This book is written from a belief that the idea of “Africa” is one that has relevance for contemporary society and that contemporary society, as a global, interconnected context, has a great stake in African reality, particularly with the shifting power relations among nations in the twenty-first century. In this book, we will discuss “African” cinema by studying the particular ways in which Africa and its diaspora are anticipated, imagined, and captured on the screen, while the notion of the “contemporary” stands in a specific relation to the past and the future. We shall explore these ideas further in this introductory chapter. The phrase “Africa Watch” indicates the complexity of spectatorship in African cinema and acknowledges, without necessarily endorsing, other projects that name themselves as such. “Africa Watch” in this book is about watching films through Africanized perspective from all locations and privileging critical methods that allow for the conception of “Africa” via such a perspective.

Notwithstanding the many sound reasons for approaching the study of the region in terms of national boundaries or specific political histories (Frindéthié), the impulse of this work coheres with the central impulses of the films that constitute its core corpus (mostly films released after 2000). Those impulses are to address, and at times to appeal to, a wide, global audience, all the while privileging the space, people, and narratives of the local African contexts of the films. These contexts, however, are constructed in the cinematic medium as networks whose signification within the film reach well beyond the knowable places represented in it. They stretch African space out beyond any containable geographical limit and interrogate many issues discussed at the global level; I argue that these chosen films imagine, and indeed construct their spectator within their process rather consciously. The most obvious African diasporas are the ones that date to the mass movement of Africans during the slave trade across to the “new” worlds of the Americas. In this book I have privileged the sense of an intellectual and aesthetic conversation that I tease out by following the construction of spectatorship in the range of films studied rather than...
by delineating what African and diaspora space means by adopting a simple geog-
ographical or nation-based understanding. For this reason, I place African-American
film in a slightly different category, particularly because of the naturally dialectical
relationship with Hollywood cinema that is part of its history, and I do not treat in it
any detail here. The idea of “diaspora” is also activated by the themes evoked in the
films, not simply because many of the “African” filmmakers move, literally, in the
spaces of diaspora in their own lives and especially in their filming endeavors since
they are often interested in liminality, but also because the dispersion of peoples
within national boundaries has itself become pertinent to the questions studied
under “diaspora” in economic, material, and identity-based terms. Gestures from
the Creole islands of the Americas as well as of the Indian Ocean as diasporas
become overt in the cinema, while the notion is also activated in the films made
within the newer migrant spaces that have emerged in the metropolises of Europe.
African and diaspora films that are artistic, connected to liberation, and that pay
attention to form to a very high degree are often contrasted to the more recently inau-
gurated video productions that are for the most plot-driven and far more connected,
it is said, to the local contexts and local audiences. We will address this dichotomy
shortly. Simultaneously, the artistic films we are interested in studying further, use
various strategies that privilege local audiences in their encounter with the film. Fur-
ther, these films engage with quite specific historical events or outcomes and are
identifiably African in cultural terms. These African “terms” will be highly relevant
to the configuration of the analyses in this book. That is, the method of interrogation,
of reasoning, of representation within the films is explored under the three rubrics
that organize the book’s structure: space (Chapters 2–3), character (Chapters 4–6),
and narrative (Chapters 7–10). These films interrogate the identity of African char-
acters they invent or recreate; the complexity of spaces relevant to Africa, though not
restricted to it geographically; and the forms of narration that their creators adopt
and devise. Engagement with representational space also implicates the cinematic
medium and the relationship of space to time. This general conception allows for a
more dialogical, and even dialectical, relationship among the films within this book.
Any of the films treated in this book could easily be studied in a different framing:
that is, all these films go well beyond the ascription of the category African and/or
diasporic African. Presenting them as an interconnected repertoire is, then, a par-
ticular enterprise that this book takes on, but it is one that is based in a particular
material history that is connected to the development of cinema on the continent,
on one hand, and, on the other, the collectives that are moving beyond their founda-
tional rationales and taking on new meanings in the contemporary context. Building
on the previous scholastic work on cinema related to Africa and its diasporas, this
book addresses an exciting array of new films that are presented as the theoreti-
cal ruminations they are on African history and contemporary society well beyond
the continent and its diasporas, all the while intervening in cinema as the diverse,
globally recognizable phenomenon that it is. Focusing on the spectator as a real but
constructed entity drawn into the cinematic experience, I present and study these
films as an interconnected “discourse” whose pertinence to contemporary issues on
Africa and its diaspora are articulated in terms that renew film theory, genre, and spectatorship in interesting ways. Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse is useful because what he attempted to do was to move away from the idea of “knowledge” as a set of ideas which are then propositions in language about a particular subject. In this sense, the discourse that these films create is not directed toward deductive reasoning which then gives an authoritative set of propositions on “Africa” or “diaspora life,” for example. These films create a particular sensibility toward Africa that then might inform spectators’ attitudes toward specific propositions encountered elsewhere. For example, while notions of patriarchy, unadapted Western education, modernization modeled on development as it is visible in many symbols of achievement, or forced migrations to the cities or to the West come under critique in many of these films, those contexts are used to do much more in the spectators’ engagement with the film in question. The spectator is asked to enter into the ethical questions the films take up, and through a variety of techniques is invited, as part of the cinematic experience, to think from a variety of positions and angles that equally challenge an instinctive (and culturally bound) reaction or an intellectual and (educated) response. This is particularly true when the experience is repeated and sustained through a repertoire of films that I present provisionally in this book.

It goes without saying that spectators might have different reactions to the filmic experience and interact with it in diverse ways. It would be impossible to somehow “account for” every possible spectator. Yet it seems that it is not the most productive move to distinguish between a “Western” spectator, who should then be constructed as an “outsider,” and another, in opposition to this, who is the authentic viewer, the “insider,” who would then necessarily be an “African” or a “diasporic African” in identity. At the same time, it remains true that the content of the film itself defines a “native” (despite the now annoying connotations of this word) a particular audience, one whom we might take to resemble the characters and occupy the spaces portrayed in the film, speak the languages used, and embody the rhythms and inexplicable sensations it evokes. However, this would only tell a small part of the filmic story. A film is so much more than its content. Its experience overflows beyond what can be contained by iconicity or intellectual endeavor; it is sensory and cerebral, all the while emotional and yet also demands both an immediate ethical engagement on the part of the spectator who is interpellated and a more processual interrogation of his or her attitudes and ideologies.

The term “interpellate,” which I will use several times in this chapter, might require some unpacking. Its original meaning is to interrupt or intervene in parliamentary proceedings to demand an explanation. Its second meaning is more philosophical: it refers to the way a whole thinking system or ideology constructs an individual or a category. The French philosopher Louis Althusser is most often associated with the term, although it has been taken up by a variety of fields, media studies being one of them, with discussion around it in Screen in the 1970s. Althusser was interested in how individuals relate to their real conditions of existence within the state and their imaginary relationship to it. Althusser’s notion of interpellation teased out the ways in which a subject apprehends itself already in the terms in which
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It is called out to by systems of power that he labelled “ideology.” To simplify his argument somewhat, he shows how individuals participate in the power structure that dominates them. The aspect that is most interesting in importing Althusser into a conversation about how we watch films is the way he shows how meaning is made and the subject comes into being in a particular way through a process that we can track in stages but which does not occur consecutively. It is only the analyses that can separate these different ongoing parts of the process: “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are always-already subjects” (Althusser 176). So it is not that the spectator is “born” as something new only through the film experience. Nor is it that he or she was already what he or she was prior to the experience. Our interest in activating such a notion of interpellation is to follow how within the experience of the film various cultural instincts are called up (differentially) for the spectator, thus drawing on models of being whose configurations go well beyond the sensory experience of the film. Yet the “presentness” of the filmic experience also relies precisely on the unknown and unknowable, the unconstituted, just as the spectator who is called up in these multiple ways is also constantly in a state of becoming as much as she or he can also exist as a being. Vivian Sobchack’s work reminds us of the spectator as a sensory nexus of meanings and meaning-making that involve a consciousness of the sensory evocations on the screen as well as one’s own body as sensing in and of itself (72–79). These dynamisms, related to the unconscious, the willingly political, the unforeseeable associative processes that occur within the interaction of the spectator’s mind and senses in the filmic experience, are drawn together in the idea of interpellation as I use it here and throughout this book. However, I wish in addition to evoke Fanon’s use of the same idea when he writes that when he is on the street the manner in which he is interpellated as a guilty subject does not require an epithet such as “dirty negro.” Just the casually surprised remark “Look, a negro” sends the black subject surrounded by white colonial culture into a crushing objecthood (Fanon, Black Skin 109). This then brings about an interrogation and analysis in Fanon’s text of the way in which the black man of that specific historical moment is interpellated in colonial culture. Adjoining Fanon’s experience of interpellation to Althusser’s more “neutral” terms recalls the particular valence of the idea of the subject in the hierarchy of colonial culture. Here, it reminds us that such a process of interpellation and the dynamic concept of the spectator are not divested from the meanings generated within the experience of the film, which while wholly present also draws on intellectual, emotional, and sensory knowledge that transcends that experience in the case of each and every spectator.

