC. Hondo wrote again on November 17, 1977, asking Capelle to intervene on his behalf with the CNC for the prolongation of his *avance sur re-*

asking for relatively small loans so that shooting may continue. A vital contribution, F500,000, came at the last minute via Yanek Services Limited, a London-based company run by a personal friend of Hondo's. Eventually, *West Indies* left Soleil O with a debt of F1.6 million, forcing Hondo's production and distribution company into bankruptcy.[239]

The film's original title, "West Indies Story," was a nod to *West Side Story* (Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961), but this "musical tragicomedy"[240] is not straightforwardly a musical. Showing popular culture "at work," the musical elements satirise the French-Antillean mediascape. Pop songs performed by West Indian entertainers conjure the spectacle of Paris, its famous sights and feats of engineering, as a utopia of consumption and economic opportunity. A boxer, a poet, and a deputy to the French parliament— figures of social mobility all—are paraded as decoys by the press, radio, and television, laying bare the "scripts" or "protonarratives of possible lives," as we might say with Arjun Appadurai, rehearsing "fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement."[241] But while the generic form of the musical is rendered transparent as a site of social reproduction and the management of mobility, the calico world of *West Indies* invites us to partake in the pleasures of the genre, to enjoy ourselves even as the ongoing co-optation of our enjoyment is revealed. Said Hondo: "Antillean or not, all can in my opinion draw many things from this film: they can at the same time learn, distract themselves, and participate in a spectacle […]."[242]

Hondo's qualified endorsement of spectacle, squaring ideological critique and pleasure, compares to Bertolt Brecht's popular didacticism and his belief that pedagogy and scientific inquiry could be a source of entertainment in themselves.[243] It is not surprising, then, that French commentators were quick to impute to *West Indies* a "Brechtian" sensibility.[244] Indeed, there is much to commend this notion. Popular song and dance numbers are central components also of Brecht's organon, and so are the film's banners, illustrations, and diagrams.[245] The acting in *West Indies* is expository, demonstrative, and non-psychological. Lines of dialogue are frequently distributed across the ensemble, jumping from one performer to another, from the chorus to the main players and back again; his-

cettes, which had been granted in 1975 and expired in 1977. See this and related correspondence at Ciné-Archives, file reference: WEST INDIES 1–3.

[239] See Hondo, "À propos de West Indies," 24.

[240] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 102.

[241] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 35–36.

[242] Hondo quoted in Dura, "Entretien," 27.

[243] Brecht expounded these views, for instance, in his *Short Organum for the Theatre* (1949).

[244] The *Figaro* review called it an "operetta with Brechtian accents." G.G., "Appareillage… West Indies de Med Hondo," *Figaro*, 1979. See also Albert Cervoni, "Un film 'rive gauche,'" *CinémAction*, no. 8 (1979): 81.

[245] At one point, an animated sequence irrupts into the live-action film to illustrate migration statistics.

torical dates are recited by rote, historical events presented in diorama-like vignettes with the actors either posing still, as if for a photograph, or robotically executing minute gestures, such as the signing of important treaties, like animatronic machine-men. As in Brecht's epic theatre, Jean-Luc Pouillade suggested in *Positif*, the net effect is of "a distanciation that avoids any realist identification with the characters and fixes our interest on the socio-political."[246] Hondo himself explained it was his professed aim to "efface identification."[247] The discontinuous, abrupt dramaturgy of *West Indies* is reminiscent of Brechtian montage. Both are seeking to disrupt the logic of organic growth that pervades, and links, both Western dramatic traditions and the writing of history.[248]

Hondo first encountered Brecht on the Paris stage, as an actor in Brecht's *Antigone* (1967) and in the role of the coolie in *The Exception and the Rule*, one of Brecht's "teaching plays" designed to be staged in schools and factories. However, I would argue that the alleged Brechtianism of *West Indies* is really an instance of Eurocentric back-projection, obscuring what is particular to Hondo's approach. Brecht's epic theatre was itself informed by non-European, especially Chinese and Japanese, theatrical traditions that emphasise highly aestheticised forms of "exposing"—what Brecht called *Zeigen*—over realist and psychological enactment. It was from this intercultural ferment that Brecht derived the means of his escape from dramatic form and narrative development in the European tradition.[249] Like Brecht on the stage, Hondo was working towards "a kind of cinema that dismantles the narrative and psychological mechanisms of traditional drama."[250] Like him, he took inspiration from a meeting of cultures. Unlike Brecht's elective affinities, however, the cultural encounter from which Hondo derived his means of distanciation, between the West Indies, Africa and France, was historically a *forced* encounter and remained an uneven relationship at the time of filming: Hondo's "alienation effects" are the effects of the migrant's alienation.

West Indies was a play before it became a million dollar musical. The film extended Hondo's militant theatrical practice into the spacetime of industrial cinema, elaborating

---

[246] Jean-Luc Pouillade, "West Indies (ou Les Nègres marrons de la liberté)," *Positif—Revue mensuelle de cinéma* no. 226 (1979): 76.

[247] Hondo in Perrot, "Entretien." (Hondo here referred not to *West Indies* in particular but his work in general.)

[248] We may also cite here instances of dialectical montage on the soundtrack: The European minuet clashes with West Indian songs and French popular music, and these musical forms are in turn confronted with sounds of labour—whiplashes, exhausted sighs, the noise of industrial production. The sound design of *West Indies* is by Antoine Bonfanti.

[249] Brecht also loaned the narrative kernel of some of his plays from Asian storytelling traditions. His *The Exception and the Rule*, for instance, has been traced back to the Yuan Dynasty-era play *He hanshan* (*The Confronted Undershirt*).

[250] *Cinematografo*, August–September 1975, 359, quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 162.

on the theatre's means. The script is based on *Les Négriers* by Martinican writer Daniel Boukman, which Hondo had staged several times, the first iteration at a theatre in Boulogne-Billancourt, close to the Renault factory featured in *Les Bicots-nègres*, with some of the cast recruited from a local worker's co-op, and a later staging at a church where migrants were holding a hunger strike.[251] The full cast of *West Indies* comprised two hundred performers, among them twenty principal actors, many of them members of the West Indian activist and publishing collective Ligue d'Union Antillaise, and forty dancers.[252] The dance choreographies, developed by Hondo in collaboration with the African American choreographer Linda Dingwall, combine elements of African, Caribbean, and modern dance. Hondo emphasised that it was essential for the group "to depart from the movement of bodies […] and to create something on that basis." It was an embodied process of creation "departing from the team's breath," a collective tuning of the body to the unsettling calico world of the ship, this liminal space between the world of the film and the space of filming.[253] The performers, Hondo explained, were forced to respond to the "necessities"—the determinations and conditions—of this precise situation.[254] Thomas Mpoyi-Buatu has suggested that music and dance in *West Indies* aim to bring into being a new "critical language." ("That is the only way," he adds, "we can get to our own modernity and cease always to be ruled by the modernity of others."[255]) All I would add is that the making of *West Indies* as Hondo describes it does not mark the accomplishment of this language but the struggle to produce it, from a marginalised position within a system of domination. There is a negative determination in this language, an element of coercion,

---

[251] In 1972, 1974, and 1975 (or 1976), for the first time at the Théâtre de l'Ouest parisien in the suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt. See Botbol, "West Indies," 9; Louis Marcorelles, "La galère de l'histoire: 'West Indies', un film de Med Hondo," *Le Monde*, September 20, 1979; Hondo, "À propos de West Indies," 24; Dura, "Entretien," 22. There were plans to stage the play in Algiers during the 1973 Non-Aligned Conference, but I have not been able to verify whether this took place. See Maziz, "Interview de Med Hondo." The play's author, Daniel Boukman, like his compatriot Frantz Fanon, moved to Algeria and fought with the FLN in the War of Liberation. The first of Boukman's published writings, dating back to 1967, was *Chants pour hâter la mort du temps des Orphée* aka *Madinina île esclave*, a collection of dramatic poems. The book was written against "Orphée noir," Sartre's preface to Léopold Sedar Senghor's seminal collection of Black poets which was a foundational text of the Negritude movement. Pallister proposes to class Boukman as the proponent of a more historically grounded "antillanité" to substitute for the vagaries and ahistorical essentialisms of Negritude. Indeed, *Chants* was conceived as a Marxist-materialist critique of Negritude. The title, which dedicates the *Chants* to "hastening the death of Orphic time," is programmatic: In the second of the three plays, Orpheus is slain by representatives of the Black working man: a fisherman, a sugar cane cutter, and a docker. See Janis L. Pallister, "Daniel Boukman: Literary and Political Revolutionary or, A New Orpheus Oils the Squeaky Wheels of Justice," *Dalhousie French Studies*, no. 26 (1994): 128. Hondo earlier planned also to make a film of Boukman's *Chants*. See Hennebelle, "Entretien," 45.
[252] See C.T., "La Saga Des Peuples Antillais," 19.
[253] Hondo quoted in Dura, "Entretien," 24.
[254] Hondo quoted in Dura, 24.
[255] Thomas Mpoyi-Buatu, "Sembène Ousmane's Ceddo & Med Hondo's West Indies," in *Film & Politics in the Third World*, ed. John D.H. Downing (New York: Autonomedia, 1987), 66.

which the film's production both conjured and resisted. In the calico world of *West Indies*, dance turns into a struggle for liberation.

Teshome Gabriel, in his stageist model of Third Cinema, places Hondo's work in the "combative" phase, that is, its most militant and "developed" form. In order to arrive there, in Gabriel's account, Third Cinema first had to free itself from the preceding "phase of remembrance," where "film language remains trapped, woven and blotted with classical formal elements, […] stained with conventional film style."[256] But *West Indies* precisely eschews Gabriel's teleology of liberation. It is not independence accomplished, but freedom fought for. The phase of remembrance, which Gabriel renders in terms of capture ("trapped"), entanglement ("woven"), and contamination ("blotted" and "stained"), comes much closer to the reality of Hondo's practice. Hondo always insisted that as a filmmaker he remained "dependent": "When I buy Kodak film or a projector, or when I use a distributor and go through multinational corporations, where is my independence?"[257] Dependence produces its own solidarities: "We are oppressed by a system and cannot be 'independent.' I myself cannot independently express myself—for my own sake, for my family, my friends, or my black American Third-World brothers."[258] It is from these solidarities, born from a shared experience of domination, that Hondo builds his new language. Both on the level of the diegesis and on that of the film's production, *West Indies… Les nègres marrons de la liberté* is about world-making from within a world made by domination. Industrial cinema, much like the "technological forms" and "fundamental knowledge" of the West, could not simply be ignored, even if they did not in Hondo's view indicate a higher stage of development and were in many ways a "catastrophy."[259] Industrial cinema, or so Hondo was convinced, was the necessary basis of future African film industries and the only form capable of challenging Western hegemony over African film distribution. The calico world of *West Indies*, however, both conjures and profanes this form, revealing a certain reticence in Hondo's relationship to industrial filmmaking. With Fred Moten, we may describe this as "the reticence of the grasped, the enframed, the taken, the kept—or, more precisely, the reluctance that disrupts

---

[256] Gabriel, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films," 36.

[257] Hondo quoted in Reid, "Working Abroad." In fact, cinema is a more dependent medium than others. "It is easier for a writer to defend their independence, because their profession is inexpensive; it's a pen, and a man or a woman. This is different from the case of the filmmaker, who needs technical means, money…" Hondo quoted in "Ni Riche, Ni Heureux, Mais Fier."

[258] Hondo quoted in Reid, "Working Abroad."

[259] Hondo quoted in Delmas, "Soleil O," 38. "Talking about development, we also need English for factories, for engineering, to become a doctor, because our history stopped. Our own progress stopped, so we have to learn what other people built, and to deal with it, differently maybe, but we have to learn it." Hondo quoted in James Leahy, "I am a kind of modern griot… Med Hondo talks to James Leahy at the 31st London Film Festival," interview transcript (1987), Med Hondo personal archive, Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

grasping and framing, taking and keeping—as epistemological stance as well as accumulative activity."[260] The "nègres marrons" of the film's title are thus legible in two ways: as Black people "conned" [*marrons*] by a false promise of freedom or as "maroons" [*marrons*], pointing to the possibility of an escape. For Maryse Condé, *West Indies* was neither West Indian, nor African, nor French, "but a film that interpellates all those whose past is made of oppression, whose present is made of aborted hopes, and whose future remains to be won."[261]

5.5 Circulation struggles: chapter conclusion

Med Hondo passed away in Paris after a long illness on March 2, 2019. His place of birth remains subject to speculation. In an interview he gave in 1970, Hondo pointed to the oasis of M'raa, "in the middle of the desert."[262] Other sources give Ain Bni Mathar, formerly known as Berguent, a town not in Mauritania but the north-eastern Moroccan province of Jerada, close to the Algerian border.[263] In an interview on French radio dating from the early 1960s, where Hondo presented himself as a popular chansonnier, he gave his nationality as Senegalese.[264] This confusion, abetted by Hondo himself, is significant: "I had a strange feeling listening to my grandmother's tales of having been born in five or six countries at the same time."[265]

Mauritania borders on Algeria and Western Sahara in the north, Senegal in the south, and Mali in the south-east; its western coast opens onto the Atlantic. A major hub of trans-Saharan trade and later a part of French West Africa, the country has long been a zone of contact and exchange between the Maghreb and the Sahel—between North and West African polities, cultures, and religions. During the colonial period, the overwhelming majority of Mauritania's population was nomadic, and so was Hondo's family—"children of the clouds" moving along the routes of trade and transhumance from Morocco and Algeria across the Sahara to Mali and Senegal.[266] Hondo's family trace their ancestry back to "Sudanese" sub-Saharan peoples captured, enslaved, and transported across the desert under Berber and Moor rule. They were *Haratin*, sometimes also referred to as "Black Moors," former slaves considered a distinct caste even after Mauritania had officially

---

260 Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 179.
261 Condé, "Med Hondo ouvre une ère nouvelle," 73.
262 Hondo quoted in Hennebelle, "Entretien," 38.
263 "Ain Ouled Beni Mathar" in Pfaff's transliteration, but she places it in Mauritania. See *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 157.
264 Hondo sang his version of Jacques Brel's *Le Moribond* (Ciné-Archives, uncatalogued).
265 Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 10.
266 Hondo quoted in Signaté, 17.

abolished slavery in 1981, the last country in the world to do so.[267] Barred from land ownership and denied other property rights, Haratin were forced into serfdom to Mauritania's *Bidan* ("White Moor" or Berber) minority. To this day, they constitute the lowest social stratum in the wider region. Hondo's upbringing was informed by experiences of marginalisation but also by stories of defiance and escape. His maternal grandfather had still been enslaved. Handed down through generations, slave narratives proliferated among his tribe.[268] He signed his early films "Abid" Med Hondo, the hereditary denomination of Mauritanian slaves, which is also a derogatory synonym for "Black."[269]

<div align="center">⁂</div>

Hondo's migrant cinema "is about telling the stories of peoples who are totally absent on the level of the image, as much for themselves as for others, and principally in the Western capitalist nations which hold the quasi absolute monopoly of the fabrication of images and content, to inform, form, or deform the people."[270] Hondo continues:

> In making these films, at the cost of a thousand difficulties, there was a fierce determination on my part to be a witness of my time. I was animated by a will to proclaim my existence as African. My ambition was to show Africans on screen, for them to express and interrogate themselves, take sides, develop a problem.[271]

Hondo, like so many others, was pushed and pulled to Europe through a "process of exile." As a migrant, Hondo discovered the Third World in the First: the peripheralisation of racialised populations within the core countries. Like Glissant's errant, he rendered totality not as self-identical but as constituted through the movement of people and the exchange of commodities, which converge in the figure of the slave, as a dynamic global relation.[272] Migration unfolds as a relation between two (or more) countries, as a "shared" history, but unevenly so. Because Africa exists in Europe, Hondo argued, so does "Afri-

---

[267] Instances of modern-day slavery persist to this day. See Murphy and Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema*, 71–72.
[268] See Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 9.
[269] See Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Petite histoire*, 117.
[270] Hondo quoted in Dura, "Entretien," 22. Hondo here refers to *West Indies* specifically, but I argue that these remarks are applicable to his wider oeuvre. "I am not alone," he continues: "All African filmmakers, in principle and in spite of their internal contradictions (different cinematic approaches, different ideologies), together with all filmmakers of the Third World objectively assist in the excavation of their own history, which as we know had been completely stifled, annihilated by colonialist and imperialist forces of oppression."
[271] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 24.
[272] See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.

can cinema":[273] "As exiles we cannot by right produce a national cinema. However, I believe nonetheless that it is an 'African' cinema."[274] Hondo's French critics insisted on placing his work in the context of European theatre and cinema. My point has not been to instead assert its "African" roots, but to show that Hondo's "modernism" properly belongs to the uneven and combined modernity—*one*, but unequal—of global, racial capitalism. From the perspective of a commodity in circulation, Hondo offers a radical remembering of history as seen from the hold, unhinging the teleology of progress. Against the positivist universalities of Negritude and Francophonie, Hondo pits the negative, fugitive universality of the migrant and the slave.

Hondo's French critics turned his struggle into a style and an object for aesthetic contemplation, but Hondo insisted that his style was a function of the conditions of filming. In a letter to the editors of *Image et son*, he reprimanded a critic for omitting from his review of *West Indies* the story of its making, "because it is in these objective conditions that this film has been realised, and it is based upon them, in the main, that a critical analysis may be brought to the film."[275] Throughout his career, Hondo inhabited different settings and modes of production, which imposed changing conditions on his practice and resulted in different aesthetic forms.[276] Departing from these varying conditions, he elaborated new filmic practices and languages. Whether as a militant filmmaker, working on a shoestring budget and on 16mm, or "like Spielberg," on a studio set and in cinemascope, "I chained myself to the rigor of the image"[277]—"not to distinguish myself from other filmmakers; rather, the historical facts objectively *distinguish me*."[278]

"African cinema," Hondo said, "was born [...] under the particular conditions of unaccomplished liberation."[279] His films carry the mark of their unfreedom, challenging us to consider his films not merely as *images of struggle* but also as *struggling images*. Hondo, of course, remained radically unreconciled to his condition: "My whole life has been

[273] Med Hondo, "Le rôle du cinéaste africain," in *Cahiers des Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma* (Montréal: Comité d'action cinématographique, 1975), 39–40.

[274] Med Hondo, "Le rôle du cinéaste africain," in *Cahiers des Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma* (Montréal: Comité d'action cinématographique, 1975), 40. "I maintain however that with *The Nigger-Arabs* (*Les Bicots-Nègres*) I have established a national cinema, even though conceived and put together outside my country." Hondo, "The Cinema of Exile," 70.

[275] Hondo, "À propos de West Indies," 24.

[276] Another reason Hondo was resistant to the auteurist label may have been its implication in the logic of French aid. The Bureau du cinéma and other French bodies of cinematographic development aid such as the Fonds Sud saw as its mission the promotion of marginal filmic practices that had little prospects of immediate commercial rentability—much like the CNC's support for the New Wave at home. This was seen as a defence mechanism against US domination in the realm of cinema, and framed as a form of solidarity "in resistance against a certain American cultural imperialism," but for filmmakers like Hondo, dreaming of the development of African national film industries, these were the wrong priorities. See Hoefert de Turegano, "Continuité et transition," 63.

[277] Hondo, "The Cinema of Exile," 74.

[278] Hondo quoted in Dura, "Entretien," 22.

a struggle for freedom, my freedom!"[280] Proudly declaring himself a "dependent" filmmaker, he challenges us to recognise the negative determination of his films, which his practice sought to escape. I have developed a materialist reading that highlights in Hondo's images the imprint of their precarious conditions of production and distribution, while tracing in his errant practice the movement of fugitivity.

Hondo's life-long travails in the sphere of distribution were part and parcel of the struggle over Africa's forms of circulation: "Ever since the first contacts with conquering European 'civilizers' our people have been misdirected, destructured, divided, and partitioned into zones of influence and trade—the continent's misery today is the logical consequence of what happened over centuries."[281] In 1994, Hondo's resumé of African cinema was sobering: "To be clear, we have failed." But silence is a greater violence than failure, as he was quick to add: "What matters is to create breaches for others to rush into, perhaps with more success."[282] In a communiqué commemorating two decades of African cinema, Hondo specified this point, explaining that "the economic constraints that African cinema has lived through are the logical basis for filmmakers' future struggles."[283] Hondo's errantry, from this—his—point of view, is not a story of progress but a series of exemplary failures, creating breaches in the smooth texture of universal history for others to rush in.

[279] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 119.
[280] Hondo quote in Francesca Colò, "Focus su Med Hondo," *Il Cinema ritrovato*, accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.cinefiliaritrovata.it/cinema-ritrovato-2017-focus-su-med-hondo/.
[281] Hondo quoted in Signaté, *Un cinéaste rebelle*, 119.
[282] Hondo quoted in Signaté, 29–30.
[283] Med Hondo and Abdoul War, "Le cinéma et l'Afrique noire," 4.

Chapter 6
Animation: Moustapha Alassane

Moustapha Alassane was the first native filmmaker to emerge from Niger. His short *Aouré* (1962), a documentary fiction in the ethnographic mode, has been hailed the "first authentic work of a Nigerien"—"conceived, performed, shot, edited and dubbed exclusively by Nigeriens."[1] It is also a contender for the first African film ever made on African soil.[2] With *La Mort de Gandji* (1965), Alassane became the first (and for some time the only) sub-Saharan African animation filmmaker.[3] In the seven years following *Aouré*, Alassane remained the only active Nigerien filmmaker,[4] then the country saw a sudden efflorescence of films lasting roughly a decade. Despite being one of the poorest and geographically most disadvantaged film-producing countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Niger was thus among the first nations to see the emergence of a native cinema.[5] Though filmmakers received even less state aid than elsewhere in West Africa, Nigerien cinema was for a time one of the liveliest.[6] The French ethnographer Jean Rouch liked to quip that Niger was the only country in the world with more filmmakers than cinemas.[7] The emergence of Nigerien cinema rested on a network of institutions of ethnological-ethnographic research in the capital of Niamey, which had been founded under colonial rule and was now attached, organisationally and financially, to the framework of French Cooperation. Though other West African countries also had ethnographic research and Cooperation outfits headed by a cast of Frenchmen, Niger was unique in the extent of these activities.[8]

Alassane met Rouch in the early 1960s. The former civil engineer first arrived in West Africa when it was still a French colony, and stayed on after the independences. Working

---

[1] UNESCO, *Premier catalogue sélectif international de films ethnographiques sur l'Afrique noire* (Paris: UNESCO/Les Presses Saint-Augustin, 1967), 215. See also Ousmane Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger* (Brussels: Editions OCIC/COE, 1993), 31.

[2] Alassane has been praised as the "first" West African filmmaker and animator, however, he himself only reluctantly accepted this epithet. David Murphy places *Aouré* at the beginning of an alternative genealogy of African cinema, noting that is has received "virtually no critical attention." He contends that the film "marked the birth of an African cinema that did not primarily seek to be didactic, to be political, to act as social commentary, or to represent a people, but rather one that sought to entertain." Murphy, Francophone West African Cinema, 1955–1969," 53.

[3] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 139.

[4] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 30.

[5] On the history of Niger, see Samuel Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger* (Lanham, Maryland & London: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 68. Nigerien cinema took off long before that of the "Nigerian giant." See Pierre Haffner, "L'école du Niger: essai de situation d'un cinéma national," in *Regards sur le cinéma négro-africain*, ed. André Gardies and Pierre Haffner (Brussels: OCIC, 1987), 151.

[6] See Oumarou Ganda, "Menaces sur le cinéma nigérien," *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 30.

[7] Eight cinemas in 1975, according to Rouch, quoted in Denyse de Saivre and Amélie Neumann, "Entretien avec Jean Rouch et Serge Moati," *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17–18 (1975): 52. See also Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 144.

[8] Serge Ricci, a filmmaker for CAI, made ethnographic and educational films in Upper Volta in the 1960s, and trained local filmmakers and technicians. In 1966, Ricci established a centre, sponsored to the tune of F120,000 by the cultural activities branch of the Department for Cultural and Technical Cooperation, for the production and distribution of films—though not for laboratories—in Ouagadougou. See Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions," 220–222.

on Rouch's ethnographic films, for instance, as assistant director on *Le mil* (1964), Alassane gleaned the basics of the craft. Alassane's filmmaking was sponsored by museums such as the Nigerien National Museum in Niamey and academic institutions such as the Institut de recherche en sciences humaines (IRSH) and the Centre des traditions orales (Centre of Oral Traditions).[9] Nigerien filmmakers relied on the material support and technical infrastructure concentrated in a veritable hub of research centres clustered around the National Museum, including, in addition to the institutions mentioned above, the Centre cultural franco-nigérien (CCFN; French-Nigerien Cultural Center). Nigerien filmmakers received practical training following the protocols of ethnographic filmmaking— either, as in Alassane's case, as part of the crew of French ethnographic films or, as in the case of Oumarou Ganda and Damouré Zika, as actors in them. The Bureau du cinéma was another important source of support of Nigerien cinema. In a joint effort with CAI, it sponsored a group of *coopérants* around Serge Moati to institute a Nigerien "film school" at CCFN in Niamey. Alassane also benefitted from the wider network of Francophonie, which enabled him to study (and later teach) in France and Canada. Nigerien cinema was unique among West African cinemas in that training, production and post-production could all be serviced inside the country, however, this did little to diminish its extraversion, which shifted from the sphere of international exchange to the level of institutional and interpersonal relations among Nigerien filmmakers and French *coopérants* in Niamey.

The task of French Cooperation as set out by Rouch was to "demystify" filmmaking, but *coopérants* also contributed to the mystification of Nigerien cinema, and Alassane's in particular. While Senegalese, Malian or Burkinabe filmmakers usually received training abroad, or so the story goes, Nigerien filmmakers were largely autodidacts "formed at the task."[10] Erasing the fact that Alassane's films and that of those of his compatriots clearly emerged from the matrix of French ethnography, Nigerien cinema appears in the accounts of French ethnographers and *coopérants* as "the cinema of Moustapha and the cinema of Oumarou." For his French supporters and self-proclaimed "discoverers," Alassane was a "naïvist" and an "autodidact."[11] The tone was often patronising: "In Niamey, a little

---

[9] Also called Centre of Linguistic and Historical Studies by Oral Tradition (Centre d'Études linguistiques et historiques par Tradition orale, CELHTO). Alassane also received support from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

[10] Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 148.

[11] See Jean-René Debrix, "Le cinéma africain," *Afrique contemporaine: documents d'Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 38–39 (1968): 10; Guy Hennebelle, "Le cinéma nigérien," *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, no. 20 (1972): 235; Giannalberto Bendazzi, "African Cinema Animation," *EnterText* 4, no. 1 (2004): 14. To be fair, this same appellation has been used by African critics, notably Férid Boughedir in "Le Cinema nigerien: l'authenticité de l'autodidacte," *Cinéma Quebec* 3, no. 9–10 (1974). Vieyra, in *Le cinéma africain*, called Alassane the "Douanier Rousseau of African cinema" (139).

draftsman with a fertile imagination is reinventing entirely the cinema *à l'africaine*."[12] Debrix presented Alassane as the "only Black director entirely to escape Western influence"—an "authentic '*primitive*,'" who made films "as if for the first time"—and proposed it as a model for African filmmakers elsewhere.[13] Nigerien films were distributed on the circuits of Francophonie and French ethnography, and they were co-produced as discursive objects by French anthropologists and ethnographers, who had a vested interest in this first instance of African "native" filmmaking. Ostensibly fascinated with the young African cinemas for "combining the most modern techniques with the most traditional style of gesture and speech," Rouch ended up reproducing a problematic dichotomy of "tradition" and "modernity."[14] My argument is not to dismiss out of hand the contributions of the likes of Rouch and Debrix to the emergence of African cinema. Rather, I will argue that the support Rouch and Debrix gave to individual Nigerien filmmakers like Alassane or Oumarou Ganda, was limiting and self-interested as much as it was enabling—that is was both of these things at one and the same time.

