Nairobi-based Female Filmmakers and the 'Creative Hustle': gender and film production between the local and the transnational

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Candidate Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines Nairobi-based female filmmakers and is situated critically between women's cinema studies, African screen media studies, transnational film studies, and creative and cultural industries. I seek to examine and explain the factors that have allowed for the highly unusual flourishing of women in a global industry (the film industry) that is male dominated in almost every context and circumstance. In Nairobi, the most critically acclaimed filmmakers – both directors and producers – are women, and yet this phenomenon has received remarkably little attention. This is the first full length study of Nairobi-based female filmmakers and the industry in which they work. I examine Nairobi as a locus of cross border artistic, commercial, and institutional networks that directly contributes to the flourishing of a female filmmaker centric screen media culture. These filmmakers work within an environment of media convergence where they fluidly shift between features, television, documentary and other forms, and I argue because of their skills and social positioning as middle class and transnationally connected, they are able to benefit from this environment of media convergence. I move beyond a nationally bounded approach to focus on transnational connectivity in terms of screen media production, financing, and circulation. I study locally based and transnationally connected modes of production such as One Fine Day Films and Docubox (the East African Documentary film fund) and explore how female filmmakers negotiate transnational circuits of cinema. A key argument of this thesis is that to understand Nairobi-based female filmmakers they must be studied from both a local and a transnational perspective. Throughout this thesis I foreground the agency and entrepreneurialism of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and show that they have built a vibrant screen media industry, despite facing precarious circumstances, because of their shared willingness to creatively and entrepreneurially hustle.

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List of Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
BEKE	Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment
DFFB	German Academy for Film and Television Berlin
DIFF	Durban International Film Festival
FCAT	African Film Festival of Cordoba
FESPACO	Festival Pan-Africain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDFA	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam
IFFR	International Film Festival Rotterdam
IIFF	International Images Film Festival for Women
KFC	Kenya Film Commission
KIFF	Kenya International Film Festival
KIMC	Kenya Institute of Mass Communication
KFCB	Kenya Film Classification Board
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OFDF	One Fine Day Films
OSIEA	Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa
SFF	Slum Film Festival
TIFF	Toronto International Film Festival
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VOD	Video on demand
VOK	Voice of Kenya
ZIFF	Zanzibar International Film Festival

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Introduction

In 2002 Judy Kibinge's debut feature film *Dangerous Affair* burst onto the Kenyan film scene and sparked a new era of filmmaking in Nairobi. The film tells the story of Kui, a beautiful woman who has returned home to Nairobi from New York City looking to get married, and who falls for and then marries the notorious playboy Murags. When Murags' ex-girlfriend Rose also moves back to Nairobi the two begin an affair, and while Rose and Murags end up together at the close of the film, they do so as social outcasts because of their shameful behaviour. *Dangerous Affair* was a local success and "managed to secure distribution through local cinemas, and even establish a presence within Nairobi's VCD piracy networks" (McNamara 2016, 24) alongside winning Best East African Production at the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) in 2003. Kibinge's career is one that has been marked by transmedia fluency, and she has been active as a director, producer, and writer in Nairobi for over 15 years; her career has spanned feature fiction films, documentaries, television, and commissioned corporate work and, additionally, she is now Executive Director of the East African documentary film fund Docubox, which she also founded. Films were being made in Kenya before *Dangerous Affair*, including *Saikati* (Mungai, 1992) and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (Kinyanjui, 1995), but it was *Dangerous Affair* that marked the start of a filmmaking renewal in which women have taken the lead (McNamara 2016; Dovey 2012a), a shift made all the more significant because of the historical marginalisation of women in African film industries (cf. Dovey 2012a). It is this movement of women filmmakers in Nairobi that is the subject of this thesis.

The success of women filmmakers in Nairobi is all the more significant considering that women make up less that 10% of film directors globally (Dovey 2012a, 21). Sobering statistics about the participation of women in global film industries include the British Film Industry's *Statistical Yearbook*, whose 2013 edition noted that women directed only 7.8% of films that year (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015, 7), and Marth M. Lauzen's most recent "Celluloid Celing" report, which indicated that women were directors of only 7% of the top 250 grossing films of 2016 in America (2017, 2). African male directors have been making

feminist films since the 1960s (Thackway 2003; Dovey 2012a), and, as African screen media scholar Lindiwe Dovey notes, it is "important to recognise how rare it is in the history of cinema that filmmakers from a particular region have *collectively* paid such attention to upholding the value of women and to critiquing patriarchy" (2012a, 19; emphasis hers). Yet, despite the strong feminist stance of much African filmmaking, women have not had nearly as sustained a presence behind the camera as their male counterparts. African film and cultural studies scholars David Murphy and Patrick Williams note that the *Directory of African Film-makers and Films* (1992) includes only eight female directors – in a list of more than 250 – which reveals how few women have been operating in African cinema historically (2007, 5). In Nairobi, the most successful and critically acclaimed filmmakers – both directors and producers – are women, and yet this creative formation remains woefully understudied, receiving only passing notes in the literature for being "interesting" (Bisschoff 2012, 64; Bisschoff 2015, 73; Dovey 2012a, 22; Wenner 2015, 190). Studying the exceptionalism of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is all the more important given this global context of the marginalisation of women in key filmmaking positions.

In this thesis, I seek to examine and explain the factors that have allowed for this highly unusual flourishing of women in a global industry (the film industry) that is male dominated in almost every context and circumstance. My central research question is: to what extent can the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement? Each chapter will approach this question from a different angle:

1. To what extent are Nairobi-based female filmmakers united by shared use of aesthetics or themes in their screen media productions?
2. To what extent can Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement because of where they are based?
3. To what extent can Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement because they share common transnational connections?

4. To what extent can Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement because their creative works circulate in the same way in Nairobi?

