

Introduction

Revising the Classics:

Opening up the archives of African cinema

Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy

Africa's Lost Classics: shining a light on Africa's cinematic past

The long journey that has led to the present volume began almost a decade ago when we started planning for the inaugural *Africa in Motion* (AiM) Film Festival (www.africa-in-motion.org.uk), at the Filmhouse in Edinburgh, which took place in October 2006. The complete programme for the festival consisted of 25 films from all over Africa (shorts, documentaries and feature films from the 1950s to the 2000s), and was designed to give audiences a sense of the aesthetic diversity and richness of filmmaking across the African continent. However, if part of our motivation stemmed from a desire to reveal the geographical range of African cinema, we were also particularly anxious to provide greater historical depth to our audience's understanding of film in Africa, and it was with this aim that we embarked on a research project—generously funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council—which allowed us to curate a series of 'Lost African Classics' as part of the first AiM.¹ The primary aim of the project was to bring little-known films—by both major and neglected African directors—to the attention of theorists and critics, as well as to the general viewing public. At the time, very few African films were screened to the general public in the UK; statistics obtained in 2005 from the now defunct UK Film Council showed that only nine African films were theatrically released in the UK between 1995 and 2005. African films could only be seen in the UK in niche film festivals or occasionally in

¹ The full title of the project was 'Recovering Lost African Film Classics: Towards a more complex history of African cinema'.

international film festivals or in special retrospectives in independent art house cinemas. The four ‘lost classics’ screened at *Africa in Motion* 2006 focused on Francophone West African filmmaking from the 1960s, which a general critical consensus (at that time finally beginning to crack) had long held to be the place and time at which something called ‘African cinema’ was born. The films screened were: *Le Retour d’un aventurier/The Return of an Adventurer* (Mustapha Alassane, Niger/France, 1966); *Concerto pour un exil/Concerto for an Exile* (Désiré Ecaré, Ivory Coast/France, 1968), *Contras’ City* (Djibril Diop Mambety, Senegal/France, 1969) and *Badou Boy* (Djibril Diop Mambety, Senegal/France, 1970). The two screenings of the Lost Classics package during AiM 2006 were well received by audiences and were, as with the rest of the festival, practically sold out.

A number of international theorists of African film took part in a roundtable discussion on the films after the screenings in order to analyse their significance in relation to African filmmaking as a whole, and the proceedings of the roundtable discussion resulted in a dossier entitled *Africa’s Lost Classics*, published in the journal *Screen* the following year (see Bisschoff and Murphy 2007). In light of the success of the initial project, we continued our exploration of ‘lost African classics’ in 2007 with a focus on the work of pioneering female directors through a project funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. Although female African directors are hugely underrepresented in the film industry, it is often overlooked that African women started making films not long after their male counterparts. At AiM 2007, we screened films from North, West and Southern Africa—*Sambizanga* (Sarah Maldoror, Angola, 1972); *La Noubia* (Assia Djebar, Algeria, 1978); and *Selbe* (Safi Faye, Senegal, 1983)—thereby also expanding the geographical range of our exploration of African cinema’s largely untapped film archive.

We were conscious that this was a potentially chimerical venture, for African cinema remains what might be termed ‘the dark continent’ of film criticism and culture, an entire continent whose output at any given time is generally reduced in the eyes of much of the

world to the ‘representative’ handful of directors whose work is screened in art house cinemas in the Global North. African film has, over the past half century or more, periodically been discovered, forgotten, then rediscovered (until the cycle begins all over again) by a mainstream, largely Western-dominated global cinematic system: works by key directors such as Ousmane Sembene, Djibril Diop Mambety, Souleymane Cissé and, in the past decade, Abderrahmane Sissako or Mahamet-Saleh Haroun have periodically broken into Western cinematic consciousness but they have largely remained isolated instances that are read as emblematic of African cinema as a whole. In the periods between the release of their films, African cinema retreats from view into a general cinematic obscurity, lost once more until the next cinematic Columbus makes the journey to rediscover it. One might argue that a similar fate befalls the cinema of many smaller cinematic nations but, then again, Africa is not a nation, it is a continent (a fact that regularly eludes the grasp of the editors of anthologies or collective volumes on ‘World Cinema’ who devote individual chapters to multiple European national cinemas while relegating Africa as a whole to a single essay if it is included at all).

The influential film journalist and documentary filmmaker Mark Cousins—who was closely involved with the activities surrounding our Lost Classics programme and who remains a loyal supporter of *Africa in Motion*—pinpointed the difficulties involved in seeking to uncover the continent’s hidden cinematic gems in an article that he contributed to the special dossier in *Screen* that we co-edited in 2007. Citing Gilles Jacob, director of the Cannes Film Festival, who has argued that a film festival should ‘discover, confirm and defend’, Cousins writes that:

The Lost Classics programme that was screened during Africa in Motion in 2006 discovered, confirmed and defended, but it was a *tabula rasa* for many people because, for most audiences, indigenous African film has never been discovered. Most

Anglophone cinephiles are not yet at the stage of confirming that Djibril Diop Mambety is great, but affirming this fact. We are still in discovery mode. For this reason, most of the films in *Africa in Motion* were a revelation, its Lost African Classics section particularly so. The title Lost African Classics implies that the films the section contained were of sufficient aesthetic merit to be compared to the better known African films that are usually considered the continent's greatest cinematic achievements. That they are lost suggests a process either of film historical forgetting (they were once remembered but are now not), or that because they were never distributed properly, or written about sufficiently, that they have not been forgotten because they were never remembered in the first place. (Cousins 2007: 507)

In essence, as Cousins argues, the Lost Classics project has taken the gamble of seeking to uncover the hidden gems of a cinema whose major works are often unfamiliar to the average cinephile or film critic. But it is a gamble that has proven worthwhile in developing a greater understanding of the complexity and richness of African film history, not least through the manner in which Cousins himself has championed several of the works screened at AiM in 2006-07, in particular Mambety's *Badou Boy* and Djébar's *La Nouba*.² Cousins' award-winning documentary series *The Story of Film*, shown on the UK channel More4 in Autumn 2011, included in the episode on modernism a detailed discussion of *Badou Boy*, seeking to place African film more centrally within the history of the development of film aesthetics internationally.³ The documentary series has rightly been celebrated as a groundbreaking work, charting a new history of global film that gives greater prominence to the marginalized

² In an article entitled 'African cinema: ten of the best', published in *The Guardian* in September 2012, Cousins lists *Sambizanga* as one of his top ten African films while stating that he has only seen the film once, which was at *Africa in Motion* 2007. This is indicative of the limited availability and 'lost' status of these films.