It is quite obvious that theories of the spectator – such as that proposed by Christian Metz, by which the cinematic experience is an enactment of the mirror stage, whereby the spectator identifies with the image on the screen in order to register his difference from his mother, whom he then understands as “castrated” – cannot fully account for the cinematic experience of any audience, even one conceived
of as homogenous. According to those early theories deriving quite directly from
psychoanalysis, the spectator's desire is then to merge with the mother and to
disavow his or her own fears of castration by maintaining a belief in the existence of
a maternal penis. Laura Mulvey's work intervened strongly in order to show how
the spectator was traditionally constructed as male and that the female spectator
underwent identification with both the passive female subjects on the screen and
the male voyeuristic position that the camera enacted and invited. Following Mul-
vey's intervention much attention has been focused on accounting for the female
subjectivity of viewers and, beyond that, of female positioning alongside moveable
identities and the positioning of spectators in general. Moreover, it is recognized
that the spectator is not passive, and thus the notion of “interpellation” becomes
more dynamic and the relationship between spectator-subject and screen-subject
dialectical— and in this sense far less predictable. But the spectator is not simply a
theoretical entity about which one might pontificate and seek to form conclusive
statements. Mulvey's early intercession and her suggestion that the spectator's gaze
counterposed the voyeuristic and the fetishistic gaze already contain the argument
that a slew of critics would subsequently pursue (among them Kaja Silverman,
Ann Kaplan, and Teresa de Lauretis): that the spectator is not a fixed entity that we
can pin down, that spectatorship is a dynamic activity, that interaction within the
filmic experience draws in the subject in multiple and changeable ways. We might
productively link Mulvey's suggestion to a more explicitly postcolonial critical
apparatus in bringing it together with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term “strategic
essentialism.” Although in Spivak's use of the term the overt political self-awareness
of the subjects engaging in these acts of identity is much greater, it can also be seen
as a series of overlapping procedures entered into by the spectator-subject in the
provisional and time-bound context of the filmic experience. But it is also useful
to keep in mind, despite the many revisions to the concept of the film experience
since Christian Metz, his sense of it resembling the mirror stage of identification.
This reminds us of the drive to “master” one's environment and oneself in it. While
most self-reflexive films that draw attention to their form subvert this aspect of
the spectator's desire, it is interesting to bear that primary impulse in mind as a
potential tendency in spectatorship as we suggest specific possible interactions of
the spectator in the films studied. The nexus “between desire, desire for political
change and the language available for its expression” (Mulvey “Changes” 16) forms
an important space from which to think about this cinema because much of the
film work here is about creating a cinematic language for new desires and new ideas
about politics which is itself wrapped up within the hope of creating a new spectator.
Spectatorship and its relationship to the female character constitute something that
is substantially rethought in the art cinema I refer to in this book. It is interesting
to follow the female character's presence within the diegesis as it plays itself out
in the larger question of the film's relationship to its spectators. African cinema
is a subaltern in its own diegesis in cinema history. Its films perform pedagogical
moves and construct their spectators as possible agents for political change. In this
endeavor, African cinema invents its own expression adequate to such a task.
In the context of this work it might not be gender that always provides the grounds for positioning and moving as we theorize the spectator’s experience. The term “spec-
tator” itself somehow becomes alien because it suggests a certain distance or remove that then aligns better with the audience of First Cinema, or cinema as spectacle. However, the notion of interpellation being a dynamic process in which the subject is hailed from the screen but enters into engagement with the totality of the film is helpful. The spectator-subject is then both a provisional nothingness whose being is contingent upon the film because within it is created the subject-spectator of the specific film experience and also a provisional totality that provides a responsive but supple “space” from which the subject enters into a dialectical relationship with the images that wash over it and transform that space into various shifting positions. We can liken these positions to provisional essentialisms if we can imagine them to be rapid, fluid, and often even contradictory.

The filmmakers situate themselves just as Frantz Fanon, the revolutionary Martinican who literally became an Algerian and an African, envisaged the ideal intellectual: such an intellectual does the theoretical and practical work of negotiating between “the people” and the totality of the nation (often against the national bourgeoisie), while also connecting with the global stage. What emerges is that these films suggest that any local African character, space, or narrative has a legitimate place in the global reality well beyond the shores of Africa and its diasporic contexts. In this book, African films are considered instances for aesthetic and theoretical reflection and opportunities for developing critical acuity about the interconnected world. Those opportunities are of consequence for the selves that emerge from making and/or experiencing those films that both claim Africanness and redefine it. The African films that are of interest in this book all participate in the quite simple task that director Raoul Peck states explicitly: to work so that Africa can no longer remain a “backdrop” in movies. In a 2012 Cannes interview, he remarks that cinema should work to bring other realities, other viewpoints to global audiences by bringing to those audiences the problems as they are known to those living in African spaces that have long been marginalized, misunderstood, and simply neglected. He thus gives spectators the opportunity to stand outside themselves and exercise the humil-
ity necessary to take on the perspectives of another person. “Otherwise,” he says, “it remains a power trip” (Peck). Peck’s conviction, and his aesthetics following from it, are made out to be quite suspect, when such films as we consider here are dismissed as being disconnected from Africa in an explicit comparison with the more commercial films that are perhaps unfairly bunched together to be called “Nollywood” (from Nigeria) or “Gollywood” (from Ghana) films. These other types of film are proclaimed as giving an accurate picture of African reality because they manage to reach a wide audience. The argument is perhaps better posed in different terms. African cinema of the “artistic” conviction is no different from art cinema in, say, India or Latin America. These films do not manage to reach huge audiences anywhere – their biggest forums to date have been film festivals for launching, and their showings only sometimes make it to large cinema theaters (which are facing a more acute crisis in Africa than anywhere else in the world). So, to say that African art cinema is available
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less easily to Africans is only to restate what art cinema everywhere in the world already knows as a reality. Instead, filmmakers from the “art” group prefer to focus on aesthetics. However, one of their major considerations still concerns the practical and the material: the distribution and exhibition of their films and obtaining the technical means to complete them. The Niamey Congress emphasized the historic nature of these concerns for “art” filmmakers. Commercial filmmakers conduct this part of their business overtly (Diawara 43–45).

African cinema is a recent phenomenon, with a proper repertory being established late in the second half of the last century, and it has emerged as a field of study from within African studies, sociology, or literary studies rather than from within film studies. As opposed to those approaches, in this book we will anchor discussion on the insights these films provide by following our experiences of them carefully as film. That is, I will share my own experience of the film (both of coming to know it as an individual and also of experiencing it in various viewings and discussions and through the shared understanding of groups of different sizes and natures, including students, colleagues, professional organizations, and friends), and I will use particular moments or themes to construct, analyze, and even imagine a range of reactions or forms of participation. It goes without saying that while these comments are not authoritative, their legitimacy comes from being grounded in the material of the film itself. The medium developed its aesthetics following the tradition of filmmaking in the colonies (from which it cannot be separated). This was linked to producing colonial documentaries and ethnographic films, often funded by colonial governments; these were the first “African” films, so to speak. While these early films were “objectively” African, often shot in Africa and even finished in some of the colonially established filmmaking facilities, they were evidently far from able to capture let alone articulate African “subjectivities.” In this way, within African Cinema, both as praxis and academic discipline, there is an awareness of historical continuity in the entry of Africans into the representational apparatus of cinema, beginning with colonial film. This has, in some ways, affected the critical apparatus that focuses on cinema’s truth-value precisely to combat the distortive ways in which Africans were depicted, particularly in colonial documentary or propaganda film and early European and Hollywood fiction. Although Africans, among others, continue to face issues of negative representation based on “difference” in mainstream media, and anything associated with the African continent might have to contend with the quick ascription of inherent poverty, backwardness, or political dysfunction, African filmmaking has come a long way in representing the fullness of African experience to audiences who care to heed it. African cinema today provides exciting films that exemplify and interrogate African realities, imagination, aspiration, and possibilities that invite audiences well beyond the continent and its diasporas to have a stake in them. Indeed, they take some trouble to show that we already do. Such are the films that have provided the reflections in this book. The African cinema that takes a long view of contemporary Africa and its diaspora has created its own history, has initiated a relationship with an audience, demands its own spectatorship, and challenges its spectators in ways that could make other contemporary cinema seem
less sophisticated. African cinema, of what we might more recently need to qualify as the "artistic persuasion," has always demanded its spectators cultivate a relationship with it by using as much critical and imaginative thought as it brings to them. This book takes on the challenge and invites its readers to do so as well.

Early on, representation of Africans in the films made by Europeans was for the most part in ethnographic films, in which they were extensively (though most often, negatively) depicted. Early experimental film included characters in blackface while colonial documentary used Africans in propaganda for colonial ventures. Colonial films served a variety of purposes well beyond bringing back images of the colony to the metropolis. For example, in East Africa, under General Platt's command, Sergeant Wernham was asked to film daily life, the work he produced is believed to have been shown to East African soldiers fighting in the British Army in Asia (Colour Film). In French Africa the Laval decree (1934) imposed explicit control on films made on the continent, while British colonial law banned Africans from watching any films at all of or relating to Europe or America, even those partially made in Africa; as a result, filmmaking in Africa by Africans could not become a reality until the late twentieth-century. The recognized power of the medium was also exploited as early as the 1930s by the British Film Institute's support of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, which educated Africans through cinema on matters such as hygiene and farming; slightly later, Catholic filmmaking facilities also trained Africans to work for them. Well before the Laval decree was lifted, Paulin Vieyra, who was born in Benin but lived mostly in Senegal, temporarily solved the problem for himself by going to France to make *Afrique sur Seine* (1955). While Pan Africanism was a movement that garnered African unity against European colonization to begin with, it is interesting to note how colonial film itself stressed African unity in paradoxical ways by framing Africa as a whole as entirely belonging to the different "empires." The division of Africa between the various imperial powers of Europe following the Berlin Conference of 1884 was to tear Africa apart.

Film became part of ethnographic recording as well. The French ethnographer Jean Rouch stands out in presenting African "difference" with a corpus of films, one of the very well known of which is *The Mad Masters* (1955). In this film Rouch records and fictionalizes the rituals of a quasi-religious movement known as the Hauka in which individuals from Niger are "possessed" by the spirits of their colonial administrators. Rouch's presentation caused controversy on both sides of the colonial divide: colonials found it suspiciously anti-colonial and Africans felt that, ultimately, its portrayal of them was negative. Rouch made numerous films between fiction and documentary – several in collaboration with the sociologist Edgar Morin – on various rites and realities, such as particular dances, circumcision, or migration (*Jaguar*, 1967), and he experimented with the medium of cinema in its truth function. Several Africans who worked on these productions with Rouch went on to become independent filmmakers themselves; amongst them, was Safi Faye, from Senegal, one of the few female filmmakers to have a long film career. The actor Oumarou Ganda was the most well-known African with film training at the time Rouch was filming in Niger.
He featured in several Rouch films, later walking away with a prize for his own film, but unfortunately he died quite young. There is no doubt that European filmmaking has had a lasting effect in this and other ways on African cinema, which continues to develop its own technological possibilities for filmmaking within the continent. Most filmmakers working on aesthetically focused films depend on European and American finishing for their films, although now India and Taiwan, among other countries, are offering new possibilities.

