African Film

African Film:
Looking Back and Looking Forward

Edited by

Foluke Ogunleye

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

African Film: Looking Back and Looking Forward,
Edited by Foluke Ogunleye

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5497-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5497-9

To

Segun Ogunleye

My husband, best critic and encourager

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

FOLUKE OGUNLEYE, PH.D.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IFE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

It gives me great pleasure to present to you this volume, which comprises of peer reviewed articles from the second edition of the Ife International Film Festival. Films are cultural artefacts created by specific cultures, which reflect those cultures, and in turn, affect them. Film is considered to be an important art form, a source of popular entertainment and a powerful method for educating - or indoctrinating - citizens. The visual elements of cinema give motion pictures a universal power of communication ("Film", 2011). However, making films, reviewing them, studying and theorizing them is hard work, although this might sound incredible because of the glamour inherent in the stars' lifestyles. Thomas Edison, the great inventor of the electrical age, who helped to refine and develop motion picture cameras, made the famous statement: "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." This publication acknowledges all those filmmakers and film scholars, who through their productions and theorization, have made a difference to the filmic universe in Africa. Their substantial contribution reflects our world and has the potential to change our lives.

The theme chosen for the 2nd Ife International Film Festival, 'African Film - Looking Back and Looking Forward', is of particular importance in that it interrogates the past, projects into the future, deals with the nature of the filmmaking profession and also possesses an interdisciplinary character. By understanding history, we can understand why things are the way they are right now. By having an awareness of what had happened in the past and the current situation, we are better placed to understand and influence our future as a people. By looking at what happened in the past, we can understand what we should avoid and what we should aim to improve. According to George Santayana in *The Life of Reason*, Volume 1(1905), "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". For Lord Bolingbroke, in his chapter titled "The Dignity and Importance of History", "History is philosophy teaching by example"; Shakespeare himself wrote that "there is a history in all men's lives". Daniel Webster

also opined that history is not only philosophy, teaching by example, but that its true purpose is also to illustrate the general progress of society in knowledge and the arts, and the changes of manners and pursuits of men (Webster, 1852).

Each contributor to this volume has achieved a degree of knowledge and has the breadth of experience to provide us with a vision of what is needed for the future. Some have focused on history, others on theory, and some on criticism and how film production can be improved. In all, they reflect the film culture of a continent. In 'Ghanaian Cinema: A Historical Appraisal', Kwaw Ansah foregrounds the story of the African film by detailing the history of Ghanaian cinema. He examines the career of the Gold Coast Film Unit and its 'civilizing' mission, the importance of the first film school in Ghana and of Kwame Nkrumah's contributions towards the development of African film.

In 'African Film: Looking Backward and Looking Forward', Afolabi Adesanya underscores the much needed synergy between the celluloid past and the present video-film while reaching forward to the digital future. He emphasizes the fact that stories and images are among the principal means by which human society has always transmitted its values and beliefs. John R. Botha, in 'South African Film: Looking Back and Looking Forward', contemplates the nature and history of South Africa's filmic evolution. Issues discussed in Botha's chapter include customs, beliefs and ideologies presented as central to filmmaking, and issues of financing. He illustrates his points by providing an exegesis of three South African films and concludes with a prognosis of South Africa's filmic future.

The fulcrum of Hyginus Ekwuazi's chapter is based on the film audience, as revealed in his title: 'Nollywood: The Audience as Merchandise'. He argues that entertainment in the Nollywood film is seriously compromised. He reiterates that the challenge for Nigerian filmmakers is to work out a creatively empirical way to package their audience for sale to a sponsor as this will prevent the motion picture industry from relying solely on selling entertainment to the audience. Tendai Chari, in 'Recapturing a Nation's Fading Memory through Video: An Analysis of 'Chimurenga' Videos', discusses the rebirth of the video film industry and the use of video in documenting the history of the liberation war in Zimbabwe. He stresses that Chimurenga videos accentuate memory, patriotism, courage and selflessness as priceless virtues needed to overcome colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Wanjiru Kinyanjui embarks on 'A Historical Voyage through Kenyan Film' in her chapter of the same title. She states that Kenya has numerous media institutions training young talents to produce films, but that what is needed is a film school if Kenya is to produce quality movies. In Nyasha Mboti's 'Unpacking the Hotel: A Study of the Cinematic Politics of *Hotel Rwanda*', we see an interrogation of methods used in film analysis. The author proposes subjecting the image to new analytical perspectives, discussing how ideology insinuates itself in the image. Aziz Chahir's chapter, based on the filmic image of Moroccan women, is titled: 'Women in Moroccan Cinema: Between Tradition and Modernity'.