³ *The Story of Film* was also screened in its entirety at the 2011 Toronto International Film Festival and shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in February 2012. It was broadcast in the United States on Turner Classic Movies beginning in September 2013 and it is scheduled to be screened in up to 10 countries and in multiple languages.

cinemas of Asia and, in particular, Africa. This aim to give Africa its full and rightful place at the heart of the history of world cinema is equally at the heart of our own project.

Opening up the archives of African film

We are not claiming that the lost classics project has been unique in its desire to promote the riches of Africa's cinematic heritage. Indeed, various 'conservation' projects since the turn of the century—the digitization of a vast body of Francophone sub-Saharan African films by the 'co-operation' section of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs; the purchase by South African media giant, M-Net, of the on-line rights for hundreds of African films; and the digitization and commercial DVD distribution of 'classic' African films by ARTE and *La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes*—have begun to make many of these films available to critics and audiences in a way that was hitherto unimaginable. Little more than a decade ago, the African film historian would have been required to spend long hours at an archive such as the *Cinémathèque Afrique* in Paris (which houses all those sub-Saharan African films made at least partially with French money). In particular, the rise of the DVD format has been a potential boon in making accessible the archive of African film but this has happened in a rather piecemeal way: for instance, over the past few years, Mambety's son Teemour, who runs his late father's estate, has released DVD copies of his first three films (*Contras' City*, *Badou Boy* and *Touki Bouki*), while, in 2007 and 2009, the Franco-German television company ARTE, released two excellent DVD box sets of key works from the *Cinémathèque Afrique* collection, under the rather prosaic title *Cinéastes africains, Vols 1-2*; however, other key works, such as Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1969), Desiré Ecaré's *A nous deux, France!* (1969) or Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972) remain unavailable. The potential for greater access to the collection held by the *Cinémathèque Afrique* itself was greatly increased by the digitization project of the *Plan Images Archives*, a scheme which ran for 3-4 years in the middle of the last decade, funded by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which created

digital copies of many of the key works of early Francophone sub-Saharan cinema that had been made with French money (see Louyot 2007). As a result of this major undertaking, the *Cinémathèque Afrique* now owns a wonderful box set containing all of the winners of the *Etalon de Yennenga*, the main film prize, at the major biennial pan-African film festival, FESPACO, held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), spanning more than 30 years, as well as thematically organized DVDs grouping together ‘lost’ works on migration, colonialism and other such topics. However, neither the box set nor any of the other DVDs produced is commercially available and they can only be accessed via the education and French cultural diplomatic channels to which Francophone African cinema has been relegated for several decades.

In this context, it is possible that the African archive may largely bypass the DVD revolution and instead become available to audiences via Internet streaming. In the middle of the last decade, the South African media and communications giant M-Net systematically acquired the rights to more than 400 African films, and, in some cases, these rights extend beyond internet diffusion to include television and cinema distribution rights also (see Pompey 2007): as it transpired, one of the many ironies of the *Plan Images Archives* project was that many African directors promptly took their newly restored digital prints, paid for at great expense by the French state, to M-Net and sold their rights to the South African company, which has now opened the African Film Library on-line film rental service, which is without doubt the most comprehensive African film archive in the world today (although the site is reportedly not always fully operative according to friends/colleagues who have attempted to use it).⁴

Unfortunately, the work of all these conservation ventures remains highly precarious: the *Médiathèque* ceased trading in 2013 (although it ceded its archive to the *Cinémathèque*

⁴ For a description of the African Film Library’s aims and a detailed list of its collection, visit the website: www.africanfilmlibrary.com [accessed 25 January 2014].

Française thus allowing potential future access for researchers) and M-Net is no longer purchasing films for its film library. As for the *Cinémathèque Afrique*, it appears to have fallen victim to recent budget cuts in France following the economic crash of 2008 and, at the time of writing, its status as a research resource remains uncertain with potential visitors routinely turned away due to staff shortages. These latest developments underline that, although important conservation projects have been initiated, they have struggled to survive, due to changes in the economic climate, new institutional priorities and the difficulty in attracting a viable audience.

Of course, the ability to maintain an archive of African film is primarily of interest to cultural actors on the continent itself, and critics must remain attentive to the institutional contexts in which the construction of African film history takes place: who controls and who has access to Africa's filmmaking past? The biennial FESPACO festival has frequently offered a strand that looks back on classics of, or lost works from, African film history, alongside the window it offers on the latest trends in contemporary filmmaking. The *Cinémathèque Africaine de Ouagadougou* was formally created in 1989 but it long lacked the means to operate as a fully functioning archive open to researchers/festivals, and then in 2009 a major flood caused damage that led to over a third of the *Cinémathèque's* collection of roughly 2,000 films being damaged beyond repair, before it finally re-opened with the aid of the French *Centre National de Cinématographie* in early 2011 (see Rochebrune 2011). The archive of African film in Africa is thus as fraught with economic and infrastructural difficulties as African film production. (The final section of this introduction will give an overview of the ways in which Africa's film heritage can currently be accessed.)

This volume constitutes an academic reflection on the implications of the increased but still partial availability of Africa's cinematic heritage and what this means for our understanding of the history and genealogy of African cinema. It thus draws together in a single volume the diverse and fragmented strands of the evolving reassessment of African

film history: for although (as was mentioned above), many ‘lost’ African films are now accessible on DVD/on-line, there is no single in-depth critical work available that might allow critics and students to gain an overview of the cinematic, political and historical issues at stake in the ‘re-emergence’ of these films. Moreover, we hope that the volume will contribute to and influence the process of canon formation—understood as a permanent process of critical negotiation—and develop new audiences for African cinema, scholarly and otherwise. For our project also constitutes an ‘activist’ intervention—present from the inception of our lost classics strands at AiM 2006 and 2007—designed to capitalize on the conservation projects that have already been undertaken and to promote further such work in this area: the films analysed in this volume are works about which film scholarship (and not just African film scholarship) should be aware: these films should be studied in university classrooms and curated by self-respecting art house cinemas and international film festivals with a truly global remit. A renewed interest in these films will, we hope, play a role in even more African films being made more available on DVD and for cinema and festival screenings.

Our dossier for *Screen* in 2007 sketched out some of the critical issues raised by the development of these new historical approaches and provided a small number of case studies of ‘lost classics’; it also explored briefly the institutional and political contexts in which African film has developed. This volume expands upon this work by providing a much more far-reaching exploration of theoretical, aesthetic, institutional and ideological issues (in the present introduction, and below in Section One), and by providing a more wide-ranging series of case studies (Section Two). In line with recent important theoretical work on the construction of film histories (see Grainge, Jancovich and Monteith 2007), the aim is to trace the history of aesthetic development alongside a greater historical understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural contexts in which different modes of filmmaking have evolved.