At the same time, African filmmaking exerted its own influence, though it might not seem as evident. Cinéma vérité, for example, which became an important movement from Dziga Vertov in 1920s Moscow to the French films of the 1960s, was no doubt influenced by the filmmaking carried out in Africa and other colonies—Rouch being one of its highly praised creators and admired by many, including Jean-Luc Godard, despite his philosophical and sometimes contentious differences with Rouch. Interestingly, while African filmmaking has recently created a tradition of documentary filmmaking that is innovative and exciting, the “biopic” has also made a comeback in Europe and the United States. It is in this context that biographies of Africans or African diasporics such as Thomas Sankara, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Patrice Lumumba can be studied. We will take a close look at two versions of biographies of the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba made by the Haitian/Congolese filmmaker Raoul Peck in Chapters 7 and 8. These remarks serve to highlight the fact that the history of African cinema predates the appearance of the first African films we can identify and that the participation of African cinema in film history goes well beyond the benchmarks accorded to it in textbook accounts.

At the height of the great decolonizing movements and in the struggle for representation, art and culture became spaces of increased contestation alongside more easily identifiable political arenas of government. Literature, written in (soon to be former) colonial languages, represented and imagined the militancy of African peoples as European colonizers left the continent from the diverse colonies. The writers and artists who produced these works were typically elites within the colonial system, a vast majority of their relatively small number having been trained in the West, not only in Europe—Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah’s American training stands out in this respect. Many of these intellectuals even went on to hold important posts in the new postcolonial nation: emblematically, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who became Senegal’s first president, or Aimé Césaire, who became the mayor of the capital of the French Overseas Department (DOM) of Martinique. One important aspect of early writing was that it addressed the colonizer in the latter’s own language, and thus exploded the passive identity that had been imposed on the colonized subject through colonialism. Thus, a novel such as the Ivoirian Bernard Dadié’s Un nègre à Paris (1959), which sends a black man to Paris so that Paris can be exoticized and Europe estranged through his eyes, constitutes a valuable moment in reclaiming the right to self-representation, which is the central feature of decolonizing beyond political handover. At the same time, in the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958), the hero, Okonkwo, becomes the narrative device for a return to
precolonial mores in his return, after exile, to his village of Umuofia. The novel allows the reader to note how the white man has brought his religion to Africa and how he gains a foothold by imposing it, while altering the terms of the specific African society and the interrelations of its people. Awareness of the incompatibility of two different spaces, of their differential power, and of a need to reinvent Africa beyond its colonial past and postcolonial imminence characterized these texts.

In film, Ousmane Sembène’s *Black Girl* (1966), which was originally a novella, powerfully portrays an African girl in France, where she necessarily becomes “black.” Diouana arrives on a steamer in the French port of Marseille with the promise of freedom from the constraints of Dakar only to discover what it means to work as a housemaid for a white family in France. This pioneering film, often considered the first truly African film, lays the groundwork for many of those features that continue to appear throughout his filmmaking career and which characterized his fiction previously. Indeed, this film is a landmark that is drawn upon by African filmmakers in various direct and indirect ways. For this reason, we shall give to *Black Girl* in particular, and Sembène’s work more generally, a special place as we understand the framework of contemporary African cinema. This book follows certain forms of continuity in the films emerging from and about Africa, while ruptures are understood to be constitutive of redefining the medium and its cohesiveness. The ruptures and their diverse pathways also indicate that the films studied here speak to clusters outside the framing of “African”: these films are interesting to discuss from the point of view of, for example only, documentary, biopic, film noir, or other genre categories. Or they intervene in a more general sense of representation of Africans and other formerly colonized peoples in art and beyond. Many of these films contest globalization and question linking the development of newly constituted nations to European modernity as the sole way of proceeding. A large number of them also raise political and ethical questions regarding the unevenness of the distribution of resources, not only between African populations and their Euro-American counterparts but also within African contexts, as a feature of contemporary society, most strikingly visible in urban areas, but deriving from and having consequences well beyond the colonially conceived city spaces.

At the same time, it is important to note again that certain streams of filmmaking completely break with the economics, aesthetics, and politics of this type of African filmmaking and are not the focus of this study. Here, I am referring to more explicitly commercial forms of filmmaking that attempt to rival the huge industries of Hollywood and India’s Bollywood in terms of their reach for numbers of spectators, primarily emerging from a new cinema scene that defined the video boom in Nigeria and in Ghana.

Film, however, posed several challenges for early African self-representation, first because the number of trained filmmakers who could operate in the medium was very limited. And this was related to the technical aspects that cinema required for the making of films to be a realistic option for African elites. However, African filmmakers also had to contend with the impossible competition from European, American, and Indian films in their market, the scarcity of funding for filmmaking.
in Africa by Africans, and numerous forms of censorship by African governments. It is in this climate that one name emerges as the cliché: “Father” of African Cinema – that of Sembène. Yet, Sembène’s position within colonial culture as someone who is not part of the elite, the colorful trajectory that started with dropping out of school and encompassed working as a docker in Marseille, serving in the French army, and training at Moscow’s Gorki Studios, fashion his corpus of film work in very particular ways, which in their turn have marked forever the notion of an African cinema. Sembène’s career as an intellectual, a writer, and particularly, here, as a filmmaker through the colonial period and well after independence, in and of itself accomplishes many ground-clearing gestures for filmmakers who inevitably referred to his work as a stalwart landmark from which to proceed – even in opposition. At the same time, it is important to remember the fact that there were films coming out of the Egyptian Misr Studios even before the 1940s, and the first films of Egyptian director Mohammed Karim’s were made close to the First World War. From films with mass appeal and Hollywood-type plots to many comedies, Egyptian film has its own history with which to contend. If Youssef Chahine’s name stands out to film lovers the world over it is because he is, as Roy Armes points out, a “Third World filmmaker [who manages] to deal with social and political issues intelligently within the formal narrative structures of a cinema directed toward a mass audience and to combine this commercial concern with a totally personal one” (Third World 254). In this he achieved the same thing that can be seen in a generation of Bollywood hits from the 1970s and 1980s in particular. Moreover, Egyptian cinema’s implication in questions pertaining to the continent and to its own national context within global economics and politics has come to the fore in films produced more recently. Contemporary films such as Mohammed Moustafa’sAwqat faragh (“Free Times”; 2006) focus on the urban problems that make of Egypt a part of the former third world and show it to have a stake in the types of reflection within African cinema more than ever. Therefore, although Egyptian film history might align it more easily with Hollywood and Bollywood in terms of style, reach, and theme, we find in Egyptian contemporary cinema an awareness of and solidarity with African cinema of the more classic kind that we are treating here. In any case, its affinity with the newer video films is yet to be established, and it does not appear to be competing for the audiences of those films in any significant way.

In privileging the type of films considered in this book, it is impossible to speak of contemporary cinema in the African context without proper acknowledgement of Ousmane Sembène’s place in its history. Sembène’s importance, though, goes well beyond his arrival on the scene of world cinema along with the wave of decolonization. His work remains the cornerstone for innovative filmmaking that is African cinema today because of the way it stands in and of itself as a corpus, offering a variety of themes, characters, techniques, approaches, and issues that concern the whole continent in the new and very diverse history of nationhood that colonialism left as its most positive-looking legacy. A perhaps less obvious reason for giving Sembène such a central position in framing African cinema is, paradoxically, not because of his cinematic content, method, or even style. Rather, Sembène early on
recognized that the positioning of the spectator was one aspect over which he, as a
director, had much greater control than he had over the distribution or the actual
spectatorship in terms of numbers or demographics that he might have liked. Cap-
talizing on that power without apology, Sembène's films are brilliant for the way
they anticipated an audience that was not merely African, or even global, but rather
“Africanized,” thus literally creating a new type of engagement with African cinema,
and so with Africa. It is perhaps for this reason that Sembène's films stand out as
an unambiguous example of what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino signaled
as a Third Cinema. And it is also what distinguishes filmmaking in this tradition
of Third Cinema as distinct from not just First Cinema, but also Second Cinema.
Frank Ukadike underlines early on that the new commercial video films produced
in West Africa tapped into and sustained an essentially First Cinema audience that
was already loyal to “Kung Fu, Hollywood, and Indian imports” (“Video Booms”
140). While Second Cinema seems oppositional to First Cinema, whose relationship
to the spectator is one that is closer to an exhibitory mode (i.e., cinema as spectacle),
its experimentation with form and the demand placed on the spectator do not really
extend to a process of real liberation as Solanas and Getino’s manifesto suggested
Third Cinema does.22 The African and diaspora films examined in this book exploit
many techniques and forms one might find in Second Cinema, but they ultimately
require of the spectator an interactivity and emotive and intellectual engagement
that transports and transposes questions of Africa into his or her own subjec-
tivity as just such an interactive agent in the viewing experience. At various points
in this book, we will return to Sembène both explicitly and implicitly in acknowl-
edging contemporary African filmmakers’ heightened consciousness of, on the one
hand, the reality of distribution and circulation of less commercially geared films
and, on the other, the cinematic possibilities of exploiting, creatively, the interpella-
tion of a newly created spectator. This takes the coherence of an African cinema well
beyond, and yet faithful to, Pan Africanism and gestures overtly to social liberation.
It is not insignificant that Solanas and Getino’s manifesto opens with a quotation
from Frantz Fanon. The mere gesture of acknowledging Sembène in this book as
such a central figure is one that institutes the idea of “African” cinema in a particular
way with nationalist and Pan Africanist beginnings alongside a particular skepticism
toward globalization even as these films resolutely frame their audience as “global.”
To do so is also to take a position on films connecting spectators to the notion of
liberation in a variety of ways. Brigit Meyer states, with regard to the booming new
film industries in Nigeria and Ghana, that many of the criticisms of the films “re-
main grounded in a paternalistic, if not colonial, idea of cinema as a medium for
education and enlightenment” and that the “vantage point from which criticisms
have been raised so far is inadequate because they fail to take into account the con-
ditions under which film production and consumption now take place in Ghana and
Nigeria” (“Popular Ghanaian Cinema”57). Most African filmmakers who continue
to have some link with the ideals of the Pan African Film and Television Festival of
Ouagadougou (FESPACO) might find, rather, that the directions given to educa-
tion and what enlightenment meant were surely to be questioned, but that education
and enlightenment remain—not paternally nor in the colonial tradition, but in a renewed manner, comically, lightly, magically, daringly, emotionally, or in many other ways—central to their project. Third Cinema might have been a particular historical movement, as the cinema critics Bordwell and Thompson acknowledge it in their book (544), but it is a practice that lives on in African cinema as well as other cinemas of the world.

