Videastes vs. cineastes: Sub-Saharan African cinema and its "schizophrenic industry"

“The theme of [the FESPACO] this year was ‘African cinema and the market.’ Does a market really exist? The answer is no. So what are we talking about?” – Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, cineaste from Chad.¹

In 2009, Nigeria surpassed the United States as the second largest film industry in the world, just behind India.² Nollywood, as it is called, has managed the impressive accomplishment of reviving the Nigerian film industry by taking advantage of the benefits of the digitization of audiovisual equipment (cameras, editing software, DVDs). The advancement in film technology has not only rendered the matériel lighter, handier, and more affordable, but also considerably reduced the costs and duration of the filmmaking process. A country like Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented boost in production, with feature films directly shot and released on video format, starting an unexpected lucrative activity. Now with an estimate of more than two thousand titles per year, the Nigerian video phenomenon has set an outstanding example of creating, for the first time, a commercially viable movie industry in Sub-Saharan Africa. The grosses approximate $50 million.³

Though originally created with local audiences in mind, Nollywood movies have met tremendous success not only in Nigeria, but also in most of black Africa, and throughout the African Diaspora.⁴ “The whole phenomenon has simply become too big for the world to ignore” as Jonathan Haynes notes.⁵ Many other countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Cameroon or Gabon, have enthusiastically embraced and imitated the Nigerian model of intense video activity. With the majority of theaters closing down in the region, those types of films have practically replaced celluloid cinema.

As a result, video filmmaking has become the alternative solution par excellence to “traditional” African cinema on the continent. In fact, the “Nollywood syndrome” has impacted African audiovisual practices at so many levels, that it has drastically changed the way films are being produced and consumed in Africa, as well as how local audiences relate to their cinemas. This situation forces us to significantly reconsider what can be regarded as “African cinema” in this new century.

In 2005, a conference entitled “Nollywood Rising” was held in Los Angeles. Brian Larkin reports from that event, that “African cinema” as the cinema referring to “the art-based cinematic practice designed to promote African cultural traditions and to develop authentically African film forms that stand in alterity to Hollywood and that are both aesthetically and politically vanguardist” has to be conceptually rethought.⁶ Indeed, a whole new generation of storytellers, who predominantly...
use digital technology, has emerged on the continent. They are filling the void and compensate for the low number and the irregular presence of African fictions on African screens (theaters and televisions). They have succeeded in delivering African narratives that resonate effectively with African audiences.

Yet, instead of being unanimously welcomed and appreciated by all creators, the video boom has caused a palpable schism in the African film environment, which sees the videastes (those who work on video/digital) compete with the cineastes (those who work on celluloid) in redefining African cinema. In fact, the differences between those two trends have unearthed many of the inconsistencies and paradoxes of the cinematic output from black Africa. The divergences between those groups not only reveal why African cinema has been unable to disenthrall itself from foreign assistance (at every level), but also why celluloid production, along with exhibition, are luxuries that Africa can undeniably no longer afford.

This essay offers a survey of the disparities between the two entities. It foregrounds their opposite take on African cinema, their antagonistic modes of functioning, as well as their contrasting relationships with African audiences and international festivals. All these dichotomies reveal why video filmmaking has become so successful in creating an African cinema for African audiences.

Nollywood has become the major African popular cinema. Because others have always ended in film festivals. ... Five minutes shots. They just clap for them and that is all about the film. Africans do not even have the opportunity to see these films. ... And they go to show [their film] in festivals, they show it in one or two places, and that is all. It cannot be sold, no African will pay a dime to buy it. They cannot sell it. ... The business of filmmaking is about making money and making statements. (Lancelot Imasuen, videaste from Nigeria).

Since its beginnings, Sub-Saharan African cinema has existed predominantly under two etiquettes: either as a didactic/post-colonialist cinema, or an arthouse cinema. The didactic/post-colonialist influence is the “cinema of duty,” the “cinema with a mission” requested in the late 1960s by the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI), and personified by Sembène Ousmane, the “father of black African cinema.” In prolongation of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s third cinema manifesto, the FEPACI demanded from African cineastes the creation of aesthetics using “didactic fictional forms to denounce the alienation of countries that were politically independent but culturally and economically dependent on the West.” Guided by this ideology, the filmmakers conceived their freedom to depict themselves as a political act.