Above all, the volume seeks to establish more complex genealogies and revised histories of African film through an extension of the historical, geographical and critical frameworks that have been deployed to analyse cinematic production from across the continent. Until recently, African film criticism was marked by a series of truncated histories: many outstanding films from earlier decades were virtually inaccessible and thus excluded from critical accounts, available only to the rare scholars with the time and funding to sift through dusty film archives; and a focus on Francophone African filmmaking had led to the marginalization of film production in other parts of the continent. Over the past decade, the situation has evolved rapidly and the remarkable diversity of African filmmaking is becoming apparent to both film scholars and audiences: in particular, film histories by scholars such as Roy Armes (2005; 2006), Jacqueline Maingard (2007), Lindiwe Dovey (2009), and Lucia Saks (2010) have underlined the significance of film histories in South and North Africa respectively.

In total this volume ‘recovers’ over 30 ‘lost’ African classic films of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The collection is divided into two sections, which are structured in broad chronological fashion, although we have deliberately constructed a set of overlapping temporal frameworks in order to emphasize the multiple histories and genealogies present within the field of filmmaking in Africa. Section One, ‘Lost Histories’, explores the ‘early’ period of African cinema from 1924-69, which has been the subject of relatively little critical attention. Sembene’s *Borom Sarret* (1962) has regularly been cited as the birth of filmmaking on the continent but, in fact, filmmaking in North and South Africa has a much longer history than this version allows. The three extended critical essays in this section will thus explore the complex emergence of filmmaking in different regions of Africa, thereby underlining the multilayered histories of African filmmaking, taking the reader from the development of the Egyptian film industry (the oldest on the continent) through the work of pioneering South African directors to the emergence of the hugely important Francophone

African cinematic tradition. The second section, 'Lost Films', covers the period from 1966-2000 and takes the form of more than 20 case studies of 'classic' African films that have been lost for a wide range of reasons. The timeframe we have chosen for our sample of films thus covers the period from early classics of the 1920s to lost gems from the brink of the new millennium, thereby seeking to extend the historical framework for thinking about African cinema beyond the current emphasis on the postcolonial period from the 1960s onwards.

Our definition of what constitutes a 'lost classic' is consciously open-ended: although it generally refers to works that have fallen into undeserved obscurity, it encompasses works by both 'major' and 'minor' directors, films that are not (or were not until very recently) commercially available on VHS/DVD, others that are now rarely screened in cinemas or film festivals, or that are generally neglected in African film scholarship for ideological, aesthetic or reasons of accessibility. The aim is not to provide encyclopaedic coverage, for general histories of African history—usually focusing on specific regions—already exist: instead, as was emphasized above, we aim to provide the critical analysis that is often (necessarily) missing from such historical work.

The process of identifying films for the Section Two involved a fascinating process of negotiation and dialogue with potential contributors. We initially suggested a list of films under each regional heading: some contributors selected from our list, while others have chosen their own films often on the basis of criteria that we had not originally imagined ourselves. What became clear from our discussions with fellow scholars in the field was that we could all readily call to mind multiple examples of lost classics that, in our view, deserved to be '(re)discovered'. We initially sought to limit our study to fiction films but the blurred lines between fictional and factual work meant that there was a compelling case for the inclusion of works such as *Fatma 75* or *These Hands*. Obviously, each of us had different reasons for classifying our choices as a 'classic', and we were conscious from the outset that this was hardly the most rigorous of critical terms. The term 'classic', drafted from a popular

critical lexicon, has been adopted here for strategic reasons that are motivated by both the activist and the scholarly goals identified above: that is, the volume seeks to underline the richness of African filmmaking, which extends far beyond the work of the handful of ‘emblematic’ directors allowed to permeate the consciousness of the Global North at any given moment, and, in the process, attempts to perform a Foucauldian archaeology of African cinema that disturbs the genealogies of this filmmaking that have been developed over the past few decades. Before turning to this archaeology of African cinema, we will set out the various headings that we and our contributors settled upon for our choice of lost classics.

What is a Lost Classic of African Cinema?

The basic starting point for the entire lost classics project was the recognition on the part of the present authors that aesthetically and thematically significant works of African film were often absent from critical discussions. For Lizelle Bisschoff, this recognition emerged from her work on South African film which, until recently, occupied a marginal position in critical paradigms of African cinema; while for David Murphy, it was archival work in the *Cinémathèque Afrique* in Paris that convinced him of the need to rethink the history of Francophone sub-Saharan filmmaking. The title ‘lost classics’ became a hook designed to try and make the project meaningful to an audience beyond the academy. In popular parlance, the ‘classic’ status of a film is something that is instinctively understood but that is far less easy to define. As was stated above, our selection of Africa’s lost classics was negotiated with our contributors and the choices made can be grouped under two broad headings, one primarily aesthetic, the other designed to overcome what might be described as geographical ‘biases’ in the ways that African film history has been constructed.

i. Aesthetics

- Films that have in the past been celebrated as great works of African/World/Third cinema but which are now rarely screened (e.g. *Soleil O*, *Harvest 3000 Years*).
- Films that provide new perspectives on existing historical accounts of the beginnings of African cinema (such as the pioneering work of Alassane, Chikly, Ngakane, Alassane). These works are often cited in historical surveys but there is a lack of critical material engaging with it in any depth.
- Aesthetically important films by relatively neglected directors such as Mustapha Alassane, Désiré Ecaré, Assia Djebar or Selma Beccar, which are rarely screened and often unknown to both specialists and general film scholars.
- Early films by established directors (e.g. Mambety, Aduaka) that often occupy a minor position within their oeuvre but that tell us something new about their work or illustrate, in embryonic form, the signature style that would be associated with them later in their careers.
- Films that contribute to an understanding of the immense diversity of genres and styles to be found in African cinema (e.g. animation, experimental, western). In particular, the short film emerged as a key form that has been central to creative innovation in African cinema (e.g. Alassane, Ecaré, Mambéty), not least because of the difficulties faced by even established directors in obtaining funding for feature films.

ii. Geography

- Films by directors from areas that are neglected due to the traditional focus on Francophone West Africa and to a lesser extent, North Africa (in particular, works from East and Central Africa, and South African cinema before the end of apartheid).

- Films that have had a certain limited success on the Francophone circuit or in their country of origin but have not received wide distribution in the UK or elsewhere (e.g. *Badis*, *L'Homme des cendres*, *Living in Bondage*).
- Films set in Africa made by members of the African diaspora in collaboration with African artists and writers (e.g. *Come Back, Africa*, and *Last Grave at Dimbaza*).

These criteria necessarily entail the discussion of quite a heterogeneous body of work, but we would argue this is a necessary step in breaking down the excessively schematic genealogies that have governed our understanding of African film history in which an early social realism of the 1960s-70s gives way to a search for 'authenticity' with the so-called 'Return to the Source' movies of the 1980s and early 1990s, before the development of a more hybrid set of genres and filmmaking practices over the past two decades.⁵ In the next section, we will explore in greater depth the ways in which the examination of Africa's lost classics might lead to more complex approaches to the archaeology of film from the continent.

