ROUTLEDGE

African Cinema in a Global Age

Kenneth W. Harrow

"An account of the shifting temporalities, spatialities, and formalities of African cinema by one of the finest scholars of African cultural productions. Kenneth W. Harrow rigorously redefines the contours of world cinema with a brilliant turn to the worldmaking projects of African films, running the gamut from video production to digital film. The resulting book is smartly historicist, formally innovative, and theoretically intelligent. Harrow has produced a field-shaping book."

—**Cajetan Iheka**, *Professor of English, Yale University*

"Harrow's book – original, eccentric, provocative – establishes African cinema from the long 1990s to the present as a singular, powerful alternative to world cinema. Translating from quantum mechanics to critical theory, Harrow brilliantly reframes key issues raised by postcolonial theory, deconstruction, and apparatus theory."

—**Carmelo Garritano**, *Associate Professor of International Affairs and Africana Studies, Texas A&M University*

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AFRICAN CINEMA IN A GLOBAL AGE

This book traces the developments in African films that were made from the 1990s to the present within the evolving frame of what came to be called "World Cinema" and, eventually, "Global Cinema."

Kenneth W. Harrow explores how, from the time video and then digital technologies were introduced in the 1990s, and then again, when streaming platforms assumed major roles in producing and distributing film between the 2010s and 2020s, African cinema underwent enormous changes. He highlights how the introduction of the continent's first successful commercial cinema, Nollywood, shifted the focus from *engagé* films, with social or political messages, to entertainment movies, but also auteur cinema. Harrow explores how this transformation liberated African filmmakers and resulted in an incredible, enduring flow of creative, inventive, and thoughtful filmmaking. This book presents a number of those critical films that mark that trajectory, projecting a new sense of African film spaces and temporalities, while also highlighting how African films continue to find independent pathways.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of African cinema and world cinema, as well as researchers specifically examining African cinemas and their relationship to globalization.

Kenneth W. Harrow is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of English at Michigan State University. His work focuses on African cinema and literature. He is the author of *Thresholds of Change in African Literature* (1993), *Less Than One and Double: A Feminist Reading of African Women's Writing* (2001), *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism* (2007), *Trash! A Study of African Cinema Viewed from Below* (2013), and *Space and Time in African Cinema and Cine-scapes* (2022). He also co-edited, with Carmela Garritano, *A Companion to African Film* (2018).

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AFRICAN CINEMA IN A GLOBAL AGE

Kenneth W. Harrow

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Work on this study began somewhere early in the 2010s when the drama of globalization was becoming a central preoccupation. As the workings of neoliberal capitalism became dominant it seemed much of the world of cinema was being reshaped, especially as the powerful platforms of cinema distribution began to expand worldwide. Following that, films were increasingly shaped so as to meet the requirements for a digital economy. What was African cinema to be during this period? Africa was a latecomer to Netflix, but eventually the popularity of DVDs and then the expansion of African networks like Iroko and many others began to change the landscape. Netflix now streams much of Nollywood and other popular African films. In this book, I undertook to attempt to situate African films that were made from the 1990s down to the present within the evolving frame of what came to be called “World Cinema” or, eventually, “Global Cinema.”

Thus the study began when some of my students—Olabode Ibironke, Cajetan Iheka, Carmela Garritano, Connor Ryan, and later Amrutha Kanipulli—were researching some of these issues. Their work always inspired me and opened me to the new worlds they were discovering, especially Carmela in Ghana and Connor in Lagos. Once opened, those worlds continued to grow with their work, from which I benefitted enormously.