The arthouse approach, on the contrary, has been more anchored in the auteur tradition. The directors from that trend, such as Abderrahmane Sissako (Heremakono, 2002) or Mahamet-Saleh Haroun (Daratt, 2006) for example, have emancipated themselves from the politics and the aesthetics of the FEPACI. They think of themselves more as cineastes who happen to be from Africa, rather than African cineastes. Such directors refuse to be reduced to the adjective “African,” which they wish would no longer be attached to cineaste. They choose to express their artistic creativity in their oeuvres. Olivier Barlet details:

They refuse to be marginalized, struggle against a certain image of Africa left over from colonial cinema, assert their Africanity in a wandering, nomadic culture far from rigid identities, seek an appropriate cinematic language for dealing with Africa’s urgent problems, and develop ties amongst themselves in order not to reproduce the individualism of their elders.

In both instances, the films created have had difficulties to get substantial theatrical exposure in their home countries, and within the larger part of black Africa. Emmanuel Sama, a Burkinabe film critic, insightfully points out that “African films are foreigners in their own countries.” Indeed, at the level of exhibition, except for South Africa, most theaters of the region have shut down or are closing, especially in countries such as Nigeria,
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Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, or Cameroon, where video production has become predominant. This environment, coupled with the cruel absence of African-owned distribution networks, has pushed African celluloid films more and more out of the continent. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra already noted in the 1970s that “to become known, African cinema has gone towards international festivals”.11 Furthermore, Brian Larkin asserts that “these films do well in western film festivals from Berlin to Paris to New York but are rarely seen in Africa itself outside of the famous festival of FESPACO”.12 The real markets for African movies are mostly located outside Africa, in Europe and North America, and are often limited to festival audiences, educational institutions, or film libraries. Even in the West, most of these films seldom get distributed outside urban centers.13 That is why terms such as “calabash films,”14 or “export cinema” or “embassy films” (because in Africa they are only screened at foreign embassies) have emerged concerning the appreciation and exhibition of African oeuvres.15

This situation is mainly due the fact that there is no “film industry per se in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the level of production, the great majority of cineastes turn to foreign institutions to gather the money for their films. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Francophonie Organization, and the European Union are the main institutions offering financial support. They put at the disposal of filmmakers from developing countries a wide variety of grants ranging from €10,000 to €300,000 (approximately $13,000 to $395,000 USD). In this respect, the French government has been the greatest patron of Sub-Saharan African cinema (especially francophone), due to the various funding opportunities that it allocates at every stage of the filmmaking process. Grants for training, writing, filming, distribution or festival attendance have been made available to African cineastes, and allotted via funds such as the Fonds Sud Cinéma, or the Fonds Images Afrique. Concerning the Fonds Images Afrique, its grant was originally administered through the Fonds ADC Sud, whose mission was to support the development of cinema in the Zone de Solidarité Prioritaire (Priority Zone of Solidarity). Initially, the fund was open to 55 countries from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle East. In 2004, however, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to substitute the Fonds ADC Sud for the Fonds Images Afrique, which became an aid exclusively offered to African countries. Its objectives were:

- to promote the creation of local television programmes and films in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. By developing national production originating not only in public and private television channels but also in production companies, it will thus help to enrich the programme rosters of television channels in the countries concerned and increase the share of African fiction films in cinemas in Africa.16

With such policies, France honestly attempted to help African audiovisual productions establish a more prominent presence on the screens of their continent. Unexpectedly, the Fonds Images Afrique lasted five years only and has been discontinued since 2009. During that time, its cinema section awarded a total of €4,205,000 (approximately $5,535,000 USD) which contributed to the production of 65 features from 11 countries.17