Vitus Nanbigne's 'Counter-Hegemony in Ghanaian Video-Film Practice' questions the reasons behind the practice of mostly amateur video-film producers, who seem to have rejected the meta-narratives of anti-colonialism. He identifies causative factors such as the lack of formal training in filmmaking and the failure to develop film scripts and evolve complex narratives.

Françoise Ugochukwu's 'Nigerian Video-Films on History: *Love in Vendetta* and the 1987 Kano riots' examines the connection between film and history in the film *Love in Vendetta*, inspired by the infamous Kano riots of that year. Issues discussed include the place of the film at the intersection between reality and fiction, an unusual treatment of history and the film's unifying agenda. Through her chapter, 'Women and Politics in Nollywood: A Challenge to Film Producers in the 21st Century', Agatha Ukata questions the gendered notions observed in Nollywood films, which usually portray women at the margins of political representation and governance.

Busuyi Mekussi focuses on history in his chapter, 'A Nation's Present in the Past: Lightening the Blurred Future through Filming'. He posits that the development of films in South Africa has gone beyond the reflection on the past and present to the presaging of the future in order for the country to begin tackling challenges around security, job provision and psycho-social stabilization. 'Migrating Nollywood: Melting Borders in Tunde Kelani's *Abeni*' is the title of Jendele Hungbo's chapter. He explores ways in which Tunde Kelani's film handles the telling effects of colonialism and its creation of artificial borders between communities.

Julius-Adeoye Rantimi Jays examines 'Issues of Picture Right Ownership in Nigerian Video-Film'. He discusses the various types of rights in the motion picture industry and concludes that contract agreements between producer, director and marketer must be specific. 'Racism in the Jungle Adventure Film', by Charles Uji and Oluwaseun Adesina, provides a race-based survey of African films. The authors state

that in spite of modernization and legislations, racism still subsists in some films made in the late twentieth century and even in the twenty-first century. The chapter focuses on Jamie Uys's *The Gods Must be Crazy*. In 'Fashion and Films: The Nigerian Example', Toyin Ogundeji states that film is an art which reflects and affects society. She supports this assertion through a discussion of Nigerian fashion and its adoption in screen costumes as well as the adaptation of film costumes for the domestic fashion scene.

Kwaghkondo Agber writes on 'Thematic Developments in Nigerian Video-films'. He emphasizes the need for a re-orientation of the home video film themes from sex, witchcraft and magic to themes that portray and reflect Nigerian cultures in more positive directions. Dominica Dipio provides a 'Historical Overview of Ugandan Film Industry'. She identifies factors that have aided the growth of the industry such as the film climate in the region and the enthusiasm this has generated among Ugandans.

In summary, this book has achieved one of the goals for setting up the annual Ife International film Festival – "To publish papers presented by filmmakers, theorists, critics, etc. at plenary sessions, special workshops, seminars and panel discussions, thereby contributing to the growing literature on the African film". This book will provide the opportunity for filmmakers, academics and students to learn about the history, theories, problems and various approaches to production, marketing and a host of other subjects that impinge upon the African film.

My thanks and special gratitude go to my academic colleagues, friends and industry professionals for their support in completing this book project. I must mention and acknowledge, in a very special way, the painstaking care taken by my colleague and contributor to this volume, Professor Françoise Ugochukwu, in going through the drafts, proofreading and offering incisive suggestions on the manuscript.

I am also indebted to the anonymous peer reviewers who helped with the review of the differnt chapters. Finally, my thanks go the the editors at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their patience and assistance. The organizers of the Ife International Film Festival hereby acknowledge the support of the Prince Claus Fund for Culture, The Netherlands, for providing the grant to facilitate the organization of the 2009 edition of the festival.

CHAPTER I

GHANAIAN CINEMA: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL*

KWAW ANSAH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TV AFRICA, ACCRA, GHANA

The history of Ghanaian cinema is filled with many pleasant memories. Yet it equally faced many challenges, some of which are yet to be overcome. Ghana officially became a British colony in 1844, when a group of chiefs of the then Gold Coast were made to sign a bond with the British Crown. From then on to the declaration of independence on March 6, 1957, the colonial masters had a vested interest in ensuring that the Africans of the Gold Coast saw their role as subjects of the British Crown as crucial. To achieve this, one of the tools they successfully employed was cinema. The Gold Coast Film Unit was created to produce films that conscientized the people of the Gold Coast on issues such as the payment of taxes and levies, while reminding them that they were subjects of the British Crown.