As Rachel Gabara has noted, many of the earliest African documentary films can be described as autoethnographic: "Working against the French tradition that preceded them, filmmakers began with an inherited style, in which footage of rituals, customs, and traditional occupations was accompanied by an authoritative, explanatory voice-over. Their films were in many cases funded by the same Paris-based institutions that had supported and continued to support French ethnographers working in Africa."[15] It has been suggested that Nigerien cinema was an extension of French ethnography; that giving Africans a camera was the next logical step in Rouch's evolving ethnographic methodology. Rouch is usually discussed as "teacher" to his Nigerien "students." I will argue, however, that Alassane's story—and that of the emergence of Nigerien cinema from the matrix of French ethnography and Cooperation—was not a story of total subsumption under the ethnographic paradigm. Just as important are the ways in which Alassane's practice struggled against, transformed and departed from the ethnographic field. Though dependent on some kind of foreign participation for most of his films (with the important exception of his late animation works, more of which below), Alassane was intensely critical of the "gift" of developmental aid, and of the developmentalist pedagogies that authorised its uses. His practice was enabled and conditioned by this gift, yet he also pushed against

---

[12] Debrix, "Le cinéma africain," 10.
[13] Debrix, 10.
[14] Rouch quoted in "Moustapha Alassane: Un jeune cinéaste nigérien 'réinvente' le cinéma," *Bingo*, no. 201 (1969): 49.

and beyond it, fighting throughout his career to further his and his fellow filmmakers' cultural, technological and economic autonomy.

Compromised though it may have been, Alassane's struggle was real, and this chapter will bring it justice—based on research into the French Ministry of Cooperation's paper archive. Against the French narrative of Nigerien cinema as a "cinema of individuals, of artisans, a popular cinema in the noblest sense, far from government sloganeering, far from men of power," I will describe the institutional network and collective ferment that spawned Alassane's practice, the pedagogies and discourses that produced Alassane and his peers as "primitive filmmakers," emphasising Alassane's proximity to "men of power" like Rouch and Debrix, and the way in which these men sought to exert their power and influence, but also, centrally, Alassane's attempts to gain degrees of autonomy, for himself and fellow Nigerien filmmakers, from within this profound entanglement. [16]

Alassane's narrative shorts, from *Aouré* and *La Bague du roi Koda* (1962) to *Conteur albarca* AKA *Deela* (1969), all have ethnographic affiliations; they also and at the same time rank among the earliest attempts to extend oral storytelling to the medium of film. His early animations borrow from animal fable to poke fun at the political establishment. *Bon voyage, Sim* (1966) mounts a challenge to state visit cinema—film pressed into the service of the sub-Saharan African political establishment (see 2.4)—both in the film's satirical content and in its mode of production, which I will describe as "undeveloped animation." The influence of Rouchian method, especially of his "shared anthropology," is on full display in *Le Retour d'un aventurier* (1966), for which Alassane invited a group of friends to imagine themselves as actors in a Western. After the French divestment from Cooperation, absent regular financial or material support by the Nigerien state, Alassane turned to Burkina Faso for funding, resulting in 1972 in *F.V.V.A.*, considered by some the first pan-African co-production, and later to West Germany, involving German technical infrastructure and personnel in the making of *Toula* (1974), a film based on an oral tale with strong allegorical overtones. Both these co-productions deal with aspects of modernisation.

His live-action films "depict the dichotomy between African traditions and new values inherited from the West," but his African critics were consistently troubled by what

[15] Rachel Gabara, "From Ethnography to Essay: Realism, Reflexivity, and African Documentary Film," in *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 364.
[16] Alassane's distance from power is asserted by Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 148.

they perceived as Alassane's moral ambivalence and unclear political commitments.[17] Against his critics, I will portray (and defend) Alassane as a moralist of changing morals.

With his ambulatory *ciné-bus de brousse*, or "cine-bush-taxi," Alassane single-handedly mounted an itinerant counter-logistics of distribution and exhibition in rural Niger. Throughout his life, Alassane experimented with a variety of procedures to make and share moving images, from shadow theatre to stop-motion animation to computer-generated imagery. As animation filmmaker, he was a self-taught bricoleur before he received formal training, making and displaying moving images with original techniques and apparatuses that he constructed himself before he had even been to a cinema. Alassane was intimately acquainted with his tools, many of which he designed, sourced and constructed himself. A trained mechanic, Alassane fabricated his own camera and projector.[18]

For Sada Niang, Alassane's oeuvre demonstrates in exemplary fashion that African cinema had from its first stirrings been "lodged within the global movement of cinematic aesthetic currents."[19] In his later life, however, Alassane retreated to a familial, self-subsistent moving image practice in his adopted home town of Tahoua, where he managed keep working during a time of political turmoil and economic crisis, when "Nigerien cinema" was faltering and most Nigerien filmmakers fell silent. Not all of the moving images produced in his family compound in Tahoua were films; many of them never left Alassane's family compound. This was an autonomous practice, but it also entailed new necessities, adaptations to precarious circumstances and adverse environments. I will argue that Alassane's late work was not a retreat from the world, but an attempt to redefine the terrain of the struggle.

"Animation" is where Alassane's practice begins and where it ends, grounding whatever compromised autonomy Alassane was able to exercise. Vieyra, in his study of the origins of African cinema, calls Alassane "the African Meliès."[20] As has often been pointed out, Alassane's practice, like Meliès', was a constant "reinvention."[21] Despite Alassane's pioneering role, as Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy have noted, he is "general-

[17] Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 5.
[18] See Guy Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," *jeune cinéma (hors série)* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 14.
[19] Sada Niang, "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane: innovation et continuité," in *Figuration et mémoire dans les cinémas africains*, ed. Jean Ouédraogo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 58.
[20] Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 139. This assessment is echoed by Serge Moati, interviewed in *Cinéaste du possible* (Maria Silvia Bazzoli and Christian Lelong, France, 2009).
[21] See, e.g., Jacques Binet, "Cinéma africain: bilan de la rétrospective organisée par le C.E.D.A.O.M.," *Afrique contemporaine: documents d'Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 83 (1976): 29; Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 14.

ly overlooked in historical accounts."[22] There is hardly an African film history that does not mention Alassane, however, as Murphy observes, he has mostly been "relegated to passing references."[23] Sada Niang relates this neglect to what he describes as Alassane's "marginalisation" within FEPACI, in his view a function of the critical neglect of animation given the federation's "militant and Manichean discourse," its preference for 35mm and penchant for realism.[24] Taking as my example the broader animation practice of Moustapha Alassane, I will reconstruct the birth of Nigerien cinema from the matrix of French ethnography and Cooperation as a compromised struggle for autonomy that, as Alassane's case will demonstrate, critically compromises the very idea of autonomy.

Alassane's compromised struggle within and against ethnography is the story of "the incorporation of African technicians into the process of assisting European filmmakers […], and then of making their own films."[25] It is still relevant today, in terms set out by Matthias De Groof:

> Still today, the legend-making capacity of African cinema is subject to and bounded by the relationship between collaboration and autonomy […]. Contemporary film productions are caught in the dialectics of alienation and appropriation (on behalf of the African filmmakers) and assimilation and refusal (on behalf of their Western facilitators). Institutional dependence on subsidies and the need for foreign editors and crews are the issues at stake in the further development of African cinema.[26]

There are few detailed accounts of how French development aid played out on the ground—both in textual and practical terms.[27] This chapter seeks to change that.

[22] Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy, "Africa's Lost Classics: Introduction," *Screen* 48, no. 4 (2007): 498. Bisschoff and Murphy wonder "how our understanding of African cinema might have developed differently if Alassane rather than Sembène had been posited as a 'founding father.'"

[23] There is not a single monograph on Alassane's work to date, however, we do have a number of articles on aspects of his work as well as one notable book chapter that attempts a more thorough reappraisal. See, e.g., Niang "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane" and chapter five of *African Nationalist Cinema*.

[24] Niang, "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane," 66.

[25] Harrow, "Preface," xi.

[26] Matthias De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn: Indigenous Film as the Outcome of Reflexivity in Ethnographic Film," *Visual Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2013): 121.

[27] A notable exception is Joseph Pomp, "France as Author of World Cinema: International Co-Production and the Fonds Sud, 1984-2012," *French Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020).

6.1 "As if for the first time": French ethnography and the emergence of Nigerien cinema (Aouré, 1963 and Deela, 1969)

Moustapha Alassane was born in 1942 in N'Jougou, Benin.[28] He spent his teens in a small village on the Niger River in what was then French Niger, where his father, a Yoruba businessman of Muslim faith, had moved the family in 1953.[29] After finishing his *brevet* (a ninth grade diploma in the French educational system) Alassane trained as a mechanic. Still in his teens, he purchased a truck and—without permit—set up a one-man haulier operation servicing the route from Niamey, the capital of Niger, to the bustling port city of Abidjan in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, where he first encountered and came frequently to visit the cinema.[30] In 1962, hardly in his twenties, Alassane was hired by the Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire (IFAN), the former Niamey branch of the colonial-era Institut français d'Afrique noire (also IFAN), the major ethnographic research facility in the region with branches in cities across French West Africa.[31] Jean Rouch was then its director; he had been appointed not long after Niger's accession to formal independence on August 3, 1960.[32] During his tenure at IFAN, Rouch made a number of films but also oversaw other kinds of ethnographic research. IFAN researchers collated a large archive of sound recordings documenting music and oral traditions from Niger and the wider region.[33] It was as Rouch's "assistant" at IFAN that Alassane acquired his basic training in filmmaking, first as lab technician and later assuming the roles of cameraman and assistant director on Rouch's *Le Mil* (Millet, 1963),[34] a film about the cultivation of Niger's main subsistence crop, and other ethnographic films.

Still in 1962—Niger had been independent for two years—Alassane made his first film, *Aouré*, an ethnographic short capturing the meet-cute and ensuing courtship of two Djerma (or Zarma) youth on the banks of the Niger River. *Aouré* predates by one year both Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret*—by most accounts the first fiction film ever to

---

[28] I glean this biographical datum from the film *Moustapha Alassane, cinéaste du possible* (Maria Silvia Bazzoli and Christian Lelong, France, 2009). It is corroborated in Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr, *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148. Other sources give a town by the name of Ndongou or N'Dougou, situated either in Niger or in Benin, as Alassane's place of birth. See FESPACO and L'Association des Trois Mondes, *Les Cinémas d'Afrique: Dictionnaire* (Paris: Karthala/ATM, 2000), 31.
[29] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 1.
[30] Alassane quoted in Yves Alain, "F.V.V.A.: le film de Moustapha Alassane dénonce un certain laisser-aller," *Bingo*, no. 214 (1970): 48. See also Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 1.
[31] IFAN's headquarters were in Dakar.
[32] To accept this appointment, Rouch left his previous position as senior research fellow at the Paris-based Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), of which IFAN was still officially a subsidiary.
[33] See De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 120.
[34] Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.

be realised by a sub-Saharan director on sub-Saharan soil—and Momar Thiam's *Sarzan* (another close contender). It was made the same year Blaise Senghor, a nephew of Senegal's first president Léopold Sédar Senghor, realised his documentary short *Grand Magal à Touba*. The consensus is that *Aouré* came first, which, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, would make it the first film ever to be realised in sub-Saharan Africa by a sub-Saharan African.[35] David Murphy has proffered *Aouré* as a more apt candidate for the first African film than Vieyra's 1955 *Afrique-sur-Seine*—presumably one of the "false starts" of African cinema alluded to in the title of Murphy's article—whose "status as a foundational work has been compromised by the fact that it was made in France rather than in Africa."[36] Pace Murphy, I will argue that the beginnings of sub-Saharan African cinema generally bore the mark of compromise, very much including *Aouré*, which not only depended on the institutions of French ethnography in material terms but was shaped by the ethnographic paradigm in other ways as well. IFAN, where Alassane was employed at the time, was part of a Niamey compound that also enclosed the National Museum, the Franco-Nigerien Cultural Centre, and the Centre of Oral Traditions. This institutional network of French ethnographic research and Cooperation formed the matrix for the emergence of "Nigerien cinema."

While I follow Matthias De Groof in arguing that the emergence of Nigerien cinema was tied to ethnographic filmmaking and evolved from within the ethnographic paradigm, however, I will take issue with his account of the parallel evolution of ethnographic and Nigerien filmmaking as a mutually enriching and self-correcting dynamic. Based on archival research, I will instead emphasise the uneven, interested, and self-limiting nature of this relationship—how the matrix of French ethnography and Cooperation both developed Nigerien films and underdeveloped Nigerien cinema in the process. I will explicate the vested interests of French ethnographers and *coopérants* in the production of "native filmmaking," leading me to question and qualify Rouch's "resolute commitment to the

---

[35] Sembène himself acknowledged both Alassane's and Senghor's lead. See Busch and Annas, *Interviews*, 8. All other films mentioned here were made by Senegalese filmmakers, reflecting Senegal's special position within the new order France had established vis-à-vis its former colonies. It was only by virtue of the ethnographic connection that a Nigerien was able to beat his Senegalese peers to the draw. We might also want to consider *Moi, un noir* (1958) by Jean Rouch, shot in Abidjan and starring, as well as "co-authored" by, later Nigerien filmmaker Oumarou Ganda. All of these first efforts were preceded, however, by African filmmakers in France. *Afrique-sur-Seine*'s "firstness" is canonical, but two years earlier Guinean filmmaker Mamadou Touré made *Mouramani* (1953), also shot in France. Another neglected figure is Sudanese filmmaker Gadallah Gubara (sometimes transliterated "Jadallah Jubara"), who had been making films in East Africa even before Sudanese independence in 1956, unbeknown to his West African peers and completely neglected, up until very recently, in canonical accounts of the origins of African cinema. Gubara is entirely omitted, for instance, in Frank N. Ukadike's and Diawara's pioneering histories of African cinema in the English language, though Ukadike later featured him in his book of interviews with African filmmakers. See Ukadike, *Black African Cinema*; Diawara, *African Cinema*. Cf. Ukadike, *Questioning African Cinema*, 41–55.

promotion and development of post-independence African cinema"—and the much vaunted French engagement in the development of Nigerien cinema more generally.[37] I will pay attention specifically to how Alassane was produced as a "primitive filmmaker"; how Rouch and Jean-René Debrix, head of the Ministry of Cooperation's Paris-based Bureau du cinéma (see 2.5), who were not only the enablers but also the first French commentators of African films, enduringly framed and shaped our critical understanding of "African cinema" in their writings of the period. Alassane acknowledged that the experience of working with Rouch had shaped what he called the "ethnographic intent" especially of his earliest films.[38] Taking a closer look at Alassane's ethnographic films, in particular *Deela* (1969), a later work commissioned by the Centre of Oral Traditions and informed by the centre's ongoing research,[39] we will everywhere discover signs of the material and textual struggle Alassane was waging from within and against this institutional matrix, this aesthetic paradigm.

Aouré was co-produced by the Ethnographic Film Committee, where Alassane was an intern between 1962 and 1963, and the Franco-Nigerien Cultural Centre in Niamey.[40] A 16mm camera—a Bell and Howell like Rouch's—was borrowed from a friend of Rouch's at the Nigerien Forest Service. Film stock was provided by Rouch himself, but not in large quantities. Alassane had to economise; only a tiny fraction of the material was allowed to end up on the editing floor. *Aouré* was shot on location, on the banks of the Niger River, however, some village scenes were filmed at the National Museum in Niamey.

Before he was hired at IFAN, Alassane had been employed at the National Museum as a designer and illustrator.[41] Among his earliest commissions as the museum's resident draftsman was the design of the new nation's coat of arms—by direct order of Hamani Diori, the first president (1960–1974) of the independent Republic of Niger.[42] Alassane

[36] Murphy, "Francophone West African Cinema, 1955-1969: False Starts and New Beginnings."

[37] Jamie Berthe, "Beyond the Entomological Critique: Re-thinking Rouch and African Cinema," *Studies in French Cinema* 18, no. 3 (2017): 271.

[38] Personal communication quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 2.

[39] Alassane was connected to the Centre of Oral Traditions in other ways as well, for instance, he contributed illustrations to accompany an ethnographic monograph published there. His drawings are of pottery fragments found at an archaeological dig near the town of Tondikwarey, originally from a Mossi-Gurma village dating from sometime between the 15th and 17th centuries. See Boubé Gado, *Le Zarmatarey: contribution à l'histoire des populations d'entre Niger et Dallol Mawri* (Niamey: Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines, 1980), 63.

[40] See Bruno Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu: le cinéma d'animation africain* (Annecy: Centre International du Cinéma d'Animation, 1993), 29. Also see Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions," 218.

[41] Debrix claimed it was here that he first encountered Alassane, and that it was him who commended Alassane to the Nigerien cultural authorities, prompting his promotion to IFAN. See Niang, "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane," 59; Ogova Ondego, "Sub-Saharan Africa's Father of Animation Films Speaks Out," *artmatters.info*, accessed December 10, 2019, https://artmatters.info/2009/12/sub-saharan-africa%E2%80%99s-father-of-animation-films-speaks-out/.

[42] See Baba Diop, "L'ingénieux Moustapha Alassane," *La Gazette du pays et du monde*, 2009.

also helped design and build the "traditional village" which was the centrepiece of the museum's permanent outdoor exhibition: an open air, living museum of everyday culture, featuring buildings of every tribe and workshops for the pursuit of "authentic craftsmanship." Rather than merely record tradition the village would preserve it in actu, offering—in the words of Pablo Toucet, the museum's French director—Nigerien and foreign visitors the promise of a "return to the source."[43] The conception of this village in front of the National Museum in Niamey carried echoes of the "African village scenes" reconstituted at World Exhibitions around the turn of the twentieth century, which had served as the backdrop to some of the earliest ethnographic moving images. It was in this easily accessible, picturesque mock-up that Alassane set parts of *Aouré*.

The film's subsequent dissemination, furthermore, was closely aligned with the circuits of French ethnography. While celebrating Alassane's debut as "truly African cinema at last," the film critic of *La Vie africaine* also noted with consternation that *Aouré* was hardly seen on the continent; indeed, it was screened mainly at European festivals of ethnographic cinema—the first film festival in the world to be devoted entirely to "African cinema."[44] Among the jury members at the 1962 Saint-Cast International Ethnographic Film Festival in the north of France, where *Aouré* took away the main award, was Debrix, one of Alassane's earliest French champions.[45] After the film's festival success, which we may assume Debrix had a hand in bringing about, his Bureau du cinéma purchased the non-commercial distribution rights for *Aouré*. It also provided Alassane with twenty reels of 16mm Kodachrome to make another film.[46]

In Debrix' view, *Aouré* was "encumbered by clumsiness" but also "bursting with freshness and authenticity."[47] He noted Alassane's "candid humour" and "astonishing simplicity of tone," hailing both Alassane and fellow Nigerien filmmaker Oumarou Ganda as "primitives of African cinema" whose films were "protected from all contamina-

---

[43] Pablo Toucet quoted in the film *Le Musée national du Niger* (Jean-Paul Vuillin, France/Niger, 1974).

[44] See D'Dée, "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire," 36. The film also won the silver medal in the 16mm category at Cannes. See Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions," 218. Alassane's later films, too, were screened in venues linked to French ethnography. *Le Retour*, for instance, had its avant-première at the Musée de l'homme in Paris.

[45] See D'Dée, "Enfin du vrai cinéma africain," *La vie africaine: le magazine d'information et de culture de l'Afrique moderne*, no. 29 (1962): 50.

[46] See D'Dée, "Enfin du vrai cinéma africain," 50. This next film was *La Bague du roi Koda* (King Koda's Ring, 1962). It tells the story of a hapless fisherman whose name, Loi de Dieu ("God's law"), provokes King Koda's hubris. The king hands Loi de Dieu a ring for safekeeping, challenging him to return the item in a year's time. If the fisherman does as he is told, he shall inherit all the king's possessions, however, should he fail to produce the ring at the appointed date, he will pay with his life. The malicious King Koda then proceeds to coerce the fisherman's wife to return the ring and plunges it into the deepest depths of the river. On the day Loi de Dieu has to return the ring, he retrieves the purloined object from the entrails of a fish, just in time to deliver it to the stunned king, who stands by his word and promptly abdicates the throne, making Loi de Dieu the new ruler of the land.

[47] Debrix, "Le cinéma africain," 10.

tion."[48] "Authentic" African filmmakers like Alassane and Ganda, Debrix adamantly declared, would restore to World Cinema its lost "sorcery." This is why Debrix urged African filmmakers to give "free rein" to their "intuition," which "the African soul, bathed in mysticism and supernatural poetry, has managed to keep intact amidst a world dangerously robotised [*robotisé*] by the spirit of geometry."[49] Skirting the "Cartesian dogma" that held Western cinemas firmly in its grip, African films would be a "true fount of rejuvenation."[50] Early cinema, which was discussed as "primitive" at the time, was a common reference in Debrix' writings: Alassane was said to portray his surroundings "with all the rigours of naiveté, like at the time of Louis Feuillade."[51] Debrix strained to establish that Alassane had been "found" and not trained; that he was "unschooled" and "no intellectual"; "spontaneously formed at the school of life"—all tropes we find repeated and entrenched in subsequent accounts.[52] While Alassane made films of "ethnographic intent," to his French supporters he was not fully an ethnographer but a "primitive filmmaker," making films "as if for the first time."[53]

Debrix' discretionary powers at the Bureau's Paris office ranged widely, as we have seen in 2.5. There was much he could do to foster and further his vision of African cinema. He casually selected projects for funding and oversaw material provisions and technical cooperation from Paris without being held to formalised criteria or indeed any form of direct accountability. As the archive reveals, Debrix also had a hand in managing ethnographers and *coopérants* on the ground, notably in Niamey. He frequently corresponded with Rouch, closely supervised a film school run by Serge Moati (see 6.3), and in at least one documented instance, directly intervened in Alassane's ongoing work (see 6.2).[54]

Jean Rouch was similarly invested in the birth of African cinema. Even before the end of colonial rule, he had employed Africans as technicians and assistants in the making of his ethnographic films, with the express aim of forming future filmmakers. Rouch's role as teacher is sometimes overstated;[55] arguably a more substantial contribution to Nigerien cinema were the technologies, knowledges, and infrastructural apparatus he was able to

---

[48] Debrix, 10; Jean-René Debrix, "Situation du cinéma en Afrique francophone," *Afrique contemporaine: documents d'Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 81 (1975): 4.
[49] Debrix, 10. "Esprit de finesse" in the French original, which Blaise Pascal opposed to the "esprit de géométrie." This same trope was also mobilised by African critics. See D'Dée, "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire," 4.
[50] Debrix, "Le cinéma africain," 10.
[51] Debrix, "Situation du cinéma en Afrique francophone," 4.
[52] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 35.
[53] Debrix, "Situation du cinéma en Afrique francophone," 4.
[54] As I discuss in 6.2, Debrix urged Alassane to excise potentially sensitive material from *Bon voyage, Sim*.
[55] See De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 120.

mobilise through French and international contacts, notably at the Bureau du cinéma, the Musée de l'Homme, and UNESCO.[56] But it is true that Rouch encouraged African filmmakers where he could: by supporting their studies in Paris, bringing in his friend Pierre Braunberger's production company, Les Films de la Pléiade,[57] or by acting himself as producer to his protégés while also participating in their films in sundry capacities, for instance, recording the voice-over for Alassane's *Samba le grand* (see 6.5).[58] He also encouraged the training of African film technicians like Moussa Hamidou, who went to Paris with Rouch's support to study film sound and recording, and later worked with Ganda (on *Cabascabo* and *Le Wazzou polygame*) as well as on Alassane's *Le Retour d'un aventurier* (which I discuss in the following section).[59] Rouch's activities extended across Francophone West Africa, into Mali, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. He also trained filmmakers in Mozambique.[60] Here I focus on Rouch's activities in Niger and his role as the "historically incontestable initiator" he is invariably—and to this day—billed as in histories of Nigerien cinema.[61] Rouch played an important role also in technical advances that made filmmaking more feasible in Africa. He regularly corresponded with Stefan Kudelski, the designer of the Nagra sound recorder, providing feedback on tropical uses of the device which resulted in important hardware adaptations. Kudelski and Rouch also experimented with sound recording, for instance, during the shooting of *La chasse au lion a l'arc* (1957–64), when "he [Kudelski] placed on Rouch's Beaulieu camera, for the first time, a special electrical motor in order to enable synchronic recordings."[62]

Rouch had elaborated a practice of shared authorship in ethnographic research which he termed "shared anthropology." Initially, this was about watching ethnographic recordings together with informants (or even the people portrayed) in order to get feedback and corrections on his version of events and underlying assumptions. Film thus offered a chance to engage in what Rouch called a "ciné-dialogue." For Rouch, this represented a breakthrough in ethnographic methodology: Ethnological knowledge was "no longer a stolen secret, later to be consumed in the Western temples of knowledge"[63] but rather, as Jamie Berthe writes, "something that arose out of a creative and collective process, as

[56] See Bouchard, "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions," 222. According to Bouchard, Rouch's experience in Niger was financed by the Musée de l'Homme and UNESCO. There were other funders.

[57] Les Films de la Pléiade also produced films by Rouch and a number of works of the French New Wave.

[58] See Dirk Nijland, "Jean Rouch: A Builder of Bridges," in *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch,* ed. Joram ten Brink (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 32.

[59] De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 120.

[60] See Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 146; Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 29.

[61]. See, e.g., Ilbo; Kadidjatou Mounkaila, *Les films de Djingarey Maïga: portée idéologique et impact sur la société nigérienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018).

[62] Nijland, "Jean Rouch," 31.

[63] Enrico Fulchignoni, "Conversation between Jean Rouch and Professor Enrico Fulchignoni," *Visual Anthropology Review* 2, no. 3–4 (1989): 299.

part of an ongoing conversation that could be shared across cultures and over time."[64] Rouch's shared anthropology later evolved into a more speculative practice of participatory filmmaking which took the form of shared ethno-fictions, involving techniques of con-fabulation and self-fashioning. De Groof describes how

> Rouch's characters become his collaborators in the process of participatory filmmaking, next to training filmmakers and technicians, a further step towards African authorship. […] some collaborative films […] are basically the results of Rouch's recording the films that his characters wanted to make. Hamidou, Dia and Mouzourane appropriated the film and thanked 'père Rouch' for having facilitated their film. In consequence, the discrepancy between their self-expression by themselves and the self-expression attributed to them is not that clear anymore.[65]

Rouch's characters participated in this process of joint imagi(ni)ng also behind the camera, as members of his crew. Berthe again: "An important part of Rouch's practice of shared anthropology included his efforts to train the people he worked with in the technologies of film production."[66] Rouch conceived of his activities in Niamey as part of the overarching mission of "technical cooperation," whose main aim should be to "demystify technology," as Rouch explained to Dutch director Philo Bregstein, teaching Africans that technology may be "mastered."[67] His own filmmaking, working on 16mm and with only a sound recordist on his side, was such a practice of "demystification," teaching by example (as Senegalese filmmaker Moussa Bathily remembers the French ethnographer's impact) that "you didn't need a great Mitchell and massive equipment."[68]

From confabulation and participation "facilitated" by Rouch, it was, for De Groof, only a small step to "indigenous filmmaking." This much is true: Rouch's desire to put a camera in the hands of African filmmakers was an outgrowth of his anthropological method. For Rouch, African filmmaking was a "natural extension," a "logical next step" of French ethnographic filmmaking; it was necessary to "pass the baton from Africanists to African filmmakers".[69] In De Groof's retrospective account of this move, Rouch's ethnographic method by its own momentum eventually produced the necessity of "native filmmaking": The "ambiguous position of the ethnographer" produces "a need for subject-generated or indigenous film in the paradigm of ethnography."[70] Indigenous film, on this account, appears an immanent development of ethnographic film, which "ultimately

---

[64] Berthe, "Beyond the Entomological Critique," 271.
[65] De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 119.
[66] Berthe, "Beyond the Entomological Critique," 271.
[67] Quoted in the film *Jean Rouch et sa caméra au cœur de l'Afrique* (Philo Bregstein, 1977).
[68] Bathily quoted in Pierre Haffner, "Jean Rouch jugé par six cinéastes d'Afrique noire," *CinémAction*, no. 17 (1982): 68.
[69] Rouch quoted in de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien," 47–48.
[70] De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 112.

recycles indigenous film in its own paradigm."[71] However, De Groof's is not a history of subsumption or co-optation. Rather, indigenous cinema posited real "productive challenges to the assumptions of the genre of the ethnographic film," the argument goes, in support of which De Groof submits Rouch's avowal that he revised his method in response to African critics—especially Sembène's "entomological critique," which alleged that Rouch was looking at Africans "as if they were insects," and depicting living cultures as tradition without evolution. In this way, De Groof suggests, ethnographic and "indigenous" filmmaking, were forming and reforming each other, bound together in a mutual and self-reflexive developmental dynamic.

