

Introduction

Black African cinema did not develop under the same circumstances as European or American cinema. Besieged by European colonizers, African cinema was not controlled by Africans until the 1960s, when Africans began to achieve independence and make their own feature films. Nonetheless, since political independence in black Africa has not been followed by economic and cultural independence, film production, even when under the control of Africans in independent countries, has mimicked the general uneven pattern of Africa's overall development. This dilemma, created by a colonial past and cemented by a neocolonial present, has prevented the emergence of a real national cinema capable of speaking for and to Africans. In the United States, Britain, or France, for example, the audiovisual mass media is a complex organizational and bureaucratic technical system, formed by the political economy of advanced capitalism. In most of Africa, the electronic media has become an instrument for the consolidation of power. Instead of being utilized as an integral arm of the sociopolitical and economic infrastructure, serving useful developmental purposes, its function has been that of an ordinary bureaucratic propaganda machine, helping to perpetuate the leadership of powerful oligarchs. This type of situation and attitude is a contributing factor to the lack of real cinematic development in black Africa, except in the case of some independent filmmakers' work. It is this very personal cinema that has given luster, meaning, and purpose to African film language.

The aim of this study is to examine black Africa's cinematic practices which, in conjunction with traditional forms of communication and rep-

resentation, offer a cultural means of expression—a coherent systematic definition of social life, politics, and conflict—spanning the colonial and neocolonial periods. I will trace Africa's historical past, particularly the oral traditions (hereby referred to as Africa's traditional media) which have been instrumental to the development and understanding of black Africa's cinema and its forms of entertainment and information media. I will also trace the dismantling of these traditional media by European colonialists who for almost a century manipulated the political, economic, and social life of African people. I will outline the broad movement of African cinema, beginning at the turn of the century, when in 1897 Lumière's film titles first stigmatized Africa with exoticism (marking the beginning of the portrayal of Africa in European movies), continuing through the twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties, and on to the emergence of a true black African cinema in the sixties. Since its inception, black African cinema has been struggling to reverse the demeaning portrayals presented by the dominant colonial and commercial cinemas which blatantly distorted African life and culture, as, for example, the Tarzan jungle melodramas and, more recently, *The Wild Geese* (1978), *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1984), and the so-called ethnographic films of Jean Rouch, David MacDougall, and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

It was not until some African countries liberated themselves from European colonialism (notably in the mid-fifties and sixties) that black Africans began to participate in film production. It was at this time that film was first used meaningfully as a voice of and for the people. This account of three decades of black African cinema—from the sixties to the present—will focus on feature films, shorts, and documentary productions as well as on some aspects of coproductions and television programs exchanged within sub-Saharan Africa. This will lay the groundwork for examining the “alternative” means by which black African cinema has moved beyond a chronic domination to espouse its own position within a decolonizing process. Intrinsic to contemporary Third World cinema, and to black African cinema in particular, are films aimed at addressing these new situations, which in turn demand that filmmakers formulate an approach to filmmaking that is in synchrony with their own cultural environments. Though psychological pressures and cultural differences abound among black African filmmakers, they are united in their opposition to what they see as escapist tendencies in Western cinema.

This book does not propose once again to summarize the history of black Africa's film production; rather, it seeks to explore the history, theory, and practices of black African cinema from an interdisciplinary perspective, at once geopolitical, socioeconomic, and ideological. My

discussion of cinematic trends will emphasize some sociocultural factors previously ignored in other works. It is hoped that this examination will herald new strategies and assert new critical criteria and grounds for appraising the accomplishments of this burgeoning cinema.

From the beginning, the major concern of African filmmakers has been to provide a more realistic image of Africa as opposed to the distorted artistic and ideological expressions of the dominant film medium reflecting (to borrow from Erik Barnouw's terminology) "the attitudes that made up the colonial rationale." Colonial films such as *Sanders of the River* (1935), *King Solomon's Mines* (1937), and *Congorilla* (1932), which excluded African participation in their making, gave no priority to African interests. Instead, they provided a distorted view of "natives," portraying them as ingenuous, outlandish, somewhat mysterious beings who were nevertheless loyal and grateful to the Europeans for coming to "guide and protect them."