In 1937, a British Major, L.A. Notcutt, was commissioned by the Colonial Government to produce series of films to "civilize Africa". This marked the beginning of the launching of Colonial Film Units in various parts of Africa, including the Gold Coast. The immediate objective, according to the film historian Jean Rouch, was to use films to get Africans to participate in World War Two. Films produced projected how honourable and heroic it was to serve in the colonial fighting force. Cinema screens were awash with films showing brave and victorious warriors being honoured on their return from fighting the enemy on behalf of the British Crown. This campaign was largely successful; it however had an unexpected aftermath. Pre-war promises were not honoured and this sparked an uprising of ex-service men, which in turn led to the speedy march to Ghana's independence.

In 1949, following a report which John Grierson wrote for UNESCO, the Colonial Film Unit initiated a film school in Accra, Gold Coast, called

the West Africa Film Training School. Grierson noted that films made by L.A. Notcutt, the Bantu Film Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit did not attract African audiences enough because Africans could not identify with them. Grierson believed that the problem of cinema in the Colonies would be resolved, "not by projecting films from the West, but by colonial peoples making films inside the colonies for themselves" (quoted in Van Beaver, p. 16-17). The film school in Accra had an initial intake of six students: three from the Gold Coast, namely Okanta, Fenuku and Aryeetey, and three from Nigeria, namely Fajemisin, Otigba and Alhaji Auna.

The British Crown had succeeded immensely in getting many young brave men to enlist into the West African Frontier Force, by enticing them through the power of cinema, making them believe that they would be honoured and rewarded as heroes on their return. After having helped to defeat the Germans, the African soldiers found to their utter disappointment, on their return, that a British corporal would earn far more than an African Lieutenant. As if reneging on the pre-war promises was not enough, the ex-servicemen, who had fought heroically on the side of the allied forces in Burma against the powerful Japanese and in the desert against Rommel's army, were disappointed to find that only the Europeans were shown in all the post-war documentary films. All the Africans' heroic deeds, especially those of the West African Frontier Force, were conveniently left out. It was probably a stark reminder to the African soldiers that the war was not their war, and that the only reason they were there was to perform their subservient duty as colonial subjects.

The above incidents, as well as general poor conditions of living, led to the famous march of the 28th of February 1948. The march was ruthlessly put down by a British Police Officer, Major Imray, when he ordered fire on the unarmed ex-servicemen, who were merely seeking to present a petition for better living conditions to the Governor at the Christiansburg Castle in Accra. Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Atipoe and Private Odartey fell in the process (for more on this, see Briggs and Bartlett p.12). These terrible events coincided with the end of the boycott of European goods, which had been successfully organized by Nii Kwabena Bonne III, a powerful chief of Osu Alata, as protest against exorbitant prices and illicit activities of the Syrian and Lebanese merchants who controlled the retail market.

Kwame Nkrumah and other members of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), obviously frustrated by the heavy-handed manner in which the demonstrators had been treated by the colonial administration, sent a protest telegram to the colonial office in London. Six of the political agitators including Nkrumah were promptly arrested and put behind bars,

and later became known as the "Big Six" of Ghana's politics. This event became a major catalyst for the attainment of Ghana's independence.

During the same period, ex-servicemen from the French colonial territories who had been camped in Senegal faced similar difficulties; when they complained, they were surrounded by French soldiers with tanks and armoured cars and several of them were killed. When Ousmane Sembene made a film based on this event, called *Camp de Thiaroye*, the film was promptly banned in France, and the usual support the French Government gave to filmmakers in Francophone West Africa was denied him. One may ask whether Sembene crossed the line by using cinema, which in the colonial days was the preserve of the colonial master, to reveal a well-guarded secret.

The British had obviously not anticipated that the submissive and obedient Gold Coast Contingent would ever dare demand that promises, made to them through the power of cinema as a reward for the sacrificing of their lives to achieve victory, be fulfilled. Indeed, before Ghana got its independence, the Gold Coast Film Unit had already produced a number of famous short feature films, such as *Progress in Kojokrom*, *Mr. Mensah Builds a House, The Boy Kumasenu* and *Theresa*. This last film was produced to encourage young women to opt for the nursing profession – a campaign which equally proved very successful.

Most of the films were used to educate Africans on the need to pay taxes and respond proactively to colonial dictates, even though 60% to 80% of the tax revenue and other natural resources were sent to Britain. The colonial authorities were mindful of the fact that resistance to taxation had already led to the Aba Women's riots of 1928-1930 in South Eastern Nigeria. In that episode, Igbo women of Aba, who were already unhappy about their husbands and sons' over-taxation, felt that the head-count of citizens which was taking place was a prelude to the imposition of taxes on women for the first time. Their successful protest forced some local "warrant chiefs" to surrender their caps (the symbol of their power) and take to their heels, while the enumeration exercise was abandoned. To avoid a repeat of such an event in the Gold Coast, a well-dramatized film, featuring local artistes, became a useful tool to gradually persuade and educate the people on the usefulness and necessity of taxation.

