ASR Forum: What's New in African Cinema?

The Winds of African Cinema

MaryEllen Higgins

Abstract: This article argues for a departure from theories of new cinema "waves" and proposes the notion of cinema "winds" as a more compelling conceptual framework for studies of African film movements. Building on the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Manthia Diawara, Ken Harrow, and Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, in addition to commentaries by various African film directors, this article looks at various dimensions of global visibility and the elusive movements of African cinemas. It also explores how African directors challenge habits of seeing and interpreting world cinema.

Résumé: Cet article revendique une rupture avec les théories de "vagues" du nouveau cinéma et propose la notion de "vents" du cinéma comme un cadre conceptuel plus convaincant pour les études des mouvements du cinéma africain. En se basant sur les travaux de Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Manthia Diawara, Ken Harrow, et Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, ainsi que des commentaires de différents réalisateurs africains, cet article se penche sur diverses composantes de la visibilité mondiale et les mouvements insaisissables des cinémas africains. Il explore également comment les réalisateurs africains défient les regards et les interprétations habituels du cinéma du monde.

Keywords: African cinema; African film movements; globalectics; New Wave

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In *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics*, Manthia Diawara (2010) describes a "new African cinema wave" (90) characterized by a determination on the part of filmmakers "to carve a new space" (96) for the continent in world cinema, and also to distinguish their work from the productions and precepts of Ousmane Sembène, who is widely regarded as the father of African cinema. These filmmakers, he writes,

> are no longer interested in applying an oppositional language to what is known as dominant American and European cinemas, but are more concerned with taking their place in the arena of world cinemas. To achieve this aim, they do not hesitate to borrow from, and to share with other directors . . . narrative forms that would have been considered less authentic from a Sembènian perspective. They are interested, as [the poet and statesman Léopold Sédar] Senghor put it, in an active assimilation of new forms and languages in order to renew themselves and their visions of Africa. No longer afraid of the old accusations of alienation, they have turned their attention to inter-textual practices, cinematic appropriations and influences that enable them to achieve new creativity and self-renewal. (2010:94–95)

A film enters the arena of what is called "world cinema" based on certain habits of recognition and habits of seeing. The notion of a "wave" represents a habitual conceptual framework for interpreting cinema; speaking of cinema movements as waves suggests that one wave follows the other with a perceivable pattern, perhaps picking up elements of the previous waves as it rises, sometimes being overcome by the retrieving forces of the earlier waves, and sometimes rising higher than the preceding waves before crashing and merging with the waves that eventually follow. But "new waves" in cinema history are also subject to the gravitational pull of the French New Wave, their currents drawn back to 1950s France.[1] In speaking about African cinema, the concept of such a *Nouvelle Vague* is perhaps alluring; there are elements of the French New Wave's critiques of patriarchs and cinema "papas" within recent films by African cinéastes such as Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun.[2] Yet in several African films, the influence of fellow African directors is markedly stronger. Haroun, for instance, in speaking about his film *Abouna* (2002), emphasizes its status as an intertextual "letter film" carrying on an implicit cinematic dialogue with Abderrahmane Sissako's *Heremakono* (Waiting for Happiness): "If you look at *Waiting for Happiness*," he says, "the father in *Abouna* could be there" (quoted in Sinagra 2004). In this context, applying the descriptor "new wave" to *Abouna* would divert Haroun's Chadian letter-film to France before it could be forwarded to Sissako's Mauritania, in the manner of colonial postage stamps.

If African cinemas create new film languages, then it is time to craft a new critical lexicon to describe these languages. One "new wave" cannot contain the intersecting global gusts of Africa cinemas, and waves, at least to the naked eye, appear to be derivatives of previous waves. As N. Frank

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Ukadike (2014:xii) writes, African cinema discourse is "not merely an appendage to dominant cinema discourse." In lieu of speaking of a "new wave" in film, therefore, I would like to suggest the metaphor of intersecting winds that sweep in and change the direction of currents in the international arenas of cinema. I argue for a windy decentering à la Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Center* (1993), for a shifting away from habitual ways of seeing and recognizing world cinema, a wind of change in ways of speaking and writing about African cinema. The recognition of what is art, what is worldly, what is authentic, or what is significant in Cannes, Ouagadougou, and Berlin carries with it assumptions about what is center and what is margin. However, as Ngũgĩ tells us, that center—that eye of the storm—is continuously subject to decentering. As he elaborates in *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, "On [the] surface [of the globe], there is no one center; any point is equally a center" (2012:8).