The new black African cinema concerns itself with the role film can play in building African society. Black African filmmakers contend that traditional ways of filmic representation—old ideas and attitudes—must give way to new ones, especially in portraying African cultures. The interest, participation, and collaboration of the people must be secured, stimulated, and maintained. Toward this goal, the majority of black African filmmakers are united by their art and ideology. Despite differences in their backgrounds, it is evident that these filmmakers have worked to establish certain criteria that might serve as the basis for black African cinema.

Although black African governments have recognized the cinema as a strong vehicle for the promotion of traditional culture, they have failed to promote it internationally. Nor have they nurtured the idea of cinema as a viable and competitive industry worthy of investing their meager resources, hardly surprising in a situation in which hard-pressed governments must do battle against drought and famine, wars and inter-ethnic strife, ignorance, and disease. The African filmmaker is inundated by conflicts relating to the complexities of economic, political, and psychological subordination. But despite these limitations and other shortcomings (for instance, the absence of material resources), the cineastes have not succumbed to failure. Inadequate financing has prevented many of them from completing their films on schedule: Med Hondo, the exiled Mauritanian filmmaker, took seven years to complete his epic thriller *West Indies* (1979); Désiré Ecaré devoted twelve years to making an exuberant raucous comedy, *Visages de femmes* (Faces of women, 1985); and Moyo Ogundipe, a Nigerian newcomer, has completed *The Song Bird* four years after production began.

These films appear as vibrant as they are ambitious. Aesthetically

and artistically, *West Indies* and *Visages de femmes* are remarkable and have been internationally applauded. (Reviews indicate that *The Song Bird* is equally ambitious.) This inestimable achievement, emanating from a body of films broad in scope, superb in talent, yet limited in material resources, exemplifies strengthened traditional structures aimed at the decolonization and reaffirmation of all aspects of black life, particularly black African life. This study asserts, but not without some reservations, that black African cinema has attained aesthetic and artistic maturity, and although a wide variety of Hollywood and European cinematic practices are evident in these films, black African filmmakers have used these practices to forge their own cinematic language and style.

I will assess black African films from the pioneering years which tend to constitute what might be called “national consciousness” films: films of French-speaking (francophone) African countries (Senegal, Mauritania, Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), which concerned themselves with the denunciation of colonialism, and films with the commercial tendencies of English-speaking (anglophone) Africa,¹ notably Ghana and Nigeria. I will examine new developments and explore other trends that have, through experimentation, achieved a cinematic language that could be called African—notably the Mozambican and Angolan revolutionary cinema resembling that of Cuba and the half-Western, half-African *Visages de femmes*, which mixes pulsating African music and dance with steamy eroticism. I will also explore why *Visages de femmes* is seen as subverting moral codes in black Africa, where sexual explicitness is taboo in the cinema, whereas it is highly acclaimed in the United States.

This book does not pretend to provide a comprehensive study of all black African films. The list of films I will be drawing from, however, is representative of three decades of black African cinema. My purpose will be to evaluate the accomplishments of these films by taking significant steps in a critical discussion that I hope will provide new insight into this developing cinema. In outlining the historical perspective of black African cinema my main aim will be to accommodate the larger thematic issues emanating from political and cultural experiences as manifested by colonialism and neocolonialism. My analysis will be strongly influenced by the notion of “culture,” “self-affirmation,” and “recognition” as reflected in the thoughts of Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Kwame Nkrumah.² The cultural concepts propagated by these thinkers suggest that if there is to be meaningful development, African states must be independent of the monopolistic international, sociocultural, and economic order, which, as the brainchild of colonialism and imperialism, perpetuates underdevelopment. In essence,

Fanon's views, as well as those of Cabral, Nkrumah, and other exponents of African cultural identity, reflect the idea that "this cultural renaissance represents a change in consciousness, a turning point in the liberation of the self and of one's society."³ This is the position the pioneers of black African cinema have also adopted—that cinema should be regarded as a powerful instrument in developing the cultural ethos of a people. Toward this end, African filmmakers have begun to examine the psychological dimensions of oppression and underdevelopment, and to explain them in cultural terms through the cinema, thus advancing the struggle for liberation in contemporary Africa.

For many African filmmakers cinema is a revolution. African filmmakers perceive film as a stimulating medium that the Third World must use for social, political, and artistic enlightenment in order to achieve what Fanon has called "a new revolutionary humanism." Under this theory, the need to break completely with the patterns of colonialism, the need for colonized people to reeducate themselves in order to achieve revolutionary objectives, and the need to build a new revolutionary culture become imperative. Even though many Third World filmmakers are heavily influenced by the theories propagated by Fanon, they find that the winds of change necessary for their full realization are controlled by the very forces that Fanon has attacked. Fanon and, subsequently, most Third World filmmakers see political education as the means for a transformation of consciousness. And, for this new way to succeed, an educational program must be initiated whose task is to raise the level of political consciousness of the masses.

