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Roy Armes. *African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. xiv + 224 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21898-8; $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34853-1.

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Filmmaking in North and Francophone sub-Saharan Africa

The subject matter of this new book is film production in two contiguous large geographical areas: the North African countries forming the *Maghreb* (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco); and the fourteen states formed from the giant colonies of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa plus the protectorates of Togo and Cameroon–that is, most of what is referred to as Francophone sub-Saharan Africa.

In the first chapter Armes sketches out the postcolonial context of filmmaking in these countries. He notes the contradiction between political independence and a structure inherited from colonialism, bilingual administrative organization, and the coexistence of the trappings of a modern state with older patterns of life for the majority of the population. He reflects on the lingering dominance of the French language and its various reasons and meanings: for example, in the *Maghreb* the strong reorientation toward Arabic meets the contending rise of Berber; in a country such as Senegal, a powerful national language imposes itself in daily speech without challenging French in officialdom; and in Cameroon no single local language predominates. Islam has been central to most of this area for several centuries, expanding its dominion under colonialism and at an even quicker pace since independence, coming in a way to the rescue of the European institutional legacy rather than undermining it. Despite the antireligious misgivings of the first, pioneering generation of West African filmmakers, many films offer today a contemporary visual culture that includes tangible expressions of Islam. The staggering rate of urbanization everywhere results not in greater social distance from the village but increased circulation and more flexibility in the structures of belonging and participation. There is also a renewed emphasis on achieving social inclusion, reflected in the narrative structures of most films where the collectivity becomes the main protagonist.

The next three chapters present a history of filmmaking in Africa. The first of these recapitulates the screening and filming activities of European expatriates, from the Lumière brothers at the turn of the twentieth century to the French dramas capitalizing on colonial sensibility, but including some local appropriations, such as those manifest in the amazing filmmaking career of Albert Chikly in Tunisia. The presentation centers on the *Maghreb*, but, striding across the geographic limits set before, it includes a section on South Africa and one on Egypt where a true and lasting popular film industry emerged in the 1930s. The next chapter offers an overview of the rise of a local cinema in the post-independence period in the *Maghreb* and in Francophone West Africa, addressing state support and, especially in the latter case, French bilateral aid. This ambiguous legacy is elaborated on in a third chapter, and includes commentary on the Bureau of Cinema under Jean-René Debrix and the transformation of French cultural aid after 1980.

After that, the author sets forth an interpretive framework, delineating three generations of filmmakers roughly on the basis of birthdates, that organizes the rest of the book. He discusses the pioneers who came of age under colonialism; the subsequent generation, which brought stylistic renewal and veered toward abstraction and interiority; and finally the most recent raft of filmmakers born after independence and representing a wide variety of voices. The similarity between the *Maghreb* and sub-Saharan Africa in this respect stands out, for example, in the assumption of transnational career patterns by the youngest generation.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on some exemplary directors, starting with the pioneering Senegalese Ousmane Sembene and continuing with three representatives of the 1970s from sub-Saharan Africa: Med Hondo, Souleymane Cisse, and Safi Faye. The 1970s are pursued in Algeria, where a national epic of the liberation war promoted by public authorities held sway, and with Tunisia

and Morocco. In the 1980s, the author finds a growing trend towards "a new tone of intimism" (p. 88) illustrated with Brahim Tsaki and Mohamed Rechid Benhadj from Algeria, Jillali Ferhati and Muhamed Abderrahman Tazi from Morocco, and Nouri Bouzid from Tunisia. For the same decade Kramo-Lanciné Fadika from Côte d'Ivoire, Cheikh Oumar Sissoko from Mali, and Pierre Yameogo from Burkina Faso provide the sub-Saharan contingent. The discussion moves on to the 1990s, focusing on several women directors from Tunisia, Abdelkader Lagtaâ and Hakim Noury from Morocco, the appearance of a Berber cinema and the case of Merzak Allouache in Algeria, Bassek Ba Kabhio and Jean-Marie Teno from Cameroon, and Idrissa Ouedraogo from Burkina Faso.