The Archaeology of African Cinema

African film criticism emerged in the late 1980s/early 1990s as a distinct body of research within the Anglophone academy. Landmark early texts, such as Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992) and Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema* (1994) defined the parameters of the field, which largely remained in place until quite recently: African cinema came to refer to work from sub-Saharan Africa, primarily from the former French colonies, and a template for the appreciation of these movies was established, focusing either on their thematic and 'political' qualities as ideologically motivated works of 'Third Cinema' or on their ability to develop a distinctively African aesthetic. North Africa's

⁵ Manthia Diawara (1992) established these categories two decades ago and, although he has revised his vision of African cinema, the taxonomies he developed have proved enduring within the field.

rich film heritage was excluded due to the perceived socio-cultural differences between ‘black’ and ‘Arab’ Africa, and the diverse body of filmmaking from South Africa was understandably approached with extreme caution as the continent’s sleeping cinematic giant was only just emerging from the nightmare of apartheid. This left Francophone Africa as the main player in the field of filmmaking, for the former French colonial masters had begun to invest in film production, initially in West Africa, almost immediately after independence.⁶ As a result of this self-conscious filtering of the available material, it soon became a received critical idea that (black) African cinema had been born in Senegal in 1962 when Ousmane Sembene made his short film, *Borom Sarret*.⁷ Sembene himself would be heralded as the ‘father of African cinema’ and what was perceived to be the dominant aesthetic mode of his filmmaking practice—a politically motivated social realism—came to be seen as the dominant mode of African filmmaking as a whole for the next two decades (see Chapter 3).

The critical belief that African film was primarily both realist and political lingered in the critical bloodstream long after it bore much connection to actual cinematic practice but this has now been effectively challenged in a whole series of works (e.g. Harrow 2007; 2013; Tcheuyap 2009, and Diawara 2010). These recent critics have widely explored the complex narratives and aesthetics of African filmmaking practice since the mid-1980s, as well as revisiting the work of ‘mavericks’ from earlier decades, in particular that of Sembene’s compatriot, the knowing aesthete Djibril Diop Mambety. In addition, the filmmaking of the non-Francophone regions of the continent has now permeated critical consciousness. However, there has as yet been little attempt to develop a better comparative history of African filmmaking practice across the twentieth century.

⁶ It could be argued that a certain critical conception of African cinema is, in fact, a French invention.

⁷ *Afrique-sur-Seine* (1955), a short documentary film by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and Mamadou Sarr, made in Paris (as a permit to shoot in Africa was refused by the colonial authorities) is the other rival to the position of founding African film (see Chapter 3).

So, if African cinema was not born in Senegal in 1962, where and when did it first make its appearance? The northern and southern extremes of the African continent have the best claims to the locations in which Africa cinema was born. Section One opens with a chapter on the development of film in North Africa, focusing on some of the early ‘Egyptian’ directors (who were in fact often from elsewhere in North Africa, the Middle East or indeed Europe). In the 1920s, the Tunisian director Albert Samama Chikly made *Zohra* (1922) and *The Girl from Carthage* (1924), while it was an Italian Stephan Rosti, who launched Egyptian cinema, the longest-standing and most successful industry on the continent, when he made *Leila* (1927) produced by and starring Aziza Amir, one of several powerful female figures from the early days of silent film in North Africa. Egyptian cinema would go on to prove hugely popular with African audiences across the continent, dominating screens in many places until the arrival of Kung Fu in the 1970s.

South Africa saw the birth of a white-dominated cinema even earlier in the century, with the epic Boer narrative, *De Voortrekkers* (1916), made by Harold Shaw, marking one of the early highlights. However, South African cinema occupies a problematic position within the history of African cinema as a whole, for it was largely and understandably excluded from most considerations of ‘African cinema’ before the end of apartheid in 1994. A wide range of recent publications attempt to reinsert South African cinema into the history of African cinema as a whole (see for example Botha 2007; Tomaselli 2007; Maingard 2007; Dovey 2009; and Saks 2010) but more comparative and complementary research is necessary in order to comprehensively reconsider the development of South African cinema alongside the development of filmmaking elsewhere on the continent. The social, cultural, economic and political reintegration of South Africa into the rest of the African continent since the official demise of apartheid opens up opportunities to reconsider some of the critically aware and politically probing films made during the apartheid years, films that are often unknown to international audiences. In the years following the Second World War and before the full

implementation of the apartheid regime, 'black' South African life was sympathetically represented on screen in a series of landmark films: for example, *African Jim* (a.k.a. *Jim comes to Joburg*, 1949) by Donald Swanson celebrates the eponymous hero, as he moves from the country to the city; in *Come Back, Africa* (1959) the director Lionel Rogosin explores apartheid from a black point of view with a script written by Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi, two journalists with the influential 'black' magazine, *Drum*.

Section Two will equally include case studies of key North and South African films of the past five decades and will furthermore expand the range to include filmmaking from Lusophone Africa, Eastern Africa and Anglophone West Africa. The example of Lusophone Africa illustrates how even 'marginal' regions in the history of African filmmaking have played a complex role in the history of film on the continent. Given the traumatic nature of the wars of liberation in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissao, and the bloody and protracted civil wars that followed, filmmaking was slow to emerge in these countries. However, as Raquel Schefer shows (see Chapter 20), important cinematic projects did occur in the immediate post-independence period in the Lusophone African countries but many of these works have subsequently been lost from view but are now being rediscovered in the more politically stable and economically vibrant period that has followed the civil wars. The revolutionary governments of Mozambique and Angola, which were the most active centres for film production in the Lusophone world, supported landmark films made by pioneering filmmakers in the nascent African cinema between 1969 and 1978 (Andrade-Watkins 1999: 180). In Mozambique in particular, the revolutionary government of Samora Machel, supported the development of filmmaking. By far the best-known and most important contributor to revolutionary Lusophone cinema was Sarah Maldoror, who was married to the Angolan revolutionary Mario Pinto de Andrade. Maldoror studied film in the ex-Soviet Union with Sembene, and started her career in filmmaking during the early years of African independence. Her films display a deep commitment to the history of the liberation struggles

of African peoples, which has earned her the ‘honorary’ title of being regarded as an African filmmaker. Her landmark film *Sambizanga* (1972) traces the path of a woman, Maria, who is searching for her husband after he was arrested by the colonial secret police, and is hailed as one of the masterpieces of early African cinema.