In neocolonial Africa, any effort to intervene at the ideological level, as well as to transform the material base, implies that the education and full participation of the masses is necessary. But the fact that this concept of mobilization has failed in the black African system of leadership also illustrates the complexity of that transition within a society, or from one mode of production to another. How has the shift from colonialism to neocolonialism or from direct domination by Europe to indirect domination by Europe and the United States enhanced or stifled the material resources necessary for the growth of an indigenous film industry?

Corresponding with the various patterns in which Britain, Belgium, France, and Portugal carved out and shared Africa, the cinema in the ex-colonies followed different patterns of development. For example, the films of French West and Equatorial Africa share similarities not seen in the films of ex-British colonies. Moreover, both groups are distinct from the representative styles adapted by Angola and Mozambique, both ex-Portuguese colonies whose independence came only in the mid-seventies. All three groups differ in their approach to and

execution of narrative, methods of representation, and definition of documentary.

The dominant black cinema of Nigeria takes the form of theatrical adaptations originating from Yoruba traveling theater (whose main exponents are Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya, and Ade Love). Nigerian cinema owes little to Western models, nor does it derive its style from any known national cinema, East or West. Capable of fascinating a popular audience, especially among the Yoruba, these films make invigorating use of popular traditions such as those found in Yoruba fairy tales, magic, and superstition. Set within the confines of oral tradition, mixing traditional songs and dances, folklore and farce, the films are highly satirical. In such films as *Aiye* (1980), directed by Ola Balogun, and *Jaiyesimi* (1980), directed by Hubert Ogunde, traditional communication merges with "modern" cinematic representation, and any effort to analyze these films must recognize the constituents of their unconventional structures. These films also draw our attention to the problem of the search for a genuine African film language.

Perhaps the best way to start considering cinema in the sub-Saharan continent is to establish first what is accepted as black African cinema. Focusing this inquiry on Africa south of the Sahara and separating it from culturally Arabic-inclined North Africa, this study will cover the areas from the western Sudan and countries on the West Coast of the Atlantic (Mauritania to Nigeria and Cameroon) to the Congo, East Africa, South-East Africa, and Madagascar. From this breakdown, it is apparent that there is no justification for positing a single African cinema. In black Africa, cinema depicts the stories and cultures of the people it represents, just as traditional African art (sculpture, body painting, murals, and so on) portrays the area from which it comes. A similar problem occurs when historians attempt to classify any art object from any part of Africa as "African art." Is it possible to posit any stylistic criteria with which to unite all the trends in African art—be that art a Bambara sculpture from Mali, a Nok or Ife head from Nigeria, an Ashanti "Akuaba" fertility doll from Ghana, or a Baluba sculpture from Zaire? Even if we reduced black Africa to an area comparable in size to Nigeria, we still would notice a range of styles. For example, in comparing the classical naturalism of Ife art from Oyo State with the abstract geometric pattern of the Kalabari water spirit masks from Cross River State, one can see that they have relatively little or nothing in common, and Oron figures, also from Cross River State, do not look very much like the Nok heads found in the northern region.

Rather than propose one stylistic entity in African art, the illustrations given here demand that we begin to understand African art as "a collection of art forms" ranging from the "classical naturalistic to the

purely abstract” whose patterns and styles of execution may be different from art forms found elsewhere.⁴ In the cinema one is also dealing with a substantial body of work from diverse geopolitical and sociocultural perspectives whose ideologies and themes are different, though inflected by, cinematic styles borrowed elsewhere. Thus we can see elements of Italian neorealism and French new wave in Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s *Afrique sur Seine* (Africa on the Seine, 1955) and in Ousmane Sembene’s films such as *Borom Sarret* (1963).