Chapter 7 revisits the 1970s, but this time to single out more experimental directors. Med Hondo and Djibril Diop Mambety represent West Africa. Some films from Morocco and those of the collective of Nouveau Theatre in Tunisia come next, offered as innovative works in their respective countries with no immediate sequels. For Algeria, the discussion goes back to Merzak Allouache, for his first two feature films, continues with Mohamed Bouamari and Farouk Beloufa, and ends up with a tribute to Assia Djebar's *La Nouba* (1978). Chapter 8 does the same for the 1980s, taking up Burkinabe directors Gaston Kabore and Idrissa Ouedraogo, along with the Malian Souleymane Cisse with *Yeelen* (1987). Also finding a place in this section are Mahmoud ben Mahmoud, Taïb Louichi, and Nacer Khemir from Tunisia, and Mohamed Chouikh from Algeria. The chapter concludes with the outstanding filmmakers from the 1990s, Ferid Boughedir and Moncef Dhouib from Tunisia, Muhamed Tazi and Daoud Aoulad Syad from Morocco, Cheickh Oumar Sissoko (for his later three films) and Adama Drabo from Mali, and the trio of Mansour Sora Wade, Joseph Gaye Ramaka, and Moussa Sene Absa from Senegal.

Chapter 9 of the book is dedicated to the latest wave of African filmmakers who were born after independence. This "New Millenium" group includes "forty filmmakers–five of them women–[who] have given us over fifty feature films in the years since the late 1990s" (p. 143). Thirteen come from Morocco, ten from Tunisia, one from Algeria, and sixteen from sub-Saharan countries. Almost all are film-school trained (no less than twenty-three of them in Paris), and, as a whole, they figure as one of the most highly educated groups of filmmakers in the world. Most have a production base in France or another European country, where they tend to reside in order to qualify for European production funds. This group has a strong sense of unity and is organized in the Paris-based Guilde Africaine des Réalisateurs et Producteurs. Many of their works carry the marks of exile and diaspora. The advantage they have is that their decision to reflect cinematically on life in the countries where they were born intermeshes precisely with the French government's desire to maintain its cultural links with its former colonies and include them in a joint front to combat the Hollywood hegemony. Paradoxically, the North Africans in this group are difficult to distinguish from second-generation immigrant sons and daughters born in France and possessing French nationality. Ivanga Imunga from Gabon, Issa Serge Coele from Chad, Régine Fanta Nacro from Burkina Faso, and Mohamed Asli from Morocco receive extended commentary. So does the most experimental of the New Millenium filmmakers, Jean-Pierre Bekolo from Cameroon, whom Jonathan Haynes described as "a cagey and attitudinous guerilla roaming the post-modern globalized mediascape," opening the way for other bold young experimenters who made award-winning films (p. 154). In the last paragraph of this chapter Armes makes a nod to Nigeria's booming video film sector to contrast it with the financial-organizational continuities in the Francophone world.

The book carries on with five shorter chapters, each taking up one of the most promising New Millennium directors for extended treatment. They are Mahamat Saleh Haroun from Chad, Dani Kouyate from Burkina Faso, Raja Amari from Tunisia, Faouzi Bensaidi from Morocco, and Abderrahman Sissako from Mauritania-Mali (whose *Bamako* [2006] received uncommon media coverage in the United States this year, as it was co-produced by Danny Glover who also provided a cameo appearance in it).

African Filmmaking is very much a film studies narrative, with only casual references to production structures or audience reception. For classes that cover this terrain, it is supremely useful for students.[1] Not only does Armes canvass enormous territory, succinctly and in elegant prose, but he has also made a judicious selection of directors and films. Most important, he takes an approach that brings together North Africa and Francophone West and Central Africa to draw out insights that might otherwise be blurred, particularly in the United States where discussion is dominated by faculty in the social sciences and humanities who have narrower regional specializations.

Note

[1]. For those who want a complementary study that provides greater technical detail on production realities and the politics of the "French connection," I sug-

gest Teresa Hoefert Turégano's *African Cinema and Europe: Close-up on Burkina Faso* (Florence, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2004), a volume produced in Europe in English, but one which has not received the recognition it deserves in the United States.

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