I must thank Cajetan Iheka especially for continually reminding me, “How is that study of World Cinema coming?” The perceptive reader can see how the early chapters, caught up in attempts to answer that question, shift with the later sections. My goal was to present African films as generally moving in their own direction, somewhat marginally to that

global imperative, while at the same time being heavily influenced by Nollywood's complete infatuation with it. At the time that I worked on this manuscript I also served as the African Studies Association's programmer for the showing of outstanding African films. That task eventually led to the ASA's board determining to formalize a committee that would award a prize to the best African film of the year, along with runners-up. I was very lucky to share the work of the committee with Marissa Moorman (whose knowledge of Lusophone cinema is nonpareil), and with my generous colleague Tama Hamilton-Wray and the talented filmmaker Jean-Marie Teno, and Samba Gadjigo. We debated film after film for determining the winners, and in the process had to view dozens of the most celebrated or talented films of the past two years, each time. The work of the committee continued most recently with Allyson McGuffie and Carmela Garritano who were also incredibly engaged and excited about all the films we had to view for the award. As a result of this work, it was possible for me to view recent films that were still struggling for distribution. I feel the last section is a strong testament to the creative work currently undertaken by African filmmakers in a time when the pressures to shape their work to fit the algorithms of Netflix and Amazon Prime are so compelling. The many filmmakers who shared their work with our committee—dozens of them, and their teams—made it possible for me to study their work and present some of it, hopefully, to this wider audience. I enlisted the help of many people over the years to suggest where I should look for "the best African films" of the year, and must thank Lindiwe Dovey, Lindsey Green-Sims, Steve Thomas, Connor Ryan, Carmela Garritano, Tundi Onikoyi, Sheila Petty, Jonathan Haynes, Julie Papaiouannou, Vlad Dima, Sheila Petty, Akin Adesokan, Noah Tsika, Matt Brown, Moradewun Adejunmobi, Rachel Gabara, Bhakti Shringarpure, Alessandro Jedlowski, Olivier Barlet, Obododimma Oha, Maryellen Higgins, Frieda Ekotto and especially Melissa Thackway; along with the folks of ArtMattan and Icarus Films who provided many vimeos for us. In truth, it would be impossible to thank all those who contributed suggestions, and provided the desperately needed contacts, that made it possible for us to view the films.

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I am grateful for permission to use the image Brooklyn Now: Atlantic Antic Crowd, by Sebastian Blake Howard.

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INTRODUCTION

African Cinema in a Global Age

Kenneth W. Harrow

As Claire Denis was releasing her first major film, *Chocolat* (1988), Nollywood's birth was adumbrated by the appearance of video films from Ghana and Nigeria. The first really successful commercial film that kicked off the Nollywood revolution was *Living in Bondage* (Rapu, Nnuebe, 1992).[1] Denis's film was a semi-autobiographical auteur film, a debut in her powerful African centered films. She had previously worked with major New Wave directors, including, especially, Jacques Rivette and Wim Wenders. Her engagements with African cinema could be understood in postcolonial and diaspora terms as she set her films on the continent and dramatized much of its major conflicts, like the fighting in West Africa that involved child soldiers, the question of independence when French troops still were present on the ground; or simply growing up in late colonial times in Cameroon.[2]

Kenneth Nnuebe's film could not be more different. He breaks the mold of politically committed African cinema that often sought to validate African culture. *Living in Bondage* (1992) can be said to have inaugurated the shift toward a successful commercial turn in African cinema, and with its appeal in the use of the esoteric it radically rewrote modes of African filmmaking (Haynes 2016). Nollywood embraced the popular in all dimensions: pop culture, popular audience appeals, success measured by distribution and financial terms, and the promotion of genre cinema.

As film theaters were closing across the continent in the 1980s and 1990s—not unlike many arthouse and film theatres throughout the world (Lobato 2012)—the video film revolution presented audiences with new home video technologies that lured many away from the old downtown

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theatres and the evening-out experience. The palatial theatres that regaled movie-goers everywhere from Dakar, with its Paris theatre, to my hometown Mt. Vernon, with its RKO and Loews theatres, attracting full-house crowds on Friday and Saturday nights, were rat-infested and decrepit by the end of the 20th century. In many parts of Africa young men turned the venues into sites of predation, as many have already attested (Haynes, Larkin, Lobato). The final blow came when the cost of maintaining celluloid projectors became prohibitive, and the worn-out equipment began to damage the films themselves. *(Bye Bye Africa*, Haroun 1999). The shift from the cinema of the "fathers" to that of the next generation—sons and increasingly daughters—is treated in a tongue-in-cheek fashion in Bekolo's *Aristotle's Plot* (2000), a film initially intended to celebrate the turn of the millennium for world cinema. The old equipment, the tsotsis who frequent the theatre "African Cinema," and the cop who chases down the thief "Cinema" all echo the parody which involved a "new" age supplanting the "old." FESPACO had not really caught up. It still was dominated by the antiquated mentality that privileged serious engaged films, whose messages had long since lost their impact. In 2017 I attended FESPACO and was surprised not only at the failure to include digital or Nigerian films to any real extent, but even more so at the old-school approaches that Bekolo had so well put down in *Aristotle's Plot*.[3]