For the purpose of this study I will posit black African filmmaking as emerging out of the excitement of nation-building and a quest for the revivification of Africa’s lost cultural heritage and identity, a quest that has inspired innovative and creative diversification in the cinema and the arts. In black African cinema we find a profuse selection of films: from Senegal the biting satirical drama *Xala* by Ousmane Sembene; from Burkina Faso *Wend Kuuni* (The gift of God, 1982) by Gaston Kaboré, a film imbued with oral tradition and filmic poetry; from Mozambique the revolutionary folk epic *Mueda: Memória e massacre* (Mueda: Memory and massacre, 1979) by Ruy Guerra of Cinema Novo fame; and from Mauritania Med Hondo’s musical drama *West Indies*.

These contrasts do not, however, represent a broad thematic and stylistic sampling of black African cinema. A close examination of this cinema reveals that colonialism, neocolonialism, and their social and political issues dominate its themes. Such trends derive from the Third World cinema’s seeking to: “(1) decolonize the mind; (2) contribute to the development of a radical consciousness; (3) lead to a revolutionary transformation of society; and (4) develop new film language with which to accomplish these tasks.”⁵ Elements of “cinematic Third Worldism” found in black African cinema can be compared to elements in Latin America cinema, particularly to Cinema Novo, in which Glauber Rocha played an important role, to the “Third Cinema” proposed by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, and to the revolutionary cinema of Jorge Sanjines and other Cuban directors. The unifying element between black African filmmakers and their Third World counterparts is perhaps the basic concept of film as an artistic tool with which to counter the hegemony of imperialism.

The earliest black African films—*Afrique sur Seine* and *Borom Sarret*—were undeniably studies of Africans from an African point of view. While the theme of *Afrique sur Seine* suggests “existentialist alienation,” *Borom Sarret* depicts cultural alienation, social and economic exploitation, and, as Françoise Pfaff has remarked in her *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene*, “the tragedy of misplaced expectation.” A blend of semidocumentary and fictional narrative forms combines to expose colonialism and the forces that are (or should be) at war with

that system, directly or indirectly stimulating the audience to reflect on the issues affecting them. Films in this category also include Ousmane Sembene's *La noire de . .* (Black Girl, 1966), Eddie Ugbomah's *The Mask* (1979), Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972), Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1978), and films by the Mozambican National Institute of Cinema such as *Estas são as armas* (These are the weapons, 1979), *Mueda: Memória e massacre*, and José Cardoso's *Abaixo—o apartheid* (They dare cross our borders, 1981).

The emergence of the neocolonial elite after the granting of independence compounded the continent's problems, and filmmakers found themselves confronting new societal issues. Cinema became introspective. It is interesting that the vivid portrayal of postindependent Africa is informed by both Marxist and non-Marxist analyses that filmmakers have incorporated into their films. The language of these films also echoes the training and experience of individual directors. Some of black Africa's directors received their training in eastern and in western European capitals. For example, Souleymane Cissé of Mali and Ousmane Sembene of Senegal trained in Moscow and then later lived and worked in France, acquiring a firsthand knowledge of French society. Safi Faye of Senegal and Ola Balogun of Nigeria studied in France, and Med Hondo of Mauritania (who claims to be self-taught and who infuses Marxist philosophy with African socialism) still lives as an expatriate in France, where he has established a base for his filmmaking career. Haile Gerima (who told me he claims no political affiliation but whose film *Harvest: 3,000 Years* is highly political) is a product of the University of California. And Ababacar Samb-Makharam of Senegal, who for several years served as the General Secretary of the *Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes* (FEPACI), trained in Rome. These filmmakers' education and experience culminate in their individual creativity. Whether it be Souleymane Cissé's *Baara* (Work; Mali, 1978), Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (Mauritania, 1969), Kwaw Paintsil Ansah's play adaptation *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (Ghana, 1981), Ola Balogun's *Cry Freedom* (Nigeria, 1981), or Sembene's *Ceddo* (Senegal, 1977), virtually all these films have one thing in common—the depiction of situations as they exist and the identification of the struggling masses as undisputed heroes who have undertaken as their task to “right the wrongs” in their societies.