Therefore, from fundraising to distribution, and even to scholarship,18 in the “odd” African film industry the main contributors are located at a palpable distance from African audiences. In this context, the narratives produced are not “persuasively packaged for the consumption of Africans” because “European review boards vetted most of the scripts.”19 By seeking to appeal to those foreign boards, African filmmakers have resulted in telling stories that, unfortunately, turned out to be less and less targeted at African viewers. As well, many of the African cineastes celebrated at major international festivals (Venice, Berlin, Cannes) currently live outside the continent - be it Haile Gerima, Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, or Abderrahmane Sissako. Olivier Barlet describes this “necessity to be [abroad] in order to be closer to funding,” as another pernicious effect, which has generated an imbalance between Africans from Africa and Africans from the Diaspora.20 Consequently, in Sub-Saharan Africa a considerable gap has continuously been growing
between celluloid cinema and local audiences. The “calabash films” and the “export cinema” have alienated African audiences. Populations have understood that the movies produced in that configuration were more inclined to please Western spectators at the expenses of African ones.

Our cinema is not fond of singular auteurs. Those who have lifted their heads above water are accused of conniving with the West, of being traitors to their cause, and of no longer being real Africans. (Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, cineaste from Chad). ²¹

Thus, the Nigerian model of cheap video films made by local directors has blossomed all over the region. In order to present images of Africa closer to Africans, videastes have started to rise in direct reaction to the shortcomings of cineastes. Without hesitation, they have taken advantage of a technology that enables them to create movies without having to look outside, neither for funding, nor for markets. Their narratives look inwards, and are more in touch with topical issues.

Here, an important nuance should be more detailed in order to fully grasp the accepted meaning of the terms “cineastes” and “videastes.” This essay aims at highlighting the perceivable dichotomies between the two groups. As we start to see, in Sub-Saharan Africa their divergences are not solely based on the fact that they work with different technologies. Instead, the format they choose reveals their contrasting motivations as African filmmakers.

Indeed, the advancements in digital technology nowadays have rendered the line between digital and 35mm really insubstantial. As a matter of fact, celluloid is destined to disappear within the next decade. As a support to film on, it has already declined so much that even firms like Panavision have decided to stop manufacturing film cameras.

Yet, in the African film environment, what separates 35mm from video has more to do with status and prestige, than with technology: celluloid has been attached to “cinema,” while video/digital has been reduced to “audiovisual/television” (music video, news reports, etc.). This hierarchy has been established by the first generations of African filmmakers, in order not to be confused with mere “faiseurs d’images” (image makers), and elevate themselves to the status of full-blown filmmakers. John C. McCall describes well the cachet that Africans directors have given to celluloid:

Undoubtedly, Nollywood has provoked an upheaval that has not really contributed to making video production more appealing to cineastes. On the contrary, the rather bad quality of the majority of the films produced on video format has somewhat equated the term videaste with “bad image makers.” Thus, many cineastes still refuse to be associated with those negative connotations, and decide to stick to celluloid, also as way to clearly distance themselves from the profit-driven video industry, which too often overlooks content and quality.

Nevertheless, since most theaters are closing in the region, Sub-Saharan Africa has the peculiarity of offering a geographical space where video production/distribution is claiming as much legitimacy (if not more) as celluloid production/exhibition. One very ironic consequence of this lack of cinema houses is that most movies are

The commitment to the celluloid medium was simultaneously aesthetic and political. Not only did advocates insist that the large-screen chemical process produced an aesthetic result that was superior to that of the electronic small screen; there was also a belief that the small screen was inherently part of the systematic reproduction of capitalist ideology. Film, despite or perhaps because of its closer association with elite art, was believed to have a greater inherent potential for social critique. Thus, when advances in digital video technology made it possible to produce feature-length movies on video with little more than a camera and a computer, it was not Africa’s celebrated film-makers who seized this opportunity to produce their work free from the oversight of European grant review boards. It was street-smart entrepreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria who led Africa’s video revolution. ²²
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distributed either on VCDs, or DVDs. This applies to all type of films, from cheap domestic productions to top Hollywood blockbuster, which are pirated, downloaded, or bootlegged.

Consequently, since all movies are predominately distributed and consumed on cheap video support anyway (on which the quality of the original does not matter so much anymore), in sub-Saharan African cinema the difference between cinema and video films has become more and more blurred. What remains are the stories, and how they connect with local audiences. Therefore in this context, what differentiates cineastes from videastes, in my opinion, is more on how they work, where they show their films, what artistic ambitions drive them, and what relationships they have with African and international audiences. Their antagonistic takes on African cinema have led to an identity crisis in creation.