De Groof's account at times veers close to what French ethnographers and *coopérants* were telling themselves at the time. Underlining continuities between African and European filmmakers and a common "inspiration,"[72] their historical accounts emphasise cooperation, friendship, and equality. At a "Quinzaine du cinéma" organised by the Association des cinéastes nigériens in 1976,[73] works by Nigerien filmmakers were placed side by side with ethnographic films made by their "European friends."[74] Serge Moati, in much the same spirit, describes his film classes at the French-Nigerien Cultural Centre as an encounter between equals in defiance of pupil-teacher-hierarchies. And in French anthropologist Pierre Haffner's sentimental recollection, Nigerien filmmakers were "as of a same family"—the family of "uncle" [*tonton*] Rouch.[75]

In reality, the development of Nigerien cinema by French ethnographers was interested. "Indigenous" filmmaking produced objects that needed studying as well as useful data for anthropological research. In this, the positionality of the first Nigerien filmmakers resembled that of African ethnographers in the terms laid out by Paulin Hountondji: They found themselves confined to producing "raw" data for anthropological theorising (or film criticism) in the metropole.[76] Fuelled by the ethnographic desire to see "like Africans," it also fed back into ethnographic methodology. Nigerien films, furthermore, were not widely seen in Africa at time; they were channelled into, and today they are re-housed in, the same Western temples of knowledge that Rouch's practice is purported to have escaped. By offering training, material, equipment, and access to processing facilities,

---

[71] De Groof, 109.

[72] The accepted euphemism for French-made films about Africa was "films of African inspiration." Rouch insisted that the African environment "inspired" his turn to film. See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 28.

[73] The Quinzaine ran from December 17, 1975 to January 18, 1976.

[74] Ilbo, 36. The event was inaugurated by speechmaking from Nigerien officials, but also the Bureau du cinéma's Jean-René Debrix. The programme included the "quasi-totality" of Nigerien films produced until that moment, including several works by Alassane, together with those of Rouch, Moati, et al.

[75] Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 146. The only monograph on the history of Nigerien cinema, when it comes to Rouch, is one-dimensional and celebratory in tone. See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 19.

[76] See Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning*.

French ethnographic investment in Nigerien films encouraged production in small ways but left completely unresolved the problem of distribution and exhibition—conditions for the more permanent establishment of an autonomous, self-sustaining film production. While encouraging Nigeriens to "pick up a camera,"[77] Rouch neglected the reality of cinema as an infrastructural whole.

Rouch had originally arrived in French West Africa in the wake of the Second World War as a civil engineer—one of a whole army of technicians dispatched by the French to "develop" the territories of the French colonial empire. Rouch was tasked with building roads and bridges, to trace routes and communications for the transport of primary materials to the North, and connecting the administrative centres the French had created everywhere in the region to service their needs.[78] After the independences, the former engineer opposed industrial development and the modernisation of agriculture in the region.[79] In Inoussa Ousseïni's testimony, "Rouch is someone who has always been against the development of our societies to the extent that development was a phenomenon of growth, however, it is necessary to raise agricultural productivity and labour."[80] The French were invested in developing Nigerien cinema as a "primitive" practice, the complement of which was a denial—in theory and in practice—of evolution.

De Groof's reading of Rouch's *La Pyramide humaine* as a self-reflexive take on the ethnographer's own method, highlights how the man saw himself: "Conciliation between the characters of a different race […] is mediated through the process of filmmaking."[81] But the reality was quite different. Patronising attitudes prevailed towards the African members of uncle Rouch's "family," who found they were not treated fully as colleagues. While the French *coopérants* addressed each other by the polite "vous" in their correspondence and referred to each other by their last names, the Nigerien filmmakers are always simply "Moustapha" or "Oumarou."[82] While it is true, as Berthe writes, that Rouch "showed a resolute commitment to the promotion and development of post-independence African cinema," this should not blind us to the conditionality and inherent limitations of the "development aid" Rouch and other French *coopérants* provided to filmmakers in Niger and the wider region.[83] My point is not to deny Rouch's contribution to West African cinema but to insist on the real antagonisms at the heart of "native filmmaking" that these

[77] Cf. De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 116.
[78] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 28.
[79] See de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien," 52.
[80] Ousseïni quoted in Haffner, Jean Rouch jugé par six cinéastes d'Afrique noire," 74.
[81] De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn," 116.
[82] See, e.g., correspondence from Jean-René Debrix to Jean Rouch, February 13, 1967, 19930381/7, Coopération; Direction de la coopération culturelle et technique; Sous-direction actions culturelles (1952–1978), Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France.

conciliatory accounts smooth over, and which alone will put us in a position fully to appreciate the struggle of Alassane and his contemporaries from within these enduring entanglements.

In the following reading of Alassane's *Deela* aka *Conteur Albarca* (1969), made seven years after *Aouré*, I will thus highlight both the filmmaker's debt and resistance to the matrix of French ethnography. The premise of *Deela* flows from systematic fieldwork conducted by researchers at the Centre of Oral Traditions. Among the oral performances they documented and recorded were 120 tales told by Albarka Tchibaou, a celebrated Hausa storyteller from the Tahoua region.[84] Commissioned by the centre, Alassane's film stars Tchibaou himself telling the story of Deela, a beautiful peasant woman who is taken in by a prince and becomes his wife, only to betray him and have him killed in the end. A close-up of Tchibaou encircled by a crowd of listeners soon enough gives way to images seemingly conjured by his oration. While the world-making technology of cinema supplants that of the griot, on the soundtrack, Tchibaou's Hausa narration yields to a French voice-over spoken by Alassane. Yet the world of the story is never completely severed from its original mover: Alassane keeps cutting back to Tchibaou's mouth and voice, reasserting the griot's parallel agency. This double agency is also reflected in the film's two alternative titles, "Deela" referring to the tale, and "Conteur Albarca" to its teller.[85]

Not in any simple sense an "ethnographic film," *Deela* was widely seen at the time as a "new use of cinema."[86] Indeed, when Ola Balogun saw Alassane's film at a colloquium on African theatre in Niamey circa 1970, he immediately recognised in this early attempt at transposing African oral cultures onto the medium of film a model for the mutual exchange he was hoping to instigate between film and oral arts—what he called "African popular dramaturgy."[87] The question of how to achieve such an exchange without the intercession of written language was hotly debated at the time, and *Deela* was proof it could be done. Vieyra's response to the film was enthusiastic: In managing to retain "local colour" while remaining comprehensible to non-Hausa audiences, *Deela* had "solved" the problem of language.[88] And Pfaff posited the film as a model for African films trying to

---

[83] Berthe, "Beyond the Entomological Critique," 271.

[84] As noted by the Centre's director, Daoudé Laya, Tchibaou recited 120 tales, several of them with a song component, which were recorded on 28 tapes. See Dioudé Laya, "Le CELTHO/OUA et la littérature orale," *Notre librairie*, no. 107 (1991): 53.

[85] A *conteur* is a storyteller.

[86] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 33.

[87] Balogun quoted in Moncef S. Badday, "Que sera le théâtre africain? Entretien avec Ola Balogun, auteur nigerian," *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, no. 15 (1971): 58.

[88] Vieyra, "La création cinématographique en Afrique," 229.

balance the demands of "African verbal authenticity" with wider accessibility.[89] For Rouch, Alassane's "oral" kind of filmmaking achieved an immediate and unmediated form of expression "directly through the camera without written dialogue or planning [*découpage*]."[90]

While Alassane's collaboration with the storyteller Albarca (like Balogun's with the Travelling Theatre) did indeed make do without a written script, the film's relation to oral culture is much more "mediated" than Rouch, with his Rousseauian bias of oral immediacy, was willing or able to grasp. Alassane first recorded Tchibaou deliver his tale in front of a receptive audience and then used this recording as a template for the shoot, asking the griot to lip-sync to his own pre-recorded words. In this way, he thought, it would be possible to retain the richness of oral performativity without, as in Balogun's case, having to compromise filmic continuity.[91] On the other hand, the distinction Vieyra wants to draw between the conventional off-commentary of ethnographic cinema and the "integrated commentary" in *Deela* is based on a misapprehension: Vieyra slightly misremembers the film, stating that the French voice-over did not interfere with Tchibaou's Hausa.[92] In truth, and in keeping with ethnographic convention, the soundtrack of *Deela*, as that of Alassane's other films, is dominated by a French voice-over. The encounter between the griot and Alassane's camera was not quite the co-eval and mutual exchange Vieyra, Balogun and others imagined. But Alassane was fully aware of these tensions, the defining features of his practice. Far from being a direct and unmediated expression of oral performance, *Deela* rehearses and reflects on the remediation of an older cultural technique by another, more recent one. Its form is an attempt to answer the question of how to capture oral culture without subsuming it, however, by staging a conflict between languages (Hausa/French) and modes of narration (griot/cinema), Alassane also draws our attention to the unresolved antagonisms inherent in an approach that was born from the matrix of French ethnography.

---

[89] "This ingenious blend of two styles respects the African verbal authenticity of the tale and renders the film accessible to both Hausa and French-speaking audiences—a technique that undoubtedly could be successfully applied to a number of other African films." Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 5.

[90] Rouch quoted in de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien," 49.

[91] See Vieyra, "La création cinématographique en Afrique," 229. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, *Deela* was not the only time Alassane collaborated with griots and drew on the inventory of knowledges and forms of African storytelling.

[92] "At a certain point in the story, the image of the storyteller disappears; what he would continue to say is then illustrated by the director's mise-en-sène wherein the scenes are performed synchronically in Hausa." Vieyra, 228–229.

6.2 Republic of toads: "undeveloped" animation vs. state visit cinema (La Mort de Gandji, 1965 and Bon voyage, Sim!, 1966)

In the early 1960s, when Alassane was still employed as illustrator at the National Museum in Niamey, he began animating scenes of village life by hand-drawing directly onto 16mm film with coloured ink. One of these early experiments, *Le Piroguier*, shows a canoe-paddler; another, *La Pileuse de mil*, a woman pounding millet, a traditional subsistence crop in Niger. These animated works were only shown privately; they were neither sonorised nor exploited commercially.[93] In 1961, Québécois actor and filmmaker Claude Jutra visited Niamey to shoot the documentary *Le Niger, jeune république* for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). He was supported in this endeavour by the framework of French Cooperation, whose brief extended well beyond French-African relations into the global network of Francophonie. Jutra later claimed it was he, not Rouch, who first noticed Alassane's early animations and subsequently brought them to the ethnographer's attention—yet another pretender to Alassane's "discovery."[94] Impressed with Alassane's inventiveness, Jutra and Rouch together pleaded with the Canadian government to grant him a bursary for a placement at the Office national du film in Montreal (ONF), where the Canadian-Scottish filmmaker Norman McLaren was teaching animation at the time.[95] There, over the course of nine months, between 1963 and 1964, during which time Alassane was training as a lab assistant, he made his first (preserved) animated film, *La Mort de Gandji*, working mostly at night so as not to disturb the laboratory's day-to-day operations.[96] The following year, in Paris, while trying to piece together funds for his next live-action film, Alassane realised another animated short, *Bon voyage, Sim!*, to "pass the time" in his hotel room, as he would later recall.[97] Widely considered the first sub-Saharan African animation films, neither of them was made in Africa.

La Mort de Gandji is set at the court of the king of toads swarming with sycophantic courtiers. A monster lurks in the bush, but the mighty toad warrior dispatched to end its

---

[93] See Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 29. Jean-René Debrix saw these early works on a visit to Niamey.

[94] In a series of travel reports for the *Cahiers du cinéma*, Jutra claimed that he happened upon Alassane while "running after Rouch." See Claude Jutra, "En courrant derrière Rouch (III)," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 116 (1961). Pfaff, by contrast, writes that Alassane's early experiments were "noticed" by Jean Rouch. Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 2. Either way, note the pervasive passive construction which has become a familiar trope in historical accounts of Alassane's work. Such details in the historical record are significant.

[95] See Pfaff, 2.

[96] See Jean Rouch, "Le salut d'irrémédiable à Suzy Bernus," *Journal des africanistes* 62, no. 2 (1992): 21. *La Mort de Gandji* was released the following year, in 1965.

[97] See *Cinéaste du possible*.

reign of terror is gripped with fear upon beholding the creature and flees. The king, at a loss, promises his daughter to whomever will vanquish the monster, but none among his entourage will step forward. In the end, a wily praying mantis, relying on his wits rather than sheer strength, wins the day by leveraging a giant boulder to squash the enemy. Alassane's second animation film, *Bon voyage, Sim!*, recasts the toad monarchy as a newly minted republic of toads whose president, Monsieur Sim, replaces the traditional king of *La Mort de Gandji*. With a few simple strokes and in only five minutes runtime, the film pokes serious fun at post-independence elites. But it also has a more specific additional target, namely, the official, state-ordained production and projection of moving images in post-independence West Africa—what François Kodjo derided as "state visit cinema" (see 2.3).[98] Disseminated via government-commissioned newsreels (or, as in the Nigerien case, television broadcasts), state visits were among the most-documented political events in Africa after the independences. Films like *Voyage officiel du président Maga au Gabon* (1972) or *Séjour officiel de monsieur le ministre de la coopération* (ca. 1975), both by Beninois filmmaker Pascal Abikanlou, were part of a firmly established audio-visual genre. Abiding by a strict protocol, the state visit was a form of political spectacle, dramatising and celebrating African rulers as sovereign agents ready and capable to represent Africa's interests on the stage of international relations. A review of *Bon voyage, Sim!* in the Dakar newspaper *Le Soleil*, describing the film's target as "the monotonous ritual of political personalities' foreign trips," illustrates that the tropes of state visit cinema were immediately recognisable to African audiences.[99] In the following discussion of the film, I will describe Alassane's satirical strategy by comparing *Bon voyage, Sim!* to Abikanlou's *Voyage officiel*. I will make two related arguments: As animated film, *Bon voyage, Sim!* explores the complicity of mass media, especially film and television, in animating political power. As largely autonomous animation practice—what I will describe as *undeveloped animation*—it elaborates a direct challenge to the hegemony of African states in the sphere of film production. At the same time, however, as the Ministry of Cooperation's paper archive reveals, the film's production was subject to another kind of interference, that is, a personal intervention by Jean-René Debrix, which ended up blunting the finished work's political edge.

President Sim is first glimpsed sat behind his office desk, when a mailman conveys the good news: Sim has been invited on an official visit to a neighbouring toad nation. The president's drawn-out journey dwells on the logistics of transport: His itinerary is

[98] Kodjo, "Les cinéastes africains," 112.
[99] Mody Diop, "Semaine franco-africaine du cinéma: les courts metrages de 'Moseka' à 'Bambo,'" *Le Soleil*, April 17, 1978: 2.

plotted along a seemingly teleological line of incremental technological development, from the mailman's plodding bike, to the smooth car-ride that delivers Sim to the national airport, and on to the Air Afrique-operated plane that whisks him up and across the border. The spectacle of mechanised flight was a readymade allegory for state visit cinema. In *Voyage officiel*, images of president Maga and his team of advisors aboard an airborne plane are overlaid with a voice-over commending Benin's excellent relations with the UN and other international organisations.[100] The view from the cockpit, while offering a triumphant image of African leaders on the world stage, also projects a promise of national development. Rostow's classic of modernisation theory *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) popularised the aeronautical metaphor of "taking-off," as Gilbert Rist has pointed out, by "depicting the future of societies in the manner of an aeroplane that speeds to the end of a runway and climbs rapidly skyward above all earthbound obstacles."[101] At the other end of the toad president's journey, ceremonial exigencies take over, eagerly followed by a host of cameras and reporters. After a tour of important national infrastructures, Sim is invited to inaugurate a university dedicated in his name—a faceless modernist cubicle among many. To great fanfare, a contract of neighbourly cooperation is signed. Marking the end of Sim's visit, an army parade is staged in honour of the state guest. On closer inspection, however, we realise that the goose-stepping toad soldiers are going nowhere at all: They are revealed to be treading on a giant rotating barrel, hand-cranked by another, particularly unhappy-looking denizen of toad country. There is a suggestion that the newsreel cameras represent a further stage in the developmental trajectory that led from the mailman's low-tech bike to the president's high-tech aircraft; that cinema, as a technological medium of transport on a mass scale, has as much, if not more, of a role to play than tarmac roads and airplanes in connecting African peoples. At the same time, this promise is disappointed by the reality of state visit cinema. The marching soldiers are a simulacrum of power animated for the gaze of state visit cinema, the barrel's rotating mechanism echoing that of the camera (or projector). Surely, African cinema has more to offer than this joyless churning, which makes a mockery of real movement.

The sequence of events constituting the state visit as political spectacle followed a highly conventionalised protocol, from airport receptions, car cavalcades, and infrastructural sightseeing to the public signing of mutually beneficial contracts. Thus it should not surprise us that *Bon voyage, Sim!* follows almost to a tee the course of president Maga's state visit to Gabon in *Voyage officiel*. The stereotypical forms of state visit cinema are on

---

[100] Later in the film we are taken on board a helicopter.
[101] Rist, *The History of Development*, 109.

display also in other satirical films of the period. *Wasan Kara* (1980), an ethnographic sketch by Alassane's compatriot Inoussa Ousseïni, captures a popular, parodistic re-enactment of the Nigerian president's visit to Niger, complete with self-made uniforms, vacuous speech-making, and a mock car cavalcade, which the youth of Zinder, Niger's second-largest city, stage as part of an annual harvest celebration. The two down and out heroes of Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* (1973) imagine themselves as statesmen at a parade, waving to the masses from the back of a moving car. Sada Niang reads this scene as indication of a popular "parade desire,"[102] but the example of *Wasan Kara* suggests we may also think of it as a popular, carnivalesque appropriation of the state visit. Like Mambéty and Ousseïni, Alassane mimics the recognisable tropes of state visit cinema with satirical intent and stages a popular appropriation of the genre. More directly than they, he takes on the role mass media play in animating the desires of the people. *Bon voyage, Sim!* punctures the monopoly on political visibility and representation shored up by media parastatals, and it does so not only as text, on the level of representation, but also as animated form, on the level of process. As I will argue in the following, Alassane's animation method (which further distinguishes *Bon voyage, Sim!* from both Mambéty's 35mm feature film and Ousseïni's narrow-gauge ethnographic short) was carrying a message of its own.

Norman McLaren firmly believed that animation was destined to become the film language of developing countries. At the Canadian National Film Board's Montreal office, he elaborated a simple animation technique with minimal material requirements for use in parts of the world that otherwise lacked the requisite infrastructure autonomously to produce moving images.[103] Bypassing the need for a camera, McLaren's method involved directly painting onto the celluloid strip. Hence its name, "cameraless animation."[104] Described in detail in an NFB-issued instructional manual, cameraless animation was based on a simple apparatus that was easy to assemble and could be built from cheap, widely available materials.[105] McLaren's method was not only "cameraless" but also, we may add, "undeveloped," doing away with the need for film processing—a crucial ad-

---

[102] Niang, "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane."

[103] See Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 29. In the 1940s and 1950s, in hopes of spreading his method, McLaren had taken a number of postings with UNESCO, notably to India and China, to teach "the basics of animation techniques to people who had only the most basic means at their disposal." Bendazzi, "African Cinema Animation," 18.

[104] Norman McLaren, *Cameraless Animation: A Technique Developed at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal: Information & Promotion Division, National Film Board of Canada, 1958).

[105] Other than wood the only materials required were a piece of glass and a lamp or mirror, or even just "a white sheet of wide card […] to give illumination or to reflect skylight or daylight ithrough [sic] the hole." McLaren, *Cameraless Animation*, 2. Further to lower costs, McLaren suggested 35mm film could be replaced by more affordable 35mm film leader.

vantage in the Francophone West African context where access to lab facilities was mediated by either African cinema parastatals or the institutions of French foreign aid, be it Debrix' Bureau du cinéma in Paris or the agencies of French Cooperation on the ground. *Undeveloped animation* held the promise of extricating filmmakers from this double entanglement. Vincent Bouchard has asserted that Alassane's stay at the NFB in Montreal was a formative experience for the young filmmaker.[106] However, it is important to note that Alassane had independently arrived at a method similar to McLaren's even before, through the experiments he conducted while working at the National Museum in Niamey (*Le Piroguier* and *La Pileuse de mil*, see 6.1) and earlier still (I will return to this point in the concluding section of this chapter).

Though animation technique is minimal and economic both in *La Mort de Gandji* and *Bon voyage, Sim!*, only the former is wholly "cameraless," its images painted or scratched directly onto the film strip, whereas the latter is based on hand-drawings on bits of paper which Alassane filmed with a borrowed 16mm camera, developing the exposed stock in the sink of his Paris hotel room.[107] In *La Mort de Gandji*, bodies are motionless and only their limbs move. In *Bon voyage, Sim!*, figures are squiggly black line drawings gliding across mostly empty white backdrops. Both films were dubbed by Alassane himself, but while the tale of the toad kingdom is told by a voice-over narrator, the citizens of toad republic all speak with their own, pitched-up voices. Alassane's animated works, much like his ethnographic films, have been described as "primitive" by French commentators; they, too, were likened to early cinema, in this case, the "primitive" animations of Émile Cohl. What these observers registered as the primitive aspect of Alassane's undeveloped animation was really its laying-bare of the usually hidden labours of animation, betrayed by the physical limitations of the cameraless animator's main tool, his hand. Slight displacements of the line from one frame to the next render visible the labour of repetition that in analogue animation grounds every stable object, contingency enters the frame. McLaren underlined the importance of muscle memory in repeating the same (or very similar) gestures across hundreds or thousands of individual frames. He even suggested that cameraless animation might unlock alternative technical genealogies tied to culturally specific trainings of the hand. This is an intriguing notion,[108] but Alassane's practice demands we unfold it in a broader sense, taking into account not only the capacities of the hand to create but also its human limitations and failure to reproduce the smooth, seam-

---

[106] Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 219.
[107] Alassane quoted in *Cinéaste du possible*.

less motion of industrial animation. Paula Callus, in her otherwise instructive article on Alassane's animation work, is wrong to contend that "Alassane could have executed his animation films with the same precision and fluidity in motion as any Western counterpart (having been trained by Norman McLaren and Jean Rouch)," and only refrained from doing so because "this perhaps was not a priority."[109] Alassane could not have done so—and he was not trying to hide that incontrovertible fact. On the contrary: An illustration, in the credit sequence at the end of *La Mort de Gandji*, of the filmmaker himself hunched over his workbench specifically draws our attention to his manual process.

The means to make moving images, furthermore, were not simply *lacking*, as suggested by McLaren's endorsement of cameraless animation as a "poor technique," they were being *sequestered* by the state for deployment in the production of state visit cinema. In the first years immediately following the independences, state visit cinema and related forms of official moving image production constituted the largest subcategory of documentary filmmaking, soaking up available funding, technical infrastructure, and material support. In the stifling atmosphere of national film centres, propaganda imperatives and the looming threat of censure severely limited filmmakers' possibilities.[110] As we have seen in 2.3, there were serious concerns about the preponderance of these "films of commandment" which monopolised the scarce means of African cinema while contributing nothing to its democratic development.[111] The self-sufficient animation method that Alassane pioneered with *La Mort de Gandji* and *Bon voyage, Sim!*, by contrast, gave him "the freedom to say many things"[112]—not only because of his autonomy from the state but also because as cartoons, Alassane's films were considered unserious, or in any event sufficiently removed from political reality to escape closer scrutiny.[113] Alassane himself maintained that his early animations, despite the fact that both films were "transparent political fables," elicited largely favourable, if not enthusiastic, responses from Nigerien government officials, implying that had he treated the same subject matter in a live-action film, government censure would have had to be expected.[114]

---

[108] If we are willing, that is, to look past the unreconstructed Orientalism of McLaren's assertion that "in oriental hands, a brush may be even better than a pen," while "in the hands of a western artist […] the forms made with them fluctuate too uncontrollably from frame to frame." McLaren, *Cameraless Animation*, 4.
[109] Paula Callus, "Reading Animation through the Eyes of Anthropology: A Case Study of sub-Saharan African Animation," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 2 (2012): 122.
[110] Balogun can tell us a thing or two about this (see 4.1).
[111] Cheriaa, "Le cinéma africain et les 'réducteurs de têtes,'" 8.
[112] Alassane quoted in Ondego, "Sub-Saharan Africa's Father of Animation Films Speaks Out."
[113] Niang relates the films to the Italian and French comics that were a popular entertainment among West African urban youth at the time. See *African Nationalist Cinema*.
[114] Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15. See also Renee Poussaint, "African Film: The High Price of Division," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971): 55.

The reality was more complicated, however. The fact is: Alassane did anticipate political censorship and re-edited *Bon voyage, Sim!* accordingly. In an earlier version of the film, the toad president is ousted upon his return by a coup d'état and thrown into a puddle of water, where he rejoins his conspecifics. In public conversation, Alassane was guarded about the issue. Pressed to clarify his position at the UCLA's 1970 African Film Festival, as one attendee remembers, he "progressively stressed the positive aspects of state visits, e.g. good will, morale of the people, etc., and seemed to prefer that his film be accepted simply as a casual satirical experiment in the use of animated form, rather than the semi-revolutionary critique others might have wished it to be."[115] As the archive reveals, Alassane re-edited the film not of his own accord but because Debrix, worried about this much "political innuendo" in a film associated with the French Ministry of Cooperation, had urged him to—even if Debrix would later complain in a letter to Rouch that Alassane had taken the edit too far: "Moustapha, thinking he was doing right by me, toned his subject down so much that he robbed it of all bite and significance."[116] Alassane's self-declared "discoverer" is not only hypocritical here but also a poor judge of his protégé's ingenuity. Alassane's animated satire of state-controlled moving image production also and at the same time posited an alternative moving image practice. Though he caved in to political pressure by Debrix, Alassane kept struggling on screen and off to disentangle the audio-visual from its hegemonic uses. His cameraless, *undeveloped* method was a message unto itself, smuggled past state and foreign interference.

6.3 Barbaric films: Western cinema and African spectators (Le Retour d'un aventurier, 1966)

In 1966, the year Alassane made *Bon voyage, Sim!*, he was put in charge of IFAN's Section cinéma, which Rouch, believing film instrumental to ethnographic research, had instituted four years previously. IFAN had since then been subsumed by the University of Niamey and renamed Institut des recherches en sciences humaines (IRSH), finally shedding, if only in name, the institute's colonial legacy. Alassane's film department at IRSH, which he was to head for the next fifteen years, was a production unit in possession of its own equipment: two Éclair-Coutant 16mm cameras, a small quantity of film stock, Atlas editing benches, and a set of perfo-tape machines which made possible sound end mix-

---

[115] Poussaint, "African Film," 55.
[116] Correspondence from Debrix to Rouch, February 13, 1967.

ing.[117] Most importantly, IRSH offered Nigerien filmmakers the possibility of developing films locally. Rushes could be processed and consulted on the spot, circumventing entirely the onerous detour via France or Britain that filmmakers elsewhere in the region had to contend with. Financed in great part by French Cooperation, the whole production line could be serviced right there in Niamey. Under Alassane's direction and technical guidance, the film department at IRSH quickly became a central "point of encounter" for those with an interest in the audio-visual, as Inoussa Ousseïni recalls.[118] According to a French diplomat, emerging Nigerien filmmakers were given access to material and basic technical training under the direction of Rouch and Alassane, but in Ousseïni's telling the film department's central pedagogic agency at the time rested with the technician Alassane, not the ethnographer Rouch.[119]

Another important pedagogic agency involved in the birth of Nigerien cinema was an impromptu film school, the "caméra-club," run by cadres of French Cooperation at the French-Nigerien Cultural Centre under the direction of the French author and filmmaker Serge Moati.[120] Then in his early twenties, Moati had been drafted as part of his military service into producing "development films" [*films de développement*] on behest of the Ministry of Cooperation, which were screened on Nigerien educational television and the ethnographic circuit. In Niamey, he met a group of Nigerien secondary school pupils, among them Inoussa Ousseïni, who hosted a regular film club and expressed interest in receiving further training.[121] Moati wrote to Debrix at the Bureau du cinéma to propose the establishment of a film school; Debrix agreed. The only African film school at the time,[122] it was attended, among others, by Oumarou Ganda—the other major "primitive" artist of African cinema. Moati's school officially pursued a double objective: to create a space for the screening and discussion of films, thereby providing an "initiation to the art of photography and cinema, their history, their genres, their authors," but also to offer basic practical training alongside access to basic equipment.[123] The film school offered three parallel courses: "cinematography," supervised by cinematographer Gérard de Batista, "sound engineering" under Gérard Delassus, and "directing" under Moati. All three

---

[117] The Éclair-Coutant was a 16mm camera named after its inventor, André Coutant, which in the Anglophone world went by "Éclair NPR" (for "Noiseless Portable Reflex"). For details on the equipment available at IRSH, see Nijland, "Jean Rouch," 31–32.
[118] Ousseïni quoted in *Cinéaste du Possible*.
[119] The diplomat is quoted in Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 219. See also Djingarey Maïga's testimony quoted in Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," 18.
[120] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 29–30.
[121] Such cine-clubs were an important alternative to the commercial film circuit. In 1967, D'Dée estimated that there were 150 cine-clubs in Francophone West Africa. See D'Dée, "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire," 34.
[122] According to Rouch, quoted in de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien," 49.
[123] See Bouchard, "African Documentaries," 219.

had been hired by the Ministry of Cooperation. Their salaries were paid by the French private-public joint venture CAI (see 2.5).