The inclusion of Anglophone West Africa appears particularly important for the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of the popular film form that has widely been dubbed ‘Nollywood’, a term that refers to the cheaply made and hugely popular ‘video-films’ produced in Nigeria and now consumed not only across large swathes of Africa but also in other parts of the Global South (not least in the Caribbean). Chief Kenneth Nnebue’s *Living in Bondage Parts 1 and 2* (1992-93) established the template around which later directors have woven their tales of corruption, greed and the supernatural.⁸ Nollywood has offered a model for the development of a vibrant indigenous popular form of filmmaking in Africa but it has also led to sterile oppositions between Nigerian video-films and the so-called elitist works of Francophone Africa. The chapters on Anglophone West Africa thus attempt to provide a more diverse understanding of the types of film that have been produced by directors from Nigeria and Ghana. The 1990s also witnessed the re-emergence of one of the continent’s sleeping giants, South Africa, after the fall of the racist apartheid regime and the implementation of democracy. This has led to a burst a cinematic creativity, led by a number of black and white South African filmmakers (discussed in further detail below). The end of apartheid has also led to the possibility of thinking in more complex ways about the contribution of white South African filmmakers under apartheid with the remarkable work of Jans Rautenbach and Darrel Roodt at the forefront of critical re-evaluations (see Chapters 8 and 10 respectively).

⁸ This mix of sex and the supernatural has even made its way into the supposedly more artistic repertoire of Francophone African cinema: see, for example, Bekolo’s *Les Saignantes* (2007).

Evoking the role of these other regional film cultures in the history of film in Africa is not designed to detract from the importance of Francophone West African cinema. The intention is rather to examine this latter body of work in relation to broader trends from across the continent. In addition, we are keen to challenge truncated accounts of West African filmmaking. For Francophone African cinema of the 1950s-1970s has often been cast as a straightforwardly ‘modernist’ moment, during which a ‘progressive’ and largely realist body of African film engaged in the cultural nationalist project of nation building as the European empires toppled one by one. It was during this period that the institutions of African cinema were created, in particular FEPACI, the federation of African filmmakers, and FESPACO, the biennial African film festival, still held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). However, as is made clear by the chapter on the birth of Francophone West African cinema in Section One and the chapters on individual films from this region in Section Two, it is far more compelling to think of this period as having been marked by a diverse range of aesthetic practices that engaged with modernity as both a political and a cultural project.

As the modernist project began increasingly to be questioned from the late 1970s, many African directors turned to new sources of inspiration. The development of a group of films from the early 1980s that came to be known as ‘the return to the source’ has generally been perceived a turn away from the modernism of the previous decades. As ever with such attempts to mark out clearly distinguishable movements/periods, the reality is far more complex—Sembene’s *Emitai* (1971) and *Ceddo* (1976) had already begun to rethink the narrative of African film in ways that engaged with oral tradition—but it remains indisputable that films by directors as diverse as Souleymane Cissé (*Finyé*, 1982, and *Yeelen*, 1987), Gaston Kaboré (*Wend Kuuni*, 1982) and Idrissa Ouédraogo (*Tilai*, 1990), were marked by a sustained attempt by individual directors to carve out a distinctive style that might better reflect different types of oral narrative. Figures such as Cissé had begun their careers working largely within the social realist vein—see his *Baara* (1978), about a strike in Bamako—but

Finyé, with its allegorical tale of young lovers living in a dour, fearful world governed by the ruling military dictatorship, marked a shift towards a more spiritual reading of contemporary events, which were interpreted through the prism of local epic traditions and systems of knowledge. This process became even more pronounced with *Yeelen*, the epic story of a father-son conflict within a powerful clan in ancient Mali, which acts as a staggeringly beautiful commentary on the way in which power and knowledge are transmitted (it can be compared with the scope and ambition of Kubrick's *2001*). This tale of a rural, magical and mysterious Africa proved (temporarily) popular with Western critics and audiences: *Yeelen* won prizes at Cannes in 1987, as did Ouédraogo's *Tilai* three years later, and both films enjoyed respectable careers on the Western art house circuit. However, for all those who hailed 'the return to the source' movies as 'authentically' African, there were those—filmmakers, critics and audiences alike—who perceived this critical and popular success as proof that these films were merely pandering to the exotic tastes of the West, that they relegated Africa to a traditional past: the pejorative term 'calabash films' presented these movies as primarily ethnographic and backward-looking. Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Quartier Mozart* (Cameroon, 1992) is often hailed as the film that finally broke with Francophone sub-Saharan African cinema's politically committed image (whether inspired by modernism or attempts to explore an 'authentic' Africa), although as contributions to this volume seek to demonstrate it constituted, in many respects, a return to the maverick playfulness of Mambety, who is an iconic figure for Bekolo and many contemporary directors. (For a discussion of Bekolo's second feature *Aristotle's Plot* (1997), see Chapter 16.)

The early 1990s can now be seen retrospectively to have marked a watershed in African cinema: it is the moment at which the old paradigms for the categorization began to break down (ironically, just as the likes of Diawara and Ukadike were trying to establish categories within which to frame their histories of filmmaking in Africa). In addition, the re-emergence of South Africa, the arrival of Nollywood and the opening up of the field to

include North Africa and other emerging regional cinemas indicated that the genie was out of the bottle: henceforth, African cinema was a genuinely continental affair.

If we look, then, at the overall position of African cinema in the early twenty-first century, the picture is very mixed. In global terms, African cinema may have recovered from the ‘wilderness years’ from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s when its films struggled to find an audience (apart from the amazing success of Nollywood), but there has been no return to the glory days of the late 1980s when African films won prestigious international prizes and has respectable careers at the box-offices of the Global North. Moreover, as will be shown below, many cinemas in Africa are closing down, and the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for African films (outside of Nollywood) to reach a local audience. However, at the same time, African cinema is perhaps more diverse than it has ever been despite the many challenges it faces. The following sections thus explore the contemporary diversity of African cinema, and conclude with an outline of the current availability of African cinema on the continent and elsewhere.

New Histories, New Genealogies: The diversity of African cinema in the 21st century

As was outlined above, while the history of postcolonial African cinema has been viewed, not necessarily accurately, to be dominated by the political and social realist films from Francophone West Africa, the past decade has seen an explosion of filmmaking activities across the African continent, with many new and innovative styles, aesthetics, themes, genres and production methods, and new trends in exhibition and distribution. Beyond the Lost Classics programmes and other retrospectives screened at the *Africa in Motion* Film Festival since 2006, the festival has also included a wide range of contemporary films over the years (see Bisschoff 2013). Spearheaded by Nollywood, low-budget, popular video-film industries are being developed all over the continent. Post-apartheid South African cinema has given rise to many popular and critically acclaimed films and a number of prominent black South

African directors have emerged in recent years. North African cinema is expanding significantly, and the recent Arab Spring uprisings are creating an unprecedented climate of freedom of speech that is also influencing film production in this region. Even previously underrepresented regions, such as East and Central Africa, are developing indigenous film industries. In the pages that follow, we will begin by briefly exploring contemporary filmmaking across the continent before focusing on recent generic and technological developments across the continent as a whole, in order to trace how the story of African film is evolving in new and ever more complex ways.