5. To what extent can Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement because they all describe their work as involving 'hustling'?

I examine the confluence of factors – on scales both local and transnational – that have allowed Nairobi-based female filmmakers to defy the marginalisation of women in the global economy of filmmaking and emerge as a powerful force in contemporary Nairobi.

Part 1: Gender and feminist theory

1.1 Defining gender

A core aim of this project is to interrogate the role of gendered identity in film production and circulation. Doing so requires a complex understanding of what gender is and means, and, in the first place, a recognition that gender and biological sex are distinct from one another, with gendered identity being a social construction. The revolutionary ideas of feminist philosopher Judith Butler are critical to such recognition and to beginning to understand the complex ways in which gender is *produced*.

Butler argues in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999 [1990]) that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1999, 33). She also argues against defining "women" as a category for this "effects a political closure on the kinds of experiences articulable as part of a feminist discourse. When the category is understood as representing a set of values or dispositions, it becomes normative in character and, hence, exclusionary in principle" (1990, 325). These ideas were ground-breaking in their time and now the idea of the performed nature of gender underpins thinking on both gender and feminism.

Any study by a white Canadian scholar, such as myself, about the industry and activities of women of colour in Africa needs to engage not only with white

feminist theory, however, but with the now established critiques of this theory by postcolonial theorists. Postcolonial feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty's path-breaking article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," originally published in 1984, in turn raises the issue that "Western feminist discourse … defines third-world women as subjects *outside* of social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted as women *through* these very structures," a mode of theorising which "ultimately robs them of their historical and political *agency*" (1988, 79-80; emphasis hers).[1] Postcolonial literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) is important here because she points out that while it is beneficial to study previously ignored subjects, it is possible that these studies will replicate the same subject constructions that existed in colonial and imperialist discourses, and therefore continue to dominate and mute subaltern voices. She urges us to ask about the consciousness of the subaltern woman and to speak to, rather than for, her (1988, 295). Addressing Mohanty and Spivak's concerns means complicating categories such as 'third-world women' and thinking about identity in a way that notes that racial, class, and gendered identities are not separate from one another but rather exist "as part of a permeable interwoven relationality" (Shohat 2006, 2).

Intersectionality is a key concept in current feminism and a cornerstone in transnational feminism, a theoretical and activist movement and the most contemporary form of globally minded feminism. Transnational feminist scholars and activists Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt argue that "we cannot address the issue of patriarchy and women's rights without talking about imperialism and racism, as well as issues related to class, economic exploitation, and struggles for a more just and equitable distribution of resources" (2009, 18). Transnational feminists Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan use the term "transnational" because it "signals attention to uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital" and because it

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[1] In a later period, Mohanty coined the concept of "feminism without borders" – a term she coined by drawing on the spirit of Doctors without Borders to "stress that our most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (2003, 1-2). This sort of feminism does not ignore difference; rather, "it acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent," and notes all the borders that exist between people be they race, class, gender, or nation "and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division" (Mohanty 2003, 2).

gestures toward "our need to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race, and gender" (2000, n.p.). This is in contrast to the term "international," which they argue "is based on existing configurations of nation-states as discrete and sovereign entities" (2000, n.p.). In addition to paying attention to intersectionality, a feminist analysis needs to avoid falling into the trap of Eurocentrism, which culture and film studies scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam define as "the procrustean forcing of cultural heterogeneity into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world's center of gravity, as ontological 'reality' to the rest of the world's shadow" (1994, 1-2).

Gender, like any other marker of identity, "comes into being in social relation to other categories" (McClintock 1995, 9), thus gender is both socially constructed and relational. This leads to the point that the very categories of 'white,' 'black,' 'male,' and 'female' (and any other form of social categorisation, such as someone's nationality) must be historicised and their evolution into important categories of social organisation must be critically and relationally studied (McClintock 1995, 16). These categories are not simply descriptive, and instead "are constituted politically and are constitutive rather than reflective of identity" (Shepherd 2013, 3). The underlying politics in this categorisation becomes clear when we note that "there is no thinkable specification of selfhood that does not have reference to other people, known or imagined" (Cockburn 1998, 212). Identity is produced relationally, in complex and often conflicting ways; it "does not simply happen in the privatised realm of the subject's relation to itself" (Ahmed 2000, 7).

1.2 The development of gender and feminist theory in Africa

The concept of gender as it has been *applied to* (rather than *appropriated within*) African contexts has been inextricably linked with development since the 1970s. There have been several movements in gendered development theory, starting with the theory of Women in Development (WID). This school of thought was initiated in the 1970s by American liberal feminists, and its premise was that aid practice has a male-bias, and overcoming this bias would "automatically" benefit women (Koczberski 1998, 397). However, this effort on the part of European and

American women at integrating women into development practices was flawed because it ignored the specific socio-cultural and historic circumstances in which diverse groups of women live (Koczberski 1998, 397). A Marxist alternative, called Women and Development (WAD) emerged in the late 1970s and it explicitly focused on the importance of class, yet, like WID, it still homogenised women (Rathgeber 1990, 493). The theory of Gender and Development (GAD) emerged in the 1980s as a response to the shortcomings of both previous schools of thought, and it adopted a relational approach to gender and looked at "relations between men and women" (Cornwall 1997, 9). Anthropologist Andrea Cornwall critiques all three development theories – WID, WAD, and GAD – because, in all of them, "men emerge as a potent, homogenous category that is invariably treated as problematic" (Cornwall 2000, 19) and argues that "it is time to move beyond the old fixed ideas about gender roles and about universal male domination" (Cornwall 1997, 12). Furthermore, these theories tend to create a "woman-as-victim narrative," that "situates African women as powerless, inviting intervention on their behalf" (Cornwall 2005, 1). Mohanty succinctly points out the problem with homogenous categorisation: "the use of universal groupings for descriptive purposes" is not in itself problematic; the problem arises "when 'women of Africa' becomes a homogenous sociological grouping characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness (or even strengths)" (1988, 67-68). The issue arises when individuality and subjectivity are erased in favour of simplistic and homogenising categorisations.