Videos dominated until VCDs and DVDs supplanted them; at the same time digital platforms began to emerge and compete. In 1997 Netflix began its business of distributing DVDs, and ten years later shifted the focus to online streaming. African participation was slow to follow. While Africa Magic and other competitors emerged, the former beginning in 2003, Netflix continued to expand worldwide, including into South Africa in 2015, with Amazon and Canal Plus the following year. Most of the continent is now covered by platforms that stream films, with Netflix the strongest player, though not without major competition.

More than they are bringing commercial films to African audiences; many African directors are now, in 2022, the time of this writing, creating films that satisfy Netflix's algorithms. Many Nollywood and other African films can be viewed online. As the auteur Denis marked something of a looming endpoint to the dominance of FESPACO films, with their serious political engagement that had heavily influenced the work of African and European filmmakers, commercial interests that defined the workings of industries, not auteur cinemas, finally began to prevail.

What kinds of films did Africans or their European collaborators create in these 30 years since that turning point of the long 1990s? My question is not how digitalization of cinema influenced new creative works, but simply, what African cinema became in this digital age, an age we often define

as dominated by neoliberal capitalism and globalization—the period I am identifying as the "global age" in this study's title. As cinema began to shift from primarily national cinemas and national industries to worldwide global ones, many of the films "became" somehow, as if by the magic of capitalist power forces, "world cinema" or "global" cinema—terms heavily laden with negative commercial or popular connotations. They were often fated to be viewed by millions of airline passengers, with their limited screens and limited attentions, rather than being closely watched and treasured in arthouse, much less revolutionary, venues. What began with *Living in Bondage* liberated African filmmakers and commercial energies, albeit with a body of trite, stock-in-trade films; but there was also an incredible flow of creative, inventive, moving, and thoughtful films coming from many countries across the continent. This book will present a number of those critical films that mark that trajectory, projecting a new sense of African film spaces and temporalities.

As we move from the long 1990s down to the present (a shifting moment, as I am writing the first version of this preface in late August of 2022), there has been a growing tendency of recent films, and especially "auteur" or independent African films, to be co-produced and co-constructed by crews and production companies that include both African and European or non-Africans. Many are made by directors like Mati Diop, or others whose location in an African space might well be geographically situated in Europe or the United States, "abroad"—or more accurately and truthfully, not really "abroad" any more, not in "diaspora," though still in many ways African. Some directors (Maïmouna Doucouré, *Mignonnes* [2020]) might now be calling themselves "French," while taking as subjects, as in *Mignonnes*, African migrant communities (see also Alice Diop's *Nous* [2021], and Dorothee-Myrien Kellou's *In Mansourah You Separated Us* [2019]). The drama of our times and their lives often turns on immigrant issues, stories, and sensibilities. However, what had once been "Maghrebin" and then "Beur," "Arab-French," or "Muslim-in-France," say—or their equivalent communities elsewhere in Europe or the United States—has changed: we can no longer speak of such cultures, peoples, lives, and dramas as "diaspora," in the old sense of the term. And to pretend that American or French or German identities remain untouched by the newly arriving immigrant peoples, with their lives, languages, and cultures, is to remain ensconced in the denials of rightwing nationalists.

That leaves us asking how to assess the passage from then, the long 1990s and its new digital age, to contemporary films, a generation later; how to mark the trajectory of these films that this study will be exploring, in more or less chronological order.

