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Imruh Bakari, Mbye B. Cham, eds. *African Experiences of Cinema.* Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1996. x + 276 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85170-511-8; $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85170-510-1.

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The book is divided into five sections. The first consists of manifestos and declarations (Algiers 1973 and 1975, Niamey 1982, and more recent ones). The second consists of personal statements by film-makers (Hondo, Cheriaa, Maldoror, Bouzid, Ngangura, Mungai, Traore, Teno, Ki-Zerbo). The third reviews the history and political economy of cinema in Africa. The fourth section covers issues of representation, and the fifth (entitled "Critical Perspectives") holds three essays, two of them by Pfaff.

One could quibble a little with the organization of the book–it is not clear, for instance, why the fifth section was separated out, or why the volume begins with official declarations, which as we know too well may have a rather tenuous impact–but it is certainly appropriate to have the artists' voices given a degree of priority. Not that critics and commentators are parasites on the process, but the creators' perspectives logically need to be heard first.

One great strength of the book's organization is its pan-Africa focus, embracing North Africa, South Africa, East Africa, and Lusophone Africa, as well as the current major centers of film production in West Africa. In the face of the continent's continuing divisions, this choice represents more than simply an attempt at comprehensiveness. Egypt is a little thinly represented, given its significance, and the new wave of popular video in Ghana and Nigeria is not represented. Nonetheless, the book's scope is very commendable.

The film-makers' statements derive partly from the 1970s (Hondo, Cheriaa, Maldoror, Ki-Zerbo), and partly from short essays presented at FESPACO 1993. Two further contributions were to my mind the strongest in this section, namely those by Nouri Bouzid (*The Man of Ashes*, etc.) and Mweze Ngangura (*La Vie Est Belle*, etc).

Bouzid writes very interestingly not only about thematic issues in his own work (which includes contributing the script to Boughedir's Halfaouine), but also about the contemporary context of film-making in North Africa. His influences included European and Latin American cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s, but also the need he felt to produce work that challenged the hegemony of Egyptian film. He wrestles particularly interestingly with the issue of Arab defeat that so dominates cultural production in the region.

Ngangura has some tart comments to make about the distance he sees between many contemporary African films and the African public. He cites a chance conversation he had with a thirteen-year-old at FESPACO '89 who asked him why there were no African Rambo figures. He acknowledges that he brushed the question off

at the time, but upon reflecting on it more carefully later drew the conclusion that there are not enough films that simply entertain, or that offer African audiences identification points with hero-figures (although he is not looking to reproduce Hollywood cliches). He acknowledges bluntly the problems film-makers encounter in relation to the power structure, and yet sharply warns against a certain contemporary tendency "to present a mythical Africa outside any geographical or historical context" (p. 63) that in his view, if expanded into a genre, would run the risk of reinforcing historical stereotypes about the continent. All in all, a very stimulating essay.

The third section, on history and political economy, includes a somewhat overlong but certainly informative piece by Ndugu Mike Ssali on the development of cinema in South Africa, and a couple of very interesting essays by Claire Andrade-Watkins, one on Lusophone cinema from 1969 to 1993, and the other on the role of the French Bureau of Cinema between 1969 and 1977 in the production of African films. The detailed story of the various French government agencies' roles in this process right up to the present has still to be told, and will one day undoubtedly make a fascinating read. The practical problems in getting all those who know that story to actually contribute to telling it are, of course, legion. Another essay in this section, by Emmanuel Sama, presents a useful if thoroughly depressing overview of the continent's pathetic current distribution mechanisms for African films.

In the fourth section, four essays offer particularly challenging perspectives. Tomaselli's argument concerning the inappropriateness of standard critical approaches to cinema for handling African cinemas begins the section, and is followed by a pithy chapter by Rod Stoneman that quickly gets to the nub of a series of issues, including dependency and auteurism. Farida Ayari writes on cinematic images of women, and Petty on the emergence of feminist themes in African cinemas.

The final section contains essays by Pfaff on Kabore's and Ouedraogo's films as anthropological sources, and on eroticism in sub-Saharan films, together with a piece by Mamadou Diouf on history and actuality in Ceddo and Hyenas. All three essays have richly detailed commentaries that will repay study.

This volume is therefore to be welcomed as a solid contribution to understanding and scholarship of African cinemas. It is likely to be a permanent fixture on the shelves of those concerned with this subject.

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