According to Moati, teaching at the caméra-club was informal and non-hierarchical. As all participants were roughly the same age (in their early twenties) and all had the "same experience," their relationship was not that of teachers and pupils.[124] Rather, they were "like brothers," watching and discussing films together, freely sharing scripts and ideas; the classes were more like "exchanges" in an informal atmosphere.[125] In this version of events, the French mainly provided technical training and refrained from interference in the conception of Nigerien films. However, some of the aspiring Nigerien filmmakers who attended the school had a different view. They complained that their main activity was to assist Moati in the making of his own development films. As the archive reveals, the caméra-club's remit was limited by design. In a letter dated February 13, 1967, Debrix impressed on Moati that the training provided by the school should deliberately be kept narrow: "We have to absolutely avoid making them believe that we will make professionals out of them. It is desirable to arouse among them the vocation to become filmmakers, but only in very small numbers."[126] Debrix also made it clear that his support of the project was conditional on the school's usefulness as a platform for the production of documentaries directed by *coopérants*. Whatever Moati's intentions, this was to be his school's actual accomplishment: With the aid by their students—Ousseïni, Ganda, and others—Moati and his fellow *coopérants* realised many more films during the school's life span than any of their Nigerien "brothers." The line-up of the 1975 Quinzaine of French and Nigerien films (mentioned in 6.1) provides a rough estimate: In the programme, which claimed to present the entirety of Nigerien film production up until that year alongside selected works by the "European friends," French-directed ethnographic and development films outnumbered Nigerien films by a factor of two.

While Moati and his team benefitted from the manpower made available through the caméra-club, they were undeniably concerned with fostering a "cinema culture" and contributed, albeit in small ways, to the dissemination and discussion of Nigerien cinema in Niger, for instance, by staging an exhibition at the National Museum in Niamey. For all its limitations, Moati's film school at the French-Nigerien Cultural Centre was a central node in the network that enabled the birth of Nigerien cinema. Together with Alassane's film department at IRSH, it provided a form of informal training, hatching the first films

---

[124] Moati quoted in de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien," 49.
[125] Moati quoted in *Cinéaste du possible*.

of such seminal figures as Ganda, Ousseïni, or Djingarey Maïga, and later Mariama Hima, as well as technicians and even a number of actors. Nigerien filmmakers received the interested, compromised, and limited education on offer by ethnographers and *coopérants*, but they also taught each other. Assisting in the making of Rouch's ethnographic works and Moati's "development" films, they learnt by doing. But they also resisted these lessons and developed their own pedagogies. The notion purveyed by Debrix and others, that Alassane, Ganda, and their fellow Nigerien filmmakers were "without schooling" is manifestly absurd, and so is the common assertion that Nigerien cinema was the individual work of exceptional talents.[127] What the experiences of Alassane at IRSH and Moati at the CCFN reveal is the conflictual collective that spawned Nigerien cinema encompassing both Nigerien and French actors on the ground. There were frictions, as I have shown, among Nigerien students and French teachers, but there were tensions also between Alassane "on his throne" at IRSH (Ousseïni) and other Nigerien filmmakers, in particular Ganda, whose debut film, the magisterial *Cabascabo*, was produced there.[128]

This was the ferment from which emerged *Le Retour d'un aventurier* (*Return of the Adventurer*, 1966), a fictional live-action short co-produced by IRSH and CAI, which Alassane realised together with a group of his close friends—many of whom later became important figures of Nigerien cinema. A satirical paraphrase of the Western genre, *Le Retour* is said to have borrowed also from Alassane's "teacher" Jean Rouch. As per the French ethnographer's method of shared anthropology, Alassane invited his friends actively to co-create the film by imagining and enacting versions of themselves as cowboys in front of his camera. Alassane's stated aim was to "record the comportment of the era," with the "Western" standing in for a range of contemporary anxieties around changing morals and the dangers of Westernisation.[129] *Le Retour* was the first African film to solicit a broad response from African critics:[130] While the popular press was enthusiastic, more politicised pundits found the film's immersion in the Western genre and its Rouchian influence deeply suspect. Indeed, it is likely that *Le Retour* was chief among the reasons that led to what Debrix, in a letter to Rouch, called Alassane's temporary "ostracism" among his Nigerien (and African) peers.[131] In the following discussion, I first contextualise the film in relation to the Western and then reconstruct its production history to de-

[126] Correspondence from Jean-René Debrix to Serge Moati, February 13, 1967, 19930381/14, Coopération; Direction de la coopération culturelle et technique; Sous-direction actions culturelles (1952–1978), Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France.
[127] Moati quoted in *Cinéaste du possible*.
[128] See Nijland, "Jean Rouch," 33.
[129] Alassane quoted in the television segment *Entrevista Mustapha Alassane* on áFrica TV, accessed November 26, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xDA_VNlbQg.
[130] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 31.

scribe how Alassane appropriated Rouch's method. In so doing, I will arrive at a different reading of the film: Defending Alassane against his African critics, I will characterise *Le Retour* as a film about the really existing African cinema culture that was thriving quite apart from the efforts of African filmmakers, and which was centrally animated by the "barbaric" foreign films invading African screens at the time. In making *Le Retour*, Alassane sought to inhabit the compromised and denigrated position of the African spectator of Western cinema.

<div align="center">⁎⁎</div>

In the film's opening shot, an Air Afrique plane touches down on the tarmac and out steps Jimi, one of the many returnees of early African cinema, except that this "adventurer"—as the stereotype came to be known[132]—is returning not from France or Europe but the United States of America. Reversing the direction of travel in *Bon voyage, Sim!*, a bush taxi takes Jimi from the airport back to his home village, where he is eagerly awaited by a group of childhood friends. The returning adventurer's suitcase springs open to reveal a cornucopia of Western props—colts, boots, and Stetson hats—which Jimi is now handing out to his friends like a director preparing for a film shoot. Starring in a Western movie of their own making, the village youth are given new names: "John Kelly," "Casse-Tout" (Break-Everything), "Black Cooper," "Billy Walter," and "la Reine Christine" (Queen Christine). Playfully at first they train their guns, together with the gestures and demeanour their new roles require. Feeling their way into the cowboy dress and style, they ride after a herd of giraffes, start a drunken bar brawl, and clash with the village elders. Soon rifts appear among the rebel youth and what began as merry posing spirals out of control as they turn against each other. In the end, after half of the gang is killed in a shoot-out, the survivors of this internecine violence return to the village fold, the wisdom of the ancients seeming to prevail over the youths' dangerous Western games.

Or is it? While the communal ethics of the village are reinstated in the end, Alassane does not in fact take sides. The momentum the cowboys bring into the world may end in disaster, but before the get their comeuppance, *Le Retour* revels in their sense of freedom,

---

[131] Correspondence from Debrix to Rouch, February 13, 1967.

[132] On the figure of the "adventurer" (*aventurier*) in post-independence West Africa, who is always also a returnee, see Sylvie Bredeloup, "L'aventurier, une figure de la migration africaine," *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, no. 125 (2008). There is an abundance of African films about returns that are often difficult and sometimes traumatic. Alongside Balogun's *Alpha* (see 4.1) and Hondo's *Balade aux sources*, there are Momar Thiam's *Sarzan* (Senegal, 1962), Ababacar Samb-Makharam's *Et la neige n'était plus* (Senegal, 1965), Timité Bassori's *La Femme au couteau* (Côte d'Ivoire, 1968/69), Oumarou Ganda's *Cabascabo*

which it contrasts to the village elders' immobility.[133] On the soundtrack, a catchy Western ballad written by Amelon Enos serenades Jimi and his fellow adventurers. Alassane's friends are clearly enjoying themselves, and he watches them with a sympathetic eye, taking part in their enjoyment and inviting the viewer to do the same. The film's last shot, when the cowboys are all either dead or back under the sway of traditional authority, belongs to a stolen horse which got embroiled in their cowboy antics. A wistful voice-over spoken by Alassane himself suggests that the animal may be mourning the sudden loss of movement: "Never have our horsemen given you this much emotion!" This assessment of *Le Retour* in a 1967 issue of *L'Afrique actuelle* gives a good sense of the film's moral complexity:

> The film parodies the bad Westerns that abound on African screens, makes a severe critique of the intoxication they make youth suffer, shows that traditional life is incapable of satisfying young people's hunger for life, as well as showing the vulnerability of the adult community who, retreating into tradition, are incapable of reacting constructively.[134]

The reviewer recognises the potentially damaging influence of the Western but rates the film as a response to the elders' selfish disregard for the problems of the young. He is taken with the sense of freedom elicited by the youths' play and affirms their ability to organise "in autonomous societies living at the margins of their elders' collectivity."[135] *Le Retour*, as this last line intimates, may also be read as a film about the emergence of West African youth culture. Many African critics confessed to being taken with and even swept away by the cowboys' movement—arguably a central attraction of the Western genre as a whole.[136] They recognised the parody but at the same time felt compelled by it. As Aly Kheury Ndaw admitted, writing in the Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil*: "We have all of us gone through this [phase], like Moustapha Alassane's hero."[137] Others—Sada Niang polemically calls them the "FEPACI ideologues"—were up in arms against what they saw as the film's "mimicry" [*mimétisme*], "cultural confusion," and "espousal of foreign values," while Oumarou Ganda called the idea of an African Western "unbearable."[138] To

---

(Niger, 1969), Djibril Kouyaté' *Retour de Tiéman* (Mali, 1970), Daniel Sanou Kollo's *Paweogo* (*Le Retour au village*, Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, 1981), and many others.

[133] Jacques Binet has also made this observation. See Binet, "Cinéma africain," 29.

[134] *L'Afrique actuelle*, February 1967, quoted in Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 32.

[135] Ibid.

[136] See, e.g., Amadou Diado, "Maiga Djingarey, premier cowboy africain dans 'Le Retour d'un aventurier,'" *L'Afrique actuelle: premier mensuel bilingue de l'Afrique Francophone et Anglophone*, no. 16 (1967): 29.

[137] Aly Kheury Ndaw, "Rétrospective du cinéma africain et arabe," *Le Soleil*, November 13, 1979: 2.

[138] Ganda, "Menaces sur le cinéma nigérien," 30.

these critics, Alassane's position with regard to the events depicted in the film was infuriatingly ambiguous.

It is worth considering in some detail the stakes of this critical debate. As the most widely seen film genre in post-independence West Africa, the Western was the site of intense anxieties around the susceptibility of African spectators to Western cinemas. Many believed Westerns were indoctrinating and intoxicating the African masses; for Kwame Nkrumah, the genre was a formidable weapon in the arsenal of neo-colonialism:

> One has only to listen to the cheers of an African audience as Hollywood's heroes slaughter red Indians or Asiatics to understand the effectiveness of this weapon. For, in the developing continents, where the colonialist heritage has left a vast majority still illiterate, even the smallest child gets the message contained in the blood and thunder stories emanating from California.[139]

Not only were African audiences prevented from *recognising* themselves on Africa's cinema screens, the argument went, worse still, they *misrecognised* themselves in a genre that actively othered non-white, non-Western peoples and sang the virtues of a rugged individualism. The mechanism of this misrecognition was variously theorised as "mimicry" [*mimétisme*] or "cultural alienation."[140] African youth especially were deemed at risk: Preceding the above-mentioned review of *Le Retour* in *Afrique actuelle* was an exposé of "cinema and young people" opening with the lines: "The city is full of traps. On the streets, cinemas lie in wait."[141] And the Western was the biggest trap of all: "In the great noise of a stampede, cinema intoxicates the young spectator hungry for images; it ropes the money-filled till with a lasso and […] carries it off to the all-powerful president-director-general pulling the strings from his air-conditioned office."[142] Vieyra, for his part, noted with great concern the negative influence of Westerns, police, and adventure films, which he thought most severe among the marginal populations of urban slums and faubourgs "uprooted" from their socio-cultural context and thrown into a state of "material, moral and affective disintegration."[143] This, he contended, made them particularly susceptible to the new values proposed to them by Western films, which therefore were able to spread among the African masses "mental habits at odds with what would be desirable for developing nations."[144] Such fears led Vieyra and other more politicised African filmmakers and critics to reject cinema as it really existed in Africa—in contrast to "Afri-

---

[139] Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism*, 246.
[140] Gabriel, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films," 36.
[141] D'Dée, "Le cinéma et les jeunes," *L'Afrique actuelle: premier mensuel bilingue de l'Afrique Francophone et Anglophone*, no. 16 (1967): 27.
[142] D'Dée, "Le cinéma et les jeunes," 27.
[143] Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 242.
[144] Vieyra, 242.

can cinema," which only sporadically found its way into commercial movie theatres. The popular cinema culture forming around foreign genre fare was likewise treated with disdain, as a bad object, or dismissed as no culture at all. African audiences supposedly lacking in culture and without consciousness of cinema's aesthetic effects, were considered unprepared for the appreciation of film and unprotected against the medium's powerful impressions. Because these audiences failed to understand that the images and sounds on the screen were technically produced, it was often suggested, they might even mistake the moving image for reality: "The divergence between the imaginary and the real," Vieyra asserted, "is not at all understood."[145] As testified by Nigerian critic Nii Osundare's remarks on the "gangsterism" of American Westerns, which "spilled over into real life as street gangs tried to 'live out' some of the violent experiences gained from the movies,"[146] the Western was blurring the line between fiction and reality like no other genre.

African audiences may have "misrecognised" themselves in Western films, as the FEPACI ideologues would have it, but part of the genre's popularity, as even Vieyra had to concede, lay precisely in how easily it was understood and "remembered"; in the fact that its simple, gestural stories were "accessible to a public which generally did not speak the film's language."[147] And though Westerns may have propagated forms of "false consciousness," African popular audiences perfectly recognised the genre's violence for what it was, indeed, it was perceived to be part of a wider genre of "films of violence" comprising a range of other B-genres, notably peplums and "adventure films." In the popular quarters of Bamako, this popular genre also went by the portmanteau of "films barbares": *barbaric films*.[148] The French anthropologist and film critic Pierre Haffner, in his 1978 study of cinema spectatorship in Bamako, insisted that even if "African cinema" did not exist, cinema did exist "in Africa," including an "ethic of the African spectator," comprising "attitudes, reactions, tastes, manners of perceiving the cinematographic spectacle," which, he argued, should be taken seriously on its own terms.[149] Haffner made much of the spontaneous appropriation of cinema by African audiences and took seriously their views. He fervently defended Africa's really existing cinema culture against its (African) detractors. Where liberationist critics saw only mimicry, Haffner insisted on the specta-

---

[145] Vieyra quoted in Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*, 45.
[146] Osundare, "A Grand Escape Into Metaphysics," 827. And Adegboyega Arulogun recounts: "In the late fifties, Ekotodo, a cinema house in Ibadan was infested with young men dressed in jeans and hats with scarves tied around their necks like the cowboys in American Western films […]. How did these men come about their dresses and occasional pranks? It was through the influence of films shown in theatres in Lagos and Ibadan. In fact, Ekotodo soon became a den of robbers, street fighters and rascals." Arulogun, "The Role of Film in Cultural Identity," 29.
[147] Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 241.
[148] See Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*.
[149] Haffner, 29.

tors' agency. Against those who would deny the capacity of African audiences to make their own judgements, he held onto the idea of some irreducible "freedom" opposite the experience, even as he acknowledged the "conditioning" wrought by Western cinema.[150]

There can be no doubt that the Western's omnipresence in West Africa was an imposition. African governments had little to no say in what was being shown on African screens, and neither had private exhibitors who operated outside foreign-owned cinema chains, for they too relied on foreign distributors for provisioning. There can be no doubt either, however, about the Western's immense popularity among African audiences, nor the pervasive influence it exerted over ways of self-fashioning, particularly among urban youth. "At the end of the school day in popular districts of Dakar, Bamako or Abidjan," writes Sada Niang, "the spectacle of school children playing cowboys and Indians was a familiar sight."[151] Okome remembers youth in the Nigerian town of his upbringing donning street names like "John Wayne," "Texas," or "Django," adding that "so pervasive was the influence of film on the local people that names, modes of dress, and general physical comportment approximated heroic deeds and actions of imported movies."[152] The anthropologist trying to reconstruct after the fact "imaginative processes of identification that originate 'below,'"[153] would describe these activities as forms of self-fashioning. As Brian Larkin puts it, "these moments of borrowing are the choices individuals and cultures […] make out of the range of mass-mediated cultural goods available to them in order to make those cultural goods do symbolic work locally."[154] Haffner, for reasons internal to his anthropological method, was compelled to argue that the foreign films flooding African screens existed "for the spectator, and equally due to them," and that films attracting such huge crowds should be interrogated as ethnological sources for a better comprehension of African (especially urban) cultures.[155] Taking this argument one step further, Haffner even proposed that the programming of West African cinemas rested on the "more or less clear understanding of the spectators more or less real needs."[156] Opposing the liberationists' ideological purism, he argued that an authentic African cinema will have to be founded on really existing cinema culture; on how cinema had actually

---

[150] "I have analyzed and nuanced this conditioning enough to believe, even today, in a freedom of judgment, in a sort of detachment from consumed objects, which makes this third cinema quite possible." Haffner, 82.

[151] Niang, *African Nationalist Cinema*.

[152] Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria," 53.

[153] Lily Saint, "'You Kiss in Westerns': Cultural Translation in Moustapha Alassane's Le retour d'un aventurier," *Journal of African Cinemas* 5, no. 2 (2013): 205.

[154] Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media," in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media,* ed. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 172.

[155] Haffner, *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*, 27.

[156] Haffner, 28.

been "received" in Africa, together with "cars, tarmac, and factories."[157] The liberationist language of "alienation," "misrecognition," and "mimicry" misses something of the complex negotiations on this stage, but so does Haffner's anthropological agnosticism vis-à-vis the foreign domination of African screens, and his endorsement of the African spectator's "freedom." Neither of these diametrically opposed perspectives, moreover, seems to allow for the possibility that so-called "pre-modern" and "pre-cinematic" cultures may impart their own preparations for the cinema. Both, in other words, remained invested in the figure of the "primitive spectator," which Haffner (unironically) defined as "he who, without any preparation, sees a cinematographic projection for the first time."[158] (They are a close relative of the "primitive filmmaker," who makes us see "as if for the first time"; see 6.1) In the remainder of this section, which reconstructs the making of *Le Retour*, I will show that the ambiguity of the film which so divided its critics was a result of Alassane's resistance to both liberationist and anthropological pedagogies. Eschewing this false alternative, I will argue, Alassane consistently took the side of the African spectator.

Jimi, the returning adventurer who sets the cowboys in motion, was played by the future filmmaker Djingarey Maïga, who was then working various menial jobs including as a meter reader for the state electricity company Nigelec.[159] A 1967 portrait of the actor in *L'Afrique actuelle* celebrating him as "the first African cowboy," noted that the first film Maïga had seen in the cinema had been a Western, George Marshall's *The Sheepman* (USA, 1958). As Maïga recalled in the interview, he had strongly identified with Glenn Ford, the star of the film.[160] Zalika Souley, who plays la Reine Christine, was working as a salesgirl at the shopping mall Galerie du Niger in Niamey. Her first cinematic encounter was with an Italian peplum, *Ursus nella valle dei leoni* (*Valley of the Lions*, Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, Italy, 1962). Seeing the film as a young girl instilled in Souley a desire to be dressed and coiffed like the film's heroine—and "to take her place," as she later recalled.[161] Souley's role in *Le Retour*—the first on-screen appearance of possibly the most famous West African actress of her generation—for the first time gave her the opportunity to dress "like whites." Another cast member attempted to straighten his hair in preparation for the shoot. According to Boubakar Souna, a projectionist at the Maison de l'Information in Niamey who played Casse-Tout in the film and would sometimes also operate the camera, the entire crew shared Maïga and Souley's love of cinema, and of the

---

[157] Haffner, 29.
[158] Haffner, 29.
[159] For more on Maïga's directorial work, see Mounkaila, *Les films de Djingarey Maïga*.
[160] Maïga quoted in Diado, "Maiga Djingarey, premier cowboy africain," 29.

Western in particular.[162] To "be like" and "take the place of" is not merely to identify but also to assume power. Souley's desire to be and dress like the actors in foreign films was not simply "mimicry" but fuelled by a fantasy of empowerment. "It's always the whites who win, it's always they who dominate," explains Souna. "We wanted to be like them."[163]

Le Retour was shot in a mere fifteen days, in a collective effort that involved not only Alassane and his friends but an entire village community. Unlike their more reticent on-screen characters, all the villagers agreed to participate in this Western of their shared imagination.[164] They not only acted as themselves in the film but also helped make the splendid Western costumes. However, there also was resistance to the film shoot. Making a film, and a Western to boot, was to put on airs and adopt strange behaviours. The act of filmmaking, in other words, was in itself a backdoor to the introduction of Western ways and values. Souley's parents were concerned about their daughter's reputation and violently opposed her acting in Alassane's film, beating her frequently. And Ibrahim Yacouba would be scolded by his father when he had not returned home from the shoot by 6pm.[165] There was resistance also among Alassane's friends who, however much they may have desired to "be like" cowboys, would refuse those of his directions which they felt conflicted with their moral sensibilities. Maïga understood full well that the situation required it, but it just seemed wrong for the "first African cowboy" to be seen kissing, or being kissed by, Souley. There was, by the actors' own account, a great deal of confusion as to the efficacy of their play-acting in the real world. This does not mean they could not distinguish fiction from reality.[166] Rather, fictional world-making, by opposing the adventurers to their families and disrupting their "traditional," communal or religious, morality, really did interfere in their social reality. The irruption of Western moral norms into a communal world—the film's subject—was a dimension also of its making.

Now is the time to respond to the second objection of Alassane's critics: the perceived proximity of *Le Retour* to Rouchian method, itself predicated on a blurring of reality and fiction. Critics of the film saw a danger in this whole procedure, whereby the friends imagined themselves as cowboys in a Western. In Vieyra's description, the collective enact-

---

[161] Souley quoted in *Al'lèèsi: une actrice africaine* (Ramatou Keïta, 2003).

[162] The remaining cast members were Ibrahim Yacouba, Abdou Nani, and Moussa Harouna. They worked as chauffeur, mechanic, and mason respectively.

[163] Souna quoted in *Al'lèèsi*.

[164] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 140. See also Jacques Rivette, "Le retour d'un aventurier," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 176 (1966): 11.

[165] Detail gleaned from Serge Moati's making-of, *Les Cow-boys sont noirs* (France/Niger, 1966).

[166] "We thought that people who kissed in the movies were actually in love," Souley recounts; Souna seconds: "If someone was shot in a movie, people thought they were dead. We thought it was real." Quoted in *Al'lèèsi*.

ment in the film comes to resemble a modern possession ritual—much like the Hauka rit-
ual depicted in Rouch's controversial *Les maîtres fous* (France, 1955). On this view,
which denies the friends' agency, it was not they who "animated" the Western props
through their play-acting. Rather, the props animated them, producing new behaviours
that ran afoul of communal morals or, in Vieyra's version of that argument, the civil eth-
ics that would befit a developing nation. But the actors were not possessed. As we have
seen, they both actively conjured their "mimetic" desire (to make a movie) and variously
resisted it.[167] Nor, however, were they completely free. *Le Retour* conceives of the impact
of the Western—and of Western culture in general—not as something that is simply suf-
fered, passively received by a "primitive spectator" who comes to the movies unprepared.
Though Western commodities were undeniably an imposition, their consumption re-
mained an active experience. Spectatorship involved the audience, their bodies, and their
living cultures. But while *Le Retour* makes *actors* of spectators, Vieyra's unease is not so
easily dismissed. Though the film is a collective con-fabulation, departing from the par-
ticipants' active self-imagination, it also, centrally, features forces outside their control.
Alassane himself remembered being swept away by the adventurers' movement during
the making of the film. The "Rouchian" method of *Le Retour* made this ambiguous in-
stance of animation all the more troubling.[168]

Frantz Fanon famously theorised the "muscle tension" he encountered among his Al-
gerian patients during the War of Independence (1954–1962), which included a range of
symptoms from bodily spasms to neurotic inhibitions, as the bodily return of the sup-
pressed social antagonism between colonisers and colonised. The post-colonial forces
that, epitomised in the Western, animate Alassane's adventurers, by contrast, are not re-
tentive but productive of movement, however, they also capture and channel what they
produce. The handling of colts by the village youth is a perfect example of this: Training
her guns in front of a mirror, La Reine Christine enters the murky realm of the body and
its habitus, beyond consciousness and will, where the lines between coercion and consent,
external impositions and internal impulse are blurred. What is this strange movement, if
neither "freedom" (Haffner) nor "possession" (Vieyra)? I find intriguing Amadou Diado's
suggestion, in his contemporaneous review of the film for *Afrique actuelle*, that the youth
are not only on the move (against their elders) but also moved themselves, with Jimi, the
bearer of Western gifts, as the group's "animator" [*animateur*].[169] Following Diado's lead,
I want to suggest that *Le Retour* renders the relationship of African spectators to Western

---

[167] The Hauka movement, too, has since been reappraised as a form of anti-colonial resistance.
[168] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 140.
[169] Diado, "Maiga Djingarey, premier cowboy africain," 29.

cinemas as an instance of "animation." Sympathetically attuned to the adventurers' desires of power and movement, *Le Retour* immerses itself in the bodily impulses and trainings of the African spectator. The friends' bodies become a playing field of competing forces and agencies. The movement is real: The camera is part of the game, swept away by the group dynamic. The film's realisation, as Hennebelle writes, was "assuredly awkward," but this was not, as some Western observers seemed to suggest, a failed attempt to recreate the look and feel of a Western.[170] Instead, we should think of the film's awkwardness as part of its method: It is an inscription of the conflicts unleashed in its making. Throughout the ensuing mayhem, self-reflexive overtones prevail. The *shoot-out* at the end of the film is at one and the same time a *film shoot*. Alassane himself later reassured us it had all been "just a game."[171] Lily Saint has suggested that Alassane resolved the contradiction of modernity and tradition by adopting an "ironic position" vis-à-vis both the village youth and the village elders.[172] But *Le Retour* never distances us from these groups' respective concerns. The film inhabits their world, but playfully. Declining both the anthropologist's "freedom" and the liberationist discourse of "intoxication," *Le Retour* opts for a collective process of animation balancing the active moment of play and self-imagination—including resistances to the game—with a frank acknowledgement of the Western's powers of animation. Caught between individualism and communal morality, Jimi's adventurers are animated by Western "gifts" which mobilise them while also confining their movement. Ousseïni has suggested an allegorical reading of this dynamic as a prophetic critique of post-colonial elites, the shoot-out anticipating the internecine struggles that beset the leadership of African nations in the post-colonial period.[173] But we may more immediately think of it as an allegory of Nigerien cinema itself: The situation of the characters in the film, constrained by that which animates them, mirrors the conflicted relationship of Nigerien filmmakers with the gift of film and its French donors.

