

enable them to enter an international market. It is a capacity that requires deliberate exposure to vast numbers of objects and one that is sadly lacking, Kraemer notes, among many younger scholars who are uniquely focused on contemporary African art. Unlike most African art historians Siegmann was also a collector whose bequests to various museums, most prominently the Brooklyn Museum, significantly enriched their holdings of African art.

Visions from the Forests is a superb multi-author volume that comprehensively and authoritatively discusses the impressive diversity of art objects created by traditional artists in Liberia and Sierra Leone over many decades. The catalogue section of the volume presents seventy-two objects of outstanding quality grouped into thirteen categories and accompanied by excellent captions. The book is a wonderful tribute to the late William Siegmann, who so cherished the art of this region and admirably served its peoples over many years. It will be of great interest to a broad readership of those interested in Africa and its artistic traditions.

Pascal James Imperato

State University of New York

New York, New York

pascal.imperato@downstate.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2017.106

Anjali Prabhu. *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora*. Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2014. x + 262 pp. Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Notes. Filmography. References. Glossary. Index. Paper. \$40.95. ISBN: 978-1-4051-9304-7.

In *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora*, Anjali Prabhu argues that twenty-first century African filmmakers consciously engage in what she calls the “Africanization” of the spectator (64). Whether that spectator is situated within or outside Africa, these filmmakers create in audiences a “sensibility towards Africa” (3) that calls into question preexisting attitudes and ideologies and facilitates a visceral, emotional, and ethical engagement. Spectators thus become “possible agents of political change” (5). Prabhu’s notion of spectatorship reflects her own intellectual grounding as a postcolonial Marxist critic, and is informed more broadly by such thinkers as Frederic Jameson, Franz Fanon, Louis Althusser, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Rancière.

This emphasis on the spectator sets this study apart from recent scholarly works on African cinema, a field that has seen a spate of activity in the last ten years with contributions such as Olivier Barlet’s *Contemporary African Cinemas* (Michigan State University Press, 2016), Valerie Orlando’s *New African Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 2017), Kenneth Harrow’s *African Cinema: From the Political to the Postmodern* (Indiana University Press, 2007), and his subsequent *Trash: African Cinema from Below* (Indiana University Press, 2013). In his earlier writings Harrow identified the need for new critical approaches to African cinema. In *Trash* he adopts a radical approach by

looking at African cinema in relation to global economics and neocolonial exploitation as demonstrated, specifically, by the images of trash and detritus that circulate in these films. Prabhu, in turn, articulates a novel approach by considering African cinema through the lens of spectatorship and ethical engagement.

Comprising nine chapters and a conclusion, this study is organized according to three main *topos*: space, character, and narrative. Within this overarching logic there is considerable variety: several chapters focus on just one director or one film, while others perform comparative readings across multiple works from disparate contexts. This eclecticism is perhaps symptomatic of the very wide scope of the study—African and diasporic cinema since 2000. While Prabhu stages interesting and at times insightful juxtapositions across temporal and geographic boundaries, some of these pairings seem forced, given the distinct historical and political contexts out of which the works emerged.

Chapter 1, “Africa Watch: Parameters and Contexts,” introduces the concept of spectatorship in African cinema by providing an overview of established theories of the spectator (through Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey) and then sketching out a history of African cinema. Prabhu, by way of Fanon, Althusser, and Levinas, defines spectatorship as a dynamic experience of encounter: “The experience of film is one in which the full play of desire is invited, the feeling of proximity cultivated, while the distance and essential cognizance of the self as different from the other . . . constitute the pathos that binds the spectator to the textures, feelings, sensations, and emotions in which the film willingly envelops her or him in an act of what we might daringly call love” (27). Taking this one step further, Prabhu addresses the readers of her book as potential spectators, and invites us into the films under analysis through highly detailed close readings. These constitute both a strength and weakness of the book. Prabhu is an astute critic who offers perceptive and sensitive descriptions of camera movement, framing, *mise-en-scène*, and other features. At the same time, however, these lengthy and descriptive readings tend to detract from the power and coherence of her argument. As noted above, the eclectic pairings of films facilitate a unique view of African cinema, one that is at once broad and focused, and which traverses the divide between sub-Saharan African and North African film. Many of the comparisons Prabhu offers, however, call for more explicit justification and contextualization. What, precisely, is to be gained from looking at two Senegalese feature films from 2000 alongside a Tunisian film from 1994, as in chapter 4? Or from coupling a postapartheid South African film about truth and reconciliation with a post-civil war Angolan film that addresses class disparities and disability, as in chapter 5?

In chapter 2, “The Postcolonial City: Education of the Spectator in Harikrisna Anenden’s *The Cathedral*,” Prabhu offers a nuanced reading of this 2006 film from Mauritius based on an early novella by Ananda Devi. For Prabhu, *The Cathedral* is an instantiation of “what art looks like from a very particular place and how it speaks to audiences beyond that place” (36).

Viewers of this film become collective witnesses to the young protagonist's hesitation about whether to accept a white European journalist's invitation and escape her circumstances, or alternatively, to cast her lot with her community. Here, Prabhu's attentiveness to the ways in which different areas of the city are represented spatially and linguistically demonstrates her skill as a close reader. Her decision to begin with a relatively minor film from Mauritius—a nation which itself occupies a “liminal space in its geographical and historical relationship to the African continent” (54)—is intriguing. Anenden is a diasporic director who resides in Switzerland and who returned to Port Louis to shoot the film in the house in which he grew up. This chapter establishes Prabhu's interest in art films as opposed to commercial cinema, and constructs a view of Africa that from the very beginning resists hegemonic or clichéd notions and includes Africans both within and outside the continent.