Like Ngũgĩ's globalectics, the wind does not have one center; like globalectics, wind suggests "interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension, and motion. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalization" (2012:8). Ngũgĩ himself harnesses the metaphor of wind, remembering anticolonial resistance as a "wind of change" growing out of a "hurricane" of mutinies. Of the English classroom of his university years, he writes, "there were no critical bridges to help us cross the gulf so that we could make sense of the howling winds outside of our Makerere ivory tower" (2012:14), and he called for a decentering of English literary studies that "seemed far removed from the whirlwind" (2012:10–11). It was in the work of African and diasporic writers such as Chinua Achebe, Peter Abrahams, and George Lamming that Ngũgĩ found "characters and relationships clearly reflective of the howling winds" (2012:15). African cinema, likewise, engages with the storms of neocolonial politics, features characters and relationships reflective of howling winds, and crosses gulfs between continental diasporas. African film criticism, in turn, traces and interprets these patterns.

Reading globalectically, for Ngũgĩ, is "to read a text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text" (2012:60). It is an approach to interpretation that brings "into mutual impact and comprehension the local and the global, the here and there, the national and the world" (2012:60). Along a similar vein, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call upon cinema scholars to recognize "a polycentric aesthetics," or the "palimpsestic multi-trace nature of art [that] operates both within and across cultures" and a "multidirectional flow of aesthetic ideas" (1998:39,40). As such, as Ngũgĩ observes of world literature, world cinema "is our common heritage as much as the air we breathe" (2012: 61). In his novel, *How to Read the Air* (2010), Dinaw Mengetsu describes "invisible transgressions" which mark a struggle "for [the] very right to exist, to live and breathe" (2010:9). World cinema, too, is our common heritage, churning out its mobile transgressions.

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The worldliness and windiness of African cinema are of course not new. In 1955 Mamadou Sarr and Paulin Vieyra had already participated in a worldly, migratory cinema with *Afrique sur Seine*. African directors' global engagements extend back to Ousmane Sembène's *La noire de*... (Black Girl, 1965), and to Sembène's alignment, as Diawara has noted, with the "Third Cinema movement and its call for imperfection" (2010:95).[3] They also extend back to the African cinema world inhabited by Djibril Diop Mambety, whose incisive critique of the World Bank, *Hyènes* (Hyenas, 1992), was an adaptation of a Swiss play (Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*) that merged iconic costumes and settings of American and Italian westerns with the fauna of Africa and the landscapes of Senegal.[4] The director Souleymane Cissé, commenting on his film *Waati* (Time, 1995), remarked that "the multinational, multicultural talents and crew reflect my ambition of moving cinema beyond the borders of Mali or Africa, to work with people across the globe and use the medium to communicate with audiences" (quoted in Ukadike 2002:24). Similarly, Flora Gomes, speaking of a production technique he had learned at the Cuban Film Institute, said "Once one acquires this technique, one has to blend it, mix it with one's own personality and way of looking at life, at the world" (quoted in Ukadike 2002:102–3). Over fifty years after *Afrique sur Seine*, the migration at the heart of that film would reverse itself, from the Seine to the South, in Sylvestre Amoussou's 2006 *Africa paradis*. And in Rachid Bouchareb's film *Little Senegal* (2001), a Senegalese man travels to the U.S. in search of the descendants of his enslaved ancestors.