With this developmental understanding of African women in mind it is easier to understand why some African women scholars strongly reacted against a form of feminism that they saw as a 'Western' invention. Before delving into this material, it is first necessary to unpack that implications of the term 'Western.' The Eurocentric idea that the world revolves around or exists in opposition to 'the West' must be deconstructed, and this also involves de-homogenising and particularising the vague space of 'white Euro-America' to which the term refers. Media scholars Gholam Khiabany and Annabelle Sreberny argue, in the context of media theory, against calls for "de-Westernization" (2013). They argue this trend divides the world too neatly into the 'West' and the 'non-West,' and, more

fundamentally, "the call for indigenisation is too vague, creating a simple mirror opposite of Eurocentrism" (2013, 484). Furthermore, "the blind spot of binary thinking is to ignore history, the long patterns of global interconnectedness that have mutually formed the West/Rest" (Khiabany and Sreberny 2013, 476-477). Thus, understanding how the term 'Western' is used in any particular context, rather than assuming a monolithic meaning for it, is essential if we want to steer clear of reductive Eurocentric binaries. The work of anthropologist James Ferguson on the different applications of the term 'modernity' is useful here. He argues that anthropologists, quick to challenge legacies of derogatory scholarship calling Africa primitive, "are eager to say how modern Africa is," while on the other hand, "Africans who lament that their life circumstances are not modern enough are not talking about cultural practices; they speak instead of what they view as shamefully inadequate socioeconomic conditions and their low global rank in relation to other places" (2005, 174). This contradiction arises because "the two claims have different referents" (Ferguson 2005, 174). While scholars can debate the merits and pitfalls of modernisation theory and argue for the existence of "alternative modernities" at the same time "the myth of modernization was never only an academic myth" (Ferguson 1999, 14). Applying Ferguson's logic I would argue that while 'the West' is not a monolithic and homogenous entity, to 'be Western' clearly has meaning, and this meaning changes according to context. Because of the instability of the term, and its multiple referents, I will place 'Western' in inverted commas throughout this thesis.

With this understanding of the term 'Western' in mind, I now return to unpacking why some African women scholars opposed a form of feminism that they saw as a 'Western' invention. For instance, the celebrated Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo said, in 1989, that feminism is an "embarrassing Western philosophy" and "the destroyer of homes" (quoted in Kolawole 2002, 93). Some scholars (cf. Kolawole 2002, 93; Arndt 2002, 32) argue that 'Western' feminism is problematically imposed in Africa because it fails to account for the lived differences between 'Western' feminists (it is implied that a Western feminist is a white Western feminist) and 'African' women. This argument, however, rests on the flawed premise that there is a definitive 'Western feminism' and a homogenous

group of 'African women.' Literature scholar Susan Arndt operates with a suspect politics for she argues that "each and every white, as part of Western society, independent of their approach to feminist practice, still profits from, and bears responsibility for, the racist discourse in the world and its economic and social effects" (2005, 162). This dramatic simplification fails to account for more varied forms of discrimination, such as colourism, and it eliminates all individual agency. Furthermore, these discourses on 'Western feminism' deny the variation of feminism *within* the wide geographic region that is broadly termed 'the West.' There is no one feminism in the Euro-American world and, following this, there can be no singular 'Western feminism' to exist as a counter to a singular 'African feminism.'

Speaking back to 'Western feminism' has led some scholars to question "the extent to which reading African lives through the lens of 'gender' works to obscure more culturally salient axes of difference: principally wealth and seniority" (Cornwall 2005, 4). The most notable scholar to argue that gender does obscure more relevant social differences is Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997; 2003). She argues that gender as a hierarchical social marker does not exist in Yoruba society, and that it is rather age/generation that is the most significant social organiser. She strongly opposes the concept of 'feminism' because she sees it as a 'Western' importation that cannot correspond with 'African' realities – which constructs an artificial binary between 'Africa' and 'the West.' Furthermore, her study is about *Yoruba* society, and yet she applies her conclusions to the whole of Africa, which disregards the particularity of Yoruba experience and how it may differ from other African contexts. Additionally, in her attempt to "articulate an account of identity and social dynamics in opposition to the western norm" Oyewùmí represses the internal differences within Yoruba society and instead makes it static and homogenous (Bakare-Yusuf 2003, 8). Furthermore, Oyewùmí ignores the fact that "for millennia, Africa has been part of Europe as Europe has been part of Africa" meaning that it is impossible to see either location as wholly distinct from the other (Bakare-Yusuf 2003, 11). Cultures do not exist in isolation from each other, but rather they are shaped through centuries of interaction,

making the idea of 'authentic' isolatable culture pure fantasy (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 92).

Other theories of 'African feminism' include Nigerian Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's theory of 'African womanism' (1985) which celebrates "Black womandom" and focuses both on the relationships between men and women and the place of both in global power structures (as quoted in Kolawole 2002, 95); Catherine Acholonu's 'Motherism,' which argues "an Afrocentric feminist theory… must be anchored on the matrix of *motherhood*" (Acholonu 1995, 110; emphasis hers); and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's 'Stiwanism' (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) – a concept she coined in order to "bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 229). Trinidadian literary scholar Carole Boyce Davies has argued that 'African feminism' is specifically contextual and intersectional, and that it "examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and does not simply import Western women's agendas" (quoted in Guy-Sheftall 2003, 32). Women's studies scholar Obioma Nnaemeka's (2003) articulation of 'African feminism' as 'nego-feminism' (a feminism without ego advocating negotiation) also points towards the importance of negotiation and compromise between men and women. Nnaemeka has also noted the central importance of action in these contexts, arguing that "for African women, *to be or think feminist is to act feminist*" (2005, 32; emphasis hers). Drawing on Claude Ake's theorising on 'building the indigenous' where "the indigenous refers to whatever the people consider important to their lives, whatever they regard as an authentic expression of themselves" (Ake as quoted in Nnaemeka 2003, 376-377), she suggests a feminist practice that moves beyond debates on 'authentic' versus 'hybrid' culture – which is crucial given the problem of essentialising 'African' feminism in opposition to 'Western' feminism.