6.4 Changing morals (F.V.V.A., 1972 and Toula, 1974)

In 1972, Alassane became the first West African filmmaker to assemble a pan-African co-production.[174] He wanted his next project to be a full-length, fiction feature film in a real-

---

[170] Hennebelle, "Le cinéma nigérien," 236. Hennebelle and Ruelle contended that it was a lack of means which impaired the film's "power of evocation." Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 14.
[171] Alassane quoted in *Entrevista*.
[172] Saint, "You Kiss in Westerns," 207. Alassane himself always insisted that *Le Retour* was not a Western proper but a parody of the genre.
[173] Ousseïni quoted in *Cinéaste du possible*.
[174] See Alain, "F.V.V.A.," 48.

ist vein,[175] but the ethnographic framework of Nigerien cinema impeded long-form and fictional filmmaking. Neither did Alassane manage to secure state funding, which was dispensed irregularly on an individual and informal basis as a form of patronage.[176] To break this deadlock, Alassane successfully strategised to leverage government support from neighbouring Upper Volta, persuading his own government to provide match funding. He also relied on material and technical support at the film department at IRSH of which he was still in charge, and by Debrix' Bureau du cinéma.[177] Shot in twenty days on a budget of F80,000, *F.V.V.A.* premiered at the third edition of FESPACO, where it won the OCAM prize for best feature-length film.[178] Alassane used the prize money, CFA1.5 million, to re-record and post-sync the film's initially inaudible dialogue.[179]

"F.V.V.A.," the film's title, is short for "femmes, voiture, villas, argent" (wives, car, villas, money): a common expression in post-independence Niger encapsulating then prevalent conceptions of worldly success.[180] A young man, again played by Djingarey Maïga, *Le Retour's* returning adventurer, pursues this elusive dream of wealth and a modern life but is driven into corruption by his unattainable ambitions and finally lands in jail. All of Alassane's films are concerned with morality but none is as straightforwardly a "moral tale" as *F.V.V.A.*, teaching us by example about the lure of commodity culture and the ills of corruption. Alassane was moved to tell this story, as he said, because "certain abuses had appeared" in Nigerien public life since independence[181]—all of them under the aegis of the ruling Nigerien Progressive Party (PPN), the sole legal party of the First Republic (1960–1974). The more critical outlook of *F.V.V.A.* was also a response to the battering Alassane had taken for *Le Retour* and the ostracism he suffered as a consequence. Placing his practice in the context of the pan-African struggle for "mental and cultural liberation," Alassane consciously adopted the language of FEPACI,[182] and retrospectively downplayed the ambiguity of *Le Retour*, presenting it as a simple "ethnography of mimicry."[183] With *F.V.V.A.*, Alassane sought to redeem himself in the eyes of his

---

[175] It was his second feature film, in fact: In 1969, Alassane had made *Les contrebandiers* with support of Nigerien television, which however proved a one-off opportunity.

[176] Maïga quoted in Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," 19.

[177] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 33. Ilbo states that Alassane was aided by the French Ministry of Cooperation; I here make the assumption that this was by way of Debrix' office.

[178] Alassane is quoted giving this figure in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 17.

[179] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 143.

[180] See Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.

[181] Alassane quoted in Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 32.

[182] Personal communication quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 3.

[183] Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15. In Pfaff's retrospective account, "Alassane denounces the cultural alienation and adverse mimetism present among certain African youth engaged in a steady diet of cowboy movies." Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 5.

detractors, who doubted his political commitments and excluded him from the community of "engaged" filmmakers.[184]

Alassane, in other words, was trying to make a film by Sembène, yet the film he actually made remains at a remove from the militant "mainstream" of sub-Saharan African cinema at the time. Underneath the stark messaging of *F.V.V.A.* against corruption and overconsumption, or running alongside it, we again encounter that characteristic ambiguity, which again riled Alassane's more militant critics. Though the film was well received by general audiences,[185] or perhaps because of it, the left critical establishment of African cinema remained thoroughly unconvinced. For Tunisian filmmaker and critic Férid Boughedir, a "FEPACI ideologue" if ever there was one, *F.V.V.A.* was exemplary of what he unfavourably termed the "moralist tendency" in African cinema.[186] Boughedir accused Alassane of the same thing for which Balogun was reproached by his critics: to moralise without offering a systematic political analysis, and to give magical explanations for modern world problems, which obscured the real issues while fostering retrograde attitudes: "Confronted with neo-colonial aggression, Alassane has no other solution to offer than to cling onto medieval traditional structures."[187] In the following discussion of *F.V.V.A.*, and continuing into my discussion of Alassane's next feature film, *Toula*, contra Boughedir's one-sided condemnation of Alassane's moralist tendencies, I will assert a more complex view.

In the attempt to outperform Sembène, *F.V.V.A.* attacks many targets all at the same time, enumerated by Pfaff as "uncritical acculturation and arrivism, the presumptuousness of Africa's new establishment, arranged marriages, the exploitative power of money marabouts, the abuses of family solidarity, and the alleged disloyalty of modern African women."[188] Yet despite this long and exhaustive list of social ills, Alassane does not denounce anyone or their world view—except, unfortunately, "modern" African women. When the protagonist's rural family pay him a visit in Niamey, making what in their world are customary demands but in the city puts a strain on their son's limited means, Alassane does not reproach the parents.[189] When the young man has recourse to the services of a marabout in hopes of gaining money and success, there is no question that the marabout is crooked, but it remains ambiguous whether or not his magic was effective. As Boughedir noted with some dismay, "in debates after the film some spectators have

---

184 See Alain, "F.V.V.A.," 48.
185 See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 33.
186 Férid Boughedir, *Le cinéma africain de A à Z* (Brussels: OCIC, 1987), 75–86.
187 Boughedir, *Le cinéma africain de A à Z*, 83.
188 Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 6.

declared that he [the marabout] may have provoked the hero's success […] the better to fleece him afterwards."[190] Djingarey Maïga, the film's lead, confessed to have "some" belief in maraboutage.[191] Did Alassane too believe in the marabout's supernatural powers? *F.V.V.A.* was Alassane's attempt to make a film by Sembène, but to critics like Boughedir, the difference between their respective modes of moralism was obvious. While nobody would have thought to question Sembène's stance on maraboutage, Alassane liked to keep people guessing.[192] Boughedir took issue with what he perceived as Alassane's lack of distance—the proximity of his film to a popular moral imagination. But this ambiguity was not a defect of Alassane's moralism but its central feature. As Pfaff has noted, Alassane firmly believed in the "didactic function of film and its capacity to initiate social change";[193] cinema, in his own words, "must serve to modify the mentality of the masses."[194] Alassane's purpose, however, as he himself asserted, "was not […] to systematically denounce Nigerien society, but to bring people to ask themselves questions about certain of our customs."[195] Alassane's moralism offers no central position to rally around, no firm ground to stand on. Instead of imposing a model of social and moral change, Alassane develops an immanent critique from within a changing world. He is a moralist, but of changing morals.

In the early 1970s, adding to the Progressive Party's corruption and abuses of power, a severe drought shook Niger's socio-economic balance. On April 15, 1974, the country experienced its first military takeover, deposing the government of the first Nigerien president, Hamani Diori. In the year of Seyni Kountché's coup d'état, Alassane realised a second international co-production, this time with West German television and a loan from the Nigerien Development Bank:[196] *Toula, ou le génie des eaux* (1974/1973). *Toula* is based on an oral tale recounted by Boubou Hama, the Nigerien author and former president of the Nigerien National Assembly under the ousted Diori. King Baharga is desperate: His village has run out of water and there is no rain in sight. The geomancer says that the drought is the work of a resentful serpent spirit who must be appeased by the sacrifice of the king's niece, Toula. A Tuareg (Tamasheq) offers to show the way to an oasis not far

---

[189] "I don't judge the parents, but they do not reckon with the fact that society has changed." Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.
[190] Boughedir, Boughedir, *Le cinéma africain de A à Z*.
[191] Maïga quoted in Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," 20.
[192] And people kept asking. For the record, according to one of his actors, Alassane did not believe in maraboutage (or, as in the case of *Toula*, human sacrifice). See Biny Traoré, "Cinéma africain et développement," *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, no. 33 (1983): 53.
[193] Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 3.
[194] Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 17.
[195] Ibid.
[196] The Banque de Développement de la République de Niger. See Harouna Niandou, "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane," *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17–18 (1975): 56.

off in the desert but the village elders, distrustful of the outsider's motives, decline his offer. The shepherd Ado, who is secretly in love with Toula, defies the elders and follows the Tuareg in search of the rumoured oasis. Before long, he finds the promised, but his discovery comes too late. Toula has already been sacrificed to the serpent spirit. As predicted by the geomancer, rain starts to pour, so abundantly that a lake is now forming where Toula gave her life. The profoundly unreconciled ending sees Ado leave the village, riding his camel into the sunset. A Western ending in reverse: The old gods have prevailed over the outsiders' attempt to introduce a new law.

For Vieyra, *Toula* was yet another "metaphysical escape" from African realities (see 4.3). He complained that Alassane described the drought as "the outcome of some god's whim […] and not of the incoherent policies of a neo-colonial regime."[197] Vieyra's verdict of the film was damning: "The tale does not at all enlighten us on our underdeveloped situation."[198] French critics Guy Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle, by contrast, understood *Toula* to be arguing "that there are other than traditional means to arrive at solutions for problems such as—crucially—lack of water."[199] These contradictory perceptions are telling of Alassane's method. The geomancer may have been right, or he may have been lucky, but Alassane does not tell the audience what to think, nor does he let on what he thinks himself, for that is strictly beside the point. Alassane's critique of the geomancer's answer to the drought squares the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns: The moral quandary of whether Toula's sacrifice was the right thing to do is a pertinent question for both the sceptic and the believer. Instead of dispelling animist beliefs, *Toula* embraces them as part of a changeable moral universe.

Equally part of that universe is the mythical story's present-day framing, in which the shepherd Ado reappears as an airport logistician. In a heated discussion about how to respond to the ongoing drought, Ado's secular reincarnation argues for technological solutions.[200] The point of this juxtaposition of the present and the past, however, is not to oppose Western modernity and technological fixes on the one hand, to traditional ways of life and animist magic on the other. Made amidst a devastating drought, *Toula* is an urgent inquiry into the forces that animate nature, but its main question is not whether we should turn to animist spirits or rational inquiry to brave the crisis. Rather, the film asks what the conditions for a more coherent politics of development in the Sahel might look like. Both

---

[197] Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Les 5es Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage," *Présence Africaine*, no. 93 (1975): 210.
[198] Vieyra, "Les 5es Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage," 210.
[199] Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 14–15.
[200] This is what Alassane was arguing for at the time. He believed the drought could be solved "if adequate measures were to be taken." Quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 17.

the one-party state deposed in the year of *Toula*'s release and the non-elective military councils that took its place cited the exigencies of national development to legitimise centralisation and abuses of power.[201] The figure of the Tuareg who knows the way to an oasis stands for a principle of renewal that would challenge the status quo and break with its certainties. He is a figure of epistemic rupture, but the fault line of this rupture does not run between "modern" or "traditional," "primitive" or "technological," solutions, but between an entrenched, inward-looking regime and a possible opening to popular democracy. *Toula* brackets the question of what to believe and which path to take, to make the broader point that any development policy, any project of modernisation, should be determined by a process of democratic decision-making and accountability.

Co-directed by the German filmmaker Anna Soehring and co-produced by West German television, *Toula* was a pioneering instance of what was to become an important funding arrangement after the partial withdrawal of French Cooperation. During the 1980s and 1990s, when the Ministry of Cooperation was reformed and its involvement both qualitatively and quantitatively reduced, European national television broadcasters and the European Union stepped in. *Toula* was made with the participation of German technical personnel and benefitted from a higher budget than any of Alassane's other films[202]—a far cry from the primitive filmmaker of the French imagination. But foreign co-funding, shared directorial credit, and imported technicians left traces on the finished product. Hennebelle and Ruelle objected to *Toula*'s much too groomed images and "disagreeably ethnological or touristic relief."[203] Vieyra complained about its French dialogue.[204] These critics were not wrong to suggest that *Toula* was shaped by foreign influence, however, as I have argued throughout, the idea that Alassane's earlier, so-called "primitive" works had been free of such determinations is severely blinkered.

6.5 Twine, wire, dust: animation and autonomy (Samba le Grand, 1977 et al.)

While the fictional drought in *Toula* was the image of a real drought in Niger, it also suggests the historical situation of Nigerien cinema in the mid-1970s, when film production entered a prolonged and ongoing reproductive crisis. With the French in retreat, the Nigerien state granted individual cash injections—Maïga in 1979 reports a subvention of

---

[201] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 15.
[202] See Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 5.
[203] See Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.
[204] See Vieyra, *Le cinéma africain*, 210. Although, as previously mentioned, most of Alassane's films have French dialogue or voice-over.

CFA20 million by the head of state of which CFA3 million benefitted the making of his *Nuages noirs*—but no sustained support.[205] According to Mahamane Bakabe, there were about ten 35mm and 16mm cameras available at the Office de radiodiffusion et télévision du Niger (ORTN), the state radio and television parastatal, but they were never given to filmmakers, who impatiently awaited the creation of an Office nigérien du cinéma.[206] State subsidies, which had been irregular and informal at the best of times, now ebbed to an all-time low, presaging the state's total divestment in the following decades. After the death of Ganda and Rouch's departure, Nigerien filmmakers were forced to go freelance and find means elsewhere. The few who succeeded, like Alassane with *Toula or* Djingarey Maïga with *Le Ballon* (1972), whose processing was made possible at the German embassy's intervention,[207] were forced to piece their films together relying on foreign aid and facilities. From the end of the 1970s through to the end of the century, film production in Niger has been in constant decline.[208] Ousseïni speaks of a veritable "rupture" in the history of Nigerien cinema.[209]

While the context of film production in Niger was unique, in the realm of commercial distribution filmmakers faced the same challenges as elsewhere in West Africa, with the same net outcome: Nigerien films were hardly seen by local audiences. Bookings by foreign distributors, which had complete, uncontested control over the selection of films, were set at a non-regulated fixed price, between 60 and 75 percent of receipts or sometimes stipulating a guaranteed minimum. Such was the situation in Niger in the 1970s. There were "independent" cinemas in Niamey owned by Nigeriens (or Togolese, as in the case of the Rex) unconnected to the big distribution chains yet beholden to their terms, meaning that independents did not in fact enjoy the freedom to programme as they saw fit.[210] Nigerien filmmakers, working within the infrastructural framework of French ethnography, generally produced films on 16mm. This was a problem because commercial cinemas were not equipped with 16mm projectors, while 35mm blow-ups were beyond the filmmakers' means.[211] Niger was third in line for provisioning by SOPACIA, after Cote d'Ivoire and Benin; films arrived two or three years after their release, by which

---

[205] Maïga quoted in Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," 19.

[206] Bakabe quoted in *Al'lèèsi*. Alassane argued for state film funding instead of direct rentability, on the model of the l'Office National du Film au Canada. See Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 17.

[207] See Thierno Balde, "Djingaré Maïga: l'autre dimension," *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 31.

[208] See Mounkaila, *Les films de Djingarey Maïga*, 18.

[209] Ousseïni quoted in *Cinéaste du possible*. For Haffner, it was an "asphyxiation"; Ilbo speaks of a "pause" in Nigerien cinema after approximately 1973. See Haffner, "L'école du Niger," 148; Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 40.

[210] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 21.

[211] See Rabiou, "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures," 20.

time the prints were usually in a very bad state, counting 400 splices on average.[212] Screenings were interrupted by incessant cuts; the conditions of projection were generally abysmal. Cinemas were in an ever worsening state of disrepair, with outworn projectors and projection booths like "furnaces," which forced usually untrained projectionists to work shirtless.[213]

Between 1974 and 1975, amidst growing production difficulties, Alassane set into motion a mobile cinema circuit, the "ciné-bus de brousse" (cine-bush-taxi). He toured the country with his truck and organised film screenings everywhere: at first in the region of Niamey, in Filingué, Gaya, Tillabery, Téra, and Dargol; later in the more remote country-side, reaching villages that otherwise had no exposure to cinema.[214] The projector Alassane custom-built for use in his ciné-bus was sourced in great part (and assembled entirely) in Niger.[215] While this itinerant distribution circuit was technically autonomous, not enough films were being made by Nigerien filmmakers to supply it. Alassane thus acquired distribution rights for a number of recent African films, among them *La Rançon d'une alliance* (Sébastien Kamba, 1974), the first Congolese feature-length film, and *Baks* (Momar Thiam, 1974), a Senegalese contribution to the "moralist tendency" castigating the evils of marijuana.[216] Alongside these, Alassane projected Hollywood and European films he held dear such as *Ben Hur*, *Bicycle Thieves* or *Rio Bravo*, as well as his own films, in front of audiences numbering in the hundreds. He was in conversation with the Secretary of Information to screen state-produced newsreels and also appealed to the Ministry of Cooperation for provisioning. (The Ministry granted the rights and, through the French Centre de Documentation in Niamey, access to prints of a selection of French-directed educational films, but there is no evidence they were actually screened.[217]) Alassane's "mini-circuit" was not conceived as an alternative to regular distribution but as a pilot project to estimate the prospects for the amortisation of Nigerien films and widen the reach of cinema in Niger, hoping to encourage the Nigerien government to invest in the urgently needed renovation and expansion of Niger's crumbling cinemas.[218] Through construction and taxes, or so Alassane imagined, the renovation of Niger's exhibition in-

---

[212] See Issaka Garba, "Cinéma: les gérants et les opérateurs," *Sahel Hebdo*, no. 136 (1978): 9.

[213] According to Garba's 1978 article, the projectors at the Rex in Niamey were 18 years old (ibid.).

[214] See Niandou, "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane," 56.

[215] As he proudly remarks in *Entretien avec Moustapha Alassane*. His editing table, too, was a custom-build: made for 35mm film but adapted by Alassane also to run 16mm.

[216] See Jean-René Debrix, "Perspectives nouvelles du cinéma au Niger," *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17–18 (1975): 55.

[217] It is possible that Moati's films were among them, but I have no evidence of that. We do know that the ciné-bus also featured films by Jean Rouch.

[218] Alassane quoted in Niandou, "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane," 56.

frastructure would furthermore contribute to Niger's economic development.[219] Alassane's ultimate goal was even more ambitious: to push for the creation of a vertically integrated "Société nigéro-africaine de production, de distribution et d'exploitation cinématographique" (SNAPDEC).

Alassane's itinerant film distribution was similar in many regards to Balogun's Travelling Cinema (see 4.4). Screenings reportedly resembled small festivals.[220] Alassane would be present at the screenings to introduce the films and moderate post-screening debates,[221] but presumably also (as in Balogun's case) to ensure the accurate rendering of accounts. During the state of emergency following Kountché's coup, the cost of Alassane's travelling cinema rose steeply. Protection money had to be paid to assuage local authorities. Eventually the ciné-bus was shut down by the authorities, citing as their reason that Alassane's practice was interfering with regular commercial distribution—when really the project was meant to highlight the importance of the commercial cinema circuit.[222] Debrix, in a 1975 article in the journal *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, declared that Cooperation should focus its efforts on the promotion and distribution of "nascent industries" and lauded Alassane's ciné-bus as a pioneering effort in that direction.[223] However, concerted support by the Ministry of Cooperation for the regular distribution of Nigerien films never materialised. By 1978, as attested by a series of articles in the weekly *Sahel Hebdo*, Niger's main movie theatres in Niamey were coming apart.[224]

One of the more remote places which Alassane toured with his ciné-bus was the town of Tahoua, the commercial centre of the Tahoua region.[225] After fifteen years at IRSH, Alassane left Niamey and settled down in this dusty Sahelian trade hub with his wives and progeny, some five hundred kilometres northeast of the capital.[226] As early as 1975, Alassane was planning to replace his itinerant distribution circuit with a more permanent "modern infrastructure" that would include both a cinema and a studio building.[227] In Tahoua, that plan was finally realised. The family compound comprised a studio building and, adjacent to it, an open-air cinema equipped with a 35mm projector, which started screening films in 1978.[228] From this base of operations, covering the gamut of cinema

---

[219] See Niandou, "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane," 56.
[220] Alassane quoted in Diop, "L'ingénieux Moustapha Alassane."
[221] According to Rouch, quoted in de Saivre and Neumann, "Entretien" 52.
[222] See Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.
[223] Debrix, "Perspectives nouvelles du cinéma au Niger," 55.
[224] See Garba, "La colère des cinéphiles"; "Cinéma: les gérants et les opérateurs."
[225] Tahoua was also home to Albarca Tchibaou, the storyteller of *Deela* (see 6.1).
[226] Alassane had regularly come through Tahoua with his cine-bush-taxi and met his third wife there. The mayor of the remote northern town pleaded with Alassane to stay and bring his cinema. See Diop, "L'ingénieux Moustapha Alassane."
[227] Alassane quoted in Niandou, "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane," 56.
[228] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 34.

infrastructure and achieving something like vertical integration, Alassane was able to continue his work in semi-autonomous fashion with little outside support, at a time when most other Nigerien filmmakers (Ousseïni, Bakabe, Diop) faltered. Lack of funds and viable distribution drove Alassane back to animation, which he produced and projected on a small scale, within the space of his expanded family compound. In this semi-domestic space, a familial moving image practice took shape, anchored in kinship relations. Alassane taught his children how to use a computer and his neighbours different animation techniques. His wives were in charge of housework and the raising of their children, but Alassane also involved them in his animation practice, which existed alongside communal life and reproductive labour.

The first known production in this mode was the 1977 puppet animation film *Samba le Grand*. Samba Gana, a young prince, leaves his father's palace in search of adventure. One by one, he subjects the peoples of the realm to his father's rule. Beyond the kingdom's outer reaches, Samba Gana encounters Analiatou Bari, a princess gifted with magical talents. The princess and her people are gripped by a leaden sadness: Her father, the king, before his death lost fifty towns in battle. Vowing to make the princess smile again, Samba Gana retakes her lost empire one village at a time. But the princess has another task for him: to battle the evil serpent that has been terrorising her people. When after eight years of fierce struggle the foe is finally vanquished and Samba Gana's bloodied weapon returned as proof of the deed, the princess doubts his word. Overcome by desperation, Samba Gana turns his lance against himself. When the princess learns of her champion's death, a smile comes over her face. At long last, she is moved. The cruel fate of *Samba Gana* is inspired by an African tale, however, it has been suggested that the film's atmosphere of futile struggle—notably Samba Gana's eight-year battle with the serpent—also speaks to the quixotic struggle of Nigerien cinema. I will argue that the film more immediately reflects Alassane's particular struggle—and the challenges he faced in the new production environment of Tahoua. The harsh Sahelian climate compelled Alassane to expand his animation repertoire beyond cameraless animation, the method he had previously employed, which required a sterile environment.[229] The dust suspended in the air caused electrostatic effects making it virtually impossible to draw directly onto the film strip.[230] Responding to these limitations, *Samba Gana* employs a thoroughly hybrid mixture of techniques. Samba Gana's passage through his father's kingdom unfolds in a series of watercolour stills, evoking the timelessness of his epic deeds. Villages and land-

---

[229] "The room where the artist is working should be clean and dusted." McLaren, *Cameraless Animation*, 8.
[230] See Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 41.

scapes are also rendered in watercolours, animated by small movements of the camera. In the main plot scenes, characters are represented by hand-made puppets, placed either before flat painted surfaces or within three-dimensional sets, and animated either in real time, stirred by invisible hands to convey the imperceptible movement of bodies at rest, or by stop-motion, the film's medium of action.

Stop-motion animation is inherently porous. Decors and equipment (camera, lights, etc.) have to be immobilised and preserved in this state for long periods of time; when animated, traces of entropy and of the puppeteers' manipulations turn into rustling, bubbling surfaces. In Tahoua, it was impossible to create such a controlled environment. Dust would collect on the puppets, sets and equipment, corroding Alassane's tools. Dust also settled on the circuitry of Alassane's collection of computers, slowing down processing speeds, blocking connections, and causing repeated breakdowns. These difficulties help us understand why, although marionettes and others forms of moving puppetry are indigenous to Africa, puppet stop-motion animation has rarely been used by African animators.[231] However, it was this same, inimical environment which at the same time constituted the material basis of Alassane's practice. His puppets were made from wood, iron, or brass wire; glue, rags, or rubber foam; sourced and repurposed from found bits and pieces, or purchased at a local bazar.[232] Niang calls Alassane's puppets "locally sustainable artifacts":[233] They are sedimentations of a local and—through the bazar—regional ecology of objects. The environment of Tahoua grounded Alassane's practice in other ways as well. Thanks to a portable film processing lab that Alassane picked up on a teaching stint in Bordeaux,[234] he was able to develop his own rushes using groundwater from underneath the family compound which had been purified by the sandy subsoil.

Stanley Cavell has famously separated animation from live-action filmmaking: While film, mediated by the camera's automatism, gives us "successions of automatic world projections," a shared life-world in which gravity and mortality hold sway, animation tends to leave our world behind.[235] In animation, the laws of physics lose their absolute hold, giving rise to the possibility of metamorphosis. Bodies become "indestructible,"

---

[231] See Freddy Denaës, "La marionnette dans le cinéma africain: Hommage à Mustapha Alassane," *PUCK: la marionnette et les autres arts*, no. 15 (2008): 150. Though no traces, neither material nor written, of the practice exist that date back before the nineteenth century, we may say with some certainty that it preexisted European colonisation. See Ebikebina Peretu, "Afrique," in *Encyclopédie mondiale des arts de la marionnette,* ed. Henri Foulc and Henryk Jurkowski (Montpellier: Éditions Entretemps, 2009), 32.

[232] See Diop, "L'ingénieux Moustapha Alassane."

[233] Niang, *African Nationalist Cinema*, 94.

[234] According to Edera, Alassane was teaching African animation students there. See *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 41.

[235] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 169. Though importantly for Cavell, we, the viewers, are also absent from this world.

even "immortal." Totally subject to the animator's will, the images become "perfectly expressive," albeit at the cost of a loss of reality: "They are animations, disembodiments, pure spirits."[236] We do not have to agree with Cavell's ontological distinction to agree that, as a rule, animation loosens, in Karen Beckman's words, the "link between the physical site of an image's production and the spaces depicted in that image."[237] This relative detachment from the world renders the practice of animation more mobile and inherently outsourceable—part of why the production of African animated films is often exterritorialised.[238] However, Cavell formulated his argument with drawn or cartoon animation in mind—in the mould of Chuck Jones's Wile E. Coyote or Mickey Mouse as sorcerer's apprentice in Disney's *Fantasia*. Alassane's animation practice, by contrast, complicates Cavell's finely drawn distinctions between film and animation, bodies and spirits. The figures in *La Mort de Gandji* and *Bon voyage, Sim* are certainly "perfectly expressive," yet they were not entirely subject to Alassane's will. While expressive of his desire to make images move, they also express the specific conditions of cameraless animation and physical limitations of the animator's hand, which compromise the illusion of seamless and self-propelled motion. *Samba Le Grand* similarly may be seen as an expression, or *impression*, of its Sahelian conditionality, its limits and resources. The moving puppets register Alassane's manual manipulations. Gravity and entropy exercise their indefatigable pull. Dust covers everything. We may go as far as describing Alassane's animation practice as form of shared authorship: shared with environmental forces beyond his control but teeming also with the material life of objects gleaned and remade from his surroundings. *Samba Gana* breathes the same air as Alassane and his familial co-producers, drinks from the same naturally filtered water, and struggles with the same climatic conditions, weather events, and infrastructure breakdowns. The film tells the story of a struggle to move a princess and lift the leaden sadness that keeps her people immobilised, but also the story of Alassane's own animation struggle "against wind and tide."[239]

A number of the animation works Alassane realised in his vertically integrated family compound never left Tahoua. *Tougé Douma* (undated) is one in a series of three-minute-long "musical works" which appear in none of the extant filmographies. Their complete absence from the historical record suggests these works never went into wider distribution. Perhaps they were never meant to circulate. In order to bolster his economic self-

[236] Cavell, *The World* Viewed, 170.
[237] Karen Beckman, "Film Theory's Animated Map," *Framework* 56, no. 2 (2015): 475.
[238] There is no regular African animated film production. Many directors only ever produce a single film. As I have noted above, what are widely considered the first two African animation films were made outside of Africa. Production is to an even larger extent outsourced and exterritorialised than in the case of live-action filmmaking. See Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 41.

sufficiency, Alassane had made two additions to his domestic studio-cum-cinema complex: first a hotel and then, next to it, Le Galaxy, a dance club furnished to give dancers the impression of being enveloped by a starry cosmos. It is possible that *Tougé Douma* and the series of musical works of which it was a part were made as visuals for use in Le Galaxy, designed to animate the dancefloor by heightening the dancers' sense of cosmic immersion. The only trace of this work is in Bruno Edera's index of African animation films, where it is mentioned only in passing.[240] All Edera divulges is the title of that series, "Galaxie Star." Many more projects remained unfinished, or were never seen outside Alassane's close circle.[241]

In 1985, with French subsidies, Alassane realised the puppet animation *Kokoa* (1985[2001]), which transplants a tournament of *kokowa*—a traditional, hugely popular form of wrestling among the Hausa of Niger—into the world of animal fable populated by frogs, crabs, turtles, vultures, and chameleons. Unlike the syncretic *Samba le Grand*, *Kokoa* is stop-motion animation through and through, but accompanied by a naturalistic soundtrack that Alassane must have either recorded himself on location or borrowed from ethnographic works such as *Lutte saharienne* (1977), a documentary short on the same subject by Alassane's compatriot Inoussa Ousseïni. *Kokoa* was privately shown in Ouagadougou in 1985 but released only in 2001, sixteen years later.[242] Alassane later recycled the animal puppets for use in a passion project he did not live to see realised. Together with one of his sons, Alassane developed a procedure to create 3D scans of his puppets which were to serve as the basic building blocks of a software toolkit he was building on computers he had collected over the years and taught himself to operate. This modular kit including customised digital brushes and colours would help train the next generation of African computer animators and enable them to make their own works.[243] But Alassane would also have made use the software himself, to realise what would have been the first African feature-length animation film.