If, in the study of the worldly, migratory patterns of film narratives, critics heed Ngũgĩ's call for globalectic readings, then films once perceived as predominantly national and local in focus can be repositioned in world cinema. Moussa Sene Absa's 1997 *Tableau ferraille* (Trash Heap), for example, alludes implicitly to "trashy" world cinema (to use Ken Harrow's [2013a] parlance) that engages with the aesthetics of garbage and with Sembène's *mégotage*, or "cigarette-butt" cinema, without being compelled to adhere to Third Cinema's demand for imperfection.[5] Moreover, *Tableau ferraille* compels world art cinema critics unfamiliar with the worlds of the Nian Coliba, the Baye Fall, and the music of Ismaël Lô to do their homework, to expand their references, to catch up with the cinema's speeding cosmopolitan winds.[6]

My aim here is not to trash the three major strands of African cinema that Diawara lays out in his wonderful book *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010). Those strands, for Diawara, are

> (1) an Arte wave, with Abderrahmane Sissako as the standard bearer; (2) "The Guild of African Filmmakers," an independent-spirited, pan-African and diasporic strand with the likes of Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, Jihan el-Tahri, as well as Newton Aduka and John Akomfrah and others; and (3) a narrative strand with talented directors such as Zézé Gamboa, Mansour Sora Wade, and Cheick Fantamady Camara. (2010:98)

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I'd like instead to intertwine Diawara's strands, to subject them to a windy tangling. As Diawara's taxonomy suggests, cinematic movements and ideas are not successive but concurrent. The shape of African cinemas is multifarious and polymorphous, like the formation of dunes transformed by the wind. The concept of the new wave cannot contain them all, as new waves have a limited, relatively predictable forward and backward reach. Winds, by contrast, travel across deserts, oceans, savannahs, forests, and cities. Waves are propelled by wind. Ultimately, Diawara's new taxonomy is, as Harrow (2013b) notes, amorphous. And what is more amorphous than wind? The metaphor of the wind can encompass the informal flows and elusive movements of Ravi Sundaram's "pirate kingdoms" (2009) of video movies. The unpredictable, ungraspable motion of wind evokes what Carmela Garritano (2013:15,19) describes, in her discussion of African video movies, as "the multiplicity of unmapped media flows and forms," and their "unrestrained and unruly heterogeneity." Southerly winds may interact with Northern "waves" but they also venture beyond them, linking African cinema to Third Cinema (Sembène's *mégotage*, Julio García Espinosa's *Cine imperfecto*, Rogerio Sganzerla's aesthetics of garbage, etc.) and Global South cinemas.

Wind, then, is particularly apposite as an alternate metaphor for African cinema movements, because wind defies impositions of linear history. It possesses a form, but that form is not ocularly graspable; we feel the wind, follow its path, and see its force as it lifts objects into the air, as it spirals the material world out of order, but we can't see it. We often can hear it, but at other times its silence gives one pause. Such arresting pauses abound, for example, in Sissako's films, with their stunning moments of stillness, or in Jean-Marie Teno's *Une feuille dans le vent* (A Leaf in the Wind, 2013), in which silences haunt Ernestine Ouandié's testimony about the weight of her father's absence. Terrestrial and oceanic, wind can travel at the speed of Nollywood, leaving us gasping as we try to catch up with its voluminous production. Winds can stir and change the landscape, as African video booms have altered the landscapes of cinema viewing in Nigeria, Ghana, and beyond. Each gust of wind is unique; it swells from a place but is not necessarily anchored in that place. Wind storms have sequels, too, as do Tchidi Chikere's *Wind of Glory* (2007), which was followed by *Wind of Glory 2 and Wind of Glory 3*, and Famous Otakponmwen's *Wind of Mistakes* (2014), which was followed by *Wind of Mistakes 2*. Winds are subject to diverse interpretations and linguistic appellations: from the Harmattan to the Haboob, to the Chubasco to the Sirocco, the Brisote and the Elephanta. As Teshome Gabriel observed over a decade ago, African cinema

> does not simply follow a single path. . . . There are many strands, many threads within it. And these strands are themselves interwoven into intricate patterns, creating an immense tapestry in which one can discern images of the past mingling with those of the present and foreshadowing the future. (Quoted in Ukadike 2002:ix)

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It is impossible to trace the beginning and the end of the wind. As David Newton (2014: 4705–6) explains, "In an ideal situation, one could draw the direction of winds blowing over an area simply by looking at the isobars on a weather map. The Earth, however, is not an ideal situation." Where does the wind commence its journeys? From where does the cinema borrow its narratives? A striking argument by Jean-Pierre Bekolo asserts that African cinema is very old. In the French version of *Aristotle's Plot* (*Le complot d'Aristote*, 1995), Bekolo provocatively situates the origin of cinema itself in Africa. The first words of the voice-over narration announce, "Sans doute au troisième siècle avant Jesus-Christ le cinema naquit en Afrique" (Without a doubt the cinema was born in Africa in the third century BC). The narrator tells us that improvisation, despite Aristotle's dismissal of improvisational, unpredictable genres, is "la base du cinema[,] . . . l'ancêtre des movies" (the foundation of cinema, the ancestor of movies). Cinema takes its inspiration from an archive of oral and written stories. Such an archive in Africa, Bekolo states in *Aristotle's Plot*, "we got."