Beyond the orientation of critics, the pedagogical impulse of a thoughtful film does not relegate the spectator to the position of a naive or inferior entity to be educated into the tradition of Europe, as Meyer seems to suggest, nor does it need to lapse into a simplistic and reductive form that overpowers any aesthetic autonomy of the work. What has changed radically through African filmmaking is precisely that cinema is no longer in the service of paternalistic, colonial discourse which was so difficult to separate from the medium itself, given the ways it entered Africa. Rather, African filmmakers of diverse origin and intent, committed in a multiplicity of ways, explicitly or implicitly and consciously or less consciously, to what we can call the ideals of Third Cinema, have effectively and collectively wrested control of the medium of cinema by each dedicating themselves to making films that speak in their own voices, see with their own eyes, and think within the complexity of their collective minds and through their experiences. They thus inaugurate, from all of these factors and through their creativity, a style that allows for the notion of African cinema. Indeed, every “African” film treated here either overtly or implicitly brings into existence a spectator who goes through some kind of education, even enlightenment. It is from having being reborn provisionally but repeatedly in and through these African and/or diaspora films that the author of this book has undertaken to share those experiences of spectatorship and to contemplate them with any reader, who it is hoped will also become, if they are not already, a spectator of African and diaspora cinema. These filmmakers, over the several decades they have been making such films, have provided us (anyone who enters into sustained spectatorship of these films) with a repertoire that takes us through their struggle to create a superb African film culture in which it invites us to participate. This book responds to the call which that standing repertoire of films sends out to an audience within and well beyond Africa: to listen and learn, in our own process of becoming citizens of a world that all seem to agree is becoming more and more interconnected. The ever-growing repertoire is mature, and now sufficiently robust that it allows for multiple points of entry and more bold forms of juxtaposition. It has built up a dialogue with longer-existing cinematic traditions without being subsumed by them. Contemporary African cinema that joins up in aesthetic, thematic, material, and political ways with cinema of the diaspora (Akudinobi 388), invites us, as spectators, to enter into the cinematic medium and ruminate on the histories and possibilities of this shared world, and of cinema in it. Ousmane Sembène initiated this bold and unapologetic venture of painstakingly visualizing and creating not just characters but also spectators, whom he interpellated with humor, intelligence, and compassion. It is important to note, as does Dudley Andrew in his assessment of the work of the semioticians on cinema theory, that cinema is not a language as is French or Wolof. That is, it is not
as “system of signification” but rather “a place where various codes come together to create meaning” (Andrew 68; emphasis in the original). Sembène initiated our introduction into that place called African cinema.

Like many of his generation, Sembène was highly conscious of the notion of the “intellectual” as someone with a responsibility (in Sartre’s terms) to “the people” in a both a Pan African and a third-world sense. If these terms seem somehow old-fashioned, there is nothing old-fashioned about the challenge each new African film has thrown out to its spectators.24 As we shall see, that they adhere to some long-standing principles or beliefs does not imply Africans are making anything but thoroughly contemporary films. Through an innovatively Africa-oriented perspective that these films demand, rather than provide, they bring us to experience Africa as reality and possibility in dynamic, thoughtful, and cinematically sophisticated ways. They call up the spectator to take a stand on issues that are fundamentally significant to the apprehension of Africa in contemporary society, no matter from where such a view is being formed. Such an idea of local African realities as a consequential space from which to think of questions well beyond it also requires the paradoxical notion of the cosmopolitanism of the intellectual creating it and the one viewing it. This does not mean that the spectator must be a “cosmopolitan,” as in someone who has travelled the world or who is knowledgeable about “high” culture in specific ways. Rather, the spectator is drawn up in conjunction with the film experience to see the world from specific African spaces and perspectives and through rhythms and movements such that the local realities and struggles are imaginatively transformed into vehicles to connect that experience with the spectator’s existence beyond the film as a member of a global community in which Africa has too long been negatively framed or simply neglected. The responsibility that the film demands is one that the spectator must accord intellectually to become a creator of this African cinema for us all.

It is in this sense that I present what I believe constitutes a corpus of work that we can term “African,” and that we can certainly critique (in the best sense) not simply for any category ascribed to it, but for the superb films that comprise it. The corpus, represented selectively here by privileging recent films (most of which were released after 2000), has emerged over decades of daring experimentation, inter-referentiality, play with form and narrative through irony and imitation without fear of becoming mere mimicry, and most of all, bringing delectable cinematic “experiences” to real spectators. In other words, the achievements of any single film or filmmaker would be unthinkable without the now rich history of African cinema prior to the contemporary period. Although the focus will be on the contemporary, as I have outlined, references to earlier films, and in particular to Sembène’s repertoire, situate the selected films within African film history.

In this way, the ambitions of this particular type of African cinema are always larger than the space of the continent. They are not removed from the realities of Africa simply because they do not enjoy the wide viewership that Hollywood and Bollywood and now the newer so-called Nollywood and Gollywood productions do, but rather because they are devotedly committed to them. As we have observed, they
are not completely anomalous in that many noncommercial films (and other “products”) the world over share the same fate in local and global markets when other “competitive” products are more readily and cheaply available because they are more easily consumable (here intellectually, too). These films are made from a vision that sees Africa, or particular parts or aspects of it, as having value to the world at large. They conceive of Africa as an actor on the world stage, as consequential for the destiny of mankind, a notion that has been largely ignored or hampered by European and American economic and political interests throughout and well after colonialism. They are brilliantly accomplished, especially because their experience involves the creation of a particular type of spectator, one who is invited to be positioned in particular ways toward Africa’s realities (riddled as it is with problems) through the creation of African spaces, characters, and narratives in the cinematic medium. Needless to say the FEPACI (Fédération panafroicaine de cinéastes /Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers), formed at the time the FESPACO was inaugurated, has had an influence on the inception and conception of what African cinema is and can be.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1975, at the FEPACI in Algiers, African filmmakers further defined their role in relation to, and solidarity with, progressive film from the third world. FESPACO, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, alternates with the Carthage film festival hosted by Tunisia (which also alternates with the Syrian Damascus Film Festival specifically dedicated to Arab film). The fact that Maghrebi filmmakers have played a crucial role in this co-operative African movement and in forging the kind of cinema envisaged by these initiatives allows us to view contemporary African cinema as stemming from but going beyond these collective initiatives. Férid Boughedir, the Moroccan filmmaker, for example, has enjoyed a very visible presence at FESPACO, both as a contestant with his films and serving notably as chair of the jury in 2001 (Boughedir, “Férid Boughedir: ‘le Fespaco’”).\textsuperscript{26}

This is not surprising at all. African films have crossed borders in their conception and production. Souleymane Cissé’s \textit{Waati} (1995), for example, takes up the story of a young girl born in apartheid South Africa who moves away and then returns. Despite a controversial response from Nadine Gordimer on the film’s authenticity or accurateness, Cissé felt fully comfortable as an artist to speak on any topic outside his own “national” context of Mali. Cissé was, by the way, also trained in Moscow after Sembène. In any case, film has always been “transnational” since its very invention, with innovation happening across Europe and in the United States. Early film theaters in the United States showed numerous European productions, while development of technologies and innovation in film also occurred transnationally. Ghana’s early filmmaking and television were set up with training occurring in collaboration with the BFI (British Film Institute), while South Africa’s first 3-D lab at Durban University uses technology developed with Taiwan. Spectatorship has also been transnational alongside the aspirations of film producers, not simply for greater distribution to sustain their filmmaking but also in the ambition of directors (who might also be producers) to speak to a universal audience. African cinema as an art form has surely shared this aspiration, and the Portuguese film of Mia Couto’s novel by Teresa Prata on Mozambique, entitled \textit{Sleepwalking Land} (2007), is testimony to
this sort of global view in production, aesthetics, ambition, and reach. Interestingly, the film has had appreciative audiences not only at Cannes and New York but also Brazil and India.

However, it is in the actual interpellation of the spectator that we can locate a renewed and revolutionized commitment to the transformed ideals that marked and oriented the beginnings of African cinema. Spectatorship for African films is a highly charged question, first, because of the politics of cinema theaters in much of Africa, which has made the showing of African films a far less frequent event than that of those from Hollywood and also from India’s booming film industry, Bollywood. Popular Egyptian films have also traditionally been contenders for theater showings. Second, since filmmakers have been dependent upon Western (European and American, and often previously colonial) sources for making these films, distribution has not been in the hands of the filmmaker. Therefore, with spectatorship being limited more generally speaking with regard to the cinema, as opposed to commercial distribution of film from the sustained industries in the world and the newer commercial production within the continent, the status of the spectator as an entity in the aesthetic and theoretical aspect of the film’s totality also becomes implicated. Walter Ong’s position that the “writer’s audience is always a fiction” (9) applies with renewed vigor to the director’s audience, particularly for the African cinema we are considering. These films are not made with a more immediately predictable audience of local or globally located consumers in mind, as we might say is the case of the staggering numbers of films produced by Nigeria and now Ghana’s respective and even collaborative video industries. It goes without saying that these video productions also reach unknown audiences in unpredictable ways, but the filmmaking process itself is not too concerned with this aspect in its form or content, being assured of the basic viewership that it has so brilliantly cultivated both at home and abroad. Although these commercial films also make connections with realities that go beyond the local, in my viewing experience of them, such connections are for the most part predictable in that they implicate economic success linked to having connections “abroad” and often include comic insult at the bumbling “hero’s” expense while the idea of return is filled with the notion of success (or false success). This in turn provokes admiration and envy (often the source of comedy, especially when the success was false) in the local sphere of “home.” Restrictive roles for women, who are either seductive and evil sirens or submissive “good girls” also abound, with lurking evil in the form of the lure of non-Christian values in the city-girl films. Many action films are inspired by the kung-fu tradition movies popular throughout the world. Sometimes we find vocabulary and imagery that appeal to, and indeed can only be fully appreciated by, local audiences and/or the new academic specialists located in the West. Alongside these somewhat reductive remarks, it is important to note that there is innovation, excitement, and complexity in many of these films. It is possible, though, to make some generalization about the trends spectators can identify, as it is in speaking of both Hollywood (with its feel-good impetus to please the widest global audience) and Bollywood (with its inherent nationalism and its commitment to bourgeois values and bourgeoisification, its preponderance of happy endings, and the prevalence of
good over evil that can be seen in Hollywood hits). I have also done so to delineate the films constituting contemporary African cinema in building the corpus for this book. At this time, it is appropriate to say that this presentation of African cinema and of the idea of African cinema comes first and foremost from the profound admiration, thoughtfulness, and enjoyment that particular films within a now wide repertoire have incited in this author and particularly in her students – many of whom were Africans or African diasporics – over about five years as this project has evolved.