The Gold Coast Film Unit also produced weekly newsreels of British news as well as news of the various colonial territories. These were shown in the cinema houses, largely with the aim of brainwashing the colonial subjects and reminding them that the Monarch's authority was supreme. After the war, the themes of the films largely changed to project British etiquette and values, and to denigrate African religions in well-crafted

stories that created hell for non-adherents to the religion of the colonial masters and heaven for the converts to Christianity. In all these stories, Satan was always visually portrayed as a black person while Christ and the angels were always portrayed as white. The effect of this psychological orientation still lives on today among Christians who believe that God is white, and this, in effect, negatively affects our self-esteem. In all these, the role of cinema has been pivotal.

Apart from the above, the people of the Gold Coast also had exposure to films made in Hollywood, Britain and other places in the Western world. Subconsciously, many of such films were to gradually mould our psychological orientation and lead us to see ourselves as servants of the values of our European Masters. In such films, the best roles Africans and people of African descent ever played were those of senseless timid domestic servants, buffoons or cotton pickers. Many generations of African youth found it fashionable to adopt names of characters in Hollywood movies, and some still live with such guy names/nicknames which have no relevance to them. This is how names like Roy Rogers, Humphrey Bogart, Lash Larou, Kisco Kid, Doris Day and Ava Gardener found their way into Ghanaian vocabulary.

Film in Post-Independence Ghana

Fortunately for Ghana, she became the first African nation south of the Sahara to gain independence. With her new status as an independent nation, came a youthful and dynamic president, with a lot of ideas and a deeper understanding of emancipation. Having studied in America and Britain, Kwame Nkrumah understood that the audiovisual media had been one of the effective tools employed by the Western world to do psychological damage to the image of Africa and the black race. He was therefore determined to reverse this state of affairs, starting with his speech on the eve of Ghana's independence, in which he declared in part: "we are going to create our own African personality and identity". Implied in that statement was a major push to transform Ghana's film unit into a modern state-of-the-art industrial complex, and that was exactly what Nkrumah did.

Within a few months of taking office, he transformed the then Gold Coast Film Unit into a full-fledged Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC). Records show that the government had established a standing order with major film equipment manufacturing companies, to supply the GFIC with every new state-of-the art equipment on the market. He also sent aspiring filmmakers out to Canada, Poland, USA, the UK and France

to strengthen their skills in the various disciplines, in order to make Ghana self-sufficient in film production. Among the beneficiaries of the training programme was one of Africa's foremost cinematographers, Dr. Chris Tsui Hesse, who was Director of Photography for the award-winning films *Love Brewed in the African Pot* and *Heritage Africa*. GFIC was to concentrate on the industrial production of relevant feature films and documentaries, and provide content for the cinema houses and television programming in Africa to minimize the negative impact of Hollywood and Western values on the continent.

The first President of Ghana believed that, in order to build the African personality and identity which he had spoken about in his declaration of independence, film would have a major role to play, just as Hollywood had effectively moulded our minds to become Americans even if we had never been there. Nkrumah thus made sure that every major event on the African continent (the achievement of independence, Organization of African Unity (OAU) activities and other important functions) was captured on film by the GFIC. This made GFIC the biggest source of African archival film material in Africa south of the Sahara, apart from South Africa. Regrettably, February 1966 came and President Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown. Since then, GFIC had never had such an advocate in the corridors of power.

The Changing Fortunes of Ghana's Film Industry

In the 1980s, a group of Ghanaian filmmakers appealed to the government with a proposal to set up a fund which would serve as seed money to encourage people in the film industry. Successive governments, reminded of the proposal, have expressed interest in it, but no further steps have been taken to craft any policy direction to achieve this vision. Unfortunately, in the 1990s, the whole GFIC was sold to Malaysians, who naturally would not be too concerned about Ghana's archives; most of our African film heritage was thus left outside at the mercy of the weather, and a whole history of films, including their negatives, was destroyed under the 'watchful' eyes of the government.