If films are made on the bodies of other films, we can take a cue from Bekolo's *Le complot d'Aristote* and ask, where did the first bodies, and the first human stories, originate? Metaphorically, wind helps us envision the transmission of oral stories through time and across continents. The wind is there in Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993), rustling though cane fields, sharing the screen with the rhythms of Sankofa the Divine Drummer, as Gerima's poem "Spirit of the Dead, Rise Up" is narrated. The camera pans over fluttering fields in the wind: "Spirit of the dead rise up. Lingering spirit of the dead, rise up and possess your bird of passage. From Alabama to Surinam, up to the caves of Louisiana, come out, you African spirits, step out and claim your stories." Film narratives, like oral stories, travel like winds. Metaphorically, winds evoke the sounds and rhythms of voices that carry these stories. When asked how he selects the music for his films, Djibril Diop Mambety replied, "I do not choose the music, I choose the sound. All movement is accompanied by a sense. I like wind very much. Wind is music, just as music is wind. I try to make the image illustrate the movement. Wind, like music, is the breath of movement and life" (quoted in Ukadike 2002:126). African cinema winds—and other cinema winds as well—attempt to capture this breath and this movement.

As Birago Diop (1979) reminds us, if you listen in the wind to the sighs of the bush, you can hear the ancestors breathing. The dead are not dead in recent African cinemas. One feels the legacy of Mambety in Moussa Sene Absa's *Ainsi meurent les anges* (And So Angels Die, 2001) (see Higgins 2010). Angels die, in the film's poem, "their hair to the wind." In Sissako's *La vie sur terre* (Life on Earth, 1998), what travels through the stillness of the air is the voice of Aimé Césaire. Césaire's screaming man, portrayed in his 1939 *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land), is embedded in the title of Haroun's *Un homme qui crie* (A Screaming Man, 2010). One hears in these films the winds of *négritude* poetry—that burst of creativity that resulted from meetings of cosmopolitan writers from Africa and the African diaspora across continents several decades ago.

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If the term "wave" is limiting, one might ask if the term "African cinema" is not equally limiting.[7] I would like to adopt Anjali Prabhu's (2014:xi) conceptualization of African cinema as a cinema that "privilege[s] the space, people, and narratives" of African and diasporic African contexts as it "stretch[es] African space out beyond any containable geographical limit." As Prabhu observes, African cinema interpellates its audiences, as the films "require of the spectator an interactivity and emotive and intellectual engagement that transports and transposes questions of Africa into his or her very own subjectivity" (2014:12). Cinema winds do not mark a brand new African film movement or genre, but rather movements that have existed since the beginnings of African cinema, movements that defy limits. Thus Prabhu's analysis of contemporary African and diasporic films begins with a discussion of Sembène's early cinema to conceptualize an African cinema "with nationalist and PanAfricanist beginnings alongside a particular skepticism toward globalization even as those films resolutely frame their audiences as 'global'" (2014:12). Sembène, Prabhu argues, "initiated this bold and unapologetic venture of painstakingly visualizing and creating not just characters but also spectators" (2014:13). Winds reflect the shifting aesthetic parameters and artistic techniques that "demand new ways of seeing and deciphering" images, as Ukadike asserts (2014:xii). Winds can also reflect ways of seeing and transporting cinema images that have existed from the outset. "Winds" is one approach to interpreting cinemas with centers of activity, locations, and aesthetics that move and shift à la Ngũgĩ (1993).