If the late twentieth-century in much of the Third World, as it was then discernible, was characterized by the surge of privatization, the opening up of national markets, and, for cinema (and many of the arts), the loss of state funding, the availability of new technologies and privatization simultaneously opened up art production to new groups (and classes). For the new African video production scene, it goes without saying that many of the early video productions were accomplished by directors, producers, and actors who had little or no formal training; many producers even rose out of the milieu of illegal film pirating. The current status of Nigerian and Ghanaian video production and the competition between them is an interesting phenomenon that shall not detain us too long here. However, the close ties which these industries have had to their respective developing national economies is of importance and noted by scholars studying, more fully, the phenomenon and the films produced (Haynes, “Literature Review”; Okome and Haynes; Meyer “Popular Ghanaian Cinema”; Larkin; Adejunmobi).

It is apparent that this book distinguishes between what we might call “art” film and “commercial” film in treating contemporary African cinema. However, while this is seen as a legitimate means of establishing a coherent corpus from which to choose films for close study and commentary, the move is also acknowledged as provisional though adequate to the moment. More and more, the gap between “commercial” and “art” film will be closed, as serious filmmaking becomes a shared concern and possibility for African filmmakers of all persuasions and ambitions and as the spectatorship for art film grows through newer channels, relieving them of their dependency upon cinema theaters, special screenings, film festivals, expensive distributors, and academic audiences. The increasingly high quality of commercial films (technologically and aesthetically), as is already evident, will allow for subtler and more variegated possibilities in the viewing experiences they provide. And yet for the current study, at the risk of being impolitic, it seems that the distinction between these differentially intended cinemas will continue to exist, though not necessarily in the rather stark current terms presented above: that is, the distinction might continue to operate but without the current gap that is visible, not simply through the types of issues tackled, the way they are tackled, the ideology, so to speak, but also through the greater repertoire in the methods of interrogation and reflection, intellectually and aesthetically speaking, for which currently “art” film in Africa as it is considered here is leaps and bounds ahead of “commercial” film. Therefore, fewer crossovers are evident to spectators seeking those riches equally. The demise of many cinema theaters across Africa (and the rest of the world, for that matter) binds the fate of “art” film more intimately to the newer and more aggressively distributed video
productions while spectatorship of the two categories gradually becomes more overlapped. Crossover films, which can speak to a wide audience, facilitate the closing of these gaps, although it will probably always be true (if we judge from Hollywood and Bollywood) that the vast majority of commercial films continue to enjoy the widest audience, at least in terms of numbers. The American-based Ghanaian Leila Djansi, for example, after winning at FESPACO for her screenplay in the documentary, *The Prostitute* (2002), turned to fiction. She has recently produced *Sinking Sands* (2010), an issues-based film that appeals to local markets but also reaches out to a larger international audience beyond African and diasporic viewers. Though her production company is based in Los Angeles, she continues to shoot in Ghana. Bagging the prize for best actress (Ama K. Abrebrese) at the Nigerian-hosted AMAA (Africa Movie Academy Awards), the film is widening its reach. Newer filmmakers are entering the arena from outside of the Nollywood/Gollywood video productions. Congolese director Djo Tunda Wa Munga’s debut gangster film, *Viva Riva* (2010), for example, despite its almost vulgar graphic quality, has received international attention after being awarded best film at the AMAA. For the most part, however, films produced in the Nollywood/Gollywood context are made specifically with local African audiences in mind, or more recent diasporics who share the day-to-day local cultures of Africa and whose ties to them continue to be close, making it likely that they will make trips back to their home. However, while the idea of wide spectatorship, beyond the continent and its diasporic viewers, is shared by most of the filmmakers considered in this book, the position advanced by the young documentarist Ariane Astrid Adtoji, from Cameroon, is not the norm: “Honestly, the idea of showing [my] film in theaters in Cameroon never occurred to me” (Petsoko). In fact, her compatriot Jean-Marie Teno’s *Sacred Places* (2009) is itself explicitly about spectatorship of noncommercial films in Africa and the hopes of the type of African cinema to which that filmmaker has held fast and which he has helped to create. We will take a closer look at this filmmaker in Chapter 9.

At the same time, the spread of Internet usage is a boon for the video industry, given that commercial videos have multiple sites from which they can be purchased. This has opened up distribution into the hands of filmmakers themselves. Independent filmmakers such as the US-based Ethiopian filmmaker Salem Mekuria and the Mauritian Harrikrisna Anenden are also exploring possibilities for wider distribution in DVD format, and thus they are directing more of the profits toward their future films rather than relying on distributors such as California Newsreel or Artmattan, which distribute noncommercial African films in the United States and are paid huge commissions by filmmakers. Jean-Marie Teno also distributes his films in DVD format through his independent website. South Africa’s M-Net initiative, African Film Library, allows viewers around the world to access footage that is hard to purchase or borrow and even harder to find in theaters. The Internet, more generally, also offers a wealth of information for cinephiles. The South African blog by (Akin Amotoso and Andy Kasrils) “The Admiral and Akin Go to the Movies,” for example, provides previews, clips, interviews, and reviews and discussions of what they unabashedly call “serious” films by Africans, and particularly South Africans.
They also have a Facebook page, as do various festivals and distributors. Although the collective and quite particular experience of the cinema theater is one that seems to be disappearing, spectatorship itself is only growing, and cinephiles have endless sources to be connoisseurs of the cinema(s) of their choice.

**Cinematic Beginnings of Contemporary African Cinema**

The colonial governments set up film units in Africa to make films that promoted colonial interests and established colonial mastery of Africa and Africans. Cinema as a technology displayed itself and its own power as being one with its colonial sources. The mobile cinemas that ran all over Africa to educate “natives,” such as the ones promoted by the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (1935–1937), showed films that were simplistic and paternalistic towards the envisaged audiences. The British Colonial Film Unit set up an instructional outlet on the Gold Coast in Accra in 1948 as they also did in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The French began setting up film units in Tunisia and Morocco in the 1940s as well, while the Belgians began producing films specifically for the Congolese after lifting the law banning Africans from entering a cinema theater in the colony. Authored by Pierre Laval, minister of the colonies, the Laval decree (which was only lifted in 1960), supposedly censored all films made in the French colonies in Africa. It effectively prevented Africans from making films and did indeed censor some films made by French directors for showing uprisings, for example. Many colonial filmmakers found value in collaborating with and employing Africans, fully understanding the meaninglessness of thinking in “foreign” rather than “local” terms. The logic of the local therefore provided films that ultimately had to record African perspectives, sometimes sympathetically and sometimes against the intent of those early filmmakers. We will not have the opportunity to expand on the very interesting and vast array of colonial documentary films here. Suffice it to say that early films produced by Africans within this framework could have developed further, but such a process was interrupted by decisions taken by colonial governments to curtail funds for their film units, particularly once decolonization started to look like a threatening reality. Thereafter, funding problems continued because of what the leaders of the new states saw as the impossibility of funding cultural development when other concerns were seen as more pressing. For this reason, we do not have a steady stream of films being produced by Africans, let alone on the African continent, once the shift to new nationhood for these countries meant, quite openly, economic dependency on the former colonial power and later on American and European aid more generally. Still, the rupture also served to give a keen sense of militancy to the new and truly “African” films (Barlet 221–231). Since Sembène’s early films, which arose from and transcended these circumstances, filmmaking from Africa as a concept was boldly born and imagined outside of and alongside imperial dramas like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Sembène’s classic black-and-white feature *Black Girl* (1966) will give us the opportunity to consider some of the questions that came together as part of African filmmaking.
for the period that began with him and which opened up the contemporary period with which we are concerned. This will put in perspective many issues which are discussed in the chapters that follow and which are organized in the three conceptual groups of “space,” “character,” and “narrative.” Primarily, Sembène will function here to alert us to the creation of the spectator of an African cinema that at the time had not yet become a reality.

The first “African” film might be considered to be *Afrique sur Seine*, which was completed in 1955 by Paulin Vieyra, from Benin and Senegal, and recounts the stories of African immigrants in Paris. Vieyra was one of the founding members of the FEPACI. Other early films from Cameroon, by Jean-Pierre Dikonguè-Pipa, Daniel Kamwa, or Alphonse Beni, for instance, tend to be highly influenced by the fact that they were state sponsored and avoided “political” questions, thus being “escapist” (Doho 22). Sembène’s *Black Girl* is an important and memorable film from that early period, following his own *Borom sarret* (1969). Our interest in *Black Girl* lies in the fact that it is cinematographically one of the most extensively theoretical films in terms of marking space, character, and narrative that exerted a profound influence on the films that were to follow. The Italian Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) is another film that is interesting from the same perspective, with added elements from the collaboration between the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front) militants in their desire to tell their story while being entangled with the Italian filmmaker’s to record it. These films are an integral part of the imaginary drawn upon for what is being studied here as “African cinema,” and they initiated a pedagogical function among filmmakers that has only become more refined, extensive, and ambitious.