Shifting toward commercialization (that is, cinema functioning as an industry rather than a didactic tool), the new generation of African filmmakers are now focusing on broad-based contemporary issues. Portraying Africa's transition from traditional life to contemporary life, and vice versa, their films tend to focus on the sociopolitical and economic forces at work among a particular group of people in different

geographic locations. In most cases, these forces are either the focus of intense investigation in the depiction of social changes or the subject of allegories of culture which intertwine with breaks and continuities within history. Appropriately, this corollary structure constitutes the scenario for the recurring theme of black African cinema: the conflict between old and new. Clyde Taylor observes that "this is never a conflict between symmetrical opposites, but rather the choice from among the modern, individualistic and industrialized, Marxist socialism, and some form of African socialism."⁶ I will explore these issues as they relate to such films as *Poko* by Idrissa Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso, 1981); *Lettre paysanne* (Peasant letter) by Safi Faye (Senegal, 1975); *Jom, ou l'histoire d'un peuple* (Jom, or The story of a people) by Ababacar Samb-Makharam (Senegal, 1981); *Wend Kuuni* by Gaston Kaboré (Burkina Faso, 1982); and *Heritage . . . Africa* by Kwaw Ansah (Ghana, 1988).

Black African cinema is infused with an infinite variety of subjects and styles, as diverse as the lives of the people it portrays; therefore, the continent cannot be completely understood or wholly evaluated by the screen image alone. Hence the social, cultural, and historical analysis here will draw from a broad spectrum of ideas: the notion of Africa's triple heritage (Ali Mazrui, Ngugi wa Thiong'o); the critique of cultural colonialism and underdevelopment (Walter Rodney, Basil Davidson, D. K. Fieldhouse); and work on traditional culture (Amadou Hampaté Bâ, Cheikh Anta Diop, Joseph Ki-Zerbo) and decolonization (Aimé Césaire). This discussion will also draw on Marxism as elaborated and disseminated by Louis Althusser's view of "ideology" (especially the concept of ideology as a total phenomenon identified with culture or the symbolic as a whole), Raymond Williams's notion of "realism" as a "conscious movement towards social extensions," and Antonio Gramsci's work on "hegemony."

In a broader light, African cinema must be understood from the point of view of historical experiences spanning colonialism to neocolonialism. That the formal independence of African states has not been followed by economic independence shows a new form of economic and cultural strangulation emerging in the form of dependence on former colonial governments, with the latecomer—the United States—playing an even larger role in Third World dominance. How has economic dependence and political impotence harmed African culture? Films like *Xala* have addressed this question, but to detail the full ramifications, this analysis will draw enormously on "dependency" theorists (André Gunder Frank, Eduardo Galeano, Samir Amin, and Aguibou Yansane). Aware of certain limitations and constraints of Marxist theories, and cultural theories in general, I will use Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*,

Amin's critique of the theory of underdevelopment, and L. Adele Jinnadu's "Some African Theorists of Culture and Modernization: Fanon, Cabral, and Some Others."⁷

The classic texts of anticolonialism are indispensable to this study: Edward Said's *Orientalism*; Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Dominated Man*; Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*; and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Although the sources mentioned are not directly concerned with film, they reflect important Third World aspirations, delineating how cultural history informs contemporary events and why past and present events are depicted in films as a useful communication process in black Africa's development.

The above summation of concerns patterns the shape of the overall discussion. On specific applications to film, I shall contrast the topics presented in these works with numerous previous studies of stereotyping, racism, and colonialism in dominant cinema. These include Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, Thomas Cripp's *Slow Fade to Black* (on stereotyping black Americans), Richard Maynard's *Africa on Film: Myth and Reality*, and David S. Wiley's *Africa on Film and Videotape 1960-81*. I will also draw on studies of Third World cinema by such critics and scholars as Roy Armes, Ferid Boughedir, Julianne Burton, Teshome Gabriel, Guy Hennebelle, Randall Johnson, Françoise Pfaff, Robert Stam, and J. Koyinde Vaughan. Finally, I shall conclude by asking where black African cinema fits within this context. It is here that we can link past and present circumstances with black African film production, exhibition, and distribution so as to best illustrate, for example, the social, political, and artistic concerns of the times.

My intention is also to expose questionable cinematic strategies wherever necessary, whether in relation to the noncinematic qualities of some films, to the misdirected policies of Africa's military oligarchs, to an assimilated elite who disdains nationalistic patriotism, or to a populace that, out of a colonial mentality, prefers foreign goods to locally manufactured ones. I shall be looking at black African films with a critical eye (an insider's eye), focusing on the realities and contradictions of contemporary Africa. To place the directorial work, major themes, and styles of black African cinema in perspective, three main questions will have to orient the discussion. First, even if this cinema is derived from Western technological invention, isn't it also necessary to have a working definition that incorporates the meaning of the nature of black African cinema? In other words, is this cinema purely a rehashing of Hollywood or European film? Second, how might we dis-

cover the way in which cultural identity is pursued in the film medium? Third and finally, how do we compare and contrast aspects of black African cinema's militancy with those of some other Third World cinemas? Ferid Boughedir identified some of the principal tendencies of African cinema in his thesis *Cinéma Africain et décolonisation* (1974), and the classification he proposes remains germane to this discussion. But since 1974 new directions and new developments have surfaced, and for this reason I will modify or expand on his classifications.