The theory discussed thus far points towards the importance of acknowledging intersectionality, location and positionality in feminist thinking. Thus, conducting research in Africa on women of colour, a white and non-African scholar such as myself must pay particular attention to contextual and local

feminist knowledge instead of importing any feminist paradigm or theory wholesale. A word of caution is necessary here, however, for,

> The quest for "authenticity", assertions of cultural difference and attempts to formulate "native" conceptions of knowledge, all too often reduce forms of culture and identity into singular and all-inclusive constructs. A parallel process is to construct 'insiders' as having better knowledge and understanding than 'outsiders', no matter what theoretical approach they use. (Khiabany and Sreberny 2013, 478)

In terms of my positionality, I agree with gender studies scholar Cynthia Cockburn who argues "that in all kinds of research it is more productive to acknowledge the active presence of the researcher than to wish it away" (1998, 4). Acknowledging this subjectivity increases the objectivity of the research by not obscuring this kind of "evidence" (Harding 1987, 9), and is a central tenet of feminist research practice. In line with this acknowledgment, I have attempted wherever possible in this thesis – for example, in the Research Methods section of this Introduction, and in other chapters – to reflect on my own positionality and process in undertaking this research.

Part 2: Gender analysis and African film scholarship

Gender has received remarkably little attention in the scholarship on African film, and most of what does exist looks at gender analysis from a textual perspective. The first volume to focus on gender analysis of African film from a textual perspective was *African Cinema: Postcolonial and Feminist Readings* (1999), edited by African literature and film scholar Kenneth W. Harrow. Because of the relative scarcity of literature on the subject, *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film* (Azodo and Eke 2007a) is an important text; however, despite being notable for its focus on gender and sexuality, it is only of limited use because of several major methodological flaws. For instance, it aims to highlight the current lack of scholarship on homoeroticism in "gender studies in African literature and African cinema" (Azodo and Eke 2007b, 1), but it only examines films from North Africa and Francophone West Africa. Secondly, the authors make sweeping generalisations, such as declaring that "homosexuality has been better and more profoundly addressed in film than in literature in Africa" (Azodo and Eke 2007c,

231), without making a comparison between literature and film.[2] Finally, in an analysis of *Finzan* (Sissoko, 1990)*, Touki Bouki* (Mambéty, 1973)*,* and *Hyènes* (Mambéty, 1992), film historian Victoria Pasley argues that "neither filmmaker presents us with an alternative model for women who wish to pursue a different life from currently prescribed roles—a necessary choice in the struggle for equal rights" (2007, 318), and yet the *most recent* film in her selection was made fifteen year prior to her chapter. Thus, she fails to account for both the historical evolution of African filmmaking and wider social, political, and economic changes across the continent. She presents a portrait of an unchanging and ahistorical Africa – something completely at odds with her stated politics of promoting equal rights for African women (though clearly within a developmentalist discourse that homogenises 'African women'). On a textual level, Pasley ignores changes in representations of sexuality in African film over time. Francophone literature and cinema scholar Alexie Tcheuyap discusses precisely these sorts of changes, and argues that in contrast to the veiling of sexuality in films from the 20th century, there is a "new discourse surrounding sexuality" in African films where "African filmmakers are stripping men of their dominant status" (2011, 201).[3]

In line with the recognition that gender scholarship must include men as well as women, there is a small body of scholarship addressing masculinity in African film. The first anthology to do so is *To Change Reels*: *Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (2003) edited by literature scholars Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela.[4] The bulk of the book focuses on historical perspectives on film, but it contains two articles, one by writer Laura Twiggs (2003) and one by writer and

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[2] In contrast, historian Marc Epprecht argues that the literature of the late colonial and early independence period often attempted "the remasculinization" of African men "through heavy-handed portrayals of African men's heterosexual virility" (2008, 136), and he specifically focuses on how these myths denied the existence of homosexuality in African contexts. His work demonstrates, in astonishing historical and geographical breadth, how "same-sex sexuality has been raised in African literature, film, and theatre by an extremely diverse group of people over more than five decades" (Epprecht 2008, 157), and thus convincingly refutes Azodo and Eke's thesis.

[3] This new and freer sexuality discussed by Tcheuyap has also been the focus of a significant amount of critical attention – particularly around the films *Karmen Geï* and *Les Saignantes* (cf. on *Karmen Geï* Garritano 2003; Dovey 2009; on *Les Saignantes* Harrow 2010; Diabate 2013).

[4] The trend towards masculinity studies within the wider realm of Africanist scholarship began with *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (2001) edited by Robert Morrell. This was soon followed by *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (2003) edited by Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher. The trend continued with *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (2005) edited by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell and *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa* (2008) edited by Egodi Uchendu for CODESRIA.

film critic Kgafela oa Magogodi(2003), that focus on sexuality and gender. The most comprehensive book on African masculinities to explicitly focus on film and literature is literature and film scholar Lahoucine Ouzgane's edited volume *Men in African Film and Fiction* (2011a). The mission of this book is to re-formulate gender and masculinity theory for the African context in relation to the arts (Ouzgane 2011b, 6-7). However, as Dovey points out in a review, the book has "no sustained analysis of Nollywood films" (2011, 151) and few authors engage with contemporary material (2011, 147) – two critical oversights in a book that aims to create new understandings of gender in contemporary African film and literature.