It goes without saying that such an idea of African cinema cannot claim un fail ing authenticity or objective existence as a category. Considering, for example, very briefly, South Africa’s recent film history, although the country was isolated by its national political situation for decades, it burst onto the international film scene with a string of big budget films that managed to frame its history in ways that have been in dialogue with locally situated South African filmmakers. South Africa has a thriving television and film industry, film schools, and enviable developing facilities on the continent. Simultaneously, films such as *Cry the Beloved Country* (1951) or Richard Attenborough’s *Cry Freedom* (1987), on the life of Steve Biko, attracted international attention to the history and reality of the people of South Africa. More recently, the US-produced *District 9* (2009) is cast almost exclusively with South Africans. However, the film made in 2005 of South African author Athol Fugard’s novel *Tsotsi* by his compatriot Gavin Hood, who had had substantial experience in Hollywood, is poignantly African in the sense we have been discussing. Moreover, it can be discussed alongside the other films mentioned and smaller films being produced in South Africa, such as Simon Wood’s very recent *Forerunners* (2011), which is about members of the first generation of blacks to become middle class, or Simon Freidman’s *Material* (2012), which is set in the Indian Muslim community of Johannesburg. In this way, the African films considered in this book all allow for a notion of African cinema by bringing to the fore spaces, characters, and narratives that are inspired by the richness of African reality and the variously configured entry
of Africa and its diasporic spaces and peoples into the postcolonial era. The films all exert pressure on the spectator to Africanize thought processes such that the notion of “inside” and “outside,” though not absolute, does not become a form of exclusion for deep engagement with the cinematic experience. Simultaneously, films from the diaspora, notably “banlieu” films, which are filmed in the poor suburbs of the (European) city often populated by immigrants, such as the iconic Banlieue 13 from France; films set or made in diasporic and essentially Creole communities such as the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean; and black British films by filmmakers such as Ngozi Onwurah, connect with, and even question, notions of Africa and Africanness in their form and content and provide insights into what African film might be. Some of these films also feature in this book. A valid question might be whether the notion of “Africanization” necessarily sets up African cinema as speaking to non-Africans. On the contrary, as Frantz Fanon showed early on, when he went to the cinema he is himself. “I wait for myself. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me” (Fanon, Black Skin 140). Seeing the black groom in the film accentuated his sense of alienation and exclusion from the images of himself that his poetics embodied. These images were ripped apart and the integrity of his selfhood as it was known in his body was exploded, not so much by the white gaze or the interpellation as a negro but rather by his own knowledge of his body through that interiorized white gaze. In fact he looks at himself, waits for himself, in a way that is not unlike that in which the other (white) people in the audience wait for him. The experience of that otherness is one that catches at his emotion: “A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim” (Fanon, Black Skin 140). It is the feeling he gets that makes his head swim; in other terms, it is not the idea of his otherness, but its experience. While we are not at the same moment when Fanon articulated these thoughts, in speaking of cinema history more specifically, the notion of the white gaze upon African bodies and realities disallows the cinematically educated viewing experience of “Africans” to be completely discontinuous between Africans and non-Africans. While it is clear that Fanon’s narrator’s alienation fills him with anguish as he waits to catch sight of himself (the negro-type), it is equally true that cinema along with other media’s powerful pedagogies have historically educated the viewing eye with images of Africans that Africans and non-Africans experience and internalize. While the effect on the contiguous selves of those subjects with their selves-as-spectators is no doubt differential, there is reason to believe that Africans as well as non-Africans as spectator-subjects have a great deal of room for the reeducation of their instincts in perceiving African subjects on screen as black subjects in a medium even physically and technologically first developed to show white subjects. It is all the more fruitful to consider how the films we have assembled here, which emerge from a history of African film criticism (to be read criticism on African films), continue to revolutionize the cinematic space, time, and image that form a totality with the spectator’s dynamic movements and shifts in a process of what I am calling “Africanization.” Such an idea follows from Fanon’s viscerally known insight. If cinema itself has grown and evolved in all its avatars worldwide, what that diverse history allows
in African cinema as it stands as a repertoire is a form of collective and sustained interpellation that rectifies Fanon’s experience of his alienation, which arose from his engagement with the screen as well as the world of material reality that surrounded him in proximity. In other words, African cinema can provide a series of interpellations that together call up a particular type of strategic essentialisms through the spectatorial processes of identification, dis-identification, even alienation and contentiousness. Those interpellations bring a sensitivity to African contexts and realities, subjectivities and agency, as they are brought into cinematic reality. The traces of such sensitivity are taken into the world by the real spectators who experienced them as (at least) momentary “Africans” and sometimes “doubly” African – depending on their (claimed or acknowledged) identity. It is this aspect of African cinema that thus addresses and seeks to soothe the whole of Fanon’s anguish that was first and foremost experiential rather than intellectual, in his view of the black man on screen as well as his consciousness of being identical to it in the hall. And, beyond the many issues of inequality, hierarchy, and injustice that African films might tackle, it is particularly in this sense of liberating the experience of the spectator that these films join up with the liberationist impulses of Third Cinema.

Ousmane Sembène’s Black Girl: Prototype of a Spectator of African Cinema

Let us take a look at the opening sequence of Sembène’s Black Girl while acknowledging its importance to the idea of African cinema and its spectatorship today. Black Girl was a novella that the author-turned-director made into what is often considered the first African feature film. From its appearance in 1969, it continues to speak to the concerns and aspirations of filmmakers and their art in the African context. The narrative is set during the colonial period and recounts the fate of Diouana, an aspiring young Senegalese woman who decides to leave Dakar for the south of France when her colonialist employers move back to their country from Africa. Diouana’s arrival in France is marked by her blackness, and, as a colonial subject, she is isolated without access to French culture, language, or anything beyond the closed walls of the high-rise apartment in Antibes, where her employers live. The technology of cinema allowed Sembène to break out of French-language discourse and afforded him ways of bringing indignation to the spectator on behalf of a humble girl from anywhere in Africa (in the original French, the title is La noire de…, meaning “the black girl from/of …”; the lack of specificity in the preposition allows for the implication of possession by someone else and suggests slavery and domination). Diouana’s tragic fate (suicide), albeit painful, is poignantly allegorical of the fate of the “subaltern” whose speech is in doubt – not because of her own failing but because she is not heard owing to the structure surrounding her – an idea that has been superbly developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her elaboration on the notion from the Subaltern Studies group (271–313). A film that speaks of and for Africa and the colonized world, Black Girl shares the fiery positions of Fanon for decolonization.
and liberation while it subtly posits and theorizes the notions of space, character, and narrative in cinema away from nationalist discourses to the highly personal, while paradoxically disallowing simple identification with the heroine. Ingenious positioning of the spectator characterizes this film as it initiated a compelling dialogue within Sembène’s marvelous intellectual and experiential framework in which we participate decades later.

The opening sequence in Black Girl is an experience of movement that the film will set up between Dakar and the south of France, between Diouana’s home and her site of alienation, between her hope and reality. The reach of the film and its ambition are only indicative of what, following in its tradition, would become African cinema and incarnate the very struggle of the making of this film by an African filmmaker who wished to speak to and for his people and beyond them. The opening is a signature moment for the future of African cinema at the time it was shot. It is quite simply about reclaiming the camera, the power of perspective, the will to represent, and a reveling in the medium: sound, movement, light, and word.

The first thing we see on screen is a white steamer occupying the center frame and shown via a still camera. Next we hear the loud horn of the ship before we see the movement of the boat toward the right of the frame. Before the prow of the ship reaches the extreme right of frame and begins to disappear, as we might expect after having followed its slow movement across the screen, there is a sudden cut and the movement is this time that of the camera which pans to the left, capturing the misty morning landscape of a harbor while we hear, for continuity, the sound of the ship’s horn. The front tip of the ship reappears about where it would have been left off but now it is on the left of the frame, moving, as ever, to the right. Our gaze, then, has been transported to the other side of the panorama and returned with the camera in its panning motion to the left across the landscape and back to the ship. Where will it dock? Where has it arrived? It is now an African who will tell us what to see, how to look, and what will follow. It represents a dramatic moment in African cinema and constitutes a beautiful statement of cinematic form. A dark screen announces in French that “Filmi Domirev” presents Black Girl, with the filmmaker, the original collection of works from which this novella was adapted, and so forth appearing on the dark background.

The next movement is from the right to left of frame: a dock worker moves swiftly from right to left of frame with the heavy ropes that he loops around the post. Immediately one is reminded of Sembène’s autobiographical Black Docker, his first novel, while today it might recall the documentary on Sembène’s life (Le docker noir, Sembène Ousmane 2009), by the Algerian director, Fatma Zohra Zamoun. The scene is highly evocative in a number of senses. Another worker joins him moving from left to right, and therefore bringing, for a moment, movement in two directions on the screen. But quickly he moves in to help the first man and they both proceed in the same direction (right to left). This is once again followed by movement from left to right with the gangplank that will connect the port and the ship. Next, movement is from right to left, with the heroine smartly dressed in a Western outfit and scarf moving with her bags from right to left of the frame continuously onto the very ramp.
Figure 1.1  (a) steamer center; (b) object movement right; (c) cut to landscape; (d) camera pans left; (e) figure appears left of frame; (f) still camera movement by object. *Black Girl*, directed by Ousmane Sembène, produced by André Zwoboda and Filmi Domirev, Les Actualités françaises, 1966.

we saw moving in from the other direction moments before. The camera recedes into a long shot, thus capturing the ship on the right of frame, the main character on the ramp in the center moving left to the port of debarkation.

Another swift cut to a close-up of the woman’s face with her exaggerated movement of the head literally “panning” in imitation of the camera’s recent movement, leads across the screen as she looks to right of frame then sweeps her gaze across to left of frame: “Est-ce que quelqu’un est venu m’attendre” (“Has anyone come to meet me?”) and then back again to right of frame. These movements, all in the span of the first two and one-half minutes are extraordinary in setting up the parameters physically rather than conceptually. The experience of space that has been rendered is about possibility, about direction, its configuration through time and its holding anticipation, it is about movement in opposite directions, the energy of unison, and it is about interruption. Our experience of all this is intimately structured by the expectancy of the one whose voice we have heard.
Given the actress Thérèse M’Bissine Diop’s experiences in African society after the film’s release, and Sembène’s indefatigable devotion to women’s issues in his films, it is indeed fitting that the documentary on Sembène was to be made by an Algerian woman filmmaker. Diop recently revealed in interviews that she was even shunned by her own mother: the idea of exposing herself on the screen as a woman was taken to be highly negative, Westernized, and even irreligious. Many African women aspiring to be filmmakers have understood that making films continues to be a daunting task for women on the continent. Although it might not necessarily be more difficult for female filmmakers than their male counterparts to sustain themselves by their filmmaking, it is certainly obvious that fewer women make the choice to pursue as their sole means of support a career which involves a ferocious hunt for funding of projects that are not likely to be blockbusters.