For instance, the FESPACO (the biggest African film festival) is now divided into two separate sections according to formats: the main competition and the TV/video competition. While the main competition awards around 15 prizes for feature films (including even an award for best poster) and 3 for short films, the video section is a “catchall” competition with no distinction between shorts and features. Only two prizes (jury prize and best film) are dedicated for works of fiction submitted on video format (Betacam, DVCam, DVD etc.), regardless of length and quality. Hence, many talented filmmakers are overlooked or simply dismissed as insignificant “videastes,” because their films have been submitted on video. Similarly, some rather unskilled directors enter the main competition with average video projects, simply because they have been able to transfer them to 35mm.

This situation has brought many criticisms to the FESPACO from both videastes and cineastes. Mahamet-Saleh Haroun vehemently complained about “the mediocrity of the selection, with films that [had] no place [t]here, nor in any other festival,” and which only showed what he qualified as a “lack of respect for cinema and for the filmmakers [who competed in the festival]”. At the 2011 edition of the festival, Haroun became so upset, calling the FESPACO an “audiovisual festival,” that he swore never to attend it again, as a sign of protest.

Michel Ouédraogo, the Delegate General of the FESPACO, explains that sections were constituted on the basis of formats because the FEPACI, which created the festival in 1969, required that films needed to be presented in 35mm in order to compete in the main competition. Ouédraogo adds that the FEPACI has to change that rule for the FESPACO to stop this division.

Still, at least thanks to that video revolution, local audiences finally get to see African productions that are trying to speak to them. African spectators enthusiastically connect with this “replacement cinema,” because it is depicting their realities on the screen the way celluloid cinema has failed to. As previously said, videastes neither share the same intentions, nor the same ambitions as cineastes.

Instead, they draw their inspiration from Nigeria. As John C. McCall explains, Nollywood did not arise from a national cinema or foreign funded interests, nor was it particularly concerned with advancing development agendas or political movements. It started as a sort of emergency solution to the drought of Nigerian cinema, and the hunger of both local audiences and filmmakers to see their own films. Videastes liberated African films, as well as African audiences, from the “diktat” of the FEPACI, and also from the dependence on the West.

Inspired by Hollywood artifacts and MTV videos, videastes want to entertain their audiences more than they want to “teach” them. They attempt to create a pleasurable African cinema, with which people can engage emotionally. They focus foremost on their local markets. As well, they have emancipated African features from Western expertise.

In Gabon, Vincent Mbindzou has been quite a successful videaste thanks to the commercial appeal of his productions. His films combine actions scenes, in the tradition of Kung-Fu and Hong-Kong movies, and visual effects, highly inspired and influenced by the Matrix trilogy. Mbindzou’s first feature La Contre-Attaque de Mouelet (2010) was one of the hits of the year 2010, grossing 1,900,000 CFA (approximately $3,700 USD) for its opening night, in one single venue. In the almost non-existent Gabonese market, where the movie-going habit has greatly disappeared due to both the lack of feature films
and of theaters, this was a great accomplishment. His second feature *La Plante Sacrée* was released in March 2012, and again included the same elements which brought him success, namely action and visual effects. Interestingly, Vincent Mbindzou has never received any assistance from abroad in his whole career. At the level of funding, it is from local patrons that he gets his financial support, which varies between 1,000,000 CFA and 8,000,000 CFA (approximately $1,950 and $15,600 USD). All his production crews have only been composed of Gabonese/African technicians. Similar to many *videastes*, Vincent Mbindzou is a “one-man band,” assuming multiple titles on his sets. He has taught himself everything he knows about film, mostly by downloading internet tutorials. He writes, produces, edits, and creates the visual effects in all his films. When asked why he has never benefited from any Western expertise, he simply replies that European technicians are too expensive.

