**Introduction to African Cinema**

African cinema is marked by a long history of marginalization – from early films to the present day – particularly in terms of international distribution and exhibition. Films from Africa constitute only around 1% of public film exhibition worldwide (African Film Fund).

Despite filmmaking in Africa being a challenging endeavor due to the complex, multi-leveled and expensive nature of this form of creative expression, film has long been used by African directors as a way to tell African stories, represent and negotiate African identity, as well as for entertainment, education and awareness-raising.

Egypt and South Africa have the oldest film industries on the continent – with South Africa’s filmmaking history of course marred by apartheid – which started to develop shortly after the invention of cinema at the end of the 19th century. Francophone West Africa developed indigenous film industries after independence in the 1950s and 1960s, with a number of internationally celebrated directors emerging from countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal.

Examples of early African films:

* Francophone classics – why the French-speaking countries? Laval decree, France’s support after colonisation. Refer here to Egypt and South Africa as atypical.
* Third Cinema – what is it? Origins – Argentinian filmmakers’ manifesto – films as a tool in liberation struggle, not economic return or entertainment (Hollywood – first cinema), not individual expression (e.g. European arthouse cinema – second cinema). Now also fourth cinema – indigenous filmmakers, such as Maori and Inuit filmmakers, Native American etc. Social realist filmmaking – Sembene etc.
* Postcolonial era, Return to the Source? Why – history of colonialism, reclaiming of African identity after independence.
* We have done a lot of work screening the ‘classics’ of African cinema over the years – not least through our ‘lost classics’ programmes initiated by Prof David Murphy and curated by him and myself in the early years of Africa in Motion – eventually led to a book *Africa’s Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*, published in 2014. Challenging endeavour to bring these films to audiences – subtitling, digitisation, softitling etc.
* Also lots of retrospectives, and a commitment to introduce the pioneering African classics to audiences – Ousmane Sembene – father of African cinema, Youssef Chahine – two pioneering father figures of African cinema; Francophone West Africa – Djibril Diop Mambety, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Gaston Kabore, Safi Faye, Souleymane Cisse etc, other regions – Haile Gerima, South African anti-apartheid classics, North Africa – Youssef Chahine.

Show clips:

* Xala
* Touki Bouki
* Yeelen
* Yaaba
* Cairo Station

While francophone West Africa dominated filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa until the 1990s, new industries are now emerging from all corners of the continent: Post-apartheid South African cinema is increasingly making inroads internationally; the much underrepresented East African film industries are growing in countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania; and the low budget video-filmmaking phenomenon of Nigeria’s Nollywood is being replicated all over anglophone Africa. With such a rich and diverse history and output, African cinema deserves to be seen by audiences all over the world, and African film festivals play an important role in countering the marginalization and invisibility of African cinema.

**Short films**

Short film competition since 2008 – for “young and emerging” African directors.

The short film genre has always been an important format for African filmmakers and is often viewed as a stepping stone to producing feature films, with a strong presence at festivals such as FESPACO (the biannual African film festival in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso). The contemporary era shows many new developments within the genre with more experimentation with form, aesthetics and theme and a number of very talented young African filmmakers emerging. Focus Features’ Africa First programme provides emerging African filmmakers with financial support and mentorship, and the programme has supported the development and production of a number of internationally recognised and award-winning short films, directed by the new generation of African filmmakers.

New short filmmaking in Africa also includes a steady rise in animation short filmmaking, from all regions of the continent. Animation schools are being established to train animators and animation programs are produced for children’s television as well as short and feature-length animation films. Different forms of animation filmmaking are employed, including computer animation, sand animation, 2D, 3D, stop-motion and cut-out animation.

Important to also think about the short film in different context other than a cinema (notoriously difficult for shorts to get screened in cinemas) – and also in galleries, installations, online viewing etc. More video art emerging from Africa as well.

3SAI: A Rite of Passage – Winner in 2009 – experimental film about army recruits in South Africa

Me Broni Ba – innovative and impressionistic documentary about African identity and beauty – especially hair and skin colour!

Mwanza the Great – children’s film from Zambia that has done extremely well! Won our SFC in 2012.

My Shoes – another great children’s film, this time from Tunisia, won in 2013.

Trailer of A Rite of Passage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRxPmdXUPB4>

**Documentaries**

Introduced documentary competition in 2015

Documentary filmmaking remains an important genre in African cinema, and is employed by filmmakers for purposes such as to educate, to raise awareness about crucial social issues, to reinterpret history and myth, and to express individual and social identity. Long burdened by the development agendas of international donors, new developments can now be observed in African documentary filmmaking, with a large number of talented contemporary African documentary filmmakers emerging. Documentary is often employed for personal storytelling, with filmmakers developing unique styles and approaches which are different from typical African-themed documentaries focusing on big historical figures or on the beauty of the African natural environment. Contemporary documentary filmmaking is often employed to focus on the micro-narratives of individual stories and everyday life.

Also many documentaries about popular culture: Music, graffiti, fashion, street art, also art and revolution, and many docs that look at the popular uprisings in North Africa.