Cinema, like literature, storytelling, religion, and other aspects of culture, reflects the natural world of things, including the human community. How these things are perceived profoundly affects their interpretation. But like the artist and the interpreter, ideological determinants combine class sympathies and beliefs to affect the production of art as well as the evaluation of the work itself. My emphasis will not only center on basic choices of subject matter but also on the ideological assumptions behind such choices, utterances, and evaluations.⁸

In methodological terms, this book presents a comparative analysis of films from black Africa, considering these films as a diachronic series that synthesizes the motivational and ideological forces that structure each film. The films are evaluated within the framework of the communal role of art in traditional African societies, as well as within the context of the historical, political, social, and economic contingencies that govern the production process. Because cinema in Africa reflects African belief systems, these films incorporate symbolic, cultural, and ideological details that render them difficult for the uninformed viewer to decipher. They defy the critical methods used to analyze Western cinema, which, when applied to films from the Third World, impair their understanding and domesticate the subversive elements of their cultural traditions. Cinematic representation entails storytelling or interpretation that uses such specific cinematic conventions and codes as camera movement, lighting, editing, image and sound relationship, and mise-en-scène. How black African filmmakers infuse these codes with their own oral narrative patterns (also considered an indispensable artistic code) demands thorough scrutiny. In light of this, black African films will be viewed through a relevant theoretical framework deeply rooted in African cultural traditions and social texts and a comprehensive methodology that attends to the intervening mediations between community life and representation. Using cultural sources as a vital prerequisite for reaching the "real" meaning of films helps us to determine the differences and transformations that have occurred in black Africa, from film to film, thematically and diachronically. I will approach each film, each individual case, on the basis of how the production materialized—negative or favorable inferences will best be under-

stood from that angle. For the above reasons, some aspects of this study will be metacritical.

My analytical method for this project is also syncretic. By employing social, political, cultural, and economic history, I will take into account, on the one hand, the historical situation in Africa to date and, on the other hand, the ideological differences among the various filmmakers (reflecting the diverse ideological perspectives operating in today's neo-colonial Africa). The filmmakers' intentions closely align with their concern for an African form of vision, so that the specific organization of codes and subcodes may not correspond with the conventions typical of the dominant Western cinemas. An understanding of the filmmakers' intentions can assist us in coming to terms with the specificities of black African cinema. The "Africanness" of such intentionality will be a central point of focus.

In black Africa, where many ethnic subcultures coexist, filmic representation is replete with numerous cultural symbols. The application of an ethnocentric reading of such films is at best useless. In order to get to the meaning of a text, the approach must also be *intertextual*. Of particular importance in this study is the exploration of the relation between cinema and the traditional arts—folklore, dance, and music. Until now, only a few studies have examined how films' narrative structures have been influenced by or interwoven with African oral traditions. Using African oral tradition as a creative matrix, filmmakers focus on social issues that address, among other things, the transition from village to city, how the "new" (Western values) impinges on the "old" (traditional values), and pastoral settings. From the perspective of creating narratives imbued with originality and filmic poetry, *Sey Seyeti* (One man, several wives; Senegal, 1980) by Ben Diogoye Beye, *Jom*, and *Wend Kuuni* are appreciated for audaciously blending cinematic conventions with oral narrative patterns.

My summation of oral tradition in these and other films will examine black African film as a medium of expression and communication, and assess how and to what degree the films are indebted to oral traditions. I will also examine two major approaches that characterize black African cinema—one following Western cinematic tradition, the other modeled on African traditional culture. I will explore how the colonial, British, French, American, Italian, Indian, Egyptian, and Cuban cinemas have influenced black African film production. And I will examine the relationship between the film text and other texts (both filmic and non-filmic), looking particularly at such source material as plays and novels adapted for the screen. In addition, I shall focus on other arts that have influenced black African cinema, such as the impact of music on *Naitou* (1982), *West Indies*, and *Visages de femmes*.