Incidental to every coup in Ghana was the sub-culture of curfews which accompanied every coup since 1966. This helped to speed up the near collapse of the film industry in the country, as night life became increasingly difficult and cinema was gradually weakened. In the midst of these challenges, private Ghanaian film production companies emerged. 'Film Africa' produced its first feature-length film, *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, which became an instant box office record breaker. Even

though the script of the film had been ready before 1980, lack of both resources and policy direction to support the film industry, and unwillingness on the part of the banks to venture into the financing of film in the private sector - which was new in Ghana and considered to be a high risk business - held it up for eight years. Later, other films were produced, such as *Heritage Africa*, *Genesis Chapter X*, *Sankofa*, and, much later, *Nkrabea My Destiny*, *Step Dad*, *Ghost Tears* and *His Majesty's Sergeant*. A Hollywood film produced in Ghana called *Contact* and others were shot with the infrastructural support of the GFIC.

During this period, stakeholders in the film industry were excited about the prospect of a new beginning for the Ghanaian Film Industry. Things were beginning to take shape. The cinema houses were regaining patronage, and a new crop of young talented actors and actresses began to emerge on the scene. At the same time, with the advent of video technology with its instant nature and low budget, video film pirates got a step ahead of the local filmmakers, making their work quite challenging. It turned out that pirates were making more profit than video film producers who soon began to incur losses. When the film industry was vibrant, Ghanaian producers offered technical assistance to Nigerian Film makers like Ola Balogun with his *Cry Freedom*, Eddy Ugbomah and others. But now, arrears of artist fees began to mount and disillusionment set in for young artists and filmmakers who had hoped to earn a reasonable living out of the film industry.

It is worth mentioning that, in 1978, the Ghana National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) was established in Accra, Ghana. It is gratifying also to note that NAFTI, this time, was not set up with the main objective to entice our youth to enlist in the colonial West African Frontier Force but to train Africans to know who they are, where they are coming from and where they are going. It has so far trained filmmakers, not only from Ghana but also from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Botswana, South Africa, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Lesotho and other countries.

In the late 1990s, our brothers from Nigeria, armed with video technology, penetrated the Ghanaian market and overran it. While it took the average Ghanaian production company a minimum of six months to one year to produce capital intensive celluloid films, it took our Nigerian counterparts a maximum of six weeks to complete a whole video film, post-production included. This made Ghanaian movies instantly uncompetitive financially because of the sheer cost of production. Many of the Ghanaian filmmakers soon went out of business, while others became agents of Nigerian production companies. Our good artists and technicians began to seek roles in Nigerian-made films, which provided some of them

with instant success in Ghana. As a result, most of our cinema houses went idle and were taken over by charismatic Churches.

While one is happy that the Nigerian film industry has significantly reduced the influence of Hollywood culture on African TV screens, one is also quite concerned with the technical quality of a number of productions, and with storylines which seem to confirm Western stereotypes of Africa. While some Nigerian films have told good and relevant stories, I am equally concerned about the portrayal of almost every successful African entrepreneur as either a corrupt politician or an occultist. Yet there are countless successful hardworking Nigerians making it through honest means. Frankly, that stereotypical portrayal of African success is worrisome. I grew up in the Western part of Ghana, where the people engaged in petty trading which grew into big businesses were often Nigerians. There was a popular saying at the time, that any Ghanaian village which did not have a Lagosian petty trader called Papa or Mame Lasisi was not commercially awake. We called the Lagosians Mame and Papa Alata. I later learnt from a Nigerian High Commissioner that 'Alata' in Yoruba means 'pepper'. This was a pleasant reminder that when Mame or Papa Alata came, they started their business with pepper on a small table, and then added charcoal and later sardine until it grew into a kiosk and eventually into a supermarket. It is therefore no accident that the biggest markets in Ghana are now called Makola Number one and Makola Number two, named after a popular market in Yorubaland (specifically Ibadan) in the Western part of Nigeria.

In the midst of all these, all hope is not lost for the movie industry in Ghana. In the last two to three years, a number of new producers have come up with a revived determination to give our Nigerian brothers a good run for their money. It is worth mentioning that a number of them have had very good productions which have been accepted beyond the shores of Ghana. The ones which I can immediately mention are *Run Baby Run*, *Scorned*, *Life and Living it, Things We do for Love, Home Sweet Home* and many other feature-length productions. We still have a long way to go in order to be able to produce six hundred movies per annum as obtains with our competitors in Nigeria. But it is heart-warming to know that these are largely young people who are making this immense effort, which means that we can expect far more inspiring African stories from Ghana and Nigeria.