Alassane's late animation must be considered on a continuum with his earlier filmmaking practice. It was a response to the decline of Nigerien feature film production, which for both exogenous and endogenous reasons had never developed into a fully-fledged industry. Though his cine-bush-taxi kept alive the hope of nation-wide distribution, Alassane's search for autonomy within a familial mode of subsistence was a de facto

---

[239] Denaës, "La marionnette dans le cinéma africain," 150.
[240] See Edera, *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 29.
[241] In 1993, Edera reported that Alassane was working on a new puppet animation film: a dance of dromedars, part of a series devoted to African tales commissioned by the Centre of Oral Traditions. See *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu*, 29.
[242] See Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 34.

withdrawal from the horizon of a national cinema. However, he not only taught his relatives and neighbours but kept trying to expand the reach of his moving image pedagogy with the aid of computer software. Alassane's late animation was in many ways self-sufficient and self-contained, yet it was not a retreat from the world. Articulating the domestic and the cosmic, the near and the far, it was an opening to his new surroundings, which both frustrated and sustained, enabled and disabled, his practice.

6.6 Animation struggles: chapter conclusion

With little outside help, Moustapha Alassane continued to make images move from his Tahoua compound, 30 works in 2005 alone, according to an interview from that year.[244] He died in March 2015. Alassane spent almost his entire life making moving images. His early animation works of the canoe paddler and the woman pounding millet (see 6.2) were not in fact his first. He had been an animator long before he met Rouch, or Jutra, or McLaren, indeed, before he had ever entered a cinema.[245] As early as in primary school, Alassane began experimenting with a variety of ephemeral animation methods. His first attempts, a form of shadow play, consisted in illuminating paper cut-outs of lions and elephants from behind a screen to entertain his friends and relatives.[246] When his assistant, a boy recruited from among the crowd, copied the apparatus and started his own show, Alassane resolved to up his game. In front of a rectangular cut-out in a wooden box covered in black paint, illuminated from the back by his father's petroleum storm lamp, he would move figures drawn on the wrappings of cigarette packages. Thanks to the stronger light source and translucent medium—a literal instance of *mégotage*—Alassane was able to produce a spectacle in colours. The price of entry was set at fifty centimes CFA.[247]

<p style="text-align:center">⁂</p>

"The West," writes Valentin Y. Mudimbe, "has created the savage in order to civilise, underdevelopment in order to develop, the primitive to be able to do ethnology." In this chapter, I have shown how the cadres of French Cooperation—ethnographers, administra-

---

[243] See Diop, "L'ingénieux Moustapha Alassane."

[244] See Ondego, "Sub-Saharan Africa's Father of Animation Films Speaks Out."

[245] It was only in his late teens, when Alassane left his village for Niamey, that he saw his first motion picture.

[246] Alassane quoted in Hennebelle and Ruelle, "Alassane Mustapha," 15.

[247] As revealed in *Cinéaste du Possible*. Pfaff writes about Alassane's childhood experiments: "Unknowingly, Alassane had succeeded in re-creating the slow evolution of moving pictures from the ancient shadow shows of Asia to our forebears' magic lantern." *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 1.

tors, and critics—co-created Alassane as a "primitive filmmaker." Ethnographic institutions and methodologies defined the terrain of Nigerien cinema, developing and underdeveloping it at the same time. Writing extensively about this emergent cinema, Rouch and Debrix produced it also as an object of discourse. Nigerien filmmakers, however, were not simply victims of this system; they asserted agency within it. Where possible, I have cited the "native" filmmakers' testimony against that of their French "discoverers" to deconstruct the narratives entrenched by the latter. (On the subject of "discovery", Alassane insisted that it was he who approached Rouch and not the other way around.[248]) I have shown that while Nigerien filmmakers were taught by the French, they resisted being treated as "students." Alassane became a teacher themselves and elaborated his own pedagogies of the moving image. Learning from Alassane, I have deconstructed the figure of the "primitive spectator," a close relative of the "primitive filmmaker": Taking the side of the African spectator, and taking seriously the cultural preparations they bring to the cinematic encounter, Alassane's moralism of changing morals confounded both French anthropologists and African liberationist ideologues.

Animation was not in Alassane's practice a form of filmmaking that leaves the world behind: His practice remained vulnerable to changing environments, baring the traces of his labour. As animator, Alassane invented new modes of creation and took further than most filmmakers of his generation the indigenisation of cinema: He managed to reproduce his practice by reinventing its technological base, adapting it to local affordances and foreclosures. He created, modified, and repaired the greater part of his own toolkit. For Sada Niang, Alassane's major contribution to African cinema was to "recentre the debate on form, its malleability, its semiotic potentials and its capacity, in the hands of a creative imagination, to make a sign [*de se faire signe*]."[249] I have suggested that it was this malleability of Alassane's moving forms, their openness to the world, which allowed him to establish a largely self-sufficient moving image practice while also accounting for the limitations and conditionality of the "capacity to make a sign." Alassane's life-long search for self-determination, I have argued throughout, was predicated on the creation of new inter-dependencies.

[248] "Since I was interested in film, I arranged to meet him, and I subsequently worked with him." Personal communication quoted in Pfaff, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers*, 2.
[249] Niang, "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane," 60.

Chapter 7
Conclusions: African cinema
as anti-systemic worldmaking

Ola Balogun, Med Hondo, and Moustapha Alassane were among the most prolific West African filmmakers of their generation—the first generation to emerge at independence. All three fought for the creation of self-determined "national" cinemas. All three, the Nigerian Balogun included, received French technical assistance and financial aid, all three equally pursued other modalities of international co-production both in the form of inter-African cooperation and foreign investment. All three were driven by necessity to incorporate, each man onto himself, a fully integrated chain of operations. Adjusting to constantly changing circumstances, in the face of political and economic crisis, they produced uniquely eclectic bodies of work which variously register their struggles. All three not only made films but also elaborated new ways of making, sharing, and showing them, reinventing the medium in the process. While only Balogun was able materially to reproduce his practice on a popular basis, all three experimented with forms of "popular" filmmaking which were responsive to their audiences in new ways, disclosing radical potentialities in a medium which in its hegemonic, "developed" form had largely been turned into a one-way means of communication.[1] Although their modes of (re)production differed considerably, all three were able to continue their work for a period but found it increasingly difficult to do so from the 1980s onwards.[2] All three have characterised their efforts as a life-long "struggle"—a struggle for communication, circulation, and animation, respectively—which in a certain sense could be said to have "failed."

What lessons, then, have we been able draw from the struggles of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane? To reprise the two main questions of this research: What has the prism of West African post-independence filmmaking taught us about "development"? And conversely, what insights about "African cinema" have we gleaned by reappraising its beginnings through the lens of development? In the first section of this chapter, I summarise the main argument of this thesis, reflect on its aims, methods, and results, highlighting my original contributions while also pointing out important limitations to the research (7.1). Finally, under the heading "What is to be done?," I offer some suggestions of where to go from here (7.2).

7.1 What have we learnt?

In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted the persistent idea (among both filmmakers and commentators) that African cinema has yet to be born. The view endorsed here is

---

[1] Balogun with the Yoruba Travelling Cinema, Hondo with *Les Bicots-nègres*, Alassane with *Le Retour*.
[2] Though it is important to note that Hondo and Alassane were both working on new projects until late in their lives.

closer to that of Andrée Davanture, a former editor at the Bureau du cinéma, according to whom African cinema "does not stop being born."[3] Following Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane, I have the described the practice of African cinema as a site of continual struggle and transformation. Their mutable practices have taught us that "cinema" was not invented once and for all time: It is an ongoing historical process the outcome of which is not yet known—nor will it ever be. It is true, as Claude Forest has noted, that this constant work of reinvention was (and is) the sign of a permanent crisis of reproduction—"the symptom of an absolute dislocation of the sector and its very difficult reconstruction."[4] Reinvention was a strategy of survival, not a solution to underlying structural problems. However, against Forest and other French economic histories in this vein for which African cinema is eternally lagging behind, trying to catch up, I have resisted such a normative position, insisting instead on the anti-systemic agencies and potentials issuing from the struggles of African cinema. Constantly evolving, West African post-independence cinemas continually bestowed new futures upon this "invention without a future."

Chapter 4, the first of the three main chapters, centred on Balogun's model of cinematic indigenisation. It showed how Balogun, in trying to reactivate lost or suppressed potentials of development inherent in African media environments through an equitable exchange with the Western technology of cinema, reinvented both in the process. Struggling for the creation of a national popular cinema befitting a (re)unified Nigeria, Balogun instead ended up improvising a minor moving image practice whose inclusive mode of address transcended the secular realm of the nation and the teleologies of the developmental state, pointing us to non-statist futures. Chapter 5 considered Hondo's migrant cinema as part of the wider struggle over Africa's forms of circulation. Hondo's experience as a migrant filmmaker and distributor made apparent the (dis)placement of African cinema within a global economy of moving image production and circulation, teaching us that "African cinema" must be thought as an uneven global relation. Following Hondo, I have argued that the history of early African cinema must be written into a common history of "combined and uneven and development" foregrounding forced encounters and inequitable exchange—a history of "world-cinema": one, but unequal. In Hondo's experience, "African cinema" was as a *dependent* practice, elaborated, as he would say, "under conditions of unaccomplished liberation"; Hondo's films, I have ar-

---

[3] Andrée Davanture, "Une indépendance nécessaire," in *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma,* ed. Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes (Paris & Dakar: Présence africaine, 1995). In 1980, after the Bureau's technical unit had been destroyed in a fire, Davanture founded the non-profit ATRIA. With support from the French Ministry of Cooperation and the CNC, ATRIA was for a time an important hub of African filmmaking in Paris, until funding was withdrawn in 1999 and it had to close its doors.
[4] Claude Forest, "L'industrie du cinéma en Afrique," *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 2 (2011): 69.

gued, show us history as seen from the hold, displacing the universal history of progress while continually charting routes of escape. In chapter 6, I have traced Alassane's struggle with the manifold agencies that *animated* his practice: from the foreign genre cinemas he encountered as a young man, to the institutions of French ethnology and Cooperation that co-produced "native" filmmaking in Niger, and on to the precarious subsistence ecologies of undeveloped animation and his late, familial animation practice. Alassane's experience discloses the development of Nigerien cinema as a form of "animation," a process-relation that is both enabling and disabling, mobilising certain potentials while constraining others. I have emphasised the ways in which Alassane reflected on and resisted the limitations inherent in these, his changing conditions of possibility, including what we might call his efforts at de-linking. However, Alassane's struggle for greater freedom of expression always also entailed new obligations, teaching us that the alternative to dependency is not autonomy but inter-dependence.

Through the historical experiences of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane, film has been revealed as a medium—a finite mediation—of global interdependencies. I have emphasised the extraversion and "forced internationalism" of African cinema, looking closely at how the French "developed" African cinema and drawing out different pathways of development departing from different colonial (institutional, infrastructural, and legal) legacies and post-colonial relationships. "African cinema," in this perspective, is not the sum total of African national cinemas, nor that of African films; it is the name of the common struggle of African filmmakers on the terrain of world-cinema. Olivier Barlet's query—whether African diasporic films and films produced by Western funders may still be considered "African"[5]—misses the point: "African cinema" *is* this struggle from within a transnational entanglement. However, while I have contoured path-dependencies, I have also highlighted instances of resistance and the power of reinvention. Without presupposing historical outcomes, I have offered a non-teleological reading of the history of African cinema that is neither defeatist nor redemptive but everywhere emphasises struggle. In reconstructing the various struggles of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane, I have been interested in how these filmmakers engaged practically with the policies and institutions of development (the developmental state, development aid, etc.), pointing to both internal contestations and efforts at de-linking. I have shown how, time and again, their struggle *with and against development* led these filmmakers to question, in theory and in practice,

---

[5] Barlet has offered an answer to his question, which however remains itself mired in ambivalence: He at first too easily asserts the "autonomy" of African filmmakers, disregarding their very real entanglements, only then to argue against the idea of autonomy as such, as though it rested on an assumption of binary

the "Western culture-systemic telos" (S. Wynter) of development, challenging not merely its empirical forms but also its underlying logic—what we might call *developmental reason*. The historian of decolonisation Adom Getachew has challenged the common view of the post-independence era as "a moment of nation-building in which the anticolonial demand for self-determination culminated in the rejection of alien rule and the formation of nation-states," and instead recasts anti-colonial nationalism as a form of "antisystemic worldmaking" which exceeds the political and economic forms of global capitalist modernity.[6] Reconstructing the historical experience of three West African post-independence filmmakers, my purpose has been to uncover the possibilities of anti-systemic worldmaking opened up by the struggle of African cinema to come into existence.

In addition to and grounding this broader argument, this thesis has made original contributions to the historiography of African cinema. Based on original archival research and drawing on critically neglected or hitherto undiscovered sources, I have not only given the most comprehensive account yet of the respective practices of Balogun, Hondo, and Alassane, but moreover have been able to tell particular stories that had not been told before: Balogun's pathbreaking work on indigenisation; Hondo's Sisyphean struggle in the sphere of distribution; Alassane's entanglement with the arms of French Cooperation. Within the scope of West African post-independence filmmaking, the most critical omission in historiographic terms (apart from the exclusion of Lusophone Africa, which I have argued in chapter 3) is that not a single woman is to be found among my case studies. Safi Faye, a Senegalese-born filmmaker of the first generation and another reluctant "pupil" of French ethnographer Jean Rouch, whose work ranges over auto-ethnographic and fictional feature filmmaking, dealt critically with agricultural development and the role of African women—a central preoccupation of development aid after the turn to rights-based approaches in the 1980s, also in film funding. Additional research on Faye's practice in the terms set out here would not only address the gender disparity of this comparative study but also widen its scope both conceptually *and* historically, providing new insight into how the changing priorities of international development in the "post-development" era impacted the practice of sub-Saharan African cinema.

 This research has also made a number of methodological innovations. I have approached the films in relation to how they were made, shared, and shown, combining film

---

(bio-racist) difference. One might say he is twice pouring out the baby with bathwater. See Olivier Barlet, "The Ambivalence of French Funding," *Black Camera* 3, no. 2 (2012).
[6] Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 2.

analysis with histories of film production, distribution, and exhibition. I have paid close attention to the ways in which contingency breaches the frame—the forced re-entry of the conditions of production into filmic form—and suggested reading strategies to make legible these signs of struggle. I have argued that the critical reception of Balogun, Hondo and Alassane's films forms part of the history of the extraversion of African cinema, prompting a reflection on how the discourse of African cinema has been shaped by non-African commentators committed to a certain idea of African cinema and its development. I have read critically Western sources, where possible checking their assertions against the filmmakers' own. I have quoted extensively from critical writings by African scholars and contemporaries, and reconstructed as best I could African reception histories of the works under consideration, giving space not only to *Présence africaine* and the crème of African and diasporic intellectuals but also to popular writers in widely read national and regional African news outlets. The most critical omission in methodological terms is that my efforts to restitute "absent images" (see 3.3) have remained inchoate at best. Owing to space constraints, I have not been able to give their full due to films lost or unmade—and this despite the fact that Med Hondo's archive in particular holds documentation pertaining to a number of important but unrealised projects that would promise both to deepen our understanding of his practice and give a more complete picture of the obstacles he was up against. Future research will have to return such critical absences to the centre.

7.2 What is to be done?

This thesis has opened up a number of perspectives for future research. I have illuminated a part of the shared history of French ethnographic—and "development" or educational—filmmaking and "native" filmmaking in West Africa, but there is much left to discover. We need more critical engagement with cinematic aid and cooperation, extending all the way into the present, with a view to changing but persistent relations of dependency and inequality.[7] At various points of this thesis, I have drawn out connections and parallels across cinemas in the "developing world", suggesting a wider comparative lens. Indeed, this is how this research was initially framed, and though I eventually settled on the no less daunting scale of West Africa, this wider view informed the research as its implicit horizon. The critical perspective I have elaborated in relation to the development of West

---

[7] Joseph Pomp has recently done this for the Fonds Sud, but his discussion of "France as author of World Cinema" is one-sided, providing little engagement with the struggle of recipient filmmakers. See Pomp, "France as Author of World Cinema."

African cinema after the independences is more widely applicable: We need more histories of "world-cinema."

My archival research has convinced me that the present archival situation of African cinema is a direct extension of the historical patterns of extraversion that are a main subject of this thesis. We urgently need critical research into the precarious afterlives of African cinema. The critical perspective of extraversion will not only enable a focussed address of the persistent inequities affecting the memory of African cinema to this day; it also has important practical implications: We need to renew the demand for the "restitution" of moving images. Public archives are a first building block of the modern nation-state and of national identity.[8] What does it mean, then, that the archive of African cinema exists in large part outside of Africa and is generally difficult to access? What to make of the sequestration of African films by Western archives and labs? How are African films restored, and who benefits from their restoration? Given the precarious state of much of this material, how to deal with loss and decay? How to account for absences and silences in the archive; for what has been lost, or never came to be? Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, in their 2018 guidance on the restitution of African artefacts from Western museums, have also recommended the return, before 2023, of "iconographic, cinematographic, and sound materials concerning African societies."[9] But the restitution of moving images comes with its own questions and challenges. Which works should be restituted? Only films made by Africans? Or also ethnographic works? What about other visual documents of Africa obtained under duress or by unequal exchange?[10] How should such films be given back? How will they be received? Who will receive them?

Paulin Vieyra, the first historian of African cinema, argued early on for a recuperation of the colonial and ethnographic archives, despite their distortions and deformation of Africans and African cultures.[11] As animated records of the African past, Vieyra wrote in

---

[8] See Carolyn Steedman, "Research Methods for English Studies," ed. Gabriele Griffin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 19. In 1964, Blaise Senghor asked for national cinematheques to be built "where will be conserved not only our own films but all those suitable to supply ciné-clubs where youth taken with cinema culture will gather." Senghor, "Pour un authentique cinéma africain," 110.

[9] Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics," policy report N°2018-26, 67.

[10] Sarr and Savoy's report on restitution explicitly mentions ethnographic films. More specifically, they include "audio-visual material derived from ethnographic inquiries, sound recordings, photos, documentary films on African societies and the individuals studied by French scientists." Sarr and Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage," 42.

[11] This is sentiment is echoed elsewhere, for instance, in Ousmane Ilbo's history of Nigerien cinema, where he writes about Léon Poirier's *La Croisière noire* (1925): "Despite its ethnocentric and colonialist naivete, this film remains a historical witness of the first order of popular celebrations and traditions." Ilbo, *Le cinéma au Niger*, 18.

1957, these works would be crucial in the struggle for true independence.[12] This task of recuperation, however, is infinitely demanding. We have to make the archive newly legible, through the strata of symbolic and material violence it registers. New rituals will have to be found to "welcome" these films back. Much as I have throughout this thesis, I would again suggest that we turn to the practice of filmmakers for further instruction. We have much to learn from the work of African and diasporic filmmakers such as Suliman Elnour (*Africa, the Jungle, Drums and Revolution*, 1979), Assia Djebar (*La Zerda et le chants de l'oubli*, 1978–1982), Onyeka Igwe (*a so-called archive*, 2020), and many others, who offer subversive and reparative approaches to the archive of colonial and ethnographic images.[13]

The restitution of African films is not just about providing access to images but must also include the means to store, circulate, display, and restore them. Together with the films in question, technical knowledges and material infrastructures will have to be made available. The task of restituting and reconstituting the archive of African cinema has of necessity been an international effort, involving forms of cooperation with Western backers.[14] How to ensure such collaborations do not reproduce existing asymmetries of power? We need research into ongoing projects for the safeguarding of African cinema in order to learn from them—and their mistakes.[15]

Archived film is sensitive to environmental influences of all kinds and reliant upon a very specific, closely regulated set of conditions, but even then its deterioration is unstoppable.[16] In this thesis, I have offered a reappraisal of African cinema as a material witness of its conditions of production, distribution, and exhibition.[17] In my discussion of Balogun's *Orun Mooru*, I have extended this reading strategy to the scars and artefacts accrued to the film in the archive, or really, in the absence of adequate archival infrastructures and care (see 4.5). The practice of contemporary Nigerian filmmaker Didi Cheeka

---

[12] See Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Reflexions sur le premier concours international du film d'outre-mer," *Présence Africaine*, no. 17 (1957).

[13] See Onyeka Igwe, "Being Close to, With or Amongst," *Feminist Review* 125, no. 1 (2020).

[14] See Andrée Davanture and Jeanick Le Naour, "Les films africains: un patrimoine en danger (propos recueillis par Françoise Balogun)," *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 124. Lab work for restorations is done in France, Cuba, Russia, central Europe, Great Britain, the Maghreb, etc.

[15] Sanogo, in his official capacity as the North American regional secretary of the FEPACI, has written on the African Film Heritage Project, which recently saw the restoration of Hondo's *Soleil Ô*. See Sanogo, "Africa in the World of Moving Image Archiving."

[16] Film stock continues to change after its original exposure. Pace André Bazin's "mummy complex," Giovanna Fossati has foregrounded the mummy's volatile and mutable nature—"the archival life of film." Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

[17] Susan Schuppli has proposed the concept of the "material witness" to designate images whose material substrate emerges from, or is breached by, violent events, thus imbuing non-representational image-matter with an agency to give witness. See Schuppli, "Material Malfeasance"; idem., "Radical Contact Prints," in *Camera Atomica,* ed. John O'Brian (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2015).

suggests further avenues for exploring the precarious archive of African cinema. His experimental short *Memory Also Die* (2020) frames brittle archival images from Balogun's *Eastern Nigeria Revisited* (1973) as the material substrate of political forgetting in contemporary Nigeria.[18]

A 16mm print of Balogun's documentary on Eastern Nigera after the Nigerian-Biafran War is currently held by the Cinémathèque française in their archive on the outskirts of Paris. As Sarr and Savoy have pointed out, "over 90% of the material cultural legacy of sub-Saharan Africa remains preserved and housed outside of the African continent."[19] Borrowing a term from the Latin American *dependentistas*, they characterise this state of affairs as a situation of "impeded or blocked memory"—a blockage of the past that is also and at the same time a foreclosure of the future.[20] Sequestered artefacts, they argue, are time capsules containing within themselves "a power of germination, which is a force in itself."[21] This has been the central inspiration of this thesis—and it is far from exhausted: The restitution of African cinema as matter and memory will be a reactivation of radical historical possibility.

---

[18] Another instructive practical example is the digitisation project of militant films from Guinea-Bissau—initiated by Portuguese filmmaker Filipa César together with Flora Gomes, Sana N'Hada, and a team of conservators at Arsenal Institute of Film and Media Art in Berlin—which deliberately retained the scars of entropy on the film material as signifiers of the violence of forgetting.

[19] Sarr and Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage," 3.

[20] Sarr and Savoy, 31.

[21] Sarr and Savoy, 44.

References

Bibliography

Agblemagnon, N'Sougan Ferdinand. "La condition socio-culturelle negro-africaine et le cinéma." *Présence Africaine*, no. 55 (1965): 32–41.

Ahmad, Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 3–25.

Aig-Imoukhuede, Frank. "A National Film Industry: Assessment of Problems and Suggested Solutions." In *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria: Proceedings of a Seminar on the Film Industry and Cultural Identity in Nigeria*, edited by Alfred E. Opubor, and Onuora E. Nwuneli, 39–59. Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979.

———. "Cinéma et télévision au Nigéria." *Présence Africaine*, no. 58 (1966): 91–96.

Alain, Yves. "F.V.V.A.: le film de Moustapha Alassane dénonce un certain laisser-aller." *Bingo*, no. 214 (1970): 48–49.

Amin, Samir. *Le développement du capitalisme en Côte d'Ivoire*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967.

———. "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Origins and Contemporary Forms." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (1972): 503–524.

———. "Popular Movements Towards Socialism: Their Unity and Diversity." *Monthly Review* 66, no. 2 (2014).

Andrade-Watkins, Claire. "France's Bureau of Cinema: Financial and Technical Assistance Between 1961 & 1977—Operations and Implications for African Cinema." *Society for Visual Anthropology Review* 6, no. 2 (1990): 80–93.

Andriamonta-Paes, Marie-Clémence. "Discutons: Le cinéma de Med Hondo." Audiovisual recording. Französische Filmtage Tübingen (2018): https://vimeo.com/302025974.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Armes, Roy. *African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Arrighi, Giovanni. "The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects." *New Left Review*, no. 15 (2002): 5–36.

Arrighi, Giovanni, Beverly J. Silver, and Benjamin D. Brewer. "Industrial Convergence, Globalization, and the Persistence of the North-South Divide." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 38, no. 1 (2003): 3–31.

Arulogun, Adegboyega. "The Role of Film in Cultural Identity." In *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria: Proceedings of a Seminar on the Film Industry and Cultural Identity in Nigeria*, edited by Alfred E. Opubor, and Onuora E. Nwuneli, 25–37. Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979.

Ayari, Farida. "Vers un renouveau du cinéma africain: faut-il dissoudre la FEPACI?" *Le Continent: quotidien de l'Afrique*, March 9, 1981, 10.

Azoulay, Ariella. "Unlearning the Origins of Photography." *Unlearning Decisive Moments of Photography*, Fotomuseum Winterthur (2018): https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155239_unlearning_the_origins_of_photography.

Bâ, Saër Maty. "When Labor and Migration Dis-Place Film: Sketch of an Idea." *WorkingUSA* 16, no. 4 (2013): 449–456.

Bachy, Victor. Correspondence to Med Hondo, September 15, 1983. Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Badday, Moncef S. "Que sera le théâtre africain? Entretien avec Ola Balogun, auteur nigerian." *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, no. 15 (1971): 55–59.

Bakari, Imruh. "Introduction: African Cinema and the Emergent Africa." In *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, edited by June Givanni, 3–24. London: British Film Institute, 2000.

———. "What is the Link between Chosen Genres and Developed Ideologies in African Cinema? Introduction to Chapter 5." In *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, edited by June Givanni, 106–108. London: British Film Institute, 2000.

Balde, Thierno. "Djingaré Maïga: l'autre dimension." *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 31–32.

Balogun, Françoise. *Le cinéma au Nigéria*. Brussels: Éditions OCIC/L'Harmattan, 1984.

———. "Die Geburt des Yoruba-Kinos." *Frauen und Film*, no. 60 (1997): 54–63.

———. "It Was Before Nollywood!" In *The Magic of Nigeria: On the Cinema of Ola Balogun*, edited by Filmkollektiv Frankfurt, 55–91. Frankfurt am Main: Filmkollektiv Frankfurt, 2016.

Balogun, Ola. "Consultancy on African Cinema," June 10, 1986. Project reference RAF/82/003. Addis Ababa: OAU/UNDP, 1986.

———. "Le Nigéria doit-il continuer à exister?" *Jeune Afrique*, no. 458 (1969): 3.

———. *Shango suivi de Le Roi-Éléphant*. Honfleur: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1968.

———. *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Crisis, 1966–1970*. Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1973.

———. "The Education of the Film-Maker: Africa." In *The Education of the Film-Maker: An International View*, 33–41. Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1975.