One problem with much of the analysis of gender and African film is that studies focus on a small number of textual case studies, making it difficult to assess cross continental trends across time. Within this context, African film scholar Lizelle Bisschoff's PhD thesis "Women in African Cinema: An Aesthetic and Thematic Analysis of Filmmaking by Women in Francophone West Africa and Lusophone and Anglophone Southern Africa" (2009) is valuable for its continental scope and breadth of analysis. A downside to this cross-continental approach, however, is that it does not have the space to ground each individual filmmaker within her specific context of work, something which my thesis strives to do by making Nairobi-based filmmakers the focus.

If one considers Nollywood and other popular forms of filmmaking in Africa, there is a large body of scholarship that considers representations of women in these films (c.f. Garritano 2000; Anyanwu 2003; Kwansah-Aidoo and Owusu 2012; Garritano 2013). Communications scholar Chukwuma Anyanwu argues that most women in Nigerian video films are depicted without agency, as victims to the whims of men, or as "catalysts to misfortune" (2003, 87). However, instead of offering a sophisticated theoretical understanding of representational strategies, Anyanwu speculates and blames the negative portrayal of women on men saying: "this negative depiction [of women] is an attempt to acquiesce to the dictates of the male-dominated audience. Producers believe that they can only make money if they pander to the male ego, through such negative portrayals" (2003, 87). Anyanwu presents no evidence of discussions with any directors, producers or other industry members, and makes no mention of discussion with any actual

audience members. Thus, this statement is pure speculation and does little to explain the actual mechanics of the Nigerian film industry – including the fact that the majority of audience members are women (Haynes 2007a, 2).

While a filmmaker's gender does not predetermine their representational strategy, it can bias analysis, as demonstrated in media scholar Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and film scholar Joyce Osei Owusu's analysis of Ghanaian filmmaker Shirley Frimpong-Manso's film *Life and Living It* (2009). They celebrate Frimpong-Manso as a feminist filmmaker because, they say, she "challenges the *status quo* of gender relationships usually portrayed in commercial African feature films" (2012, 67) by having 'independent' women characters. In explaining why, at the end of the film, each of these supposedly independent women ends up in a 'traditional' heteronormative relationship they say Frimpong-Manso's feminism is one that "explicitly favours equal power sharing between men and women, rather than shifting power away from men to women" (2012, 62). Rather, I would argue that this sort of film follows in the tradition of filmmaking that feminist theorist bell hooks has called "mock feminism" – films that centre on women characters (and have women involved in their production), but nonetheless present women using the same old sexist imagery, and, even less subversively, get celebrated and marketed as feminist work for women (2009, 65-75). Having a woman behind the camera, or anywhere in the production process, is not an automatic guarantee of feminism or even-handed portrayals of gender relations, and thus female filmmakers have to be held up to the same level of critique as their male counterparts (cf. Kaplan 2003, 25).

While, as I have highlighted so far in this section, there is a rich body of literature discussing representations of women in African screen media, there has been comparatively little research done to date to understand how the process of making films is gendered. The first volume to address these dynamics directly is feminist film scholar Beti Ellerson's *Sisters of the Screen* (2000), which is a collection of 36 interviews with African and diasporan African female film practitioners. This volume both concretely demonstrates that there *are* women

working in African film industries,[5] and it is a treasure trove of primary material on female filmmaking experiences in Africa in the late 1990s. One problem with the book, however, is its slightly utopian tendency that obstructs some of the problems women face in filmmaking. This tension is touched on by Guadeloupan filmmaker Sarah Maldoror – the first woman to have directed a fiction feature film in Africa (*Sambizanga*, 1972). When Ellerson told Maldoror the book's title, Maldoror replied: "'But we are not sisters, really, we are each in our own isolation making films'" (2000, xviii). According to Maldoror, the shared experience of being 'women' did not result in the solidarity necessary to be seen as a collective of filmmakers. A sisterhood without substance is no sisterhood at all. In this thesis I adopt the same questioning stance as Maldoror and do not assume that Nairobi-based female filmmakers are a movement because they are all women, but rather question to what extent they can be thought of as a group, collective, or movement.

The next important book that came out on the topic was African film scholar Melissa Thackway's *Africa Shoots Back* (2003), which includes a chapter on women filmmakers and womanist film that combines textual analysis and interview material. Thackway is perhaps too optimistic when she argues that "the emergence of women's filmmaking has enabled women directors everywhere to deconstruct stereotypical representations of female characters that are generally filmed from a male point of view" (2003, 147), for this does not account for the power relationships inherent in media technologies. We must note with caution that "media technologies are not neutral," and "through their very form, [they] impose new social relations" (Ginsburg et al. 2002, 19). Questions of access and hierarchy exist within communities, and therefore all the problems associated with filming or recording 'others' do not disappear simply because the person wielding the camera is an 'insider' to the community (Turner 2002, 78). Furthermore, in a discussion of the work of Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, world cinema scholar Shohini Chaudhuri notes how we must be attuned to his status as a middle-class urbanite filming villagers in isolated rural areas, and watch for the potential

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[5] This is a claim that other authors seem content to ignore – see, for example, *Postcolonial Cinema: Ten Directors* (Murphy and Williams 2007), which only includes one female director on the basis that no other female director has made more than two fiction films. For a further analysis of Murphy and Williams see Chapter Two.

ethical pitfalls that can come along with such an encounter due to the varying relative levels of power and privilege of each participant (2005, 77). Thus, an intersectional approach is essential to conducting research on contemporary filmmakers of all genders.