The Ghanaian Film Industry began in pre-independence days, when the colonial authorities saw film as an important tool for the colonial orientation process. It was transformed in the days of Kwame Nkrumah into a tool for creating what the visionary called the "African personality

and identity" with the establishment of the GFIC. However, the industry took a downward turn due to lack of attention from successive governments after Nkrumah and is now largely in the hands of private producers who do not always appreciate the power of the tool they work with. That notwithstanding, the end of the once vibrant Ghana film Industry is far from sight. 'Film Africa', the producers of *Love Brewed in the African Pot* and *Heritage Africa* and promoters of Television Africa have put together a well-equipped five-studio complex called 'Film Africa Studios', to support the re-emergence of the Ghanaian Film Industry. Even though we might not be able to produce the same number of films as our Nigerian counterparts produce per annum, we are determined to ensure that the stories we bring out are very strong and inspirational. The doors of Ghana's 'Film Africa Studios' are now open to our Nigerian brothers for us all to tell stories together.

In conclusion, filmmakers must be cognizant of the very powerful tool at their disposal. The negative image associated with Africa today is largely a creation of the Western audiovisual industry. Fortunately now, technology has put the tool at the disposal of very capable and thoughtful African filmmakers. What we do with this tool is entirely within our control. We could choose to use it to reverse Western stereotypes, which have created an inferiority complex for our continent and its people, but we could also use it to reinforce those negative views. The caution is that, if, for purely commercial reasons, we do not tone down excessive projection of occultism and Juju, the obsession with nudity and the blatant copy of decadent Western values, we may be sowing the seeds of perpetual psychological damage to future generations, something which may not be easy to reverse.

Bibliography

Briggs, Philip & Bartlett, Mary-Anne, 2006, *Malawi*. Malawi: Bradt Travel Guides.

Van Bever, L., 1952, *Le Cinéma pour Africain*, Brussels: G. Van Campenhout.

CHAPTER II

NIGERIAN FILM: LOOKING BACKWARD AND LOOKING FORWARD

AFOLABI ADESANYA
MANAGING DIRECTOR, NIGERIAN FILM CORPORATION

Preamble

This chapter is an attempt to focus attention on the need to reappraise the reasons for the disconnect, if any, between the African cinema heritage of Ousmane Sembene, the godfather of the African film industry, Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of the industry, Adeyemi Afolayan, (of blessed memory) and forerunners from Nigeria (Francis Oladele, Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbomah, Moses Olaiya Adejumo - Baba Sala, Newton Aduaka), Senegal (Moussa Sene Absa), Congo (Balufu Bakupa-Kayinda), Cameroun (Jean Marie Teno), Burkina Faso (Fanta Regina Nacro), South Africa (Ramadan Suleiman), Kenya (Judy Kibinge), Ghana (Veronica Quarshie), Mali (Abderrahmane Sissako) on the one hand, and the current wave of video filmmaking, championed by Nigerians, on the other. According to Olivier Barlet, this last one, which leaves much to be desired, has nevertheless come to be accepted as a model worthy of emulation.

On another level, the focus also goes to underscore the much-needed synergy between the celluloid past, the video present and the digital future, though not in any chronological sequence. The structure of this chapter is therefore intended to stimulate both critical analysis and discussion. I would rather move forward by looking back, through an interactive historical journey covering five obvious sub-themes:

- The colonial phase,
- The postcolonial or post-independence phase,
- The modern phase,

- The post-modern phase / the future of film on the continent,
- The policy environment of African film.

But first, what do we understand by African cinema? African cinema started literally and symbolically with Ousmane Sembene. The term is generically employed to describe films produced in sub-Saharan Africa since the independences in the 1960s. It is therefore a conglomeration of national film industries, including film directors living in the Diaspora. Directors invariably represent the soul of the film; it is in that vein that the following quotation becomes apt in showcasing African film. Writing on African film directors, Okoh Aihie says they are

> A metaphor of strength, a symbol of hope that can't be dimmed so easily, a pulsating stream of life that is constantly rejuvenated … (with) a desperation to prove something, that African people have something that goes beyond poverty and misery, they always want to speak about the beauty of the continent, exhibited in manifold cultured and splendid natural settings… in spite of the wars and famine … (2004: vi)

Film directors are undoubtedly the owners of the film because the film cannot be complete without them. They call the shots. And in the same vein, film directors are storytellers! It is their responsibility to create a story that others will see as they see it. They must have a deep understanding of the essence of the story, which they have been given the mandate to make into a movie, taking into account the visuality of films. The hallmark of African cinema then is this: stories steeped in African mythology, folklore and ancient beliefs, full of superstition, exotericism, empiricism and sourced from our cultural background. We love stories of conquest and mysticism, uniquely told, aided by aesthetics of beautiful landscapes and scenery, echoing the peculiarity of the African experience, cultural heritage, philosophy and mode of governance, and displaying a different orientation altogether.