———. *Nigeria: Magic of a Land*. Paris: Éditions J.A., 1978.

———. "Form and Expression in African Arts." In *Introduction to African Culture: General Aspects*, edited by Alpha I. Sow, Ola Balogun, Honorat Aguessy, and Pathé Diagne, 33-81. Paris: UNESCO, 1979.

———. "Cinema, Reality and the Dream World: Film Language as the Inheritor of Visual and Oral Tradition." In *Cinema and Society*, edited by International Film and Television Council (IFTC) under the auspices of UNESCO, 41-47. Brussels: OCIC/IFTC, 1981.

———. *Cultural Policies as an Instrument of External Image-Building: A Blueprint for Nigeria*. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1986.

———. "Pathways to the Establishment of a Nigerian Film Industry." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 183-192. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

———. "Education of the Film-Maker in Africa." Working document (dated February 28, 1972) for the meeting of experts *Education of the Film-Maker for Tomorrow's Cinema* in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 22–26 May 1972.

———. "The Role of Television and Film in Contemporary African Cultural Perspectives." Working document for the *Symposium on Black Civilization and Education* at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria, 15 January–12 February. Paris: UNESCO, 1977.

———. "Ethnology and Its Ideologies." *Consequence: Journal of the Inter-African Council for Philosophy*, no. 1 (1974): 109–125.

———. "Decoding the Message of African Sculpture." *The UNESCO Courier*, no. 5 (1977): 12–20.

Bamba, Mahomed. "In the Name of 'Cinema Action' and Third World: The Intervention of Foreign Film-Makers in Mozambican Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s." *Journal of African Cinemas* 3, no. 2 (2012): 173–185.

Bangré, Sambolgo. "African Cinema in the Tempest of Minor Festivals." In *African Ex-*

periences of Cinema, edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham, 157–161. London: British Film Institute, 1996.

Barber, Karin. *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theater*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

———. "Popular Arts in Africa." *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 1–78.

Barlet, Olivier. "The Ambivalence of French Funding." *Black Camera* 3, no. 2 (2012): 205–2016.

———. "Africultures Dossier." *Black Camera* 1, no. 2 (2010): 63–102.

Barrett, Eseoghene. "Ajani-Ogun: A Film for All Seasons." *New Nigerian*, June 19, 1976, 2–3.

Bassori, Timité. "Un cinéma mort-né?" *Présence Africaine*, no. 49 (1964): 111–115.

———. "Un théâtre nègre à Paris: La compagnie Les Griots." *Africultures* (2016): http://africultures.com/un-theatre-negre-a-paris-la-compagnie-les-griots-13855/ (accessed 20/04/2019).

Beckman, Karen. "Film Theory's Animated Map." *Framework* 56, no. 2 (2015): 472–491.

Belinga, Eno. "Audiovisuel et tradition orale." In *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe*, edited by Mohamed Aziza. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions africaines, 1972.

Ben Salama, Mohand. "Les chants viendront d'eux-mêmes (Les Bicôts-nègres, vos voisins)." *Positif—Revue mensuelle de cinéma*, no. 165 (1975): 61–62.

———. "Les Bicots-Nègres, nos voisins." *France-Pays Arabes*, no. 47 (1974).

Bendazzi, Giannalberto. "African Cinema Animation." *EnterText* 4, no. 1 (2004): 10–26.

Bentsi-Enchill, Nii K. "Money, Power and Cinema." *West Africa*, no. 3255 (1982): 2093–2094.

Bernstorff, Madeleine. "Transnationales Lernen." Website of the Deutsche Kinemathek: https://dffb-archiv.de/editorial/transnationales-lernen.

Berthe, Jamie. "Beyond the Entomological Critique: Re-thinking Rouch and African Cinema." *Studies in French Cinema* 18, no. 3 (2017): 267–277.

Binet, Jacques. "Cinéma africain: bilan de la rétrospective organisée par le C.E.D.A.O.M." *Afrique contemporaine: documents d'Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 83 (1976).

Birri, Fernando. "Cinema and Underdevelopment." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 211–217. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

———. "From 'Birth Certificate of the International School of Cinema and Television in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, Nicknamed the School of the Three Worlds.'" In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 309–312. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

———. "For a Nationalist, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema." *Screen* 26, no. 3–4 (1985): 89–91.

Birri, Fernando, Ousmane Sembène, Jorge Silva, Santiago Alvarez, Med Hondo, Jorge Cedron, Moussa Diakite, Flora Gomes, Mohamed Abdelwahad, El Hachmi Cherif, Lamine Merbah, Mache Khaled, Meziani Abdelhakim, Mamadou Sidibe, and Mostefa Bouali. "Resolutions of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 275–284. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Bisschoff, Lizelle, and David Murphy. "Africa's Lost Classics: Introduction." *Screen* 48, no. 4 (2007): 493–499.

Botbol, Maurice. "'West Indies', les nègres marrons de la liberté: une autre histoire des Antilles." *Le Quotidien*, November 17, 1979, 9.

Bouchard, Vincent. "African Documentaries, Critical Interventions: The Non-Fiction Film Production at the Origins of Francophone West African Cinema." *Critical In-*

terventions 11, no. 3 (2017): 214–227.

———. "Appropriation de l'œuvre audiovisuelle par le spectateur: le cas du film commenté au Sénégal et au Burkina Faso." In *Regarder des films en Afrique*, edited by Patricia Caillé and Claude Forest, 97–113. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2017.

Boughedir, Férid. "Le Cinema nigerien: l'authenticité de l'autodidacte." *Cinéma Quebec* 3, no. 9–10 (1974).

———. *Le cinéma africain de A à Z*. Brussels: OCIC, 1987.

———. "Ancien cuisinier et débardeur, l'émigré Med Hondo exprime sa vérité de l'exil." *Jeune Afrique*, no. 725 (1974): 60–63.

Bozimbo, Willy. "Ajani-Ogun Can Pull a Crowd." *Daily Times*, May 17, 1976, 8–9.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Observation." In *Poems 1913-1956*, edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, 415. London: Methuen, 1976.

Bredeloup, Sylvie. "L'aventurier, une figure de la migration africaine." *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, no. 125 (2008): 281–306.

Buchsbaum, Jonathan. "A Closer Look at Third Cinema." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21, no. 2 (2010): 153–166.

———. "One, Two… Third Cinemas." *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 13–28.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Busch, Annett, and Max Annas. *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews*. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2008.

C.T. "La saga des peuples antillais: 'West Indies' s'insère dans les salles commerciales." *Le Devoir*, April 8, 1980, 19.

Callus, Paula. "Reading Animation through the Eyes of Anthropology: A Case Study of n n African Animation." *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 2 (2012): 113–130.

Campos Johnson, Adriana Michele. "Visuality as Infrastructure." *Social Text* 36, no. 3 (2018): 71–91.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. "Reflections on 'Rationality' and 'Development.'" In *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 175–218. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Cenciarelli, Cecilia, and Aboubakar Sanogo. "Lezione di cinema: Il cinema secondo Med Hondo." Audiovisual recording. Il Cinema ritrovato, Bologna (2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA_cH-Bou2g&ab_channel=CinetecaBologna.

Cervoni, Albert. "Un film 'rive gauche.'" *CinémAction*, no. 8 (1979): 81–82.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism* [1955]. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Legacies of Bandung." In *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, edited by Christopher J. Lee, 45–68. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010.

Chalaye, Sylvie. "La compagnie des Griots ou l'ambition d'un 'véritable théâtre noir moderne.'" *Africultures* 2–3, no. 92-93 (2013): 248–251.

Cham, Mbye Baboucar. Review of *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, edited by A.E. Opubor and O.E. Nwuneli. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1981): 154–159.

Cheriaa, Tahar. *Écrans d'abondance ou cinéma de libération, en Afrique?* Tunis: La société d'impression/Édition Laplume (for SATPEC Tunisia and Organisme Lybien du Cinéma, El Khayala), 1978.

———. "Le cinéma africain et les 'réducteurs de têtes': Regard rétrospectif sur une stratégie de libération." *jeune cinéma* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 8–9.

Cherif, M. "Rencontre avec Mohamed Hondo: Il faut libérer notre cinema…." (1974).

Chilcote, Ronald H. "The Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 3 (1968): 373–388.

Chomentowski, Gabrielle. "Filmmakers from Africa and the Middle East at VGIK during the Cold War." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 13, no. 2 (2019): 189–198.

Ciment, Michel, and Paul Louis Thirard. "Interview with Med Hondo [1970]," in *1970–2018: Interviews with Med Hondo*, edited by Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and Brigitta Kuster, 47–55. Berlin: Arsenal Institut für Film und Videokunst/Archive Books, 2021.

CinémAction. "L'influence du 'troisième cinéma' dans le monde: dossier réuni par CinémAction." *Revue Tiers Monde* 20, no. 79 (1979): 615–618.

Clover, Joshua. *Riot. Strike. Riot. The New Era of Uprisings*. London & New York: Verso, 2016.

Colò, Francesca. "Focus su Med Hondo." Website of Il Cinema ritrovato (2017): https://www.cinefiliaritrovata.it/cinema-ritrovato-2017-focus-su-med-hondo/ (accessed 13/04/2019).

Comité africain de cinéastes. "Communiqué du C.A.C." *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, 1981, 5–6. Brochure.

———. "Le cinéma et l'Afrique: Quelques points d'Histoire." *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, 1981, 8–9. Brochure.

———. "Liste des films sélectionnnés par le Comité africain de cinéastes." *Comité africain de cinéastes: Pour le défense et la promotion du film africain*, 1981, 10–11. Brochure.

Condé, Maryse. "Med Hondo ouvre une ère nouvelle: Quand le cinéma militant devient beau et riche…." *Demain l'Afrique*, no. 33–34 (1979): 72–73.

Cooper, Frederick. "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept." In *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard, 64–92. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

———. "Writing the History of Development." *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine* 8, no. 1, Modernizing Missions: Approaches to 'Developing' the Non-Western World after 1945 (2010): 5–23.

Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. *Petite histoire de l'Afrique: L'Afrique au sud du Sahara de la préhistoire à nos jours* [2011]. Reprint. Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2016.

Cottenet-Hage, Madeleine. "Decolonizing Images: Soleil O and the Cinema of Med Hondo." In *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*, edited by Dina Sherzer, 173–187. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

———. "Images of France in Francophone African Films (1978–1998)." In *Focus on African Films*, edited by Françoise Pfaff, 107–123. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.

D'Almeida, Ayi-Francisco. "Les politiques de communication sociale au moyen du cinéma: le cas des pays africains." *Tiers-Monde* 24, no. 95 (1983): 583–588.

D'Dée. "Jeune cinéma d'Afrique noire." *L'Afrique actuelle*, no. 15 (1967): 3–42.

———. "Le cinéma et les jeunes." *L'Afrique actuelle: premier mensuel bilingue de l'Afrique Francophone et Anglophone*, no. 16 (1967): 25–27.

———. "Enfin du vrai cinéma africain." *La vie africaine: le magazine d'information et de culture de l'Afrique modern*, no. 29 (1962): 50.

Davanture, Andrée. "Une indépendance nécessaire." In *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma*, edited by Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes, 391. Paris & Dakar: Présence africaine, 1995.

Davanture, Andrée, and Jeanick Le Naour. "Les films africains: un patrimoine en danger

(propos recueillis par Françoise Balogun).” *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 121-126.

De Groof, Matthias. “Rouch’s Reflexive Turn: Indigenous Film as the Outcome of Reflexivity in Ethnographic Film.” *Visual Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2013): 109–131.

de Rivel, Moune. “Un mauritanien tourne l’histoire des Antilles: Med Hondo parle de son film ‘West Indians Stories.’” *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 35–37.

de Saivre, Denyse, and Amélie Neumann. “Entretien avec Jean Rouch et Serge Moati.” *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17–18 (1975): 47–53.

“Debout, les temps sont propices!” *Notre pays*, 5–6 January 1980.

Debrix, Jean-René. Correspondence to Jean Rouch, February 13, 1967. 19930381/7, Coopération; Direction de la coopération culturelle et technique; Sous-direction actions culturelles (1952-1978). Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France.

———. Correspondence to Serge Moati, February 13, 1967. 19930381/14, Coopération; Direction de la coopération culturelle et technique; Sous-direction actions culturelles (1952-1978). Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France.

———. “Le cinéma africain.” *Afrique contemporaine: documents d’Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 38–39 (1968): 7–12.

———. “Perspectives nouvelles du cinéma au Niger.” *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17–18 (1975): 55.

———. “Situation du cinéma en Afrique francophone.” *Afrique contemporaine: documents d’Afrique noire et de Madagascar*, no. 81 (1975): 2–7.

Decalo, Samuel. *Historical Dictionary of Niger, Third Edition*. Lanham, Maryland & London: Scarecrow Press, 1997.

Delati, Abdou Achouba. “Entretien avec Med Hondo.” *Écran*, no. 30 (1974): 80–81.

Delmas, Jean. “Soleil O: entretien avec Med Hondo et Robert Liensol.” *jeune cinéma*, no. 48 (1970): 32–38.

Denaës, Freddy. “La marionnette dans le cinéma africain: Hommage à Mustapha Alassane.” *PUCK: la marionnette et les autres arts*, no. 15 (2008): 149–153.

Diado, Amadou. “Maiga Djingarey, premier cowboy africain dans ‘Le Retour d’un aventurier.’” *L’Afrique actuelle: premier mensuel bilingue de l’Afrique Francophone et Anglophone*, no. 16 (1967): 29.

Diawara, Manthia. *African Cinema: Politics & Culture*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

———. “Sub-Saharan African Film Production: Technological Paternalism.” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 32 (1987): 61–65.

Dickinson, Kay. “The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie.” In *Cinema at the Periphery*, edited by Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal, 137–155. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.

Diène, Doudou. “La création audiovisuelle en Afrique.” In *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe*, edited by Mohamed Aziza, 149–161. Dakar & Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1977.

Diop, Baba. “L’ingénieux Moustapha Alassane.” *La Gazette du pays et du monde*, 2009.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* [1974]. Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1987.

Diop, Mody. “Semaine franco-africaine du cinéma: les courts metrages de ‘Moseka’ à ‘Bambo.’” *Le Soleil*, April 17, 1978, 2.

Djagalov, Rossen, and Masha Salazkina. “Tashkent ’68: A Cinematic Contact Zone.” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 2 (2016): 279–298.

Dovey, Lindiwe. *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Downing, John D.H. “Post-Tricolor African Cinema: Toward a Richer Vision.” In *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*, edited by Dina Sherzer, 188–228. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

Druick, Zoë. "UNESCO, Film, and Education: Mediating Postwar Paradigms of Communication." In *Useful Cinema*, edited by Haidee Wasson and Charles R. Acland, 81–102. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Dura, Madeleine. "Entretien avec Med Hondo." *jeune cinéma*, no. 121 (1979): 21–28.

Edera, Bruno. *À la découverte d'un cinéma méconnu: le cinéma d'animation africain*. Annecy: Centre International du Cinéma d'Animation, 1993.

Editorial Board. "Hopeless Africa." *The Economist*, May 11, 2000.

Ekwuazi, Hyginus. *Film in Nigeria*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2018.

Escobar, Arturo. "'Post-development' as Concept and Social Practice." In *Exploring Post-development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives*, edited by Aram Ziai, 18–31. London & New York: Routledge, 2007.

Eshun, Kodwo, and Ros Gray. "The Militant Image: A Ciné-geography: Editors' Introduction." *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 1–12.

Espinosa, Julio García. "Meditations on Imperfect Cinema… Fifteen Years Later." *Screen* 26, no. 3–4 (1985): 93–94.

———. "For an Imperfect Cinema." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 220–230. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Esseghaier, Lazhar. "Vous avez la parole: Mohamed Abid Hondo." In *Cinémas des pays arabes*. Cinémathèque française and Cinémathèque algerienne, 1977. Exhibition catalogue, not paginated.

Ewandé, Félix. "Causes du sous-développement africain en matière de cinéma." *Présence Africaine*, no. 61 (1967): 199–205.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin, 2001.

———. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes. "Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 303–307. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

———. "The Algiers Charter on African Cinema." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 296–298. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

FESPACO, and L'Association des Trois Mondes. *Les Cinémas d'Afrique: Dictionnaire*. Paris: Karthala/ATM, 2000.

Field, Allyson Nadia. "To Journey Imperfectly: Black Cinema Aesthetics and the Filmic Language of Sankofa." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (2014): 171–190.

"Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 94–102.

Forest, Claude. "L'industrie du cinéma en Afrique." *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 2 (2011): 59–73.

———. "Le cinéma en Afrique: l'impossible industrie." *Mise au point*, no. 4 (2012): https://journals.openedition.org/map/800.

Fossati, Giovanna. *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

Foster-Carter, Aidan. "Neo-Marxist Approaches to Development and Underdevelopment." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 3, no. 1 (1973): 7–33.

———. "From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting Paradigms in the Analysis of Underdevelopment." *World Development* 4, no. 3 (1976): 167–180.

Frank, André Gunder. "The Development of Underdevelopment." In *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*, 3–20. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969.

Frey, Marc, and Sönke Kunkel. "Writing the History of Development: A Review of the

Recent Literature." *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 2 (2011): 215–232.

Frodon, Michel. "La deuxième mort d'Idrissa Ouedraogo." *Slate* (2018): http://www.slate.fr/story/158041/cinema-disparition-idrissa-ouedraogo.

Fulchignoni, Enrico. "Conversation between Jean Rouch and Professor Enrico Fulchignoni." *Visual Anthropology Review* 2, no. 3–4 (1989): 265–300.

G.G. "Appareillage… West Indies de Med Hondo." *Figaro*, 1979.

Gabara, Rachel. "From Ethnography to Essay: Realism, Reflexivity, and African Documentary Film." In *A Companion to African Cinema*, edited by Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano, 358–378. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019.

Gabriel, Teshome H. *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982.

———. "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines, and Paul Willemen, 30–52. London: BFI, 1989.

Gado, Boubé. *Le Zarmatarey: contribution à l'histoire des populations d'entre Niger et Dallol Mawri*. Niamey: Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines, 1980.

Ganda, Oumarou. "Menaces sur le cinéma nigérien." *Bingo*, no. 319 (1979): 29–30.

Garba, Issaka. "La colère des cinéphiles." *Sahel Hebdo*, no. 135 (July 10, 1978): 16-17.

———. "Cinéma: les gérants et les opérateurs." *Sahel Hebdo*, no. 136 (July 17, 1978): 8–10.

Geggus, David. "The French Slave Trade: An Overview." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 119–138.

Genova, James E. *Cinema and Development in West Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Gerima, Haile. "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs Lucy." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, 65–89. London: BFI, 1989.

Getachew, Adom. *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Getino, Octavio, and Fernando E. Solanas. "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Culture: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 230–250. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014.

Ghali, Noureddine. "Med Hondo: Je suis un immigré." *jeune cinéma*, no. 81 (1974): 29–31.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Givanni, June. "Preface and Acknowledgements." In *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, edited by June Givanni, xii–xvi. London: British Film Institute, 2000.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation* [1990]. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Goldfarb, Brian. "A Pedagogical Cinema: Development Theory, Colonialism and Post-Liberation African Film." *Iris*, no. 18 (1995): 7–24.

Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Granotier, Bernard. *Les travailleurs immigrés en France* [1970]. Reprint. Paris: François Maspero, 1979.

Grieveson, Lee. "What is the Value of a Technological History of Cinema?" *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 6 (2013): http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue6/PDFs/ArticleGrieveson.pdf

Grieveson, Lee, and Colin MacCabe, eds. *Empire and Film*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Guèye, Sémou Pathé. "Fin de l'histoire et perspective de développement: l'Afrique dans

le temps du monde." *La Pensée: revue du rationalisme modern*, no. 309 (1997): 99–117.

Gutsche, Thelma. *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895–1940*. Cape Town: H. Timmins, 1972.

Haffner, Pierre. *Essai sur le fondement du cinéma africain*. Abidjan & Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1978.

———. "Jean Rouch jugé par six cinéastes d'Afrique noire." *CinémAction*, no. 17 (1982): 62–76.

———. "L'école du Niger: essai de situation d'un cinéma national." In *Regards sur le cinéma négro-africain*, edited by André Gardies and Pierre Haffner, 143–153. Brussels: OCIC, 1987.

———. "Des écrans à la recherche d'une mémoire, des cultures à la recherche d'un miroir: 1er Festival panafricain de cinéma de Ouagadougou (5–13 février 1983)." *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, no. 35 (1983): 91–102.

Handler, Mario. "Consciousness of a Need." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 253–256. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Harrow, Kenneth W. "Introduction." In *African Filmmaking: Five Formations*, edited by Kenneth W. Harrow, 1–30. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017.

———. "Preface." In *African Filmmaking: Five Formations*, edited by Kenneth W. Harrow, ix–xii. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017.

Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Haynes, Jonathan. "Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments." *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (1995): 97–119.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* [1837]. London: George Bell and Sons, 1878.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.

Hennebelle, Guy. "Le cinéma nigérien." *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, no. 20 (1972): 235–240.

———. "Soleil Ô de Med Hondo." *CinémAction*, no. 8 (1979): 80–81.

———. "Entretien avec Med Hondo." *Cinéma 70* no. 147 (1970): 39–50.

Hennebelle, Guy, and Catherine Ruelle. "Alassane Mustapha." *jeune cinéma* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 14–17.

———. "Avant-propos: La fin du "mégotage"?" *jeune cinéma* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes d'Afrique noire (1978): 4-7.

Hickel, Jason. *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions*. London: Heinemann, 2017.

Higbee, Will, and Song Hwee Lim. "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies." *Transnational Cinemas* 1, no. 1 (2010): 7–21.

Hodge, Joseph Morgan. "Writing the History of Development (Part 1: The First Wave)." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6, no. 3 (2015): 429–463.

———. "Writing the History of Development (Part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider)." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 7, no. 1 (2016): 125–174.

Hoefert de Turegano, Teresa. "Continuité et transition dans la coopération cinématographique française en Afrique." *CinémAction*, no. 106 (2003): 58–63.

Hoefert de Turégano, Teresa. "Sub-Saharan African Cinemas: The French Connection." *Modern & Contemporary France* 13, no. 1 (2005): 71–83.

Hondo, Med. "Le rôle du cinéaste africain." In *Cahiers des Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*, 39–40. Montréal: Comité d'action cinématographique,

1975.

———. "Contribution pour une evolution positive du CIDC" (1984). CAC 2–4, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné–Archives, Paris, France.

———. "The Cinema of Exile." In *Film & Politics in the Third World*, edited by John D.H. Downing, 69–76. New York: Autonomedia, 1987.

———. "What is Cinema for Us?" In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 300–303. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

———. "Le cinéaste africain à la conquête de son public: Document du C.A.C." February 5, 1983. CAC 2–4, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. "Les Bicots-nègres, un film menacé: Quand un étranger parle aux français." *Libération*, December 17, 1974, 9.

———. Correspondence to Adamu Halilu. December 19, 1983. Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. "À propos de West Indies… Les Nègres marrons de la liberté: Critique d'un critique." *La Revue du cinéma: Image et son*, no. 345 (1979): 22–26.

———. Correspondence to Alain Gili. January 21, 1980. WEST INDIES 5–8, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. Correspondence to Mahmoud Ba. May 4, 1981. MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. Correspondence to Mohamed Ould Babetta. May 5, 1980. MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. "West Indies Story: A Black Opera," undated. WEST INDIES 1–6, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. Correspondence to Mohamed Ould Babetta, undated. MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. "Pour une meilleure planification des structures de diffusion et de production cinématographiques en Mauritanie," undated. Uncatalogued, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Hondo, Med, and Abdoul War. "Le cinéma et l'Afrique noire," 1983. CAC 2–4, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Hountondji, Paulin J. *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002.

Humblot, Catherine. "Le cinéma africain et les ministres: conférence à Ouagadougou." *Le Monde*, May 6, 1982.

Igwe, Onyeka. "Being Close to, With or Amongst." *Feminist Review* 125, no. 1 (2020): 44–53.

Ilbo, Ousmane. *Le cinéma au Niger*. Brussels: Editions OCIC/COE, 1993.

Ilboudo, Patrick G. *Le FESPACO 1969–1989: les cinéastes africains et leurs œuvres*. Ouagadougou: Editions la Mante, 1988.

Illner, Peer. "Who's Calling the Emergency? The Black Panthers, Securitisation and the Question of Identity." *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 7, no. 3 (2015): 479–495.

Jackson, Steven J. "Rethinking Repair." In *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, edited by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot, 221–239. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014.

Jedlowski, Alessandro. "African Videoscapes: Southern Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Côte d'Ivoire in Comparative Perspective." In *A Companion to African Cinema*, edited by Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano, 293–314. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019.

Jutra, Claude. "En courrant derrière Rouch (III)." *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 116 (1961): 39–44.

Kaboré, Gaston. "Foreword." In *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma*, edited by Fédéra-

tion Panafricaine des Cinéastes, 17–18. Paris & Dakar: Présence africaine, 1995.

———. "L'image de soi, un besoin vital." In *L'Afrique et le centenaire du cinéma*, edited by Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes, 21–22. Paris & Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1995.

Kao Chung-li. "Experiment—My Film History." Unpublished translation from the Chinese original, undated. Microsoft Word file.

Kapalanga Gazungil, Sang-Amin, and Daniel Peraya. "Le groupe, essence du spectacle africain?" In *Camera nigra: le discours du film africain*, edited by Centre d'Etude sur la Communication en Afrique (CESCA), 103–107. Brussels: OCIC/L'Harmattan, 1984.

Ki-Zerbo, Joseph. "Cinema and Development in Africa." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham, 72–79. London: BFI, 1996.

Kodjo, François. "Les cinéastes africains face à l'avenir du cinéma en Afrique." *Tiers-Monde* 20, no. 79 (1979): 605–614.

Kracauer, Siegfried. "Kalikowelt [1926]." In *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays*, 271–78. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977.

L'Herbier, Marcel. *Intelligence du cinématographe*. Paris: Editions Buchet-Chastel, 1946.

Langellier, Jean-Pierre. "Sally N'Dongo (obit)." *Le Monde*, March 10, 2001.

Larkin, Brian. "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media." In *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, edited by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 170–192. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

———. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Laya, Diouldé. "Le CELTHO/OUA et la littérature orale." *Notre librairie*, no. 107 (1991): 52–55.

Leahy, James. "I am a kind of modern griot… Med Hondo talks to James Leahy at the 31st London Film Festival," 1987. Interview transcript, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

———. "CinemaScope South of the Sahara: Med Hondo Talks About Making a New Cinema in Africa." *Monthly Film Bulletin* 55, no. 648 (1988): 9–10.

Lefait, Philippe. "Med Hondo." *Des mots de minuit*, no. 188, France 2 (TV programme), January 5, 2005.

Lelièvre, Samuel. "Les cinémas africains dans l'histoire. D'une historiographie (éthique) à venir." *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze*, no. 69 (2013): 136–147.

Leys, Colin. *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*. Oxford; Bloomington, Indiana & Nairobi: James Currey/Indiana University Press/East African Educational Publishers, 1996.

Ligny, Michel. ""L'Oracle," de Guy Menga." *Présence Africaine*, no. 70 (1969): 193–194.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Löwy, Michael. *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution*. London: Verso, 1981.

Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Accumulation of Capital*. 1913. London: Verso, 2003.

Maarek, Philippe J., ed. *Afrique noire: quel cinéma? Actes du colloque Université Paris X Nanterre, décembre 1981*. Nanterre: Association du Ciné-Club de l'Université Paris X, 1983.

Mabrouki, Azzedine. "Cry Freedom! de O. Balogun." *Les 2 Écrans*, no. 35 (1981): 30–32.

Marcorelles, Louis. "Le point de vue de l'Afrique: rencontre avec Med Hondo." *Le Monde*, May 15, 1982.

———. "Le pari de Carthage: Un front commun des cinémas afro-arabes." *Le Monde*, November 7, 1974, 19.

———. "La galère de l'histoire: 'West Indies', un film de Med Hondo." *Le Monde*, September 20, 1979.

Martin, Marcel. "Brève rencontre… avec Med Hondo." *Écran 79*, no. 81 (1979): 25–26.

Maziz, Mimi. "Interview de Med Hondo." *Revolution Africaine*, no. 498 (1973).

Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

———. *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisé*. Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2013.