The key, older question of Johannes Fabian was to ask what was at stake when the outsider looks at the "Other," assuming that *he* is occupying a time and space, a temporality and location, that purports to be modern, when observing Others living in some version of the past. For Fabian this was the great sin of anthropology—and we would say of the liberal arts and social sciences—that sought to maintain the positionality of modernity in the face of those societies and peoples still "in the process of becoming" modern ("en voie de développement"). That is, in Fabian's terms, the "denial of coeval time" that modernity was grounded on, was based upon: "we" are modern, "you" are becoming modern.

The films of the past thirty years fly over the oceans with the immediacy of a jump cut, and instead of imagining a time here and another time there, give us the impression that a mobile phone call from here to there can bring together different locations with immediacy. We could say, with Fabian, that the events in both locations occur simultaneously; that the temporalities of each people in each location are marked, equally, in their own way by participating in the present, thus, as Gikandi (1996, 2011) would have it, jointly forging the features of modernity. For Fabian it was important that there be no "décalage," no cleft in time between here and there.

But he is wrong on that point, at least technically. Disparaging modern physics, he saw in relativity no useful concepts that might mark time or bodies on the macro-scale. If he were completely right, we could not have GPS systems, as they rely on special relativity to measure how time moves more slowly as a moving body increases its speed relative to one situated in an inert location. This phenomenon is called time dilation. Realizing that the location of the moving object depends on the point from which the observation is made—that the point of observation changes the measurement of when and where an event takes place—Einstein early on came to the conclusion that there can be no simultaneity between events when measured or observed from different locations that have different axes of location.

Taking this as a starting point, we can say that if we are to deny noncoeval temporality it isn't because time is objectively the same everywhere, or even that temporalities could be called universal, evenly distributed, or objectively existent apart from those who observe or measure them, but rather are being constructed with each experiment, each observation, each different observer. It isn't that my time is modern and yours is backward or not yet modern, but that I am creating modernity in the act of setting it off from your temporality—and typically by introjecting into my "modernity" the position of "truth" and all the power that accompanies such judgments (as in, "let me show you," "tell you," "help you to be modern"). The problem is not anthropology and its other, or othering, but

even more, not knowing how much our very acts of observing are always already marked by orientations, biases along axes that are pre-liminary, prior, pre-conditional.

We could take this speculation on the shakiness of what we had assumed to be objective time—our own measurements of time, our own abilities to measure without interfering in what we were observing—take these basic concepts of relativity and apply them to the changing facets of cinema, notably African cinema, to ask how non-coeval temporalities have shifted their features from their early biases along the axes of modernity to contemporary axes that deny the simultaneity of coeval timed events. That is, to ask what we are doing as we see these films disarticulate the temporalities and spatial locations of what had once represented Africa, Africa abroad, or diaspora. We can then de-privilege Greenwich Mean Time, as William Kentridge does in his Harvard lectures (2014).

Relativity is based on the relation of the observer on the inert platform and the moving cars of a train as it increasingly speeds up and moves away. If the person with the clock were on the train, the station would appear to be moving away, in the opposite direction of that of the train, and the person on the platform would be experiencing time dilation and length compression. And were they to come together 20 years later, it might be the person on the inert platform who would be so many years younger than the one on the train, contrary to the perception of time from the point of view of the one on the train. Time dilation—faster time, slower time—does really work, but only relative to those outside the one time frame, i.e. GPS depends upon the relativity of two points of observation, not just one.

We need to imagine, then, the progression of a series of films from one point in time to another as not ineluctably taking meaning and indicating a direction, the so-called "Arrow of Time" always associated with progress. This is the great threat posed by the denial of coeval time, the primary sin of anthropology, the primary weapon used by modernity. That said, how can we pretend to observe a series of films as if comfortably ensconced in a chronology that would mark their progress on a linear trajectory?

Michelle Wright (2015) is right in identifying this—the Arrow of Time, the direction of progress—as the worst sin of the Enlightenment, and to seek to disrupt it through special relativity. But Carlo Rovelli goes one step further in seeking to establish that time emerges only when particles—or indeed other objects—collide or interact. If we are not limited by thinking that quantum functions only on the micro-sub particle level, then we might consider the collision or coming together of other beings . . . or movies . . . colliding, interacting, and generating time. Time is the product of physical interactions—not something objective and outside all matter, as Newton had thought (Rovelli 2018). It requires an observer

to create measurements that purport to explain the causality and temporality that mark the interaction.