Because African audience expectations have been formed by foreign cinematic and cultural conventions (prior to the advent of African film), I shall explore audience consumption and reception patterns in African society. My approach will therefore also address *the reception of films by spectators*. This critical orientation will be useful not only in terms of the analysis of what makes imported foreign films fascinating but also in helping understand African film of the eighties, when the younger generation of African filmmakers began to challenge the filmic paradigms initiated by film's pioneers.

Although I have emphasized ideological and intertextual analysis, as well as metapsychological analysis, all of these do not form an exhaustive interpretation of a film's meaning. For this reason, my approach will also be *contextual*. All those forces bearing on the cinematic industry will be considered, such as the changes and challenges that have occurred in production, distribution, and exhibition, as well as the social institutions and production practices that construct the image of the continent. It is important to posit black African cinema within multiple contexts: historical, economic, political, and cultural. African existence is punctuated by such events as internecine conflicts, internationally inspired wars, coups d'état, and unstable economies (caused both by Western financial supergiants who regulate the prices of Third World exports and Africa's own internal mismanagement). I shall also concern myself with the contradictions inherent in the evolution of technology and cinematic practices and with the tension between government agencies and independent filmmakers. I shall investigate the cooperation between theater groups and film production groups and between film industries inside and outside Africa. Addressing these issues, I will draw from relevant resources in other disciplines—sociology, anthropology, politics, and economic history—linking these references with the development of cinema. It is here that this study becomes fully interdisciplinary.

A considerable amount of work has been done by scholars of Africa's economic history. Recent works on this subject provide a platform on which to base the study of African film's economic history. Cultural historian Ali Mazrui, in his book *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, for example, offers illuminating insights into Africa's sociocultural and political problems. But owing to some limitations, especially his obsession with Islam and his bias against other religions, his socialistic views lack the cultural foundations on which to base my analysis. For Ali Mazrui, the most serious form of decay in African society is deeply rooted "in the institutions inherited from the Western world, rather than those bequeathed by Islam."⁹ His view of Islam contradicts those expressed by the film director Ousmane Sembene in *Xala* (1974) and *Ceddo* (1976),

in which Muslim imperialism is condemned for its role in the breakdown of African spirituality. (Both Mazrui and Sembene were brought up as Muslims by parents who were ardent and loyal followers of Islam.) In *Soleil O*, Med Hondo reverses the Christian meaning of the symbol of a cross into a sword. In doing so, he dichotomizes the cultural polarities signified by the white man's symbol of ideology (the cross and Christianity) and Africa's adoption of the Christian religion, which he sees as a "violent" and unwelcome intrusion into Africa's social fabric. However, this type of contradiction reflects Africa's sociopolitical structures and helps to explain how the issue of "Africanness" in this study relates to the proclamations of filmmakers, individual films, and writings on African cinema in general. Reality is perceived on so many levels that what is factually accurate for one may become propaganda for another; "one man's meat is another man's poison." To deal with these discrepancies, Edward Berman's critical analysis "African Responses to Christian Missionary Education"¹⁰ will be used in conjunction with the examination of other films about religion, for example, *Njangaan* (The Koranic school student, 1975) and *Shaihu Umar* (1976).

In the past, international organizations such as UNESCO and the Paris-based Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique have made positive contributions by supporting organizations and events that allowed African filmmakers to meet, exchange views, see one another's films, and debate issues affecting African film production. Also, Africa has several long-established biennial film festivals such as JCC (Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage) and FESPACO (Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou), the proceedings of which will provide valuable primary information and have been published in Guy Hennebelle's *Cinemas d'Afrique noire* series, *Cinémaction*, and *Colloques des journées cinématographiques de Carthage: Bilan et perspectives*. Moreover, reports about African cinema have been published in the gazettes of African governments that have attempted to develop film production in their countries.

There is little secondary literature in English on black African cinema. Recently, however, some international English-language film journals have devoted whole issues or published articles on Third World cinema: *Jump Cut*, *Screen*, *Sight and Sound*, *Film Quarterly*, *Présence Africaine*, *UFAHAMU*, *African Studies Review*, *Thirdworld Affairs*, *Frame Work*, *BFI Dossiers*, and *Cineaste*. Generally, in discussing black African films and filmmakers, writers seem to prefer Western critical criteria to judgments reflecting African cultural traditions. This study will abide by the fact that the historical complexity of black Africa's cinema is not to be approached with a method that reduces the

problem to a mere simplistic economic determinism as most writings on Africa have done in the past.