In returning to the notion of spectatorship, it is interesting to note how the famed, popular American critic Roger Ebert reacted to *Black Girl*, which played at the Three Penny Cinema in Chicago in 1969. Ebert preferred the “poetry” of *Borom Sarret*, which was also screened at the same time, and found the former film to be less impressive:

The weakness of “*Black Girl*” is in its slow, journeyman style; one feels that Sembene learned filmmaking by making this film. It also suffers from a kind of primitive naturalism, as if the script were by James T. Farrell out of Theodore Dreiser. Every motive is spelled out in unnecessary detail, and little attempt is made to get into the minds of the characters. The maid’s white employers, in particular, are drawn as such broad caricatures that we never believe in them as flesh and blood. People are stupid and casually cruel, yes, but rarely in such a direct and even melodramatic way as these two. (Ebert)

The first point that stands out is Ebert’s lack of belief in the mind that is so obviously brought to him through this film. Next, his plain disbelief regarding how “stupid” and “cruel” people can be is naive. Nobody who experienced colonialism or observed or studied it for that matter would ever disagree with Sembène’s portrayal nor have any problem believing in people’s cruel stupidity as the “we” imagined by Ebert are assumed to do. The idea of “primitive naturalism” along with the condescension inherent in the assessment that it felt as though Sembène had “learned filmmaking by making this film” suggests that this viewer’s bias gets in the way of what he surely must have been well-schooled in doing: which is precisely suspending disbelief. Clearly, the interest of the film to the notion of African cinema lies elsewhere for us. As we have seen, the film posits movement as its central way of knowing space. Movement is also intimately related to the psyche of Diouana, whom we are priviledged to know because of the filmmaker’s willingness to give us her voice (in French, though we would imagine she would speak to herself in Wolof). This authoritative critic’s reaction only serves to highlight the need for the specificity of African cinema, of recognizing the demand it places on its spectators, from its very inception, to listen with greater care than is required simply to be able to hear the emblematic and loud horn of the steamer. *Black Girl* is about reclaiming cinema’s very core, the paradox of stasis and movement that is the most basic and most “primitive” truth.
of the medium itself, but it is about reclaiming it in the name of Africa, its peoples, its history, its imaginary – and its offerings to each of us. As Siegfried Kracauer perspicaciously stated, "movement is the alpha and omega of the medium" (158). These impulses of a commitment to Africa in cinema are about liberating the image of Africans from caricature and blackface and about believing in Africans not only as flesh and blood humans but also as transcendent imaginative souls. Ebert’s fixation misses the central point. Creating African cinema is about rediscovering direction, and it requires no particular color of skin for the director, or political persuasion of a character, or even geographical location of the spectator. Instead it requires entering fully into the phenomenological experience of cinema because of how it is an experience of the world in which (here) African perspective of not just Africa but the world is privileged in its multifaceted existence to be discovered again by its own people and the world through all kinds of positions, perspectives, and cinematic techniques. This move by the spectator invited by African cinema is consequential, coming after the distortions of colonialism and simultaneously with the growing reach of global capitalism, whose effects often gave continuity to the worst residues of colonialism in the spaces it had penetrated long after its demise. The need for a commitment to recognize the Africanized spectator whom African cinema was bringing into being, and which the eminently qualified Ebert failed to incarnate so soon after its inception, frames this book.

What Sembène did was not to give us Diouana’s thoughts, all the “inside” of the “other” that was formerly unknown, unknowable, or just unimportant in film as in the world. Despite hearing what we take to be her voice, in many instances the spectator is frustrated that Diouana does not reveal (to us) more than she does in her terse monologue. Even in the contentious scene in which she takes back the mask she had once given her mistress we hear rather the conversation between the white couple, where the man says that after all it is hers so she should have it back. Similarly, before her suicide, she only chooses to say, as she packs up her things, that “jamais plus [never again]” would she be mistreated. An unsuspecting (first-time) spectator would surely think she were going back to Senegal. Sembène’s film form underscores the fact that although we cannot know the character’s experience we can have some sensations and imagine some scenarios. His techniques privilege spatial experience so that as a spectator we might feel we are beside the character more literally than psychologically, and being to think and feel from outside of ourselves and thus approach the other with greater, if inarticulate, empathy.

**Spectatorship and African Cinema**

In considering African and African diasporic film in this book, spectatorship becomes instantly intercultural and transnational. This is not because the films in question are constructed for a non-African audience as many critics claim and thus dismiss them as “authentically” African. Rather, it is because the films themselves do not present Africa to a pre-existing spectator. Much of the film “work” in the
cinema we are studying, is directed toward theorizing and interpelating a spectator, who comes into existence in the cinematic experience crafted by the creators of each film. This spectator, who is of course embodied in the many people who watch the films over time and in different settings, is put in touch with an experience that is both sensory and phenomenologically describable (and variable from individual to individual through personal history, memory, association, culture). Such an experience at some point in the film calls attention to the limits of the cinematic medium itself, no matter who the spectator is, and allows for a particular form of intellectualization that becomes the politics of the film through, but beyond, its experience. Carefully, over the span of its identifiable existence, African cinema has been building up an experiential history of spectatorship that contemporary films exploit and develop. It is in this sense that I present a study on the cinema of Africa and the diaspora. In the analyses of the films, I will pay considerable attention to the specific positions and possibilities of spectatorship that have significance for the sensory and intellectual awakening of real spectators and that connect up to some central impulses, preoccupations, and aesthetic and sensory proclivities that allow for a provisional unity of a repertoire of films.

African cinema as framed here shares much with Emmanuel Levinas’s project:

I have tried to find the temporal transcendence of the present toward the mystery of the future. This is not a participation in a third term, whether this term be a person, a truth, a work, or a profession. It is a collectivity that is not a communion. It is the face-to-face without intermediary, and is furnished for us in the eros where, in the other’s proximity, distance is integrally maintained and whose pathos is made of both this proximity and this duality. (Levinas, *Time* 93–94)

African cinema, in the version presented in this book, is always future-oriented in this manner, cognizant of and therefore hopeful because of the temporal transcendence of the present. These films imagine with their spectator that another future is possible beyond the one ordained by the long history of colonialism, the disillusionment of its aftermath, and the terrific inequalities of the current moment. The collectivity envisioned and indeed created by these films is not simply the national or even pan-African community against the world. Rather, it challenges its most unlikely spectators in Africa, Europe, America, or Asia to imagine and enter into a collectivity through thought and action. Such is the ambition of these filmmakers. Though the actual creation of each film involves so many intermediaries, the experience of the film is one in which the full play of desire is invited, the feeling of proximity cultivated, while the distance and essential cognizance of the self as different from the other, both within the film and in the filmic experience between the film and its desiring spectator, all constitute the pathos that binds that spectator to the textures, feelings, sensations, and emotions in which the film willingly envelops her or him in an act of what we might daringly call love. Because, above all, it is love of the cinema as it is known through the experience of these films that would bring a spectator back for more, and make of him or her a cinephile. However, giving in to the film’s multiple sensory and intellectual experiences in our desiring interlocution
with it also consists in feeling what Levinas calls the caress, because what the caress seeks “is not situated in a perspective and in the light of the grasppable” (Totality 258). While the sensory experience of the film cannot be captured in an analytical “interpretation” mediated by the written word, which configures absence in such a distant manner, I have worked by way of numerous stills to bring back the image into our thought about the films. It is not just the action or the objects and characters captured in a moment or particular point of the plot that I have tried to convey through them. Rather, I have sought to excavate the “special sense of the frame” (Deleuze, Cinema 1 200) and follow the set of relations that the still allows one to establish and interrogate as a spectator. This involves attention not just to what is in the frame, the action, the relations among what is captured, but also how that frozen moment can be seen in relation to other parts of the film in its totality. For this reason, I dwell at some length on most frames used in the book as images.

This book is above all an attempt to share a sustained viewing experience with the reader. Therefore, in a mood of enthusiasm and optimism for an imminent viewing or a recollection (if the film is already known by the reader), I somewhat unselfconsciously, and sometimes conjecturally, refer to “our” collective and possible reactions. These comments should not be seen as prescriptive, but rather as suggestive. Because of the many, many presentations, both formal and informal I have made in sharing these magnificent films and some of my ideas on them—in contexts as varied as a computer screen at an airport, a formal 35 mm capable theater, a classroom, a makeshift large screen outdoors in my friend’s backyard, in our living room, to students, scholars, colleagues, neighbors, friends, relatives, and hapless strangers who happen to show curiosity—I already anticipate them as real and possible readers to form a provisional “we” that I address. Despite justified scholarly skepticism toward notions of an easy collectivity, I hope this book participates in interpelling the reader as a potential spectator in ways these films permit: I hope this book makes or remakes of the reader a spectator of some or all of the films studied and many more. In all cases, I have tried to proceed directly to the film matter and therefore prevent the text from being laden with theoretical references. Even when some references are made to film theory, cultural theory, and concepts from postcolonial studies, feminism or African studies, I have attempted to ground them in the particular films in question. This book is first and foremost about the African/diasporic films and how we might experience them as diverse spectators: it is written from the love inspired in one such spectator. I am reminded of Hamid Naficy’s endearing biographical essay in which he recalls himself as a young man forging a relationship with cinema in Iran and later in England, identifying the young immigré with various protagonists from films he had strongly liked. Following his lead, I theorize spectatorship by not effacing my own implication in what is essentially an experience of encounter and its dynamics (Naficy, “Theorizing”; Wexman). But further, I focus on spectatorship at specific, concrete moments in the African films I have chosen to study closely in this book. Such an effort seeks to ground the notion of spectatorship in the film work itself and at the same time to open up the processes shared to the critique and assessment of the varied readers I imagine and anticipate. A serious study on the spectatorship, in terms of statistics but also of the cinematic experience remains to be done: study
of the spectatorship of specific films and film traditions; exploration of comparative experiences of spectatorship; investigation of the impact of the changing contexts of viewing cinema of all kinds in Africa and in African diasporas and of viewing African films in European, North American, and Australian contexts; and interrogation of the subject across the vast viewership in Latin America, the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Asia. The terms in which such a study could be attempted for any of these regions are constantly evolving even before we may imagine the findings. This book does not provide such a study.