Following Sembène, generations of African filmmakers have placed their hopes in turbulent youth who, in the worlds of their films, bring in shifting generational winds and transformations. The lingering breath of Sembène, who served in World War II, labored in France, trained in Moscow, challenged the international status quo, launched invectives against patriarchs, and created a cinema that envisioned possibilities for generational change, is present in the youthful rebellions by rap artists and moto-taxi drivers featured in Bekolo's *Le Président* (2013). Sembène's cinematic investment in the promise of women resurfaces in the voice that concludes Haroun's trilogy in *A Screaming Man*—the voice is not a screaming man but a singing woman, Djeneba, who carries and converts the scream. Diawara (2010:51) notes the presence of Sembène in Mambety's 1973 film *Touki Bouki*: "It seems to me that the great pleasure of watching *Touki Bouki* derives from its director's awareness of Sembène's cinema and his determination to deconstruct it in order to emphasize the significance of formal play, correspondences between image, storytelling as a game, and the pleasure of the text for itself." Inter-referentiality within African cinema abounds, embedding the world of African cinema within African films, so that the sounds and images of former African films emerge and reemerge on screen. What Haroun characterizes as "letter films" take unprescribed routes and are converted into new energy, new letters, and new configurations in subsequent letter films. The director dips into a global field of cinematic seeds

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and transports them: at the bus stop where Atim and his friend Moussa rest in *Daratt* there is an advertisement with a woman's hand elegantly holding a globe. It reads, "Le monde. À portée de main" (The world . . . in reach of your hands).

"Any book on weather," writes Jan DeBlieu (1998:2), "will tell you that winds are caused by the uneven heating of the earth." African films tell us about the earth's unevenness—about gross colonial and neocolonial inequalities, uneven distributions of justice, the uneven impacts of neoliberalism. Wind, in addition to serving as a conceptual tool that recognizes the great ancestral breaths in African cinema and beyond, can also herald political changes and aesthetic changes, as they do in Souleymane Cissé's 1982 *Finye* (The Wind). The wind is howling at the very beginning of *Finye*, sweeping across treetops, heralding political change. *Finye* opens with the sound of the wind and then an image of ripples in water. Text appears on the screen as the camera pans across the treetops: "Wind awakens the thoughts of men." In *Finye*, university students protest against government oppression, are arrested, and then manage to bring about a transformation to civilian rule. The young student Batrou defies her father, a military governor, as her boyfriend, Ba, resists the dictates of his grandfather, a Bambara chief. As Harrow (2007:164) argues, *Finye* is not only a critique of Moussa Traoré's military regime in Mali and a polemical narration of "the winds of change being brought by the new generations"; it is also a film that renders visible "various realms of spirituality and dream worlds that exceed the frames of quotidian reality from the start." The wind moves in between the trees, howling, as a young boy appears out of thin air. He is "evanescent," as Harrow says (2007:164), transparent but present—suggesting, as Walter Benjamin does in his discussion of the optical unconscious, that "we inhabit a world only ever partially perceived" (Smith 2013:4). Cissé's "fantasmic wind effects" in *Finye*, to borrow Harrow's description (2007:166), anticipate political changes in Mali propelled by students' revolts. The wind also operates as a language itself, a language like Cissé's fantasmic film language, elusive in its meanings as its lens yields insights into worlds only partially perceived.

The cinematic winds I present here travel in a manner similar to, but not precisely the same as, the rhizomes described by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The rhizome "can be connected to anything other," whereas the root-tree has a single taproot, "plots a point, fixes an order" (1987:7).[8] Texts that investigate new international cinema waves tend to position the French New Wave as the taproot. African cinema movements, arguably like other global cinema movements, are rhizomatic—they break ranks with the cinema's alleged roots and take unpredictable routes, or "lines of flight" (1987:3). The rhizome is "not a tracing" but a fluid map of multiplicities "open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (1987:12). Like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, cinema images, I would like to suggest, "can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an

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individual, group, or social formation" (1987:12). African directors may be self-described nationalists or nomads, to borrow from Christopher Miller's title (1998), or somewhere in between or beyond; however, African cinema is separate from the directors and also connected to them, with its multiple links, its diverse directions, its lines of flight. "Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree," write Deleuze and Guattari (1987:5), and such a system of thought, which posits "a pivotal taproot supporting the secondary roots," will not get us very far. Such a binary system, like the discarded oppositional film language that Diawara mentions in the quotation that opened this essay, operates too statically, marking divides.