This description cannot take place without an observer, so the entire process is best described as that of an "apparatus," with apparatus theory here touching much more than the orientation of an ideology, but the full mechanisms that generate the understanding of the event. In a real sense, the event itself is created by the act of observing it, since it is the observation that puts together parts that all together combine to make up the story, i.e. the experiment and its results. Every film is the same. Its meaning is constructed as it is being observed by us, its causality along with its temporality and space. And as we do this, with full confidence of having understood, we simultaneously occlude our own acts of seeing, observing, making sense of, and constructing the scenes, motives, meanings. We have been trained by life to understand the world in these terms, terms dependent on causality, temporality and its Arrow of Time, of past-present-future existing independent of our material world. This orientation cannot be undone. But when we watch a film, we have the choice of seeing ourselves as observers, and reading ourselves as we read the film texts. We have the choice of doing this with the films I am considering in this study. In the act of seeing them, through the optic I provide as my own readings, we can also read back to the long 1990s relative to the present to ask, repeatedly, is this where non-coeval time can be seen to have been constructed and deconstructed? Where modernity and its locations can be dissembled and reassembled? Where we can disturb enough to return the gaze of the film, and finally recommence, as Hannah Arendt (1958) would have it, as each child starts out in the world? Not with the new eyes of a child, of course, but with something different, caught in our eyes, to make us aware of our vision.

The project intended to spark this approach can be described as having three sections. In the first, I place Denis's *Chocolat* in conjunction with Nnuebe's *Living in Bondage*, both of them points of departure following the late stages that came before. If this resembles a conventional chronology, it will be up to the reader to see a conjunction that makes the logic of Arrow of Time chronology insufficient.

The second section involves a body of six works that move gradually toward the experiences of Africans in places like Brooklyn (e.g. *Mother of George* [2013]), or Belgium, Manhattan, and California. I set the stage for this dispersal of space by examining modernity in the work of Tunde Kelani, especially in *Thunderbolt: Magun* (2001) and *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1993).

What then follows is a trio of films involving the brilliant actor Sotigui Kouyate, including Dominique Loreau's *Les Noms n'habitent nulle part*

(1994), Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Sotigui Kouyaté* (1995), and Rachid Bouchareb's *Little Senegal* (2000). Moussa Sene Absa's similarly themed *Ainsi meurent les anges* (2001) works in counterpoint to Anyaene's *Ije* (2010) with iterations of failed departures putting into question the classical immigration stories of struggle and ultimate success.

These films are placed in conjunction with Kelani's own celebration of Yoruba culture as defining the center of his worldview. For Kelani, modernity is the inevitable opportunity and curse, the site of disease and cures, that are always best met with Yoruba understandings, and cultural practices, often emphasizing language, dance, and even curses. The gas stations in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1993) will be built and sacred woods will be chopped down, but Kelani remains faithful to the belief that we can sustain our lives with practices remembered from the past. All of the five films mentioned above return to similar questions of migration or the transposition of people into foreign cultures, and the need to remember and retain what our parents and grandparents had lived, spoken, and acted out. The section ends with Dosunmu's powerful *Mother of George* (2013). The cinematography by Bradford Young was award winning; the richness of the visual elements matched the complex drama that put into question Kelani's faith in the traditional world, as a couple who are unable to conceive turn to practices that throw into relief how genre roles are strained to the breaking point when Yoruba values clash with western medical practices in Brooklyn.

The last section evokes the dramatic changes accompanying relocations of people, often incurring loss of lives and tragedy, but also openings to new possibilities. The filmmakers of this period have moved considerably away from the early paths of African cinema and its politics of engagement. Instead of a path of national liberation, there is the question of how, in an age dominated by global forces and their accompanying authoritarian states, the humanist imperative could survive. Diawara's *Opera of the World* presents the dramatic features of immigration by juxtaposing the perspectives of major cultural figures in Europe with his own Africa-based performance of an African opera dealing with immigration. Diawara's rich voice-over provides the link between the two worlds. Death haunts his vision as the sight of drowned bodies is punctuated by the singers' laments. Alain Gomis takes us one step further, with his haunting fable *Tey* (2012), with Saul Williams playing the role of Satché who is aware of his impending death, adumbrating the turn toward the unreal we have recently viewed in Mati Diop's zombie film, *Atlantiques* (2019) or the Kenyan Mbithi Masya's film of the spiritual world in the after life, *Kati Kati* (2016).