Since the mid-1950s, when African filmmakers started to produce films, literature on African cinema has consisted primarily of articles written in French and published in African and European magazines, journals, and newspapers. Gradually, a growing number of articles in English by scholars, critics, and historians (in America and Britain as well as in anglophone Africa) also began to emerge in a wide variety of periodicals. Diverse in scope, some of these works have coalesced into a series of new, short books that focus on filmmaking in specific African countries. In this category are five books that have been published in the *Cinémas d'Afrique noire* series: Victor Bachy's *Le cinéma au Mali*, *Le cinéma en Côte d'Ivoire*, and *La Haute-Volta et le cinéma*; Rik Otten's *Le cinéma dans les pays des grands lacs Zaïre, Rwanda, Burundi*; and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's *Le cinéma au Sénégal*. (Vieyra's other books on African cinema include *Le cinéma Africain: Des origines à 1973* and *Sembene Ousmane cinéaste*.) The books in these series deal with the diverse origins and development of filmmaking in a number of African countries, cataloging the problems of African filmmaking from preindependence to the neocolonial era and focusing most notably on the lack of capital for film production, foreign domination of exhibition and distribution channels, lukewarm government support for filmmaking, absence of infrastructure to support a film industry, inadequate training facilities, and misplaced government priorities for using film. These books are generally brief, and, as a result, their discussions of filmmakers and the chronology of their works, concerned as they are with themes and content analysis, are devoid of details.

Vieyra's ambitious project *Le cinéma Africain des origines à 1973* chronicles African cinema from country to country, while Françoise Pfaff's *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene: A Pioneer of African Film*, as the title suggests, is an in-depth study of Sembene's work. *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*, edited by Alfred Opubor and Onuora Nwuneli, is a collection of seminar papers in which various contributors discuss Nigeria's Indigenization Decree which attempted (but failed) to implement the transfer of the distribution and exhibition of feature films into the hands of Nigerians from the hands of foreigners, who own and control American Motion Pictures Exporters and Cinema Association (AMPECA), specializing in American and European films, and NDO Films and CINE Films, owned by the Lebanese, specializing in Indian, Egyptian, and Asian films. These books cite the origins and multifariousness of African film production. However, none of them, except Vieyra's *Le cinéma Africain*, attempts to bring together into one source information pertaining to the entire continent's

film production. Important developments since 1973 have yet to be compiled into one single source.

Françoise Pfaff's *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene* is an exception to the other books mentioned because of the quality of its in-depth analysis of Sembene's films. Pfaff uses Sembene's biographical data as a blueprint for her interpretations of his films, which makes this work, despite a wealth of detailed analysis, seem somewhat hagiographical. Despite this observation, the book is highly informative. Pfaff's second book, *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study with Filmography and Bio-Bibliography*, attempts a broader documentation of black African film practice and is a valuable research source for scholars concentrating on francophonic films.¹¹

The shortcomings of the published writings about African cinema illustrate the limitation not only of French, British, and American perspectives on black African cinema but also that of the new emerging critics of Franco-African descent. As of this writing, Vieyra is the only African author who has published books on African cinema. As an experienced filmmaker who is also regarded as one of the "fathers" of African cinema, his in-depth knowledge of African cinema separates his work from that of foreigners who have written about African cinema. He asserts an authoritative voice that divorces him from the pedestrian view characterizing other works.

The list of writings on black African cinema indicates that the majority are in French, perhaps evidencing France's lead in encouraging the development of cinema in Africa. However, many of these books emphasize context more than the text. They ignore, for example, the emerging trends and styles of this new cinema. When these books discuss the films, their coverage is not extensive enough to incorporate the wider issues treated in African historiographies, such as the influence of both Eastern- and Western-style education; Marxist method and historical process in contemporary African studies; the implications of mortgaging African countries to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a prescription for reviving degenerating Third World economies; and the uses of oral tradition, music, and art in African culture. All these, in one way or another, are vital attributes that should inform our understanding of the cinema of black Africa. The process of studying black African cinema demands sociopolitically informed methodology, one that measures up to the demands of its cultural range and ideological complexity. Such will be my guiding principle and the challenge of this book.

It is my contention that any study of black African cinema should start with an introduction to some cultural dynamics of African tradition. This will give the reader a broader picture of why this cinema is informed not only by the cultural preferences and ideological needs of