Film scholar Audrey Thomas McCluskey's *The Devil You Dance With* (2009) is a collection of interviews like Ellerson's book, but she interviews men as well as women, leading to some interesting understandings of gender. However, its geographical focus, unlike Ellerson's, is exclusively on South Africa. This narrow perspective is advantageous because it can delve much more deeply into particulars and because this refuses to attempt to homogenise the whole field of 'African film.' The book contains a wealth of primary interview material, but it would have benefitted from a holistic analysis of all the interviews by McCluskey. Furthermore, McCluskey cannot offer any consideration of the content of the films in relation to their contexts of production since she has not seen many the films she is discussing – a reminder of the importance of integrating close film analysis within broader methodologies of media scholarship. This is why I have chosen to foreground the actual films made by the group of filmmakers I am studying in my next chapter.

Video film scholar Carmela Garritano argues, in *African Video Movies and Global Desires: a Ghanaian History* (2013), that "serious African film, African popular video, and the many hybrid forms that fit neatly into neither category are enabled and constrained by different material conditions of creation, circulation, and consumption" (2013, 7), and lays out a methodology for in-depth study on the material conditions of various forms of African screen media production. Her study is notable for its in-depth approach to Ghanaian film history as well as being the first book on video-film history to take an explicitly gendered approach. She sees "African popular culture as a gender apparatus, a technology that produces and naturalizes particular gender ideologies" (2013, 17), where cultural products "do not simply reflect" gendered identities, but actually produce them (2013, 18). This theoretical positioning makes the book exciting, but more importantly, Garritano analyses the Ghanaian industry across time to track historical change and she looks at gender both textually and in terms of production. She is also innovative

because she differentiates between video films (most scholarship treats video film as an enormous mass) and uses all the tools of classic cinema studies to answer her questions. Thus, the book is one of the most sophisticated examples of textual and contextual gender scholarship on African screen media. While inspired by this approach, my thesis takes a different tack and instead of taking the more conventional national film industry focus (studying Kenyan film), I emphasise the importance of the city of Nairobi to understanding the development of a movement of female filmmakers.

The most recent volume to specifically address African female filmmakers is *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminisms in Africa* (2015a)*,* edited by film scholar and maker Jyoti Mistry and political studies scholar Antje Schuhmann. It includes interviews and essays and is explicitly a collaboration between academics and practitioners. The book argues that African women filmmakers need to be studied together not on the grounds of "an essentialising retreat to a universal womanhood, but by an interrogation of what it means for people who self-identify as women to work with and in film" in contemporary African locations (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015b, xvii). Mistry and Schuhmann adopt a bricolage method where "the use of interviews with practitioners as well as theoreticians, critical essays coupled with reflexive positions, and storytelling (anecdotes and experiences) serves to creative a heterodox practice" (2015b, xiv) and they include contributions that express views they may not share. For instance, in a particularly illuminating interview Egyptian female filmmaker Jihan El-Tahri continually mentions that gender is irrelevant to her filmmaking, a position that *Gaze Regimes* as a whole works to question (El-Tahri, Mistry, and Schuhmann 2015). The book presents what they term a "cacophonic counter-canon" (2015, xiii) that acts as a provocation demanding future research. This thesis aims to take up the gauntlet of seriously considering women working in screen media in Nairobi, and instead of adopting perspectives from across the continent, delves in depth into one case study.

2.1 Gender, spectatorship, and film circulation

A critical approach in film theory has been to try to understand how and why people watch films, and not only how and why people make films. Film and

spectatorship theory has a long history dating back to the invention of the medium in 1895, but what specifically applies here is the trajectory of feminist film thought on the topic of spectatorship. This trajectory begins with feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's influential 1975 article in *Screen*, titled 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in which she applies psychoanalytic theory to film criticism to explore the 'male gaze' of film. She chose to use psychoanalytic theory "as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (1999b, 58). Her article is explicitly combative and she aims to reveal and critique the pleasure derived from watching film (1999b, 60). She draws on Lacan's work on the 'mirror stage' and uses it to demonstrate how pleasure works in film – essentially the male spectator recognises himself on screen through the practice of identification and this identification offers the pleasure of scopophilia in relation to the 'passive' female bodies on screen (Mulvey 1999b, 62). As Mulvey says:

> The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* (1999b, 62-63)

Mulvey's work on the male gaze of cinema, though very influential, garnered significant criticism for failing to account for differences in sexuality, among other things (cf. Citron et al. 1999). She responded to this criticism with an article titled "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun (1946)" where she tried to understand how women can enjoy films (Mulvey 1999a [1981]). Essentially, her argument is that "the 'grammar' of the story places the reader, listener or spectator *with* the hero" and women are used to the necessity of "trans-sex identification" when watching films (Mulvey 1999a, 125). Women become men for the purpose of viewing films. This failed to satisfy critics both because it continues to assume that the female viewer is heterosexual, and because it permits "no place for the actively resistant female reader; such a reader is only 'borrowing masculinisation'" (Thornham 1999, 112).

The idea of 'resistant' reading was theorised by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall. He argues that there are three positions a viewer can adopt in watching

media: "dominant hegemonic" (where viewers interpret the media according to the producer's intentions), "negotiated" (where the viewer privileges the intended message, but adapts it to their local circumstances), and "oppositional" (where the viewer understands the message, but resists it) (1980, 136-138). Hall's work is important because it no longer attributes different readings to *misunderstanding.* This theory shows that meaning "does not always inhere in a text, but is negotiated, made and remade as the text moves" through time and space and is seen by different audiences (Nyaior and Ogude 2005, 238-9).