Indeed, many celluloid movies are shot with trained Europeans, technicians who are experienced in film and know how to work with 35mm, whereas the majority of African technicians are trained on the job. Hence, *cineastes* regularly complain about this lack of skilled professionals on the continent, which for them justifies why they have to “import” many of their crew members along with the equipment. Yet, just like a dog biting its own tail, *cineastes* utilize a technology that is actually not available in the region (film stock and laboratories), and which not only inflates budgets but also prevents local technicians from significantly improving with this equipment. Furthermore, without the *Fonds Images Afrique*, *cineastes* have been cut off from one of their most precious funds, which only complicates their financial equation even more. Now, they always have to compete with the rest of third world cinema to get grants:

You are up against funders who see you as all the same, as poor filmmakers who need to be assisted. Yet, if there’s something worth defending, it is not ‘African cinema’, which doesn’t actually exist, but visions of Africa by different African auteurs. (Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, *cineaste* from Chad).27

Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, a *cineaste* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has worked in about thirty African countries. Parallel to his fictional outputs, which include *Le damier, Papa National Oyé!* (1996) and *Juju Factory* (2005), he has also directed a series of documentaries dealing with Pan-African issues such as *Thomas Sankara, l’espoir assassiné* (1991), about the murdered Burkinafaso revolutionary leader, *Roger Milla, le lion des lions* (2006), a portrait of the Cameroonian soccer icon, or *Bongo Libre* (1999) in which he offers a subtle, yet acerbic critique of the now-deceased Gabonese dictator. From those experiences, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda has come to the conclusion that he knows all the problems that African countries face concerning production and cinema. He deplores the fact that few countries have well-trained technicians. Because he personally values skills in his professional activity, he has always resorted to working with technicians from the West (he simply calls them “Whites”) in all his films. He justifies this necessity by the fact that he has established most of his networks in the West, where he was trained (Europe and the US), and where he currently lives and works (between Paris and Brussels). Nevertheless, he is aware that one of the best trainings is the one that puts people at regular practice. That is why he has always tried to have film crews that include local professionals and Western expertise. Still, unlike Vincent Mbindzou, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda can only admit that he has never been able to work with an exclusively African team on any of his films.
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As a result, cineastes create their own vicious circle, in which their favored format will always force them to be dependent on the West at almost every level. Whereas with video production, everything is financed and executed domestically. Crews are almost exclusively Africans. Thanks to a technology that is more affordable and more user-friendly, costs are reduced so much that oftentimes projects are even shot without a budget! By using a format that is more accessible to them, videastes not only save money, but also improve their skills considerably, because they get to work on more projects. In Nigeria, filmmakers and actors struggle to keep track of their filmographies, which easily include hundreds of movies.

Hence, Nollywood has been able to start a viable film industry out of nothing. It hires thousands of people, such as crew members, actors, people sticking posters on the streets, video stores, distributors, etc. Chukwuma Okoye has estimated that every year in the past half decade, about 200,000 to 300,000 new people have been lifted from unemployment thanks to that industry.28 There is pride in the fact that Nollywood has been able to accomplish that. It gives great hope that in the near future, other countries in the region will be able to repeat this achievement. Celluloid cinema in Africa has never been able to do this in its entire existence.

Indeed, in order to constitute a film industry, one needs films (no matter if they are produced on celluloid or on video format). Foreign aids provide cineastes with the convenience of receiving non-repayable financial support. However, this support also comes with frustration, as it is the result of a tedious administrative process. Since most funding can be awarded concurrently, for each project cineastes tend to apply, with or without success, to many committees, which inconveniently have their own different calendars. Oftentimes, they meet only once or twice a year, within three to six months after the deadline of their call for projects. They do not publish their decisions until a month after their review boards have gathered. Of course, it goes without saying that those commissions decide not only what can be told about Africa, but also how it should be shown, as Haile Gerima, cineaste from Ethiopia, points out: “As long as we incorporate colonial interest, white characters or white ideals, and exotic things about Africa into our stories, we get money to finance our movies.”29