African Film: The Colonial/Post-Independence Celluloid Past

The film medium, which is the most important invention of the 20th century, became a force and a tool to reckon with, used by all and sundry, especially for political gains. As we commence this historical voyage, it is pertinent to note that film was brought to Africa within the colonial context, at the height of the colonial era. Arriving at an auspicious time, it helped in no small measure to perpetuate colonial ambitions, reducing

colonial subjects to its scope of reference in politics, culture, economics and social systems. In most colonial societies, especially those far-removed from a national cinema culture, the film image resided outside the province of social reality because colonial cinema impressed "unreal images". This is one of the deepest lingering legacies of the colonial cinema heritage (Okome (1995: 26-27).

Apart from this, the missionaries also craved to create a new religious order for the "natives" through film screenings. Since 1903 when the first film was exhibited in Nigeria and on the continent at large, the response from indigenous populations had understandably been euphoric, as the people loved the magic of the moving image (Okome, 28). Mgbejume (1989) contends that

> The early films shown [to] the African audiences before locally made films were available were those made in Europe, England and United States. These films were sent by the colonial government "as a benevolent gesture of tutelage to the colonial people".

However, colonial cinema affected all modes of indigenous cultural production negatively and delayed advancement in film production, distribution and film studies. The film medium nonetheless provided a means through which colonialism articulated the need for the actual dislocation of the inherited system and cultural values of Africa. The context of colonial films was anti-native, glorifying European middle class etiquettes, and the screening procedures were quite often disorientating and patronizing.

The post-independence era nonetheless witnessed an outburst of creative energies as the aforementioned pioneers and pathfinders strived, against all odds, to establish an indigenous cinema across the continent, away from the colonial legacy which mainly thrived on the newsreel and documentary genres. Both the "Med Hondo" School and the "Ousmane Sembene" School of African film hold that, to effectively decolonize the Africa film and work out an aesthetic recognizably African (its Hollywood appendages notwithstanding), African filmmaking should be a reaction against Western filmmaking, against the Western stereotype of the black man and his world – a functionalist view of culture which served as the compass for the pioneers to bequeath an enduring legacy to generations yet unborn.

Culture is therefore at the heart of the African film. And at the heart of culture is language, be it English, French or Portuguese, which I described elsewhere as "that privileged and fragile vehicle of communication and cultural identity." Our style and identity separate our films from those

produced on other continents. Of course, the colonial question contributed a lot to this, coupled with the experience we had in Africa. In spite of this dichotomy, however, creativity was evident in the films produced by pioneers and pathfinders. It is our style and our identity that separate our films from every other type.

In summary, the basic aim of the celluloid past was cultural re-evaluation and the restitution of African culture from colonial domination and Western propaganda. African filmmakers have produced and continue to produce some of the world's finest films in response to the aspirations of their people and perhaps in response to what Sembene Ousmane proposed as the perception or role of the African cinema

> … Becoming the important tool for the fertilization of a new African culture. …the cinema brings together the essences of African traditional culture which are essentially oral. Thus, it has the possibility of being an excellent ferment in the vast political culture which the African masses possess" (Edison, 1979: 93).

Examples of these films abound in the few books and many other scholarly works published on the industry by both foreign and indigenous authors.

The Modern Video Present

The "cinematic heritage" inherited from the two phases paraphrased above proved unsustainable in the face of the economics of film production and marketing. From the 1990s, African countries, and especially Nigeria, began to experience dwindling fortunes which eventually led to the demise of the feature film. Although a number of Francophone filmmakers, who looked up to France for film funding, continued to churn out films on celluloid, the story was different in Anglophone countries shooting their own films using their own resources. From reversal stock to the video, the emergence of movies on the continent was only a matter of time, even though, coming more than two decades after the arrival of video in America, it aligned itself to the intention of the manufacturers – to quickly redistribute the image to a larger population.

Some of the greatest beneficiaries of this paradigm shift are poorer African countries, and we all must admit that the oil bust of the late seventies and early eighties, the subsequent austerity measures and the structural adjustment programs (SAP) of the nineties dealt a devastating blow to the burgeoning film industry. The gradual rise of poverty limited

the people's ability to pay for outdoor entertainment, while the rising profile of insecurity kept people at home. Robbed of the prospect of financial assistance, optimistic Nigerian filmmakers dumped the expensive celluloid medium in favour of a cheaper alternative - video - with disastrous consequences (Ademiju-Bepo and Okpodu, 2006: 23).

African films certainly cut across the entire film genre, with stories including witchcraft, romance, some action, horror, comedy, opera, and drama - a carry-over from the postcolonial heritage. Nigeria, known for the ingenuity of her film practitioners, led the way in re-inventing the video format across the continent.