Show trailer of Miner’s Shot Down: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkK_T_vz7cY>

Show trailer of Beats of the Antonov: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K797ysGoAt4>

**New regions**

# Due to its relatively small cinematic output in comparison to other regions, East African cinema is underrepresented in historical and analytical studies of African cinema as a whole. However, indigenous filmmaking has indeed been emerging in East African countries such as Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia as well as initiatives aimed at training young aspiring filmmakers and supporting the distribution and exhibition of local films. Film festivals have emerged in this region too.

# Today a range of innovative developments and creative filmmaking trends can be observed in these countries, for example feature fiction films with stunning cinematography produced with sophisticated hi-tech digital technology such as the Red One camera, primarily employing local crews and casts and often using non-professional actors trained through collaborative workshops. These films mostly address relevant local themes and stories and explore the recent past and current socio-political situations. Urban settings, youth stories, contemporary stories. Films that are being seen internationally.

# Show:

# Boda Boda Thieves trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdV-nQ7laGE>

# Nairobi Half Life trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRjBLAnx2jU>

Both these films have been developed through workshops – One Fine Day Films – Nairobi Half Life, and Yes, That’s Us – Boda Boda Thieves. Participatory filmmaking.

**African genre film**

Sci fi, horror, thrillers, musicals. Genre as a good way to “lure” audiences in. Beyond the social realist and political work of earlier years. Audiences then do not see the films as difficult, elitist, arthouse, subtitled, but are attracted to a film because they recognise the genre. Also good to challenge audience perceptions of what African cinema is, or should be. Lighten the “burden” of African filmmakers to only make politically and socially engaged work, also entertainment, experimentation with genre etc. In an equal playing field filmmakers will tell stories from anywhere in the world.

Sci fi probably one of the most interesting developments in African genre cinema: In contrast to the historically dominant social realist tendency in African cinema, an increasing number of films can be observed with themes and aesthetic styles that resemble genres of science fiction and fantasy. The use of science fiction in African cinema is a significant development for Africa, because the continent has consistently and continually been represented as the orientalist ‘other’, alien to ‘the West’. Narratives of science fiction and fantasy afford Africa, just like the genres are used in Western film and literature, the possibility to project different, alternative and multiple futures. As such, these narratives could serve a counter-hegemonic function which enhances African emancipation and self-reclamation. At the same time, these genres should not be seen as merely escapist, as they often confront social issues and are products of the societies in and on which they are based. The use of science fiction, fantasy and speculative narratives in contemporary African cinema - how these genres allow alternative representations of the so-called ‘Dark Continent’.

Thriller – Of Good Report, South Africa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HkWNZq-6u0>

Sci Fi – Crumbs, Ethiopia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuL2o72F7YA>

**Nollywood and other video genres, new technologies**

The development of cinema has been intimately linked to technological progress. Technology has been particularly important for African cinema, as a symbol of colonial authority, of modernity and progress, and as a catalyzing factor in transforming filmmaking from an expensive activity of cultural and educated elites, to an activity attainable to wider audiences. The “digital revolution” has brought about new opportunities and challenges for African film production. Digital technology is not exclusively used for video-filmmaking but also for more politically and socially conscious work, as well as for experimental and innovative audio-visual projects that push the boundaries of both the contents and form of filmmaking in Africa, such as filmmaking with mobile phones (dubbed “cellphilmmaking”). SMS Sugar Man from South Africa was hailed as the first feature film entirely shot on mobile phone camera, when it cam out in 2006. New technologies have brought new methods in the production, distribution and exhibition of African films. Online, streaming, VOD platforms etc.

The low-budget, popular video-film industries have become an important part of popular creative production and consumption in Africa. This phenomenon emerged firstly in Ghana and Nigeria (to become known as Nollywood in Nigeria) and the Nollywood model has subsequently been transposed to other, in particular Anglophone, African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. These video-film industries replicate and borrow themes, narrative styles, and production and distribution methods from each other, and are thus decidedly transnational and pan-African in nature. Technology plays a big part in the development of these industries, as it is the accessibility and affordability of digital technology (in production and distribution) that has lowered barriers and made it possible for these countries to develop self-sustainable, popular local film industries. While Nollywood films typically deal with narrative themes such as relationships, religion and witchcraft, and upwards economic mobility, the expansion of the video-film industries also means a proliferation of themes and genres.

Last Flight to Abuja trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bLpMC5NcfA>

Again – a genre film, disaster movie, my favourite!

**Exilic and diasporic African cinema**

New themes and styles can be observed in contemporary African cinema that move beyond the social realist, historical confrontation, and pre-colonial themed films (as outlined by African film scholar Manthia Diawara in 1992) of the first few decades of post-colonial and indigenous film production. Experiences of voluntary exile which many African filmmakers, especially the younger generation, find themselves in, have increasingly led to transnational filmic themes exploring displacement and the diasporic condition, in particular from a resolutely personal and individualist perspective. It would appear that these filmic explorations of negotiating individual identity in a foreign cultural environment, or returning home after an absence, do not fit into the established categories of older African films, as individual alienation and the resulting feeling of displacement is a thoroughly modern and contemporary condition. Themes of exile, homecoming and belonging.

Filmmakers such as Alain Gomis from France/Senegal, Mama Keita – Guinea/Vietnamese, Abderrahmane Sissako, Mahamat Saleh Haroun, Andrew Dosunmu, Sarah Bouyain

Restless City trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbwvThF8aas>