Portrayals of grandparents discarded by their children haunt this final section. At times the visions of adult children shunting the old aside entail

enormously bitter traces, as in the films concerned with showing elders being cursed as witches: Rugano Nyoni's *I Am Not a Witch* (2017) and Maia Lekow and Christopher King's *The Letter* (2019) are two compelling films on this topic. The most unforgettable performance of the old woman embodying the past and her community, facing global destruction of their village and ways, is seen in Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese's *This Is Not a Funeral, It Is a Resurrection* (2019). Mary Twala, on the verge of her own departure from life, plays the role of Mantoa, who seems to bring us to the border between the past, the present, and the future, periods seen as coeval, and again posited against the single dimensions imposed on their lives by modernizing globalization pressures brought by the state.

More fundamentally, these "witches" take us into the world of old age and death to an extent never seen in African film before. We started this study with the child "France" in *Chocolat* and in most of the next generation coming after the sons and daughters of the revolutionary stages of African cinema. But as the "Independences" and their dawning hopes were transposed, the vectors of progressive stories became deflected. The "mother" of George could not provide him with a child, and the identity of the true father had to be hidden. Satché's impending death looms before him and the community, but unlike Soyinka's Eman in *The Strong Breed*, there is no air of a sacrifice any more. As with Agamben's "bare life," there is no more value ascribed to the old; no loss with their passing. For the global economy, their worth lies entirely with the property their heirs expect to receive on their passing.

More recent work shifts temporalities and lifetimes into arenas never portrayed with the first generations of African cineastes. At times this generation of films posits the greatest challenge to temporalities unhampered by the Arrow of Time, i.e., to find in age and death moments not properly described as marked by degeneration, decay, and rot. Even rot and death become Other when the Arrow of Time is temporarily dethroned. Gomis pushes death to its limits in *Tey*; and death becomes something other in *This Is Not a Death, It Is a Resurrection*. In his *Opera of the World* (2017), Manthia Diawara challenges us again with genre and questions of modern cultural authority by portraying the death of a child as though amiably agreeing with what he hears, while driving our feelings to the limit with questions that only cinema can pose to its viewers. "Do you see me, really, or is it I in the mirror looking back?" "Do you see the bodies now?"

Time cannot be measured in a vision caught in the abyss, in the mise en abyme, because as you catch on to the one image, its reflection carries the eye on to the next reflection, and seemingly on to infinity. This book is not intended as a denial of coeval temporality but as an attempt to catch a moment in the mise en abyme, to pin it down for a period, and to ask

what we see and what we see as seeing, doing the seeing, for that time. We can call that time the period of global cinema, or "African cinema's" demise, or African cinema's resurrection in a time of globalization. At a time when "global cinema" threatens to englobe and diminish all national or independent cinemas, Africans working outside the law of the algorithm, working in their own non-coeval time, are producing films that continue to ignite that spark of the new Arendt saw as the sign of hopefulness in each generation. A "burial" and a "resurrection," as Lemohang put it in his brilliant film about a woman of many years, whose ending could be called only ambiguous.

This study attempts to track how we reached this point of signification by tacking on arbitrary points of beginning and ending—using *points de capiton*,[4] Lacanian upholstery buttons to temporarily halt the signifying chain; the better to open the question of any series of passages for cinema, and to question time's denial of clear punctuation to demarcate its cinematic eras. It is an attempt to portray African cinema as not reduced to a section of global cinema, but as continuing and shifting sets of works that are taking form beyond the market forces of the global.