The city is again the focus of chapter 3, “Framing the City: Africanizing the Viewer and Viewed through Angle, Distance, Genre, and Movement.” Here Prabhu considers the city as a site of “alienation, or foreignness, and simultaneously of desire and ambition” (61), as evident in an array of twentieth-century films including Ousmane Sembene's *La Noire de . . .*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, Raoul Peck's *Lumumba*, and Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley*. She then turns to a detailed examination of representations of the city and how subalterns navigate it in Nour Eddine Lakhmari's *Casanegra* (Morocco, 2008) and Pierre Morel's *Banlieue 13* (France, 2004). Unfortunately, despite its engaging readings the chapter conveys a weak sense of chronology and offers minimal synthesis of the films examined; here again, the connections between the two films chosen for analysis (from Morocco and France, respectively) call for further unpacking.

Chapters 4–6 focus on questions related to gender. In chapter 4, “Models of African Femininity,” Prabhu considers the heroines of three very different films: Sembene's *Faat Kine* (Senegal, 2000), Joseph Gai Ramaka's *Karmen Gei* (Senegal, 2001), and Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences of the Palace* (Tunisia, 1994). *Faat Kine* features an especially compelling female protagonist—a woman who, rather than exploding or overturning the system, successfully conquers and enters the spaces from which women have been marginalized. The heroine of Tlatli's film, by contrast, remains entrapped in her history, while Ramaka's main character enacts a fantasy of freedom. Prabhu's analysis of these three female protagonists is highly thought provoking, although one wonders whether the pairing of these Senegalese and Tunisian works is entirely justified. Chapter 5, “African Masculinity: ‘We Don't Need Another Hero,’” evaluates the “crisis in masculinity” that has come about following decolonization. The chapter proceeds from the assertion that African cinema features many exemplary strong women while male characters are invariably compromised and includes readings of Zézé Gamboa's *The Hero* (Angola, 2004) and Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* (South Africa, 2004), both of which interrogate masculinity in relation to economic class, political power, and disability. Chapter 6,

“Revolutionary Personhood: Revolutionize the Spectator, or Stop, Thief,” draws largely on Fanon to evaluate how films involve the spectator in an ethical engagement across social, economic, and geographic divides. Here Prabhu reads Gavin Hood’s *Tsotsi* (South Africa, 2005) as a film that foregrounds the humanity of its protagonist through a series of carefully crafted ethical moments to offer viewers the opportunity to “enter what might be a profoundly ‘other’ experience” (142).

In the final chapters of the volume Prabhu shifts gears to consider narrative strategies. In chapter 7, “Documentary Film: Situating a Style,” she analyzes the specific *langage* (169) of documentaries by Peck (Haiti/Congo), Salem Mekuria (Ethiopia), and Ramaka (Senegal). Prabhu highlights various features of these filmmakers’ works: Peck’s efforts to analyze his own history within his films and his use of overlapping sound; the rich fluidity offered by the multiple split-screen images in Mehuria’s work; and the audaciously rapid production of Ramaka’s filmmaking, designed specifically to educate and influence voters prior to an important election. Chapter 8, “African Narration: Narration of Africa,” offers a valuable comparison of Peck’s two films on Patrice Lumumba: *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet* (2002) and *Lumumba* (2002). Prabhu considers the two films as interwoven parts of a whole in order to understand Peck’s struggle to find the right voice through which to confront Lumumba’s story and more broadly, African leadership, for audiences in Africa and abroad. In chapter 9, “Jean Marie Teno: Creating an African Repertoire,” Prabhu bypasses Teno’s more widely known films to focus on two minor but highly rewarding works—*A Trip to the Country* (2000) and *Sacred Places* (2009)—showing how the filmmaker’s use of images and irony disarms the spectator and brings about what Rancière called a “new regime of sensibility” (213). In her conclusion, “Inside/Outside or How to Make a Film about Africa Today,” Prabhu offers further close readings of Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Bamako* (2006) and Edward Zwick’s *Blood Diamond* (2006), while interrogating the work that art films perform in contemporary African societies as opposed to mainstream global blockbusters or Nollywood productions. While art films are (rightly) considered an elite genre, they reflect a keen awareness of class difference and engage in a sustained and complex interrogation of this and other critical social issues.

In sum, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora* offers students and scholars finely wrought readings of African cinema and a valuable lens through which to consider cinematic production in Africa since 2000. The occasional lacunae are inevitable in a study of this scope. Prabhu chooses not to attend to popular forms of African cinema (Nollywood and Gollywood), opting instead for the more self-conscious and reflective genres of art cinema and documentaries. There is a notable absence of Algerian films in the discussion, and North African cinema in general is given short shrift despite its importance. The different sections of the book (on space, character, and narrative) could have been more explicitly linked to the issue of spectatorship, and the varied

conditions of production and specific political situations in each context under analysis could have been more clearly elucidated. Some terms (e.g., “modernity”) could have been defined more carefully, and the author might have included more references to the work of other film critics who have written on these films. Nonetheless, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora* introduces readers to a wide spectrum of work from across the continent. African cinema, Prabhu argues, is oriented toward the future while remaining deeply vested in the past and conscious of the continued inequities of the present. It is both local and transnational. It is, above all, conditioned on the spectator’s willingness to engage in a transformative encounter with others, and to this end Prabhu stages productive and original dialogues with the reader. In addressing us as potential spectators, Prabhu makes a persuasive appeal for our engagement and participation.

Kathryn Lachman
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts
klachman@llc.umass.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2017.108