It is intriguing, given Deleuze and Guattari's dismissal of the arboreal, that some of the films that prompted my thinking about winds start or end with images of trees. Yet it is not the stationary tree that stands out most in these films, but the ascending or descending motions, movements in between trees or beyond, or the aerial routes—the flights—that the camera lenses take. In both *Finye* and Sembène's *Mandabi* (1968), treetops are featured in the establishing shots. The top of the baobab appears at the start of *Mandabi*; the camera then descends from the tip of the tree in a vertical motion and rests, momentarily, on characters having a pleasant and leisurely shave. Multiple treetops inhabit the screen at the commencement of *Finye*; however, the shaving of hair in *Finye* is transformed into a hostile, vengeful, and blood-drawing procedure forced upon student protestors. The movement from Sembène's film to Cissé's film is rhizomorphous; as Deleuze and Guattari (1987:15) write, "to be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses." Strange—or unfamiliar and innovative—"new uses" of film genres appear in Wanuri Kahiu's short science fiction film *Pumzi* (Breath, 2009). In it, an untraceable sound that suggests motion, but without any visually perceivable movement, breaks the quiet stillness of a devastated, dead landscape. Viewers read that the setting is "East Africa 35 years after World War III—the water war." The sound is as strange as the landscape, like an approaching storm—an undetectable splitting of blank space—something we "read" into the air before a young woman has a vision of a magnificent tree inhabiting the dead landscape. In a world in which people are commanded to take dream suppressants, *Pumzi*'s heroine defiantly transports a tangle of roots into the forbidden territory. At the end of the film she plants the roots and a tree sprouts from the place where her body lies, beyond which a previously unseen forest—perhaps fantastical, and perhaps futuristic—emerges on the screen. In an interview with Oulimata Gueye (2009), Kahiu argues that science fiction is not a new genre, and that Afrofuturism "existed before the term was coined." She links the presence of the tree to ancient storytelling about trees; the difference now, she articulates, is that African stories travel through wider routes, are more accessible, and intertwine with multiple genres.

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Teno's *Une feuille dans le vent* (A Leaf in the Wind) begins at the tip of a tree as Ernestine Ouandié, the daughter of the late Ernest Ouandié, speaks about her father's assassination in Cameroon and the oppressive silence that ensued. In this 2004 interview with Ernestine, she refers to herself as a leaf on a branch that was cut from a tree. She was cut off from her father at a young age, unable to obtain information about what had happened to him. As Olivier Barlet (2013) puts it, Ernestine "est comme la feuille d'un arbre sans racines"—is like the leaf of a tree without roots. Her story, however, travels with Teno's film; his film is the wind that carries her voice when her body cannot. In between the interview clips with Ernestine, who committed suicide in 2009, Teno inserts her father's images: old photos, a picture of him in handcuffs that pained Ernestine, and a series of cartoon frames in which images of him are drawn, depicting him as a lover to her Ghanaian mother, a fighter against French colonization, and an arrested and assassinated rebel against authoritarian rule. The rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari (1987:25) write, "is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*." Like the indefatigable and mobile rhizome, the suppressed narrative of Ernest Ouandié's imprisonment exists, elusive, in the space between these drawings, beyond the frame, like the leaves that travel in air after the tree is cut.

Why "winds of African cinema" then, and not rhizomorphous African cinema? The rhizome is "a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other way, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:25). The rhizome is, in short, like the wave that moves in between continents. To speak of the winds of African cinema is to further deterritorialize cinema, lift it even farther from its subterranean, underground, rhizomatic field. Wind, like African cinemas, moves not only in between spaces, but also over waves and water. The translator of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi, explains that the *fuite*, or "flight/escape" in the book "covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance" (quoted in Deleuze & Guattari 1987:xvi). However, *fuite* "has no relation to flying." Wind can uproot the trees, unground cinema conceptually in a way that the weed cannot. Unlike the rhizomorphous, subterranean weed, wind revels in its own "lines of flight"; it can cause the rhizome itself to fly. The bodies and the political commitments of African directors may be traveling or grounded, nomadic, cosmopolitan, or nationalist, but these cinema bodies are not forever anchored by arboreal rootedness. The cinéaste taps into the world of the cinema not as one taps a root but as one draws in renewable, constantly mobile energy. The technologies of cinemas are its wind instruments, its sails, its illusion-crafting windmills. Wind currents are generated by solar energy; Joseph Nicéphore Niépce called his photograph—which is often considered as the first photograph—a "heliograph," or "writing of the sun" (Smith 2013:1–2). As Bekolo suggests, it is not a treelike genealogy that generates African cinema, but rather light, imagination, an endless repository of stories, global currents. Wind is not