The problem of failing to account for ethnic, racial, and sexual difference among spectators in favour of focusing on the universal oppression of women by men was a core concern of many theorists. Bell hooks, writing in 1992, in a scathing critique of a particular sort of 'Western' feminist film theory said: "feminist film theory rooted in an ahistorical psychoanalytic framework that privileges sexual difference actively suppresses recognition of race" and thereby 'erases' black women (1999, 314). Hooks effectively says that film discourse based on psychoanalytic theory marginalises non-White women. African film scholar Manthia Diawara speaks back to Mulvey's theory that the Hollywood film is "made for the pleasure of the male viewer" by arguing that, in addition to this, "the dominant cinema situates black characters primarily for the pleasure of white spectators (male or female)" (1999, 848). His most fundamental point is that "the components of 'difference' among elements of race, gender and sexuality give rise to different readings of the same material" (1999, 846), and that these elements must not be side-lined.

The psychoanalytic tradition was also criticised for focusing excessively on the early stages of human development. Scholars in this tradition "tended to neglect what they saw as later social formations—namely those of class, ethnicity, sexual preference, nationality, and race" (Kaplan 2000, 7). This gave rise to the move from studying theoretical spectators to studying real audiences. British sociologists pioneered audience research in television studies (Kaplan 2000, 9).[6] This kind of audience research questioned the fundamental assumptions of

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[6] The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham was particularly important to this methodological shift.

psychoanalytic theory because, rather than confirming a universal unconscious reflected in each spectator, these researchers gathered "widely diverging empirical responses to television and film texts" (Kaplan 2000, 10), which implied that an analysis of unconsciousness could only be partially explanatory. An early, and influential, study in this tradition is cultural studies scholar Ien Ang's 1985 study explaining the popularity of the American soap opera *Dallas*. She engaged actual audience members through letters requested in a women's magazine advertisement (1989, 10), and her most basic point is that looking for a hidden message within the show to explain its popularity does not make logical sense because the show was incredibly popular all over the world and people attach meaning differently in different places (1989, 4).[7]

Turning specifically to studies of media spectatorship and circulation in Kenya, the first ethnography of media audiences was media scholar Minou Fuglesang's 1994 book *Veils and Videos: Female Youth Culture on the Kenyan Coast*. Her work focuses on female youth culture in Lamu in the 1980s and early 1990s, and she did a participant observation study of women aged 15-25 (1994, 2, 13 and 30). She sought to understand how the women interpreted the Bollywood videos they were mostly watching with the theoretical foundation that "the meaning of a text is the result of a communication process in which the individual, placed in a historical context and with specific cultural competence and experiences, interprets the message" (1994, 171). One of her main arguments is that the films, watched at home, gave young women "a 'language' for dealing with issues such as romance, sexuality and marriage" and she explores how the evolution and change in these ideas could be integrated into the ideas of "more traditional authorities" (1994, 157). These findings (later echoed by popular culture historian Laura Fair's study of love elsewhere on the Swahili Coast [2009]) suggest that onscreen representations of women and gender have real world impact. In the cases

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[7] Janice Radway's work in literary studies is also informative here. Her book *Reading the Romance* argues for the simultaneous use of ethnography and textual analysis, noting that the act of romance reading "as a form of behavior operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects, women who saw themselves first as wives and mothers" (1987, 7). She also makes the important point that, while these women read romances, defining them as "romance readers" may overinflate the importance of what it just one aspect of their lives (Radway 1996, 244), meaning socially situating readers (and viewers) is critical.

explored by both Fuglesang and Fair, the filmic narrative, and the social practices surrounding film viewing, contributed to local practices of love.

Cultural historian Bodil Folke Frederiksen (2000) has explored love and marriage among young people in Nairobi, and particularly how they engage with American television shows such as *The Fresh Prince* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. While foreign media (for instance, *The Fresh Prince* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*) were debated, so were "local discourses on love, marriage and family relations" (2000, 217). Anthropologist Rachel Spronk contemporaneously discussed the impact of Hollywood films on patterns of love and romance in Nairobi, also arguing that the films provide another frame of reference for dealing with love in a shifting social context (2002). A final example of this trend is historian Maurice N. Amutabi's study of the impact of the popular American soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* on Kenyans, in which he argues that discussing the soap created a new discursive sphere where it was acceptable to talk about taboo subjects such as divorce and sexuality (2009, 185). While this scholarship provides vital information about audiences in Kenya (and most specifically Nairobi), none of it includes an analysis of Kenyan (or Nairobian) audiences watching Kenyan screen media.

A more recent trend in spectator scholarship in Kenya is the study of local film festivals (Dovey, McNamara, Olivieri 2013; Dovey 2015a; Dovey 2015b; Olivieri and Wong 2015; McNamara 2016). These are the first studies to consider how audiences within Nairobi consume locally made screen media productions (in contrast to earlier works on the consumption of American or Bollywood screen media), and to specifically begin to outline the politics and economics of film circulation in this context. This work will provide the foundation for much of my analysis on film circulation in Chapter Five.

2.2 Nairobi-based female filmmakers in the literature

As previously mentioned, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have received remarkably little attention in the critical literature, and as such very little is known about them and the industry in which they work. The lack of critical scholarly work

on this group of women is a key gap in the literature on gender in African screen media, and one that my thesis seeks to contribute to.

When specifically discussing Nairobi-based female filmmakers, one of the most popular forms has been the published interview. For instance, *Sisters of the Screen* (Ellerson 2000) provides valuable primary information on filmmaking in Nairobi in the 1990s via interviews with Wajuhi Kamau (director of *Mine Boy* [1997]), Catherine Wangui Muigai (producer of *Saikati the Enkabaani* [Mungai, 1999]), and Wanjiru Kinyanjui (director of *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* [1995]). Other interviewees include Anne Mungai (Cham and Mungai 1994; Harding 1997), Wanuri Kahiu (Barlet 2014), a group interview with Wanuri Kahiu, Judy Kibinge, and Lupita Nyong'o (Bonetti and Seag 2010), and Wanjiru Kinyanjui interviewed by fellow Nairobi-based filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte (Bonetti and Reddy 2003). *Looking Back, Looking Forward: 20 Years of the New York African Film Festival* (Bonetti and Leal-Riesco 2013) includes short biographies and very brief interviews with Wanjiru Kairu, Hawa Essuman, Judy Kibinge, and Ekwa Msangi-Omari. Further to published interviews, there are also a small number of opinion pieces by Nairobi-based female filmmakers offering snapshots of their thoughts and professional practice (Mungai 1996; Kahiu 2016; Kinyanjui 2008).[8] These interviews and opinion pieces are a valuable source of primary information, but their analytical use is limited because the information contained is not expanded upon, or perhaps contested, by the interviewer or author.