Digitization: The Post-Modern Future of Video

Jonathan Haynes noted that History had imposed the clash of the traditional and the modern as an inevitable theme of African cinema as well as literature. The novel and the film as urban modern art forms therefore tend to look back to the village oral literature or orature in a bid to move forward. Today, we live in a global village, where almost all primordial barriers to arts, commerce, communication and human relations have collapsed. Africa seems to be responsive to this call, going by the theme of the National Broadcasting Commission's 7th Biennial Conference of African Broadcasters, Africast 2008, held in Abuja in October 2008: 'Digitization and the Challenges of Broadcasting', which focused attention on the future of filmmaking and broadcasting on the continent.

In looking forward, African film should begin to take the issue of digitization seriously. Since we do not yet manufacture any of the equipment we use, we must brace ourselves up for the challenges ahead. As the Honourable Minister of Information and Communications, Prof. Dora Akunyili, said, this will be done "by encouraging world class production and developing ideas to enhance (Nollywood) African films without taking away the cultural appeal that has endeared the industry to the world".

The Policy Environment of the African Film

Let me briefly share a few thoughts on the policy environment of the African film, using Nigeria and one or two other countries as paradigm. Through the colonial, postcolonial and modern phases, key policy goals have included nationalization, increased language filmmaking, investment, empowerment, technological innovation and the competitiveness of the sector. From the Colonial film Units (CFUs) which dotted the continent,

through the Film Divisions of the independent nations, to the present day Ministries of Information or Culture, Broadcasting or Communications, African film has passed through a series of policy evolutions aimed at strengthening the industry towards achieving the goals and aspirations of its founding fathers.

Successive governments in Africa have ensured that a conducive atmosphere is provided and guaranteed for the practice, production, distribution and marketing of films to meet global demand for Africa's stories. From investment, tax incentives and infrastructural development to research, training, capacity building and professionalism, appropriate legislations are continually put in place to maximize the potentials of the film medium to the advantage of Africa.

In the future which begins today, African filmmakers should strive for global best quality and standard – from scripting and directing, through shooting to editing and sound – which will make our films admissible into international film festivals across the continents, and ultimately bring annual harvests of laurels. This is without prejudice to the indigenous viewership, which we must sustain through an edifying content that could be the pride of every African at home and in the diaspora. The government of the day would also support these efforts with the patriotic intention of placing our continent on the world map.

Concluding Remarks

Every average African has either gone through the experience of going to the cinema and watching films or watching videos at home. The revival of the cinema theatre culture among Africans is now gaining momentum. This is influenced by the mass appeal enjoyed by our home videos and the desire to go back to the celluloid production. However, the challenge of investment in the sector still stares practitioners in the face daily. But we must hope for a change.

The African film industry cannot be relevant until it defines its image without ambiguity. Can donor-funded films still provide a platform for the stories our filmmakers really want to tell? Do the issue-led films of today hark back to the propaganda of the 1960s and 1970s or is there a real need and desire to make this type of film? Filmmakers are warriors and history makers. It is in discovering your own problems, telling your own stories - those that are under your nose, that you become a better person. Stories and images are among the means by which human society has always transmitted its values and beliefs, from generation to generation, with

films driven by stories. It we fail to use them responsibly, creatively and simply, we are likely to cause irreversible damage to the health and vitality of our African societies.

CHAPTER III

SOUTH AFRICAN FILM: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

JOHN R. BOTHA
NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

When contemplating the nature and history of a country's film evolution, the task is made a great deal easier when such developments are characterized primarily by stylistic idiosyncrasies rather than linguistic and racial differences. It is, for example, a matter of simple academic analysis to peruse the early development of film in France, and to describe it in terms of technical achievements and the eventual divergence towards, on the one hand, films of a more narrative and sometimes historical approach, such as the films by Louis Gance, Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné, where the epic and reflective storytelling nature of French film is clearly visible (Peacock: 2001: 555). On the other hand, France's film history could just as easily be described in relation to the experimental approaches used by Georges Méliès and later René Clair, Fernand Léger, Louis Buñuel and Jean Cocteau (Bordwell, 1997: 18), leading to the French New Wave (Bawden, 1976: 265-266). Germany is immediately identified with Expressionism, Italy with Neo-Realism and so forth (Bordwell & Thompson, 2003: 103-109, 359-366).

In a country such as South Africa, it is on the one hand very easy, for anyone looking at it from a primarily political point of view, to establish the main stream of filmic developments, for there can be no doubt that the Golden Era of South African film, between 1960 and 1980 (Botha in De beer, 1998: 192-196) was directly linked to the demand of the apartheid society for primarily Afrikaans language films. English films were however seen as an acceptable alternative, since the largest number of South African filmgoers, whether English or Afrikaans, grew up under the