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only a metaphor that illuminates the movements of films, but also a metaphor that recognizes how films can lay bare our habits of seeing and recognizing the world. The wind makes the enigmatic presence of air palpable. In the cinema, previously invisible, discarded, or suppressed stories can surface, then be brought into motion and into recognition. Haroun's cinema, like the photography described by Shawn Michelle Smith in *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (2013), prompts us to envision what is beyond the edge of vision. Beyond the framelike boundaries in which violent blows are enacted, or beyond the moments when assassinations are carried out, Haroun conjures up what the blows carry in their wake. Haroun has said, "I observe the landscape after the storm, the life that goes on after the debris, ruins and ashes" (quoted in Diawara 2010:283). Haroun's position resembles what Wendy Hesford (2011:102), describes as "the witness who addresses," whose "rhetorical function is to give trauma a presence." Haroun's *Daratt* (Dry Season, 2006) opts not to visualize the traumatic blows inflicted in Chad's civil war, but rather the murky aftermath, the detritus, the lingering damage, the loss, the heavy presence of absence. The recognition of trash, of overlooked detritus, is a creation, as Harrow (2013a:223) detects, of a new archive, an "absence turned into presence." Framing the invisible, following the paths of the howling winds with the camera, is a venture that takes us beyond habitual modes of seeing. In some of the initial sequences of *Daratt*, the sound of guns shooting—a moment of reciprocal violence—is followed by the image of a blind grandfather who tries to read the sounds in the air. The scene shifts to the grandson, Atim, who handles shoes without bodies, shoes that belonged to the people who were present in the earlier scenes but who have seemingly fled, and are eerily absent. In the background, a piece of debris floats momentarily and unsteadily in a quiet wind. In *Trash: African Cinema from Below,* Harrow observes that

> The trash was always there, only we never noticed it. . . . Trash was there for a reason: to provide *les damnés de la terre* with the power to stimulate change—the heritage of Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*, now given image and voice on screen. There is more here than loss; more than decay and descent. In fact, the descent is here only because of the belief that the depiction of it will serve to enable a change, an ascent, to become possible. (2013a:1–2)

African cinema winds shift directions, deterritorialize, remember ancestral breaths, transport them, gather new breaths, take new and unexpected aesthetic turns. My summoning of winds and waves is not an act of separation: winds over here, waves over there. I've used winds as a way to describe the movements of African cinemas, but they could be adapted to suit any cinema. To "see" the connections among African films as winds is, as John Rajchman (2000:5) puts it, to "embark on the sort of voyage where one throws out one's hermeneutic compass and leaves one's discourse behind."

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The concept of wind is not meant to ignore or whisk away the problem of the continued marginalization of African cinemas in international film festivals, in books celebrating world cinemas, and in formal distribution circuits, or marginalization by funding institutions. Instead, I hope to reconceptualize the movements of African cinemas in a gesture that turns away from an oceanic landscape that suggests a shoreline of derivative and successive waves. Because the wave flows backward to a stunning moment in France, because it positions the French New Wave as the eternal taproot, the habitual use of the "wave" risks implying that African films, like Southern "modernities," are "either transplants or simulacra," as Comaroff and Comaroff write in *Theory from the South* (2012:2). In Comaroff and Comaroff's reading, the theory of modernization "posits a strong normative teleology, a unilinear trajectory toward a future . . ." (2012:9). The concept of the wave suggests a rooted moment—albeit a celebrated moment, of calculated artistic disturbance, disruptive use of technology, a breaking of established cinema rules, a subversion of the old patriarchy. Yet the political and artistic subversions and innovations in African films are not vehicles on a road that begins in France. Wind begins with air, pressure, motion, collision. It takes flight. Winds, DeBlieu writes, are forces unto themselves (1998:1). To abandon the wave is to open an alternative vision of African cinemas: a vision, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2012:12) describe it, in which Africa is "not running behind Euro-America, but ahead of it."