The influence and legacy of the pioneering Francophone West African directors`_Sembene, Mambety, Cissé and Safi Faye—is built upon by contemporary directors such as Moussa Sene Absa (Senegal), Moussa Touré (Senegal), Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (Chad), Abderrahmane Sissako (Mauritania), Mansour Sora Wade (Senegal), Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda (DRC), Dani Kouyate (Burkina Faso), Alain Gomis (Senegal/France), Mama Keita (Senegal) and Fanta Regina Nacro (Burkina Faso). New themes and styles are being explored in contemporary films from Francophone West Africa, which have extended far beyond the categories identified by Diawara (1992)—social realist, historical confrontation, ‘return to the source’—to classify the first few decades of postcolonial film production (categories challenged by Murphy: see chapter 3). Diawara himself ‘updated’ his seminal 1992 volume with the publication of a new book in 2010 which explores what he views as the new forms of aesthetics and politics in contemporary African film, including the so-called ‘Arte wave’ (a small group of formerly Paris-based African directors), new popular African cinema, and the video-films of Nollywood. The new genres, styles and themes in contemporary African cinema also necessitate new analytical paradigms, and Kenneth Harrow (2013) provocatively proposes the metaphor of ‘trash’ to show how contemporary films have depicted the globalized world, and to describe a destabilizing aesthetics of African cinema.

Many Francophone African filmmakers, especially amongst the younger generation, find themselves in voluntary exile, based in Europe where they can obtain the funding to make their films. This has increasingly led to trans- and post-national films exploring questions of belonging, displacement and the diasporic condition, and they are filmed from a resolutely personal and individualist perspective. These filmic explorations of ways in which individual identity is negotiated are, in many ways, a new departure in African filmmaking but, as is illustrated by our archaeology of the African film archive in the present volume, it is also possible to trace such ideas back to early works such as Alassane's *The Return of an Adventurer* (1965), Ecaré's *Concerto pour un exil* (1967) or Mambety's seminal *Touki Bouki* (1973). The failure of the African nation-state has crushed the nationalist optimism of the immediate post-independence era, rendering the notion of 'national' African cinemas obsolete, as Alexie Tcheuyap (2011) argues in his book on postnationalist African cinemas, which investigates the ways in which contemporary African filmmakers locate postcolonial forms and identities beyond essentialist nationalist frameworks. Instead, these diasporic and exilic films might best be analysed through Hamid Naficy's notion of an 'accented' cinema (2001).⁹

Since the end of apartheid, South African cinema has been undergoing a steady process of re-integration into African cinema as a whole, both in terms of film production/distribution and film criticism (as attempted by a number of scholars cited above). A large volume of films is being produced, they are increasingly gaining international recognition and more black South African filmmakers are entering the industry. Many South African films focus on identity politics and struggles, reflecting on the fact that the post-apartheid era has not magically resolved South Africa's troubled history of racial and economic segregation—films such as Ntshaveni Wa Luruli's *The Wooden Camera* (2003)

⁹ Examples of these diasporic African films include US-based Nigerian director Andrew Dosunmu's *Restless City* (2011), French/Senegalese director Alain Gomis's *Tey* (2012), Senegalese/Vietnamese director Mama

about a friendship between children across racial and economic borders; Ramadan Suleman's post-apartheid drama *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), set within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Madoda Ncayiyani's *Izulu Lami* (My Secret Sky, 2008), about AIDS orphans; Ralph Ziman's *Jerusalema* (2008), an urban gangster tale set in Johannesburg in the vein of the academy award-winning *Tsotsi*, directed by Gavin Hood (2005); Minky Schlesinger's *Gugu and Andile* (2009), the story of Romeo and Juliet transposed to a South African township; and Sara Blecher's *Otelo Burning* (2011), set in a black surfing community on the advent of Mandela's release from prison. Two of the brightest stars currently working in the South African film industry are Oliver Hermanus, whose film *Skoonheid* (Beauty, 2011), about Afrikaner sexual repression, was the first Afrikaans film to be selected in Cannes' prestigious Un Certain Regard section; and Jahmil Qubeka, whose controversial noir thriller *Of Good Report* (2013) is, at the time of writing, still making headlines the world over. Given its financial muscle and more developed infrastructure, South Africa has also managed to make more commercially orientated works that have enjoyed success around the world such as *Tsotsi* (mentioned above) and *District 9* (Neil Blomkamp, 2009).

[Image 1]

Caption: Still from *Of Good Report*, dir. Jahmil X. T. Qubeka, South Africa, 2013

(Copyright: Spier Films)

Contemporary North African cinema is a growing presence in world cinema, with films from Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco increasingly being screened in cinemas and film festivals worldwide. As is outlined in Chapter 1, North Africa, with Egypt at the forefront, has a long and complex cinematic history, with a corpus of films incorporating a variety of genres and themes including melodramas, musicals, feminist stories and magic

Keïta's *L'Absence* (2008) and Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness* (2002).

realism. North African films are gaining worldwide recognition through film festival screenings and awards at major festivals: e.g. celebrated Tunisian director Nouri Bouzid's *Making Of* (2006) and *Hidden Beauties* (2012); Algerian director Amor Hakkar's *La Maison Jaune* (The Yellow House, 2007) and *La Preuve* (The Proof, 2013); Moroccan director Souad El-Bouhati's *Française* (French Girl, 2008); Moroccan director Faouzi Bensaïdi's *WWW: What a Wonderful World* (2007) and *Death for Sale* (2011); Franco-Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb's *London River* (2009); Moroccan director Mohamed Mouftakir's *Pegase* (Pegasus, 2011); Algerian director Djamila Sahraoui's *Yema* (Mother, 2012); and Egyptian director Ibrahim el Batout's *Winter of Discontent* (2012). These films express the social realities of the Arab, Islamic and North African worlds, reflect on diasporic and exilic experiences, and often critique patriarchy and Islamic fundamentalism. The recent Arab Spring uprisings have influenced film production in this region, with many exilic filmmakers returning thanks to a milder political climate and invitations from film organizations. Significantly, the civil resistance campaigns of the Arab Spring were characterized by the use of social media and digital technology as a way to spread information, subvert censorship and promote freedom of speech.

Popular filmmaking in Ghana and Nigeria (commonly dubbed Nollywood) has historically been at the forefront of low-budget, digital, video-film production, but this method has now been adopted by many other African countries such as Uganda (Ugawood), Kenya (Riverwood), and Tanzania (Bongowood), and nascent video-film industries are emerging in countries as diverse as Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ethiopia. The video-film industries have become an important component of popular creative production and consumption in Africa. These 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 major role 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 to develop economically 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. Long criticized for its low production values, clichéd narratives and stereotypical representations, Nollywood has seen a more progressive and technically advanced brand of video-films emerge over the past couple of years, branded ‘New Nollywood’, with filmmakers such as Obi Emelonye and Kunle Afolayan as its poster boys. The increased production values of these Nollywood films also mean that they are accessible to international audiences, beyond Africa and the African diaspora.