In Chapter 2 we shall study an instance of the pedagogy of the spectator through a recent Mauritian film entitled The Cathedral (2006). The choice of a film shot in Mauritius by a Mauritian Indian is particularly significant for our conviction regarding African cinema as we present it here that it is an aesthetic category first and foremost, one in which Africans from different perspectives and historical trajectories participate, and one which reflects Africa’s multiethnic contemporary reality. Chapter 2 also carefully examines how space is configured in the cinematic medium. Along with this chapter, Chapter 3 presents the city, a crucial element that has been formative on the aesthetics of film more generally, and no less so in this cinema. Both these chapters explore space as a category of the filmic experience for the spectator. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, explore character: chapter 4 focuses on the representation and reception of the heroine in three very different films and examines female subjectivity within the film experience, while Chapter 5 teases out the image of masculinity. Chapter 6 singles out revolutionary characters and their cinematic evolution. Chapters 7 through 10 focus on narrative. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the category of documentary in particular, and how African and diasporic filmmakers have engaged with and transformed this genre. Chapter 9 focuses on the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Marie Teno, who provides an array of documentaries that construct a unique method and style. The concluding chapter takes up the polemic from the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina’s ironic exhortations on “How to Write About Africa” and playfully but seriously examines a blockbuster film on Africa alongside a quintessentially African film to revisit questions of inside/outside that can become highly contentious in any narration on the continent. The processes of Africanization that these films operate in mobilizing a particular valence and direction for interpellating their spectators allows us to conceive of a dynamic “discourse” (which is not to be understood as a set of propositions) that I assemble from a particular corpus of films under a conception of the contemporary cinema of Africa and the diaspora.

A glossary of cinematic terms is provided as a reference for basic film analysis terminology.30

Notes

1 While V.Y. Mudimbe’s works expose and contemplate the construction of “Africa” through epistemological and sociological processes in the longue durée of its history, and particularly its history of colonialism, African cinema stands in relation to the past in a particularly futuristic way, imbuing many of the films with a latent utopianism. See Mudimbe.
2 Nation- or region-specific studies are provided by a range of scholars. A classic one is Claire Andrade-Watkins’ beautifully researched and argued essay which explicates the role of Mozambique’s National Institute of Cinema in forging a cinema that worked with the liberating movements in the formation of the new nation. See her often reprinted essay, “Portuguese African Cinema.” Also, for a discussion of Guinée-Bissau’s Flora Gomes, the national, and a complex view of tradition and modernity, see the more recent Adesokan, most specifically pages 31–53.


4 See Reid for questions of inside/outside in African-American cinema, Alexander for an informative view of contemporary black American directors, and Everett for a study of the fuller context of African-American cinema history.

5 See Tcheuyap for a view of African cinema in terms of a “postnationalist” look at a repertoire he proposes in terms of genres.

6 See also Gauntlett.

7 See Plate 1 and Plate 2 for images of female characters (Alia and Méle) who depend on moments of spectatorship to understand and seize their deepest emotional desires for change in their identity. These characters are further discussed in Chapters 4 and 10 respectively.

8 On the one hand, being able to share the “people’s” reality affectively, the intellectual must also, on the other, “be able to see the people as part of a greater totality.” See Prabhu, Anjali “To Dream of Fanon” p. 63.

9 The issues of who is an African director, who is a diasporic African director, and who is an outsider took an interesting turn, as Andrade-Watkins describes the scene at the 1991 Panafircan Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou ; FESPACO). See “A Mirage in the Desert?” (149).

10 Even The Economist was compelled to take note of this industry in Nigeria. See ”Lights, camera, Africa.”

11 This is not merely a theoretical argument about film aesthetics, though it is that too. Spectators of African films are real and South Africa’s “Encounters” film festival for documentary films, for example, continues to offer an audience-voted prize for serious films, includes many interviews and panels attended by the audience. The festival promotes South African documentaries but includes international entries, particularly from the continent.

12 It would not be too bold to say that the divide between “art” film and “commercial” film is temporary and fluid. As the more recent video industry that took off in Nigeria, with Ghana following close on its heels, gains historical perspective, it will become increasingly hard to continue to pigeonhole directors in one or the other groove. At the same time “art” film will also be able to tap into the networks of distribution available to commercial film, although to do so it will need to appeal to a different temperament of the same audiences, at least to start with. Commercial film has penetrated quite well into the networks that were more strictly reserved for art films, making its way into film festivals.
gradually and now even showing up in the category of "African" cinema on distributor's websites. See "Thunderbolt."

See, for example the clip and description of the film "War Came to Kenya," where white women are exhorted to contribute to colonial efforts.

Perhaps tabloid culture has opened up the market for biopics of celebrities; one recalls the recent films on the writer Françoise Sagan (Sagan, 2008) and on Edith Piaf (La vie en rose, 2007) and the recently announced project of the German-based Banana Films (managed by Jean-Luc Van Damme) for a $13 million 3-D film on Dali. Martin Scorsese's Living in a Material World: George Harrison (2011) is yet another such celebrity biopic.

Interestingly, a new documentary on Sankara has been announced by the ambitious Gambian, Prince Bubacarr Aminata Sankanu, a newcomer to film who aligns himself to the tradition of Sembene, although his journalism is, at the very least, dubious. See, for information on his first film, his announcement of the Sankara film: "From the Film Set of 'Backfire.'" For a lively critique of Sankanu, see: "Bubacar Sankanu has no Shame!!"

Unlike Kenneth Harrow, I do not find that Sembène's films necessarily limit our understanding of the contemporary at all (see Harrow 1) because scholarship has not paid his films any sustained attention to their cinematography in the first place. That work is still to be done, although we will touch upon it to the extent it informs our understanding of contemporary films. Indeed, the "price paid" (ibid. 8) for taking inspiration from many sources including Sembène but going well beyond him is what we find in the form of contemporary films such as Karmen Geï or Bamako, which are examined in this book. On the other hand, for a biographical understanding of Sembène's career see Sembène.

The term "modernity" is first and foremost related to Europe's modernity, which coincided, and indeed depended on, colonialism, in the form it took from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries in particular. In Europe it was indicated through increased specialization of labor and therefore the division of society relative to the demands of labor and capital. African filmmakers inherit the notion of modernity as quite simply one in which Africa, which enabled European modernity via colonization, lags behind it in every way. Modernization has meant the transformation of "rural" agrarian societies into industrial societies modeled after European changes. It has been doubly registered in the creation of African cities and their relationship to what surrounds them as well as Africans' and diasporic Africans' fraught relationship with their own cities and with European cities as "immigrants." It goes without saying that modernism in European art was marked by a reaction against consumerism, a questioning of Enlightenment rationality and particular forms of coherence and harmony in art that also reinforced the authority of older institutions. But early postcolonial cultural and political forms showed that European modernism (in forms such as surrealism, for example, that négritude would transform) had to be thoroughly reconstituted and rethought if it were to be of relevance to Africans. The awareness of the meanings of modernism and modernity as always already fractious for Africans of the continent and the diaspora frames the aesthetics of the filmmakers studied here and is ingrained in the usage of these terms that are related in this particular way in this book.

The collection of essays in Saul and Austen attempts to bring together these usually disparate groups of films while focusing on viewer experience, screenings, audiences, and the tensions between them as well as how Western blockbuster films enter into the mix.
The amusing anecdote Oliver Barlet tells of the lion in Souleymane Cissé’s Waati underscores the ironies of African filmmaking. The lion that terrorized the local ivoirian characters had to be flown in from Marne-la-Vallée zoo in France. See Barlet, p. 227.

On Ousmane Sembène, Med Hondo, and Souleymane Cissé, see Woll, pp. 223–240.

See, for an in-depth discussion of Egyptian Cinema, Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema.

Their manifesto, “Toward a Third Cinema,” has been reproduced in many places and can be easily accessed on the Internet at several sites.

Some films explicitly reach from Africa to the diaspora, such as Mweze Ngangura’s Pièces d’identité, which is dedicated to the African diaspora. In an interview Ngangura explicitly states that he made the film in thinking of the diaspora experience of Africans (see Akudinobi).

Although some filmmakers, notably Jean-Pierre Bekolo, are polemic in their wish to break from FESPACO and its ideals, their reasoning seems legitimate – and in some ways true to FESPACO. Their rationale is that they want to be filmmakers rather than “African” filmmakers. Are they filmmakers first and Africans second? It matters little, in the sense that their daily struggles are characterized by their search for funding; the questions of shooting; the difficulties of developing and finishing their products, often of getting permission or access; and then the issues of film festivals, distributions, and so forth. African filmmakers rightly apprehend the need to be recognized as filmmakers in their own right, no matter how they align themselves toward their collective struggle, and this book is a direct response to that desire.

FESPACI recognized that for African cinema to thrive it had to be not simply intellectually committed in particular ways but that a whole system of legal, economic, and political factors had to be navigated on its behalf. See Diawara, pp. 44–48.

Boughedir’s insistence upon the unity of African cinema, of the shared solidarity among filmmakers and their common aspirations for their films, as well as the common roots of the two festivals (FESPACO and Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage) remain a landmark to respect in the idea of “African” cinema. Boughedir also continues to gesture explicitly to his African identity (“We, Africans”). See Boughedir, “Férid Boughedir: ‘le Fespaco’.”

For example, African Film Library, African Film Festival Inc, Africa in Motion Film Festival.

There is much work to be done in this field. See Peter Bloom.

The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance in Johannesburg and Cape Town; the Durban Institute of Technology’s Television section; the South Africa Film Academy, also in Durban; as well as media studies departments in various universities, all provide a depth and breadth to cinema and other media in South African culture.

Many wonderful sites abound on the Internet, with more detailed terminology. For example, the one by the Internet Movie Database (see “Glossary”), the one by AMC (see “Film Terms”), or the one by Kodak (see “Glossary of Film/Video Terms”), which gives more technical detail. The glossary in this book includes, alongside terms one might find in such glossaries, vocabulary generated through years of compiling terminology in French and English. Colleagues have also generously shared the lists they use. A selection of useful and pertinent terms has been provided for this book.