With so many months between sessions, cineastes spend long periods of time waiting, because most aids cannot be awarded if filming has already started. Consequently, it takes an average of two to four years to release an African film in celluloid. That is why there is such a terrible irregularity in production. In Gabon for instance, only two cineastes have released four films in 35mm between 2000 and 201130. The Central African Republic produced its very first feature in celluloid in 2003 with Le Silence de la forêt, co-directed by Bassek Ba Khobio (Cameroon) and Central African cineaste Didier Ouénangaré. Ouénangaré was already fifty at the time. Regrettably he died three years later in 2006, after having only (co-)directed that one movie, which became the accomplishment of a lifetime. Fernand Lepoko, a Gabonese videaste,
complains about the very tedious application process of foreign institutions, which comes with long waiting periods and anxiety over the uncertainty of obtaining the aid. With the purpose to “produce in order not to die” (produire pour ne pas mourir), Lepoko chooses to solicit financial assistance from local individuals rather than ask support from international institutions, even when it is their mission to provide funding opportunities.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, filming with celluloid greatly reduces the number of movies that can be made, as well as the number of people who can work on them. An industry cannot possibly rise under these conditions. Hence, compared to other regions of the world, the registry of black African cinema includes relatively low numbers of entries for both cinéastes and films. Furthermore, at every level of the discourse around African filmmaking (from funding, to scholarship, via festivals) it is always the same directors who are singled out, as well as the same movies. Due to the lack of more varied output to incorporate, those few cinéastes and their movies have ended up representing whole countries, or entire regions. As a result, the very reductive ensemble called “African cinema” still dominates the debates.

Video production made possible a “democracy” in filmmaking, because many more people are able to express themselves instead of waiting to be represented by some “delegates.” In Gabon, where only four features were produced in 11 years, eight video films by six directors were released between December 2010 and December 2011. They have been screened to a delighted local audience, in spite of the sometimes improvised venues (such as conference rooms, or wedding ballrooms), or flawed presentations (old video projectors with saturated colors, and skipping DVD players). In fact, just like in many other African countries, Nollywood has succeeded in Nigeria because local populations have longed to see more of their own films. Despite their poor quality, those films are still better than nothing.

Thus, celluloid cinema does not have the monopoly of African narratives anymore, because video filmmaking allows a regular and more consistent number of productions. Now, there is enough substance to finally break the ensemble called “African cinema” into national entities. It provides scholars with more films to study, and more filmmakers to deal with, in order to get a better sense of a national culture in each country. There is room for many varied studies, such as “witchcraft and curse” or “religious films” in Nollywood productions for instance. Likewise, large video booms are currently localized in Nigeria (Nollywood and Kannywood), Kenya (Riverwood), Ghana or Burkina Faso. This opens the way for a specific focus on each geographical area.

Table 1 shines a light on the economy of production on celluloid in black Africa, which has created obstacles and prevented the constitution of viable local film industries. From this table, which we admit is certainly not comprehensive, it can already be noted that no celluloid film, for which the relevant economic data could be obtained, has made any profit. On the contrary, those movies are in such deficit, that they provide evidence for the fact that, in black Africa, celluloid production is an extremely loss-making practice. Even the grosses collected by Unifrance do not include figures from Sub-Saharan Africa. Matthieu Thibaudault, the economic data manager in charge of worldwide grosses at Unifrance, explains that no other area proves to be more difficult in providing reliable box-office records. There is no entity regulating and monitoring the cinema activity that he can turn to, nor is there any distribution network to collaborate with.