Due to its relatively small cinematic output in comparison with 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 and Uganda, as well as initiatives aimed at training aspiring filmmakers and supporting the distribution and exhibition of local films. 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. Internationally recognized and award-winning feature films are emerging from Kenya, such as Wanuri Kahiu’s *From a Whisper* (2008), Hawa Essuman’s *Soul Boy* (2010), David Tosh Gitonga’s *Nairobi Halflife* (2012), and Judy Kibinge’s *Something Necessary* (2013). In Uganda, Caroline Kamya has emerged with her feature film *Imani* (2010); along with Judy Kibinge, Wanuri Kahiu and others, she is part of a new generation of female East African filmmakers.

Lusophone Africa remains a somewhat marginal presence in African cinema and filmmaking has emerged in a piecemeal fashion. Flora Gomes (see Chapter 21) remains by far the most visible Lusophone director, more than two decades after his first film. His latest film, *The Children's Republic* (2012) is a fantastical tale featuring Danny Glover in the main role, surrounded by a cast made up entirely of children. Angolan director Zézé Gamboa has emerged as a significant director with *The Hero* (2004), depicting the struggles and challenges of an amputee veteran of the Angolan civil war to assimilate and survive in Luanda, and most recently, *O Grande Kilapy* (2012), a comedy-drama set in Luanda during the colonial period. Licínio Azevedo is a Brazilian filmmaker and writer living in Mozambique, who took part in training activities alongside Ruy Guerra, Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard at the National Film Institute of Mozambique in the late 1970s. His latest film, *Virgin Margarida* (2012) depicts the harsh reality of life in a 1970s re-education camp for Mozambican prostitutes. Mozambican director João Ribeiro directed *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* in 2010, set in the immediate post-civil war period, and Angolan director Maria João Ganga's *Hollow City* (2004) is also set during this country's civil war, depicted from the perspective of orphaned children. Also of note are two female Portuguese directors who both have a close connection with Mozambique, either through birth or through having lived there for long periods of time: Teresa Prata (*Sleepwalking Land*, Mozambique, 2008) and Margardia Cordoso (*The Murmuring Coast*, Portugal/Mozambique, 2004).

Documentary filmmaking remains a prominent 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 and NGOs, new developments can now be observed in African documentary filmmaking, with a large number of talented contemporary African documentary filmmakers such as Khalo Matabane (South Africa), Jean-Marie Teno (Cameroon), Osvalde Lewat (Cameroon), Katy Lena Ndiaye

(Senegal), Angèle Diabang Brener (Senegal), Dyana Gaye (Senegal) Leila Kiani (Morocco) and Jihan El-Tahri (Egypt). Documentary is often employed for personal storytelling, with filmmakers developing unique styles and approaches that are different from typical Western documentaries on African themes, which tend to focus on major 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.

As was mentioned above, 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 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 recognized and award-winning short films, directed by the new generation of African filmmakers.¹⁰ There has also been a steady rise in the production of short animation films, from all regions of the continent. Animation schools are being established to train animators and animation programmes 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. Animation is sometimes used as a way to make subtle and covert social comments through political satire such as Kenya's *The XYZ Show*, and dedicated animation series for children such as the hugely popular Tanzanian/Kenyan series *Tinga Tinga Tales* have replaced imported content with home-grown stories relevant to African children's lives, and have, in turn, been exported to the Global North.

¹⁰ See <http://www.focusfeatures.com/africafirst/> [accessed 29 January 2014].

The development of cinema has, since the inception of the medium, been closely linked to technological progress. Technology, as a symbol of colonial authority, modernity and progress, has been particularly important for African cinema, and in the contemporary era it has served as a catalyst in transforming filmmaking from an expensive activity of the cultural and educated elites, to an activity accessible to the wider public (see Bisschoff and Overbergh 2012). The ‘digital revolution’ has brought about new opportunities not only for film exhibition (as described in the next section), but also for African film production. Many of the best-known African filmmakers, particularly Francophone West African directors, were trained in the USSR and European cities such as London or Paris. Filmmaking was considered an extremely perilous career choice due to major economic challenges and the expensive equipment required for celluloid filmmaking. Even celebrated directors, such as Ousmane Sembene and Souleymane Cissé, often endured long gaps of up to a decade between their productions. However, digital technology has brought about accessible and increased opportunities for film production in Africa. The accelerated process of technological progress that Africa has undergone over the past decade is providing new possibilities for local, popular and creative expression, including new forms of citizenship and activism (as can be observed, for example, in the use of social networking during the Arab Spring uprisings). Digital technologies are not exclusively used for video-filmmaking (as exemplified by Nollywood) 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. Digital documentary filmmaking projects have been implemented in many African countries, and the mobile phone is increasingly being utilized for the production and consumption of audio-visual content (dubbed ‘prosumption’). There is currently a widespread (if not unanimous) critical belief, perhaps overoptimistic and even utopian, that digital technology can play a democratizing role in

African communities, in empowerment and increased possibilities for representation and communication.

Where to watch African films today?

As the Lost Classics project is fundamentally underpinned by a desire to make African cinema and its history more visible, our discussion of where African cinema has come from and where it might now be heading concludes with a discussion of where it is possible to view African films early in the twenty-first century. As was argued above, interest in African cinema in the Global North has ebbed and flowed over the years: over the past two decades, the commercial success of the likes of *Yeelen* and *Tilai* has become a distant memory, although a small number of African filmmakers continue to enjoy major critical and minor commercial success: e.g. Mahamet-Saleh Haroun's *Abouna* (2002), *Daratt* (2006) and *A Screaming Man* (2010); Abderrahmane Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness* (2002) and *Bamako* (2006); as well as, most recently, Alain Gomis with *Tey* (2012). If the decade from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s was something of wasteland for African cinema, it now appears to be in a rather healthier position. There is a growing recognition on the part of governments, as well as cultural and educational institutions of the importance of African film: this is evident from the number of academic institutions worldwide now incorporating teaching in this area; from the number of film festivals, in Africa and internationally, dedicated to African cinema, the expanding international recognition and awards that African directors are receiving; and from the increase in accessibility to African cinema in terms of DVD distribution and general cinema exhibition, even if in an uneven and piecemeal fashion. And, as is illustrated by the present volume, there is now a sustained interest in charting the history of African film.