———. *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

McLaren, Norman. *Cameraless Animation: A Technique Developed at the National Film Board of Canada*. Montreal: Information & Promotion Division, National Film Board of Canada, 1958.

Mercer, Kobena. "Third Cinema at Edinburgh: Reflections on a Pioneering Event." *Screen* 27, no. 6 (1986): 95–104.

Mestman, Mariano. "Third Cinema/Militant Cinema: At the Origins of the Argentinian Experience (1968–1971)." *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 29–40.

Mgbejume, Onyero. *Film in Nigeria: Development, Problems and Promise*. Nairobi: African Council on Communication Education, 1989.

Mignolo, Walter D. "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 449–514.

Millet, Raphaël. "(In)dépendance des cinémas du Sud &/vs France: L'exception culturelle des cinémas du Sud est-elle française?" *Théorème: Revue de l'Institut de Recherche sur le Cinéma et l'Audiovisuel*, no. 5 (1998): 141–177.

Monémembo, Thierno. "Just Like a Film." *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 13–15.

Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1, no. 4 (2000): 54–68.

Moten, Fred. "The Case of Blackness." *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218.

Mounkaila, Kadidjatou. *Les films de Djingarey Maïga: portée idéologique et impact sur la société nigérienne*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018.

"Moustapha Alassane: Un jeune cinéaste nigérien 'réinvente' le cinéma." *Bingo*, no. 201 (1969): 48–49.

Mpoyi-Buatu, Thomas. "Sembène Ousmane's Ceddo & Med Hondo's West Indies." In *Film & Politics in the Third World*, edited by John D.H. Downing, 55–67. New York: Autonomedia, 1987.

Murphy, David. "Francophone West African Cinema, 1955–1969: False Starts and New Beginnings." In *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*, edited by Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy, London: Modern Humanities Research Association/Maney Publishing, 2014.

Murphy, David, and Patrick Williams. *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

N'Dongo, Sally. *La "coopération" franco-africaine*. Paris: François Maspero, 1972.

———. *Voyage forcée: itinéraire d'un militant*. Paris: François Maspero, 1975.

Nash, Aily. "Kidlat Tahimik." In *Speaking Directly: Oral Histories of the Moving Image*, edited by Federico Windhausen, 74–88. San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque Books, 2013.

Ndaw, Aly Kheury. "Rétrospective du cinéma africain et arabe." *Le Soleil*, November 13, 1979, 2.

Nelson, Max. "First-World Problems." *Film Comment* 53, no. 5 (2017): 11.

"Ni riche, ni heureux, mais fier… Entretien avec Med Hondo." *El Watan*, June 21, 2015.

Niandou, Harouna. "Un pionnier: Moustapha Alassane." *Recherche pédagogie et culture*, no. 17-18 (1975): 55–56.

Niang, Sada. "Les films d'animation de Moustapha Alassane: innovation et continuité."

In *Figuration et mémoire dans les cinémas africains*, edited by Jean Ouédraogo, 57–71. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010.

———. *African Nationalist Cinema: Legacy and Transformations*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014.

Nijland, Dirk. "Jean Rouch: A Builder of Bridges." In *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, edited by Joram ten Brink, 21–35. London: Wallflower Press, 2007.

Niokane, Amadou. "Retour au pays du soleil," undated. Uncatalogued, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* [1965]. New York: International Publishers, 1966.

Noble, Peter. "Balogun: I Just Go from Film to Film." *Screen International*, no. 256 (August 30, 1980): 25.

Nyerere, Julius. *The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance*. Arusha: 1967.

Nyerere, Julius K. *The Arusha Declaration: Ten Years After*. Dar es Salaam: The Government Printer, 1977.

Okome, Onookome. "The Character of Popular Indigenous Cinema in Nigeria." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1995): 93–108.

———. "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria: The Colonial Heritage." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (1996): 42–62.

———. "Ola Balogun et les débuts du cinéma nigérian." *CinémAction*, no. 106 (2003): 158–164.

Ondego, Ogova. "Sub-Saharan Africa's Father of Animation Films Speaks Out." *artmatters.info*, October 30, 2005: https://artmatters.info/2009/12/sub-saharan-africa%E2%80%99s-father-of-animation-films-speaks-out/ (accessed 10/12/2019).

Opubor, Alfred E., Onuora E. Nwuneli, and Onuma O. Oreh. "The Status, Role and Future of the Film Industry in Nigeria." In *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria: Proceedings of a Seminar on the Film Industry and Cultural Identity in Nigeria*, edited by Alfred E. Opubor and Onuora E. Nwuneli, 1–24. Lagos & New York: National Council for the Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979.

Osikomaiya, Jide. "Ogunde's Film 'Aiye' Explains African Science." *Daily Times*, 1979, 1.

Osundare, Niyi. "The King of Laughter." *West Africa*, no. 3388 (July 12, 1982): 1821.

———. "A Grand Escape Into Metaphysics." *West Africa*, no. 3277 (May 12, 1980): 826-828.

Ould Babetta, Mohamed. Correspondence to Med Hondo, March 2, 1981. MH FILMS 5–7, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Pallister, Janis L. "Daniel Boukman: Literary and Political Revolutionary or, A New Orpheus Oils the Squeaky Wheels of Justice." *Dalhousie French Studies*, no. 26 (1994): 121–129.

Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Pasley, Victoria. "Kuxa Kanema: Third Cinema and Its Transatlantic Crossings." In *Rethinking Third Cinema: The Role of Anti-colonial Media and Aesthetics in Postmodernity*, edited by Frieda Ekotto and Adeline Koh, 107–124. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009.

Pattieu, Sylvain. "Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer: le BUMIDOM (1963–1982) et ses ambiguïtés." *Politix* 29, no. 116 (2016): 81–113.

Pavsek, Christopher. "Kidlat Tahimik's 'Third World Projector.'" In *The Utopia of Film: Cinema and Its Futures in Godard, Kluge, and Tahimik*, 78–149. New York & Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Peretu, Ebikebina. "Afrique." In *Encyclopédie mondiale des arts de la marionnette*, edit-

ed by Henri Foulc and Henryk Jurkowski, 32–36. Montpellier: Éditions Entre-
temps, 2009.

Perneczky, Nikolaus. "Continual Re-enchantment: Tunde Kelani's Village Films and the
Spectres of Early African Cinema." *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 6 (2014):
https://framescinemajournal.com/article/continual-re-enchantment-tunde-kelanis-
village-films-and-the-spectres-of-early-african-cinema/

Perrot, Hugues. "Entretien avec Med Hondo," 2018. Unpublished audiovisual recording.
Uncatalogued, Med Hondo personal archive. Ciné-Archives, Paris, France.

Pfaff, Françoise. *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmog-
raphy and Bio-Bibliography*. New York; Westport, Connecticut & London:
Greenwood Press, 1988.

———. "An African Filmmaker in Paris." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*,
no. 31 (1986): 44–46.

Pines, Jim, and Paul Willemen, eds. *Questions of Third Cinema*. London: BFI, 1989.

Pommier, Pierre. *Cinéma et développement en Afrique noire francophone*. Paris: Éditions
A. Pedone, 1974.

Pomp, Joseph. "France as Author of World Cinema: International Co-Production and the
Fonds Sud, 1984–2012." *French Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020): 111–123.

Pouillade, Jean-Luc. "West Indies (ou Les Nègres marrons de la liberté)." *Positif—Revue
mensuelle de cinéma*, no. 226 (1979): 76.

Poussaint, Renee. "African Film: The High Price of Division." *Ufahamu: A Journal of
African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971): 51–63.

Rabiou, Gani. "Avec Djingarey Maïga en trois heures." *Sahel Hebdo*, no. 197 (October
15, 1979): 18–30.

Rège, Philippe. *Encyclopedia of French Film Directors*. Lanham, Maryland; Toronto &
Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Reid, Mark. "Working Abroad: Interview with Med Hondo." *Jump Cut: A Review of
Contemporary Media*, no. 31 (1986): 48–49.

Rist, Gilbert. *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* [1996].
London, New York: Zed Books, 2008.

Rivette, Jacques. "Le retour d'un aventurier." *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 176 (1966): 11.

Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* [1983].
Reprint. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Rocha, Glauber. "The Aesthetics of Hunger." In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema
Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Scott MacKenzie, 218–220. Berkeley:
University of California Press, 2014.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. 1972. London: Bogle L'Ouverture,
1988.

Roggero, Gigi. "Notes on Framing and Re-inventing Co-research." *Ephemera* 14, no. 3
(2014): 5111–5523.

Roof, María. "African and Latin American Cinemas: Contexts and Contacts." In *Focus
on African Films*, edited by Françoise Pfaff, 241–270. Bloomington; Indianapolis:
Indiana University Press, 2004.

Rostow, Walt Whitman. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Rouch, Jean. "Le salut d'irrémédiable à Suzy Bernus." *Journal des africanistes* 62, no. 2
(1992): 15–22.

Ruelle, Catherine. "Balogun Ola." *jeune cinéma* and *CinémAction*, no. 3, Cinéastes
d'Afrique noire (1978): 22–24.

Ryan, Connor. "A Populist Aesthetic: Ola Balogun's Commercial Films and Cultural Pol-
itics." In *The Magic of Nigeria: On the Cinema of Ola Balogun*, edited by Film-
kollektiv Frankfurt, 161–171. Frankfurt am Main: Filmkollektiv Frankfurt, 2016.

Sachs, Wolfgang. "Introduction." In *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge*

as Power, edited by Wolfgang Sachs, xv–xx. London & New York: Zed Books, 2010.

Saint, Lily. "'You Kiss in Westerns': Cultural Translation in Moustapha Alassane's Le retour d'un aventurier." *Journal of African Cinemas* 5, no. 2 (2013): 203–217.

Saleh, Hamada O. Mohamed. "Entretien avec Med Hondo: 'Un homme qui essaie de combler sa conscience.'" *Chaab*, September 30, 1987, 3–4.

Salti, Rasha, ed. *Saving Bruce Lee: African and Arab Cinema in the Era of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*. Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2018.

Sama, Emmanuel. "African Films Are Foreigners in Their Own Countries." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham, 148–156. London: British Film Institute, 1996.

Sandon, Emma. "Cinema and Highlife in the Gold Coast: The Boy Kumasenu (1952)." *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 3 (2013): 49–519.

Sanogo, Aboubakar. "The Indocile Image: Cinema and History in Med Hondo's Soleil O and Les Bicots-Nègres, Vos Voisins." *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 19, no. 4 (2015): 548–568.

———. "Africa in the World of Moving Image Archiving: Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century." *Journal of Film Preservation* no. 99 (2018): 8–15.

Sarkozy, Nicolas. "Le discours de Dakar." *Le Monde*, November 9, 2011.

Sarr, Felwine. *Afrotopia*. Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey, 2016.

———. "Rouvrir les futurs." In *Politique des Temps: Imaginer les devenirs africains*, edited by Achille Mbembe, and Felwine Sarr, 175–187. Dakar: Philippe Rey/Jimsaan, 2019.

Sarr, Felwine, and Bénédicte Savoy. "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics." Policy report N°2018-26.

Sayad, Abdelmalek. *La Double Absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*. Paris: Seuil, 1999.

Scherer, Bernd M. "Preface." In *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past—Rebellions for the Future*, edited by Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010.

Schissel, Howard. "Focus on Third World Film Maker." *8 Days: Middle East Business* 2, no. 44 (1980): 56.

Schuppli, Susan. "Radical Contact Prints." In *Camera Atomica*, edited by John O'Brian, 277–293. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2015.

———. "Material Malfeasance: Trace Evidence of Violence in Three Image-Acts." *Photoworks*, no. 17 (2011): 28–33.

Scott, David. *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Scott, Felicity D. *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity / Architectures of Counterinsurgency*. New York: Zone Books, 2016.

Senghor, Blaise. "Pour un authentique cinéma africain." *Présence Africaine*, no. 49 (1964): 104–110.

Shaka, Femi Okiremuete. *Modernity and the African Cinema: A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcoloniality, and Modern African Identities*. Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004.

Signaté, Ibrahima. *Med Hondo: un cinéaste rebelle*. Paris & Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1994.

Singh, Nikhil Pal. "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation." *Social Text* 34, no. 3 (2016): 27–50.

Sokhona, Sidney. "Notre cinéma." *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 285 (1978): 55–57.

Soyinka, Wole. "Theatre and the Emergence of the Nigerian Film Industry." In *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, edited by Alfred E. Opubor, and Onuora E. Nwuneli, 97–103. Lagos & New York: National Council for the

Arts and Culture, Nigeria/Third Press International, 1979.

Steedman, Carolyn. "Archival Methods." In *Research Methods for English Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin, 17–29. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Syms, Martine. "Black Vernacular: Reading New Media." Martine Syms' official website (2013): http://martinesyms.com/black-vernacular-reading-new-media/.

Tahimik, Kidlat. "Cups-of-gas Filmmaking vs. Full Tank-cum-Credit-Card Fillmaking." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2013): 81–86.

Tall, Sékou, Solo Randrasana, and Alkaly Kaba. "Point 2. How the cinema can present the human, social and cultural realities of Africa." *Présence Africaine*, no. 90, Le rôle du cinéaste africain dans l'éveil d'une conscience de civilisation noire (1974): 62–95.

Taylor, Clyde. "Eurocentrics vs. New Thought at Edinburgh." *Framework*, no. 34 (1987): 140–148.

———. "Black Cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, 90–110. London: BFI, 1989.

———. "New U.S. Black Cinema." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 28 (1983): 46–48.

Tcheuyap, Alexie. "African Cinema(s): Definitions, Identity and Theoretical Considerations." *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2011): 10–26.

Thomas, Dominic. "Africa/France: Contesting Space." *Yale French Studies*, no. 115 (2009): 141–153.

Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage, 1966.

Tiémélé, Jean-Baptiste. "Le cinéma africain en circuit fermé." *Présence Africaine*, no. 170 (2004): 99–101.

Tomaselli, Keyan G, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke. "Towards a Theory of Orality in African Cinema." *Research in African Literature* 26, no. 3 (1995): 18–35.

Tomaselli, Keyan G. "'African Cinema': Theoretical Perspectives on Some Unresolved Questions." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Baboucar Cham, 165–174. London: BFI, 1996.

Traoré, Biny. "Cinéma africain et développement." *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, no. 33 (1983): 51–62.

Tsika, Noah. "Soft Power Cinema: Corporate Sponsorship, Visual Pedagogy, and the Cultural Cold War in West Africa." *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 73 (2014): 51–65.

Ugboajah, Frank. "Implications culturelles de la communication en Afrique." *Revue Tiers Monde* 28, no. 111 (1987): 595–600.

Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank. *Black African Cinema*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1994.

———. *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

UNESCO. *Premier catalogue sélectif international de films ethnographiques sur l'Afrique noire*. Paris: UNESCO/Les Presses Saint-Augustin, 1967.

Union générale des travailleurs sénégalais en France. *Le livre des travailleurs africains en France*. Paris: François Maspero, 1970.

Van Dyke, Kristina. "The Menil Collection: Houston, Texas." *African Arts* 40, no. 3 (2007): 36–49.

Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. "Reflexions sur le premier concours international du film d'outre-mer." *Présence Africaine*, no. 17 (1957): 118–122.

———. "Propos sur le cinéma africain." *Présence Africaine*, no. 22 (1958): 106–117.

———. "Mon itinéraire cinématographique." *Le cinéma et l'Afrique*. Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1969.

———. "La création cinématographique en Afrique." *Présence Africaine*, no. 77 (1971):

218–232.

———. *Le cinéma africain: des origines à 1973*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975.

———. "Les 5es Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage." *Présence Africaine*, no. 93 (1975): 208–214.

———. "Xe anniversaire des Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage." *Présence Africaine*, no. 101–102 (1977): 231–235.

———. "Responsabilités du cinéma dans la formation d'une conscience nationale africaine." *Présence Africaine*, no. 27–28 (1959): 303–313.

———. "Résolution de la commission des arts: Le cinéma." *Présence Africaine*, no. 24–25 Special issue on the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1959): 415–416.

Warren, Bill. *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*. London: NLB/Verso, 1980.

Willemen, Paul. "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, 1–29. London: BFI, 1989.

———. "The National." In *Looks and Frictions*, 206–219. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Winkler, Hartmut. *Diskursökonomie: Versuch über die innere Ökonomie der Medien*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004.

Woll, Josephine. "The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa." In *Focus on African Films*, edited by Françoise Pfaff, 223–240. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Wynter, Sylvia. "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?: A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped.'" In *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, edited by Aguibou Y. Yansané, 299–316. Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1996.

———. "Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man." In *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, edited by June Givanni, 25–76. London: British Film Institute, 2000.

Zacks, Stephen A. "The Theoretical Construction of African Cinema." *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (1995): 6–17.

Filmography

Ola Balogun
  One Nigeria (Nigeria, 1969)
  Les Ponts de Paris (France, 1970)
  Fire in the Afternoon (Nigeria, 1971)
  Thundergod (Nigeria, 1972)
  In the Beginning… (Nigeria, 1972)
  Alpha (France, 1972)
  Nupe Masquerade (Nigeria, 1973)
  Owuama: A New Year Festival (Nigeria, 1973)
  Eastern Nigeria Revisited (Nigeria, 1973)
  Amadi (Nigeria, 1975)
  Vivre (*Live*; Nigeria, 1974)
  Nigersteel (Nigeria, 1975)
  Ajani-Ogun (Nigeria, 1976) Balogun says 1975
  Muzik Man (Nigeria, 1977)
  A deusa negra (*Black Goddess*; Brazil/Nigeria, 1978)
  Aiye (*Life/The World*; Nigeria 1979)
  Ija Ominira (*Fight for Freedom*; Nigeria, 1979)
  Cry Freedom! (*Pour la liberté!*, Nigeria/Ghana/UK, 1981)

Orun Mooru (*Heaven is Hot*, Nigeria, 1982)

Money Power (*Owo l'Agba* aka *Le Roi du fric*, Nigeria, 1982)

Sanders Feeds (Nigeria, 1984)

Au bout de l'effort… la victoire: 4èmes Jeux Panafricains Nairobi 1987—Kenya (*The Hard Road to Victory: 4*[th] *All African Games Nairobi 1987—Kenya*, Belgium, 1987)

Destination Paix (*The Peace Connection*, Nigeria/France, 1988)

Iron Eagles (Nigeria, 1987-88)

Le Retour (*The Return*, France, 1989)

PANA—Une voix pour l'Afrique (*PANA–A Voice for Africa*, Nigeria/France, 1989)

River Niger, Black Mother (*Fleuve Niger, mère noire*, Nigeria/France, 1989)

Children of Africa (*Les Enfants d'Afrique*, Nigeria/France, 1990)

Fin d'exil (*In Search of Peace*, Nigeria/France, 1993)

The Magic of Nigeria (Nigeria, 1993)

Destination Barbados—Calypso Island (Nigeria/France, 1994)

Juju Roots (Nigeria, 1994)

Le cinéma autrement [untitled] (France, 1994)

Le Train de l'Humanité—Un aller-simple Dakar Bamako (*Peace Mission on Wheel*, Nigeria, 1994)

Winnie Mandela Speaks—The Battle Against Apartheid (Nigeria, 1994)

Glimpses of Burkina Faso (Nigeria/France, 1995)

Les Artisans de l'avenir (The Artisans of the Future; Nigeria, 1995)

Million Man March (Nigeria, 1995)

Gods of Africa in Brazil (Nigeria, 1998)

Med Hondo

Balade aux sources (1967)

Roi de Cordes (1969)

Partout ailleurs peut-être nulle part (1969)

Soleil Ô (1969)

Mes voisins (1973)

Les Bicots-nègres vos voisins (France/Mauritania, 1974)

La faim du monde aka *Sahel la faim pourquoi* (1975, directed by Théo Robichet)

Nous aurons toute la mort pour dormir… (1977)

Polisario, un peuple en armes (1979)

West Indies… Les nègres marrons de la liberté (1979)

Sarraounia (1986)

Lumière noire (1994)

Watani: un monde sans mal (1998)

Fatima, l'Algérienne de Dakar (2004)

Moustapha Alassane

Le Piroguier (early 1960s)

La Pileuse de millet (early 1960s)

Aouré (Niger, 1962)

La Bague du roi Koda (1962)

La Mort de Gandji (Canada/Niger, 1965)

Bon voyage, Sim (France/Niger, 1966)

Le Retour d'un aventurier (Niger, 1966)

L'Arachide de Santchira (1966)

Sonara (ca. 1967)[1]

Les Contrebandiers (1969)

---

[1] Mentioned in Jean-René Debrix, February 13, 1967.

Conteur albarca aka *Deela* (Niger, 1969)
Jamya (1971)
F.V.V.A. (Niger, 1972)
Shaki aka *Albimbola chef de Shaki* (Niger/Nigeria, 1973)
Toula, ou le génie des eaux—together with Anna Soehring (Niger/West Germany, 1973)
Soubane (1974–75)
Samba le Grand (Niger, 1977)
Festival à Dosso (1979)
Kankamba (1982)
Kokoa (Niger, 1985 [released 2001])

Other
1871 (Ken McMullen, UK/France, 1990)
A Bissau, le carnaval (Sarah Maldoror, Guinea-Bissau, 1980)
À nous deux France (Désiré Écaré, France, 1965)
Africa, the Jungle, Drums and Revolution (Suliman Mohamed Ibrahim Elnour, USSR, 1979)
Afrique-sur-Seine (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra & Mamadou Sarr, France, 1955)
Agogo Ewo (Tunde Kelani, Nigeria, 2002)
Al'lèèsi: une actrice africaine (Ramatou Keïta, Niger/France, 2003)
Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1979)
a so-called archive (Onyeka Igwe, UK/Nigeria, 2020)
Badou Boy (Djibril Diop Mambéty, Senegal, 1970)
Baks (Momar Thiam, Senegal, 1974)
Balikbayan #1: Memories of Overdevelopment Redux III (Kidlat Tahimik, Philippines, 2015)
Ben Hur (William Wyler, USA, 1959)
Bicycle Thieves (Vittoria De Sica, Italy, 1948)
Bob Morane (Robert Vernay, France, 1965)
Borom Sarret (Ousmane Sembène, Senegal, 1963)
Boubou-cravate (Daniel Kamwa, Cameroon/France, 1972)
Bullfrog in the Sun (Hans Jürgen Pohland, Nigeria/West Germany, 1972)
Bulworth (Warren Beatty, USA, 1998)
Bush Mama (Haile Gerima, USA, 1976)
Cabascabo (Oumarou Ganda, Niger, 1969)
Caméra d'Afrique (Férid Boughedir, Tunisia, 1983)
Cap Vert, un carneval dans le Sahel (Sarah Maldoror, France, 1979)
Ceddo (Ousmane Sembène, Senegal/France, 1977)
Certificat d'indigence (Moussa Bathily, Senegal, 1983)
Cissin…Cinq ans plus tard (Mamadou Djim Kola & Maurice Bulbulian, Burkina Faso 1982)
Concerto pour un exil (Désiré Écaré, France, 1968)
Death May Be Your Santa Claus (Frankie Dymon Junior, UK, 1969)
Djéli (Fadika Kramo-Lanciné, Côte d'Ivoire, 1981)
Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, USA, 1969)
En residence surveillée (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Senegal, 1981)
Et la neige n'était plus (Ababacar Samb-Makharam, Senegal, 1965)
Fantasia (USA, 1940)
Finye (Souleymane Cissé, Mali, 1982)
Ganga (Inoussa Ousseïni, Niger, 1975)
Grand Magal à Touba (Blaise Senghor, Senegal, 1963)
If… (Lindsay Anderson, UK, 1968)

Ironu (François Sourou Okioh, Benin, 1985)

Jean Rouch et sa caméra au cœur de l'Afrique (Philo Bregstein, Netherlands, 1977)

Jom (Ababacar Samb-Makharam, Senegal/West Germany, 1982)

Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage (Férid Boughedir, 1982)

Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1993)

Kaddu Beykat (*Lettre paysanne*, Safi Faye, Senegal, 1975)

Kongi's Harvest (Ossie Davis, Sweden/USA/Nigeria, 1970)

L'Imprévu (Alpha Adama, France, 1965)

La Chasse au lion a l'arc (Jean Rouch, France, 1965)

La Croisière noire (Léon Poirier, France, 1925)

La Femme au couteau (Timité Bassori, Côte d'Ivoire, 1968/69)

La Fleur dans le sang (Urbain Dia-Moukori, France, 1966)

La hora de los hornos (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Fernando E. Solanas & Octavio Getino, Argentina, 1968)

La Noire de… (Ousmane Sembène, Senegal/France, 1966)

La Passante (Safi Faye, France, 1972)

La petite hutte (André Leroux, France, 1965)

La Rançon d'une alliance (Sébastien Kamba, Congo, 1974)

La Zerda et le chants de l'oubli (Assia Djebar, Algeria, 1978-1982)

Le Mil (Jean Rouch, France, 1963)

Le Musée national du Niger (Jean-Paul Vuillin, France/Niger, 1974).

Le Niger, jeune république (Claude Jutra, Canada, 1961)

Le Soro (Inoussa Ousseïni, Niger, 1980)

Les cow-boys sont noirs (Serge Moati, France/Niger, 1966)

Les Dodos (Sanou Kollo, Burkina Faso, 1980)

Les mâitres fous (Jean Rouch, France, 1955)

Les princes noirs de Saint-Germain des Prés (Ben Diogaye Bèye, Senegal, 1975)

Le Retour de Tiéman (Djibril Kouyaté, Mali, 1970)

Les statues meurent aussi (Ghislain Cloquet, Chris Marker & Alain Resnais, France, 1953)

Living in Bondage (Chris Obi Rapu, Nigeria, 1992)

Lutte saharienne (Inoussa Ousseïni, Niger, 1977)

Mandabi (Ousmane Sembène, France/Senegal, 1968)

Memory Also Die (Didi Cheeka, Nigeria, 2020)

Moi, un noir (Jean Rouch, France, 1957)

Môl (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Senegal, 1966)

Monangambee (Sarah Maldoror, Angola, 1968)

Mortu nega (Flora Gomes, Guinea-Bissau, 1988).

Mouramani (Mamadou Touré, Guinea, 1953)

Moustapha Alassane, cinéaste du possible (Maria Silvia Bazzoli and Christian Lelong, France, 2009)

Mueda, memoria e massacre (Ruy Guerra, Mozambique, 1979)

Nationalité: immigré (Sidney Sokhona, France, 1976)

Notre fille (Daniel Kamwa, Cameroon, 1981)

Nuages noirs (Djingarey Maïga, Niger, 1979)

Os cafajestes (Ruy Guerra, Brazil, 1962)

Paris c'est joli (Inoussa Ousseïni, France, 1974)

Paweogo (*Le Retour au village*, Daniel Sanou Kollo, Upper Volta [Burkina Faso], 1981)

Petit à petit (Jean Rouch, France/Niger, 1970)

Point de vue (Urbain Dia-Moukori, France, 1965)

Pousse-pousse (Daniel Kamwa, Cameroon, 1976)

Rio Bravo (Howard Hawks, USA, 1959)

Roots (USA, 1977)

Safrana ou le droit à la parole (Sidney Sokhona, France/Mauritania, 1978)

Sambizanga (Sarah Maldoror, Angola/France, 1972)

Sarzan (Momar Thiam, Senegal, 1962)

Saworoide (Tunde Kelani, Nigeria, 1999)

Séjour officiel de monsieur le ministre de la coopération (Pascal Abikanlou, Benin, ca. 1975)

Shadows (John Cassavetes, USA, 1958)

Shaihu Umar (Adamu Halilu, Nigeria, 1976)

Son of Africa (Nigeria, 1970)

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (Melvin Van Peebles, USA, 1971)

The Boy Kumasenu (Sean Graham, Gold Coast, 1952)

The Cool World (Shirley Clarke, USA, 1963)

The Sheepman (George Marshall, USA, 1958)

Terror Train (Roger Spottiswoode, USA, 1980)

Top Gun (Tony Scott, USA, 1986)

Touki Bouki (Djibril Diop Mambéty, Senegal, 1973)

Ursus nella valle dei leoni (Carlo Ludivico Bragaglia, Italy, 1962)

Voyage officiel du président Maga au Gabon (Pascal Abikanlou, Benin, 1972)

Wasan Kara (Inoussa Ousseïni, Niger, 1980)

West Side Story (Jerome Robbins & Robert Wise, USA, 1961)