Therefore, even for movies for which grosses were unavailable, we can estimate without speculating too much, that it is highly unlikely that they turned out to be profitable, given their vast expenses. This emphasizes that the costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production format</th>
<th>Budget in Euros</th>
<th>Worldwide box-office in Euros (excluding France)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sia, le rêve du python</td>
<td>Dani Kouyaté</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 871,951</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndeysaan – Le prix du pardon</td>
<td>Mansour Sora Wade</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 339,062</td>
<td>€ 30,806 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nha Fala</td>
<td>Flora Gomes</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 2,377,947</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La colère des dieux</td>
<td>Idrissa Ouedraogo</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 2,812,782</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris selon Moussa</td>
<td>Cheik Doukouré</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,225,188</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouaga Saga</td>
<td>Dani Kouyaté</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,854,123</td>
<td>Not available</td>
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<tr>
<td>La nuit de la vérité</td>
<td>Fanta Régina Nacro</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,080,498</td>
<td>€ 17,094 b</td>
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<td>Zulu love letter (Lève-toi et marche)</td>
<td>Ramadan Suleman</td>
<td>South-Africa</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,985,321</td>
<td>Not available</td>
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<td>Delwende</td>
<td>S. Pierre Yameogo</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 683,506</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamako</td>
<td>Abderrahmane Sissako</td>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,606,693</td>
<td>€ 351,125 b</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daratt</td>
<td>Mahamat-Saleh Haroun</td>
<td>Tchad</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,300,252</td>
<td>€ 71,201 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’appel des arènes</td>
<td>Cheikh A. Ndiaye</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 847,440</td>
<td>Not available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faro, la reine des eaux</td>
<td>Salif Traoré</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>35mm (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,107,080</td>
<td>Not available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le divorce</td>
<td>Manouchka Kelly Labouba</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>HDCam (Short)</td>
<td>€ 38,112 c</td>
<td>€ 3,048 c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maléfice</td>
<td>Fernand Lepoko</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>HDCam (Short)</td>
<td>€ 38,112 c</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La contre-attaque de Moulet</td>
<td>Vincent Mbindzou</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Mini-DV (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 762 c</td>
<td>€ 2,896 c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La plante sacrée</td>
<td>Vincent Mbindzou</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mini-DV (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 1,524 c</td>
<td>Not released yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terre &amp; fils</td>
<td>Fernand Lepoko</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mini-DV (Feature)</td>
<td>€ 4,573 c</td>
<td>Not released yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dedicated to African celluloid productions are particularly high, especially since there is no evidence whatsoever that those films can generate profit on any market (foreign or local), or at least break even. Instead, because African cineastes have always received financial assistance in the forms of gracious aids, they have totally detached their modes of functioning from any preoccupation concerning financial returns.

For nearly five decades, African cineastes have not been “playing by the rules,” because their very existence has never relied on a domestic film industry. “The African exception,” as Olivier Barlet nicknamed it, has never succeeded in creating a market, with producers and distribution networks to guarantee the circulation of African films on the continent. Table 1 also illustrates that most of the economic data for African celluloid films are accessible through French organizations, while the ones for video productions are accessible locally, usually directly from filmmakers. As well, we see that video films are significantly less expensive than celluloid artifacts, and it does look as if there is an attempt to adjust the budgets to the market capacity. Even though we do not possess sufficient data to positively confirm that tendency, we know for a fact that videastes are more dependent on local audiences. Thus it is by successfully winning those audiences with their films that videastes have managed to challenge cineastes as the legitimate representatives of African cinema.

Today, cineastes are fighting on multiple fronts. Abroad, they compete for funding with other cinemas from emerging countries such as Brazil, or China, which have more substantial domestic markets, and are not equally over-dependent on the West. At home, cineastes might start to realize that their mode of functioning is totally incompatible with the African film environment in its current state. Imunga Ivanga, cineaste and director of the Gabonese Institute for Image and Sound (IGIS), admits that digital technology might indeed be more suitable for African filmmakers, as it better reflects the reality of African economies, and closely links the entire chain from production to exhibition. He acknowledges that it is important that African creation comes from multiple directions, to attract all types of audiences.

Now that videastes have offered an alternative that suits Africa better, they have also highlighted the fact that African cinema, as it is exercised by cineastes, has to be revised. Videastes have made more progress in constituting a genuine space and fan community for African films. In Nigeria, some people watch three to five Nollywood films a day. In light of these developments it can legitimately be said that Nollywood, and videastes are drastically changing the entire field commonly known as “African cinema.”

