When the new African cinema comes to Canada this month (April 24-30 in Montreal, earlier May elsewhere), Canadian cinephiles will be able to screen a continental cinema that is vibrant, diverse and provocative.

What characterizes the films we are likely to see during the 5th Journées du Cinéma Africain (JCA) in Montreal and on tour in other Canadian cities? What observable trends highlight current African production, now in its third decade? Screenings at film festivals in Africa (FESPACO 87 and 89) and Europe (Amiens '87 and '88, and Nantes '88) reveal the following:

CURRENT TRENDS
- The revitalization of feature-film industries in English-speaking Africa, especially in Nigeria and Ghana. Nigeria's private-industry formula films in Yoruba left the Ouagadougou site of the '89 FESPACO, pan-African film and TV festival) audiences in stitches. Ghana's rebirth is spearheaded by the government-funded Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC), working closely with private film companies.

The thrust of this new dynamism is exemplified by Heritage Africa (Kwab Ansah, whose earlier Love Brewed in an African Pot successfully toured English-speaking Canada as a fund-raiser for the NGO, CUSO). Heritage: Africa became the first film from an anglophone African country to win the grand prize at Ouagadougou's prestigious FESPACO (1989), John Akomfreh's Testament (previous film, Handsworth Songs) has been praised for its lyrical qualities. Both are re-interpretations of the period when Kwame Nkrumah dominated Ghana's indigenous political scene - the first prior to independence in 1957 and the second a decade later.

But it is surely to Nigeria that the future belongs. New government policies in both culture and mass communications and a revitalized Nigeria Film Corporation (NFC, under filmmaker Eddie Ugbomah) have already led to nearly finished, sorely needed film lab in Jos (also headquarters for the NFC) and an imminent decision about a possible international film festival within two years. Nigeria already has Africa's most prolific filmmaker: Ola Balogun, with Black Goddess, Oumou Manu and other titles. The Yoruba-language films (with subtitles in English or French) have been joined by controversial Maitetoure (Sale's first Hausaspeaking feature), a bloody re-enactment of the religious fanaticism of a Muslim sect terrorising Kano to the point where the Governor called in the Nigerian Army for pacification - shades of Jim Jones' Jonestown and the Ayatollah's attacks on Rushdie.

First features have emerged from Zimbabwe and Kenya, both locations for recently successful Hollywood films (Cry Freedom and Out of Africa). Both have recently established specialized schools in film and TV production.

The evolution of a new generation of filmmakers whose trademark is low-budget, personal statement films and in whom there is high expectation from critics and authorities. Included in this group of creators are Sissoko of Mali, with Fissam; Ouadiego of Burkina Faso, (Yaya - Grandmother); and Gaston Kaboure, also of Burkina Faso, with Zam Boke. All are second features. Both Burkinefilmakers use a highly personalized, ethno-dramatic style: dramatic re-enactment characterized by long shots with long takes, slow pace and the natural beauty of rural decor. Kaboure's leadership role in the rebirth of the Federation of Pan-African Filmmakers (FEPACI) assures him an important place in current African cinema.

Sassoko, on the other hand, has opted for urban decors of Mali's capital, Bamako, in his low-budget films. All were prizewinners at Ouaga and should find their way to Canada mid-year either through the JCA, or the World Film Festival.

South-South co-productions across national and continental boundaries, illustrated by Burkina Faso, with joint ventures with Cuba and other countries. Interest-free loans by the Burkinkîbe government and collaboration between public and private sectors, perpectively seen by authorities as necessary for the survival and growth of Burkinkîbe cinema. Ghana, with its revitalized GFIC, is also active in international co-productions, involving both African (Gerima, Ansah) and non-African (Herzog) directors.

Camp de Tiratoire (Ousmane Sembene - the 'Peop' of African cinema - and Thierno Fatty Sow), which received a special prize at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival, is included in this group of creators.

Tania Rogers in John Akomfreh's Testament

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Venice Festival, was a co-production of Senegal, Algeria and Tunisia at both the creative and financial levels. And the two new, hedging film countries (Kenya and Zimbabwe), already used for shooting Hollywood and European productions (and Canadian - ed.), can be expected to profit from co-productions.

- Unabashedly commercial films, with possible international mass appeal often shot on location in glamorous urban areas (eg. Abidjan, Ivory Coast) and often with humour too seldom found in more politically or more culturally motivated films. These films are found in decided capitlist states: Bil Pessavre (Henri Duparc), Bosjé (Gnoan M' Bala); and Les Gistoriers (Sim Bakala) all of the Ivory Coast, as well as the productions from Nigeria noted previously.

Can we now expect to see African versions of

Coming To America, Out of Africa. Cry Freedom or perhaps The Revenge Against Tarzan?

- Proliferation of complementary African Diaspora films or Proliferation of a complementary African-Diaspora cinema by: 1) African-born filmmakers living abroad for diverse reasons (economic, technological, cultural, political) and 2) African-origin, African-oriented filmmakers born outside Africa. (Creators based in Europe - France, the U.K., Belgium, Holland - all countries with a colonial past; and in the New World - the U.S., Canada, Brazil, Cuba - all with legacies of slavery and colonialism.

As well, in the Creole-speaking sides of the Indian Ocean and Caribbean, filmmakers are reinterpreting African history and the traumatic dislocation and nomadry outside Africa. Saramurin (Med Hondo, Mauritania-France) and Testament (John Akomfrah, Ghana-U.K.) (on the earlier Herriot 300 Years (Halle Gerima, Ethiopia-U.S.A. ) as revisionist cinematic products challenging the traditional Eurocentric interpretations of African history.

Two of the most important films produced by and about the African Diaspora in the Caribbean are emotionally moving, aesthetically innovative and historically accurate. Rue Cote Negue (Zeuxian Palzy, Martinique-France), is a touching portrait of a young man struggling for development and coming of age in the French colony of Martinique in the 1930s. The earlier classic Olof France (Sergio Gark, Cuba - with struggling mid-1960s in New York) is undoubtedly the most important, analytically significant film ever made on African slavery - and resistance to slavery - in the New World. The film attains historical importance because of its innovative style in demystifying the romantic depiction of slavery in abolitionist novels such as Uncle Tom's Cabin and Frencho - hence the film's title - and hundreds of the pro-White planters' South until Black Civil War and reconstruction films, Gone with the Wind and Birth of a Nation being two of the least subtle examples.

A common denominator of these African-Diaspora films, no matter the birthplace of the filmmaker, is an Afrocentric sensitivity. Those in the Caribbean draw upon a knowledge of oppressive and repressive political and economic realities imposed and legitimized by European colonization and endorsement of Africans. All in all these African-Diaspora filmmakers, with access to better material conditions (technological and economic) than those currently available in Africa, have used varying aesthetic techniques to analyze African peoples' resistance to domination - wherever. All these films deserve widespread distribution, commercial and non-commercial, than they have thus far received.

London-based film cooperatives (CEDDO, Sankofa, Black Audio) with multi-year subsidization for production and distribution form Channel 4, are critically analyzing current, local and international exploitation through such sensitive issues as race, gender, class, identity search and sexual preference.

In Paris, filmmakers are continuing the predominance of French bureaucrats and technicians at all stages of the creative process (pre-production, production, post-production). Lost we forget, most films from Francophone Africa are, in fact, African-French co-productions. Numerous filmmakers have dual addresses in Paris and in Africa.

- A deeply feminist - not always female - commitment to human and equal rights for both genders.

Marta Negre (Flora Gomes, a male), Giova Riosau's first feature, treating the collective struggle for political independence after five centuries of Portuguese rule; the...
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