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**African Francophone Cinema. Samba Diop. New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2004. 106 pp.**

**Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan African Film. Melissa Thackway. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Oxford: Oxford, UK: James Currey, Ltd. Capetown, South Africa: David Philip, 2003. 230 pp.**

Samba Diop's *African Francophone Cinema* is destined for students who have an interest in francophone-African cinema, although Diop does not specify for which educational level it is appropriate. Given its traditional thematic approach and the limited number of films it discusses, I would limit its use to undergraduate introductory courses in film, or as an introduction for the uninitiated scholar. Melissa Thackway's *Africa Shoots Back* is both more ambitious in scope and more successful in its presentation. Although Thackway gives adequate attention to the African narrative traditions and themes outlined briefly in Diop's book, she goes beyond them to acknowledge francophone-African filmmakers for their innovation in style and technique.

She explores how African directors create their own artistic vision, rejecting the restrictive notion of "African cinema." Thackway illustrates convincingly how these filmmakers incorporate traditional images and practices from Africa in their films when beneficial to an understanding of their people, but how they eschew stereotypical images of Africa imposed by the West.

Diop organizes her book by theme—history, oral tradition, myth, religion, gender and sexuality, and postcolonialism—and much of what the book purports to achieve is contained in its summary introduction and conclusion. The body of the book analyzes in some detail films based on their central themes; for example, *Ceddo*, by Ousmane Sembène (Senegal), is used as the backdrop for a general discussion of the history of francophone-African cinema; *La genèse*, by Cheich Oumar Sissoko (Mali), illustrates the role of religion. Such an approach is valid, and there is much good thematic analysis of the films. However, Diop also promises to discuss cinematic technique, but there is very little about it in this text, and she inevitably returns to themes as major points of discussion.

In contrast, Thackway discusses traditional, thematic approaches while also acknowledging the technique and concerns of African directors independent of their categorization as African filmmakers. In her useful introduction Thackway challenges the qualification of Sub-Saharan Africa into linguistic categories—anglophone, francophone, and lusophone—rightly arguing that these distinctions are convenient colonial constructs, but that a minority of the peoples of these regions actually uses European languages with any regularity. Her argument is more lengthy and detailed than Diop's cursory discussion of "diglossia," in which native African languages are used alongside European ones in African cinema. Thackway explains that the term "francophone" refers to a common socio-political heritage, rather than as proof of the primacy of

France as a cultural reference. She is concerned with the traditional preoccupations often delineated in this type of text—themes that she refers to as “representation, identity and voice”—but she enlarges this view to explain how African filmmakers challenge European stereotypes and empower their audiences through the filmic medium. Her chapters are well organized and detailed. In the first chapter, she situates African film in its broader, predominantly European context, and illustrates how current critical cinematic theory may be applied to African cinema. In chapter 2 she explores representation, identity, and voice—how filmmakers use the medium to affirm African identity while challenging negative Western stereotypes. Chapter 3 shows how filmmakers’ cultural identity is developed and how elements of African oral tradition are integrated into film. Chapter 4 is a discussion of memory and history in which the author illustrates how colonial powers repressed or misrepresented African history, and how African directors reappropriate their history and interpret it from an African perspective. Chapter 5 contains an important, but often overlooked, aspect of francophone African film—African films set in Europe, which give audiences a view of the immigrant experience and explore the notion of African identity rarely treated in film, either African or European. Chapter 6 gives women in film their rightful due, exploring themes of empowerment in films by both female and male directors. Special attention is given to three prominent women directors—Safi Faye (Senegal), Anne Laure Folly (Togo), and Fanta Régina Nacro (Burkina Faso).

Diop devotes several paragraphs to problems of production and distribution among francophone-African filmmakers—again, an important point. Receiving little or no funding from their country of origin, these filmmakers must seek financing through the French Minister of Cooperation, and in many cases, what is asked of them by the French government is “authenticity,” which means depicting scenes of agricultural life, indigenous spiritual and cultural rituals, and native dance and music. In other words, it is difficult and sometimes controversial for African artists to depict more modern concerns—post-colonial political and economic strife, the AIDS epidemic, and loss of cultural identity. However, much of this information seems anecdotal, and the text itself is poorly organized and referenced. Long lists of filmmakers and their countries are given in the introductory chapter instead of as a filmography at the end of the text. The filmography that is given at the end includes only the 15 films actually discussed in the text, and then referenced only by director’s name and title of film. It would be helpful to have the country of origin here for quick reference. A short discussion of women filmmakers—Sarah Maldoror (Guadeloupe) and Flora Gomes (Guineau-Bissau) is included in the second chapter on history, but it seems an afterthought or a duty fulfilled, after nearly the entire chapter is devoted to Ousmane Sembène (an important pioneer in African cinema, no doubt). Certain subject groupings are curious and confusing. Why, for example, does Diop include “New Aesthetics” (ostensibly a discussion of directorial technique, distribution, and production) in a chapter largely devoted to gender and homosexuality? Although as stated above, Diop does a creditable job of illustrating themes, some of his analyses are obvious, even to the uninitiated student or scholar, such as when she comments that “...a distinction between documentaries and fiction must be made as the two do not necessarily play similar roles” (66).

The difference between the two books in terms of source material and references is telling. Diop provides nearly ninety sources, but in roughly one quarter of these (many of them journal articles) no date of publication is given, making them difficult to find if one chooses to conduct further research. No still photos of the films are included, which might help to illustrate some of the thematic discussions and spark interest in viewing the films discussed. Thackway, on the

other hand, is thorough and painstaking in her references. She includes an extensive filmography (well over 100 films are discussed in her text), including details such as country of origin, distributors, running time, and medium. The bibliography of reference works is detailed and up to date, and includes a wealth of sources for further study. Since these films are sometimes not easy to find, most helpful is the contact information for major distributors of francophone-African films included at the end. Reference notes appear in the right margins of each page (which I found less distracting than footnotes but more easily accessible than endnotes), and there are dozens of movie stills and reproductions of movie posters to illustrate technical points and key thematic elements. As an introduction to francophone-African cinema, Diop's text is sufficient in spite of its weaknesses, whereas Thackway's text is an excellent source in every regard—as an introduction to the subject, as a reference for serious scholars, and as an assigned text in an undergraduate or graduate course.

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