In this respect the example set by Djo Tunda Wa Munga, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, provides us with an interesting case which also opens the debate over what should be considered “African cinema.” His directorial debut Viva Riva! (2010) was shot on video using the Canon EOS 7D camera. The film is a crime thriller packed with action, violence, and sex, not unlike many Nollywood movies. Its production format, its style, and its genre clearly resemble the common approaches of videastes. However, Djo Tunda Wa Munga does not consider himself a videaste. “Cinema is about a state of mind: about what one wants to tell, about the point of view and about the method” he says. He explains that video technology can be used as a means of expression, when one does not have the tools nor the financial resources to shoot on celluloid. He resorted to using 35mm, only as a format to facilitate the exhibition of his film. Viva Riva! shows that African cinema ought to have more commercial appeal (which should not be the sole preoccupation of videastes), without giving up on good quality (which should not be the sole preoccupation of cineastes). Djo Tunda Wa
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Munga advocates that using video technology with cinematic ambitions is a good strategy for Africa. His initiative sets an interesting example for the future. Djo Tunda Wa Munga transcends the limitations of both cineastes and videastes, who sometimes are too trapped in their opposing visions of “African cinema.” His approach disregards their boundaries, and is certainly a better remedy to help African cinema overcome its current “schizophrenic industry.” Curiously, maybe due to this “hybridism,” Viva Riva! was not selected at the 2011 edition of the FESPACO.

Manouchka Kelly Labouba is a PhD student in Critical Studies at USC’s School of Cinematic Arts. Her research interests include Sub-Saharan African cinema, its economy, its reception by African audiences, and its relationships with dominant cinemas. She is also an independent director/screenwriter/producer from Gabon (Central Africa), where she became the first woman to direct a work of fiction with her 40min short Le Divorce (2008). She has been selected in official competition at the FESPACO, and the Carthage Film Festival. She pursues a dual career as a scholar, and as filmmaker.

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End Notes

1 Olivier Barlet, “This Is the Last FESPACO I’ll Be Coming To: An Interview with Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,” trans. Melissa Thakway, Black Camera 3.1 (2011), 136.
2 The 2009 cinema data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimated a total of 1,200 feature-length films produced by India, 987 by Nigeria (all in video format) and 694 by the United States. <www.uis.unesco.org/culture/Pages/cinema-data-release-2011.aspx>
7 Quote from the documentary Nollywood Babylon (dir. Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal, 2008).
12 Brian Larkin, 110.
13 John C. McCall, “The Pan-Africanism we have: Nollywood’s invention of Africa,” Film International 5.28 No. 4 (2007), 93.
14 This particular appellation originates from the fact that African films serve as tokens of Africa’s contribution to world cinema, since they are mostly shown abroad in festivals outside the continent. Because of their stories, their aesthetics, and the languages they use, those productions are not expected to draw significant grosses. They are not even required to make money, because their mere existence is what counts. Thus, at the level of representation, African filmmakers permanently face internal conflicts as, on the one hand, they try to tell specific stories to their people, but on the other hand, they have to somehow fulfill certain Western expectations concerning the depiction of Africans on the screen, in order to receive funding. As a result, “calabash films” that are more appealing to Western audiences are created.

Those films constitute the backbones of most studies on African cinema, such as the ones by Manthia Diawara, Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike or Olivier Barlet for instance.

15 Brian Larkin, 110.
18 Those films constitute the backbones of most studies on African cinema, such as the ones by Manthia Diawara, Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike or Olivier Barlet for instance.
19 John C. McCall, 93.
20 Olivier Barlet, “The African exception.”
21 Olivier Barlet, “‘This Is the Last FESPACO I’ll Be Coming To’: An Interview with Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,” 136.
22 John C. McCall, 93-4.
23 Olivier Barlet, “‘This Is the Last FESPACO I’ll Be Coming To’: An Interview with Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,” 135.
24 Ibid.
26 John C. McCall, 94.
27 Olivier Barlet, “‘This Is the Last FESPACO I’ll Be Coming To’: An Interview with Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,” 136.
32 Data from the CNC (Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée) is tagged a. The CNC is the French national center of cinematography in charge of the regulation, the promotion, the preservation, and the support of cinema in France. Within those lines, the CNC keeps economic data for all films made with French financial support, which includes many African films.
Data from Unifrance is tagged b. Unifrance is the organization in charge of promoting French cinema worldwide. For this purpose, Unifrance gathers economic data for all French productions or co-productions released outside France, which again includes many African films.
Data from the filmmakers is tagged c. The budgets are estimates of the amounts the filmmakers believed to have spent on their films. The grosses are also estimates of the minimum amount grossed for sure in Gabon, when the films were commercially released in a theatre venue.
33 A woman interviewed in the documentary Nollywood Babylon.