

THE HISTORY AND STATE OF AFRICAN FILM

doi:10.1017/S0021853707003106

African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara. By ROY ARMES. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 224. £50 (ISBN 978-0-7486-2123-1); £16.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-7486-2124-0).

KEY WORDS: Culture/cultural, film, media, postcolonial, state.

The recent death of the great writer and filmmaker, Sembène Ousmane, will undoubtedly provoke reflection on the history and state of African film, making this overview of the subject particularly timely. Sembène was not only the brilliant pioneer of African cinema in the 1960s, but continued to make movies, releasing his last film, *Moolade*, in 2002. Unfortunately, as Roy Armes points out, Sembène was one of only a handful of African filmmakers who were able to sustain careers in film. Like many of his less successful colleagues, he brought a strong social conscience to his movies, and, again like many other African filmmakers, he was often at odds with the authorities and frequently struggled to find an audience in West Africa. In the 1960s and 1970s, cinema was seen as a powerful tool for revolutionary change, but as this book makes clear, the optimistic if didactic vision enshrined in the 1974 Charter of African Cinema has given way to a situation in which even the most talented filmmakers find it difficult to make movies and very few of these movies attract large numbers of viewers.

A film studies scholar, Armes sets out to identify the key forces shaping the development of African film and to define trends in filmmaking in historical terms. Except for very brief mentions of movie-making in South Africa and the Nigerian video industry, Armes devotes his attention to the former French dependencies in North and West Africa, home to the vast majority of the African filmmakers of the last forty years (setting aside Egypt – the one country in Africa to develop a substantial local film industry). He argues persuasively that it makes sense to examine films from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia together with those from countries south of the Sahara, since many of the same forces have shaped filmmaking across this vast area and there are some remarkable similarities in the historical progression of themes and approaches in the movies that have been made – only some 600 in all since the 1960s.

The first chapters sketch the political economy in which filmmaking occurred, focusing on the central presence of African states in film production on the one hand and the critical role of official French financial assistance on the other. Armes guides readers through a state-by-state history of official film policy, providing a four-page listing of agency acronyms for readers who become lost in the bureaucratic forest. In many cases, most notably in Algeria, the state moved quickly to subordinate filmmaking, with financial resources becoming progressively more meager. At the same time, the number of cinemas seems to have declined sharply with dire implications for internal film markets. Although Armes does not systematically address box-office appeal, it is quite plain from scattered mention of the popularity of certain films that it has been the rare movie (for example Gaston Kabore's 1982 feature, *Wend Kuuni*) that has attracted anything resembling a mass audience. More than a few films have never been shown commercially in their countries of origin.

The powerful impact of French support for African film, through Fonds Sud and other agencies, has tended to exacerbate these conditions. In part to counter the powerful impact of American movies, the French have actively supported African films, even if the movies themselves were not in French. Armes argues that this has generated a constellation of African filmmakers, in Africa and in France, who are dependent on this financing, with the larger result that little local infrastructure has been created and the films produced are distributed through

French official cultural networks rather than through commercial arrangements. Certainly, given the relatively small number of films produced and the absence of local film industries, it is impossible to talk of anything like a 'national cinema' anywhere in Africa outside of Egypt.

The remainder of the book is largely given over to a generational categorization of African film production, which consists of a very rich country-by-country, director-by-director, film-by-film survey. Film studies scholars will be better equipped than historians to evaluate Armes's taxonomy, but anyone interested in the subject will find these chapters a very useful guide to the most important work that has been done by African filmmakers (a listing of key films and perhaps some information on access to them would have been helpful). The final brief chapters look at the work of five important younger directors, among them Dani Kouyaté from Burkina Faso. Well known for his first feature, *Keïta!* (1994), Kouyaté has most recently produced, on high-definition video, a pulsating account of life in Ouagadougou, *Ouaga Saga* (2004). One of the film's protagonists, Sherif, dreams of the cinema and he attends a showing of Howard Hawks's classic 1959 western, *Rio Bravo*, at the beginning of the movie. With *Ouaga Saga* and with this gesture, Kouyaté raises some critical questions that Armes might have addressed, notably the relationship between African films and the American movies that have long been popular among African audiences, and the implications of the availability of new media technologies like video for shaping the future direction of African film production.

University of Texas at El Paso

CHARLES AMBLER

THE FATE OF BLACKS IN NAZI GERMANY

doi:10.1017/S0021853707003118

Des victimes oubliées du nazisme. Les Noirs et l'Allemagne dans la première moitié du XXe siècle. By CATHERINE COQUERY-VIDROVITCH. Paris: le cherche midi, 2007.

Pp. 196. €15, paperback (ISBN 978-2-7491-0630-4).

KEY WORDS: African diaspora, biography, race/racism, violence.

This book provides a survey of the history of blacks from late Wilhelmine Germany to Nazism. It starts with a brief mention of black intellectual life in pre-1914 Germany and then discusses the various racist aspects of that period, such as the genocide of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa, the development of racialized eugenics and the practice of presenting African village life in zoos. The book gives short shrift to the German encounter with black soldiers in the First World War but dwells extensively on the distorting campaign against the colored soldiers of the French army in the occupied regions of Germany after the war (the so-called 'Black Horror'). Next, the author traces the place of anti-black racism in Nazism, discusses the sterilization of mixed-race children, and examines the difficulties of everyday life for blacks and mixed-race people in Nazi Germany. In this section, the book largely follows the well-known autobiography of Hans Massaquoi. The author points out that the film industry, always in need of blacks for films about colonial adventures, provided a safe haven for some blacks in Nazi Germany. The book also covers the success of black athletes at the Berlin Olympics of 1936, which embarrassed the Nazi regime, and presents various efforts of the regime to repress jazz and other art forms closely associated with blacks. The anti-black policies of Nazi Germany, however, were