One of the major paradoxes of this interest in Africa's cinematic past is that it is occurring at a moment in history when classic modes of film production and consumption on the continent are breaking down. While many African countries had numerous film theatres

in the 1960s and 1970s—sometimes beautiful architectural gems such as Zanzibar’s art deco cinemas, built in the immediate post-independence years—many have closed down or been converted for other uses across the continent since the economic decline brought about by the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s. This process has even been explored by African filmmakers: for example, Mahamet-Saleh Haroun’s *Bye Bye Africa* (France/Chad, 1998) is a thoughtful reflection on what it means to be a film director on a continent where cinema culture is on its deathbed. This means that, on the continent itself, opportunities to see African films in cinemas are increasingly rare. Multiplex cinemas and cinema chains exist in some countries, such as Nigeria’s Silverbird Cinemas which is the largest cinema chain in West Africa with over 50 screens in Nigeria and Ghana, and South Africa’s Ster Kinekor and Nu Metro cinemas. While local video-films are sometimes premiered in cinemas in Nigeria and Ghana, these multiplexes and chains are more likely to show foreign fare such as Hollywood and Bollywood, perpetuating the distribution and exhibition practices which have existed since before the advent of indigenous African film production.

The most accessible ways of watching African films on the continent today are on DVD (or VCD, video compact disc), on television, or through digital distribution online. The video-film industries of Nigeria and Ghana have in fact partly developed out of the difficult socio-economic climate of the 1980s which made celluloid filmmaking an increasingly expensive endeavour. These films mostly bypass cinema distribution to be distributed directly on DVD and VCD or broadcast on dedicated television channels (such as M-Net’s Africa Magic channels), and are also increasingly distributed online. Digital technology has had a major impact on the African film industries, not only in film production, but also in exhibition and distribution. Whereas the video-films of Nigeria were originally distributed primarily on DVD and VCD, improved internet and streaming technology means that these films can now be downloaded or watched on VOD (video on demand) platforms online, a development that has had an impact particularly amongst African expat and diaspora

communities. Africa-specific digital technologies are becoming more commonplace, with smartphones becoming affordable and ubiquitous all over the continent, and companies such as Afrinolly (Nigeria), Buni TV (Kenya), and Wananchi (Kenya) creating triple play platforms which utilize the internet, television and mobile phone capabilities simultaneously. African audio-visual content and audiences have become hugely diversified as a result, which is particularly significant on a continent where very few ‘traditional’ cinemas have survived the economic decline that started in the 1980s. The accessibility of media streaming platforms means that African-produced content, at least in certain parts of the continent and in the diaspora, can now compete with the imported and foreign content that previously formed the main film diet of African audiences.

Film festivals, less accessible to the general African public than the distribution mediums described above, form another important outlet for African cinema. These four best-established and longest-running film festivals on the continent are the Journées Cinématographique de Carthage in Tunisia (North Africa), FESPACO in Burkina Faso (West Africa), Zanzibar International Film Festival in Tanzania (East Africa), and Durban International Film Festival in South Africa (Southern Africa). Smaller film festivals have emerged all over the continent over the last decade, including in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. International film festivals in Africa such as the main four mentioned above, often prioritize African films in their programming, in particular films that strengthen regional and linguistic links between countries.

Outside of the continent a number of major African film festivals exist primarily in Europe and North America, bringing African films to local audiences who would otherwise have very little access to these works, and many international film festivals and art house cinemas include sections for contemporary African films or retrospective programmes and seasons, although screenings can often be quite rationed. For example, in early 2008, the *Cinémathèque française*, in its hugely impressive new, custom-built home in the Bercy

district of eastern Paris, deployed its vast resources in a major celebration of sub-Saharan African cinema, including a significant archival dimension as part of a two-month retrospective, entitled *Africamania*.¹¹ Over 60 films were screened, including the four that had been shown at AiM 2006, plus other very rare works, such as Désiré Ecaré's astonishing *A nous deux, France!* (1969), a caustic and stylish take on race relations in late 1960s Paris. To see African cinema occupy such a prominent position within the *Cinémathèque*'s rolling 'history of cinema' was remarkable and seemed like a major breakthrough in terms of the position of African filmmaking within general accounts of film history. However, subsequent trips to Paris have raised doubts about the *Cinémathèque*'s commitment to the type of process that *Africamania* appeared to have launched: for its two-monthly programmes of screenings (which run to hundreds of films, as its multiple screens often show approximately 8-10 films in total each day) have often failed to include a single African film. *Africamania* thus seems a classic example of an initiative that inadvertently reinforces the existence of something called 'African cinema' as ontologically different to cinema *per se*; any general archival or cinematic insights conveyed have remained trapped within the context of the time-limited retrospective.

A much wider selection of African films is available for purchase on DVD than was the case even just a decade ago, from the established stalwarts such as New Yorker Films and California Newsreel, but also from an increasing number of new and smaller independent distributors. A small number of African films have had relatively successful theatrical runs in cinemas worldwide, in particular films that have been hailed at international film festivals such as *Tsotsi* (2005), *Bamako* (2006) and Djo Tunda Wa Munga's *Viva Riva!* (2010). As was outlined above, online distribution provides the fastest growing access to a diverse range of African films, including platforms such as M-Net's African Film Library, Buni TV, Zuku,

¹¹ *Africamania* ran from 17 January-17 March 2008. For details of the series, see <http://www.cinemathèque.fr/fr/dans-salles/hommages-retrospectives/fiche-cycle/africamania,152.html> [accessed

African Movie Channel, The Africa Channel, Africafilms.tv and IrokoTV. Finally, pirated content and illegal, peer-to-peer uploading, downloading and streaming also deserve a mention. A plethora of sites exist where one can watch Nollywood films online, posted there illegally, and these unofficial channels of distribution might also be significant for other African films, and should perhaps not be readily dismissed when keeping in mind the ongoing struggle of African film industries to make their content widely available. Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* is a case in point: for many years this classic of Lusophone African cinema was only available to Anglophone audiences on a single fragile 16mm English-subtitled print, but in 2012 a cinephile took the initiative to upload the entire film, recorded from a projection of the 16mm print, to YouTube. At the time of writing it has been viewed almost 37,000 times, not an insignificant number of viewers for a film that previously was all but 'lost'.

Digital, on-line archives might thus provide the most viable, durable and accessible solution to the preservation of Africa's lost classics and contemporary films. We stand at a moment of flux in the history of cinema, as the digital revolution and evolving urban trends promote new ways of both making and viewing films. In this context, the type of filmmaking and film culture explored and celebrated by this volume may soon become obsolete, and we readily acknowledge the potentially nostalgic, backward-looking dimension of our project. However, from its inception, we have also conceived of the Lost Classics project as essentially contemporary and forward-looking, seeking to promote a dialogue between past, present and the uncertain future into which we are heading. Our volume aims to steer the reader through some of the most significant 'lost' films in the history of African cinema, in the hope that this will contribute to these 'lost' films becoming 'found', and thus integrated into new and ever-evolving histories of filmmaking from the continent.