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Notes

1. For example, the investigations of international cinema waves in James Tweedle's *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (2013) and Sean Martin's *New Waves in Cinema* (2013) both commence with discussions of the French New Wave.
2. French New Wave (*Nouvelle Vague*) directors, especially François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, condemned a cinematic tradition characterized by refined images, uninspiring, formulaic adaptations, and expectations of high production value. Truffaut launched his criticism of the French "tradition de qualité" (tradition of quality) in his famous 1954 essay for *Cahiers du Cinema*, "Une certaine tendence du cinéma français" (A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema) (see Truffaut 1954). French New Wave directors referred to this cinematic tradition of quality as "le cinéma de papa" (papa's cinema). The "new wave" African filmmakers described by Diawara likewise challenge the mandates of paternal figures in the cinema (most notably Sembène). However, in an interesting reversal of the New Wave scenario, recent African directors employ a stylish cinematography that might fall under the rubric of polished, "quality" cinema. Many African filmmakers are highly innovative and politically engaged without feeling an obligation to utilize the rough, "imperfect" aesthetics found in Sembène's films and in Third Cinema (see note 3), a movement with which Sembène was aligned.
3. In a move that echoed French New Wave director François Truffaut's criticism of quality cinema (see note 2), the Cuban film director and critic Julio García Espinosa denounced the type of filmmaking that emphasizes artistic quality in his manifesto essay "For an Imperfect Cinema" (originally published in Spanish in 1969). In contrast to films that aim for "perfect" technical and artistic mastery, Espinosa called for revolutionary, politically committed, and technically "imperfect" films that would not seek praise or recognition from elite European audiences. As it eschews artistic elegance and elitism, an "imperfect" cinema tends to use economically cheaper film stock and to produce deliberately unrefined, unpolished images. Espinosa is one of the key figures of Third Cinema, a cinema movement primarily of the 1960s and 1970s dedicated to projecting anticolonial struggles in the "Third World." Other key figures of Third Cinema are the Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, as well as the Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha. Solanas and Getino's essay "Towards a Third Cinema" (originally published in Spanish in 1969) played a pivotal role in defining Third Cinema. Solanas and Getino called for revolutionary, anticapitalist films that would reject established Hollywood models and the value placed on entertainment or commercial success. For Solanas and Getino, the French New Wave was a progressive, but limited, alternative that was locked within the dominant system. For a more elaborate discussion of Third Cinema and its aftermath, see Guneratne and Dissanayake (2003).
4. See Oscherwitz (2008). See also Mambety's interview with Frank Ukadike (Ukadike 2001), in which Mambety describes his work as local, continental, and global.
5. Sembène's clever term *mégotage*, which compares the process of piecing together a film to the process of collecting cigarette butts, is well known among African film scholars. The piecing together of leftover film scraps produces the kind

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of "imperfect," unpolished cinema images advocated by Third Cinema theorists (see note 3). Diawara (1992:167) writes, "To define the term *mégotage*, the word *mégot* means cigarette butt; therefore, the concept means to make a film by the painful process of putting bits and pieces together. It means waiting—as one waits for a cigarette butt—for European remains such as film stock left over by rich producers." Shohat and Stam (1998) compare *mégotage* aesthetics with Rogerio Sganzerla's aesthetics of garbage, Teshome Gabriel's diaspora aesthetics, and other international movements.

6. In an essay on Absa's film *Ainsi meurent les anges* (And So Angels Die) (Higgins 2010), I critique the clichéd presentation of artists who are situated in the South as artists who remain fixed in the "local," while artists from the South who perceive the North as home are viewed as "global." I argue that artists such as Absa reverse the direction of this scenario, so that the site of cosmopolitanism is transported to the cosmopolitan, global South.
7. I would like to thank the reviewer for *African Studies Review* who posed this helpful question.
8. In his foreword to Ukadike (2002), Teshome Gabriel also refers to Deleuze and Guattari as he analyzes the links among past, present, and future in African films as "more a matter of rhizomes than of taproots" (x).

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