Notes

1 Chris Rapu was the director. Nnuebe was the driving force behind the production and essentially deserves credit for the film coming out (see Haynes 2016).
2 Some of her major "African" films include, in addition to *Chocolat* (1988), *Beau Travail* (1999), *35Rhums* (2008), and *White Material* (2009).
3 Olivier Barlet's write up of the conference was relatively devasting. However, reports on subsequent iterations of FESPACO seem more favorable to me. Still, the cutting edge of African film festivals seems to have passed from Ouaga to Durban and Zanzibar.
4 https://nosubject.com/Point_de_capiton

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PART ONE

The Long 1990s

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1

WHAT THE 1980S BROUGHT

Kenneth W. Harrow

I.

The 1980s brought a new historical trajectory in African cinema (loosely defined here to include films "close to" Africa, like Denis's). In *Chocolat* (1988), Claire Denis didn't frame the narrative using anti-colonial or post-colonial binaries like metropole-colony or liberation/independence. For the first generation of African films *engagement* was the primary determinant of value. That started to blur with films that moved in a more heteroclite set of directions. Consider how all these disparate films came out in 1992: *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* (Flora Gomes); *Living in Bondage* (Kenneth Nnuebe); *Hyènes* (Djibril Diop Mambety); *Quartier Mozart* (Jean Pierre Bekolo); *Guelwaar* (Sembène Ousmane).

In this period of Structural Adjustment Programs that roiled the African continent, and with the global implementation of neoliberal capitalism, the film industry began to move in new directions. It wasn't so much the exhaustion of old themes, but new technologies that led to this historical cusp. Clearly there were anxieties over change in the world order/economic order in Africa, and in the manifestations of power. In 1993 violence would break out in Burundi and explode in 1994 in Rwanda. By 2000, much of Central Africa would never be the same. The "Suns of Independence" were no longer really relevant in this changing landscape. Mandela was released and then came to power in the same year that almost a million Rwandans were slaughtered, 1994. Authors like Boris Boubacar Diop would aver that their lives were forever changed. Filmmakers were bathing in the same waters of change. We could say there

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was a "before-Nollywood" and an "after-Nollywood," or that the anticipation of "neo-" was not only for Nigerian cinema. A new generation arrived with auteurs like Haroun, Sissako, Nacro, Bekolo, whose world had come to know violence, disruption, and death. It was not possible to film as the grandfathers had done.

Ramon Lobato (2012) gives us a handle on how the film industry underwent monumental change. Demand for videos skyrocketed in the 1980s. As VCR machines became popular, "US production skyrocketed from around 350 pictures per year in 1983 to nearly 600 by 1988" (Lobato 22). He details the changes brought by neoliberal capitalism:

> [There was an] ongoing deregulation of broadcasting in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. As formerly state-run stations were commercialized and/or privatized, the demand for 'average or below-average American films' increased exponentially and a new market niche was born.
>
> *(Lobato 23)*

Half of the revenues for home videos went to independent companies.

The birth of this movement sounds close to what was occurring in Nigeria around that time, though there the distribution was initially handled by markets, which still continue to play an important role (Haynes 2016), though alternatives like streaming networks are gradually taking over much of the worldwide market. For the American independents, Lobato describes the birth of the video industry as chaotic: "These independents worked on a flexible model of dispersed, small-scale production and ad hoc distribution through the mini-majors, the larger independents, small fly-by-night operators, or through self-distribution" (Lobato 23). He says it was undercapitalized, but compared with Nollywood's early films would have seemed royally capitalized. Their predecessors in celluloid included porno and B-films industries. For Nollywood there was romance, occultism, and a range of genre films spelled out by Haynes in *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (2016).

In tracing this shift, I want to suggest that it did not occur in a vacuum. The increasing costs of celluloid production and the increasing difficulty of studios to find the funding to create enough films to meet demand and to be profitable enough to support them led to a sea change in the industry. Video technology drove up demand enormously, so that the only way it seemed possible to satisfy market demand was to churn out inexpensive B films, with religious films increasing in popularity, as well as such genre types as porno, horror, martial arts, and drugs/sex/crime. This in turn might have encouraged urban grit marking lo-grade as well as hi-culture films, or both simultaneously like Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) or