The first significant analysis of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is communications scholar Beatrice Wanjiku Mukora's writings on identity in *Saikati* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (2003).[9] Her focus is on textual analysis of these two films, and this is the dominant methodology employed in more recent scholarship on Nairobi-based female filmmakers as well. The most prolific scholar in this tradition is Kenyan film and theatre scholar Rachael Diang'a (2005; 2007a;

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[8] A biography and filmography of Wanjiru Kinyanjui is also included in *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Diawara 2010) in a section of biographies and filmographies of African filmmakers. However, the filmography lists inaccurate information and states she is the director of *The Captain of Nakara* (incorrectly named *Nakara's Captain*) (2012) when the film, in fact, was directed by Bob Nyanja. While searching for the film myself I found information online that also falsely attributes the film to Kinyanjui.

[9] This chapter draws from her MA dissertation (1999), which itself is a valuable work for its section on the historical development of film in Kenya.

2007b; 2011; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2017), yet her work is of limited use because of its methodology. For instance, she writes about the use of cinematography in three Kenyan films from across three decades[10] (2015a).[11] However, she chooses her films so that one can represent each decade on the grounds that "the rate of film production per year was extremely low as the industry began" (2015a, 187), a choice that is methodologically unsound given the amount and diversity of content actually produced in Kenya across these decades. She uses a similar methodology in a chapter on marriage and sexuality in Kenyan film. She again chooses a sample of films[12] to represent three decades and does so on the assumption that "this enables the paper to capture a representative portrayal of sexuality and marriage in each of the last three decades" (Diang'a 2005, 2).[13] In this case it is troubling that she equates *fictional* representations of Kenya with actual society. In her most recent research (2017), she writes about trends across fifty years of Kenyan film production (1963-2013), but the article is necessarily shallow given that it is only eight pages long. Nevertheless, her research is valuable as a whole for shining a light on an area of African filmmaking (Kenyan filmmaking) that has long been academically marginalised.

Diang'a's work consciously positions itself as commentary on Kenyan filmmaking and intends to use specific films as representative examples of wider trends. However, the majority of other textual analysis of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers approaches the films based on how they illustrate a theme or form. For instance, *Pumzi* (Kahiu, 2010) is discussed in the literature on the basis of its generic approach (it is a science fiction film). African literature scholar Matthew Omelsky discusses it as an example of "postcrisis African science fiction" (2014) and comparative literature and women's studies scholar Ritch Calvin (2014) examines it from an environmental perspective.[14] Film and

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[10] The films are *Kolormask* (Gamba, 1986) for the 1980s, *Saikati* for the 1990s, and *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten* [Ombogo-Scott and Mbuthia, 2008] for the 2000s.

[11] This article seems to be based on her doctoral thesis "Style and Content in Selected Kenyan Message Films – 1980 to 2009" (2013), as it uses three of the same case studies (the thesis also includes *Piece for Peace* [Bresson and Kimani, 2008]).

[12] The films are *Dangerous Affair*, *Kolormask*, *Behind Closed Doors* (Munene, 2004), and *The Married Bachelor* (Keya, 1997).

[13] The article was later republished in *Human Sexuality in Africa: Beyond Reproduction* (2007a).

[14] A larger discussion of genre and *Pumzi* can be found in Chapter Four.

television scholar Clara Giruzzi (2015) explores the theme of nation building and reconciliation after political violence using *From a Whisper* (Kahiu, 2008) and *Something Necessary* (Kibinge, 2013). However, her analysis is undercut by basic factual inaccuracies. For instance, she erroneously states that *Something Necessary* is set in Nairobi when in fact the film takes place in Nakuru. This basic factual error clearly shows the limitations of the textual methodology she employs and suggests the importance of field-based research.

The recent and growing attention to these films is essential; however, what is missing from the research here is an account of the films' contexts of production. To theorise this aspect of Nairobi-based female filmmakers' work, I will now turn to considering the scholarship specifically addressing 'African film' production.

Part 3: Power dynamics and 'African film' production

3.1: Labour and entrepreneurialism in screen media production

While scholarship on Nairobi-based female filmmakers has largely neglected studying the production of their films, cultural and creative industries scholarship offers insight into these industrial dynamics. *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labour* (Curtin and Sanson 2016a) and its companion *Voices of Labour: Creativity, Craft, and Conflict in Global Hollywood* (Curtin and Sanson 2017a) offer vital insights into the ways transnational media industries – such as global Hollywood (a term that refers to Hollywood studio films that are made transnationally) – impact local creative workers in industries around the world. They argue:

> The movie business today is producing bigger and more spectacular amusements but at the same price point as last year's model, and in less time. Foot to the pedal, the industry is careening along under conditions that many deem unsustainable, with significant implications for the future sustainability of its global production apparatus, and even more dire consequences for the personal and professional lives of media workers. (Curtin and Sanson 2017b, 4)

The voices of workers in global Hollywood and other film industries across the world are rarely heard, and Curtin and Sanson's two edited collections attempt to shine a light on the conditions that those workers face, as well as the innovative

solutions they formulate to address the challenges posed by those conditions. This focus on the *labour* involved in making films rather than the business of filmmaking (or film texts and films stars) is crucial to understanding the impacts of increasingly transnational media industries across the world. A further examination of precarity in global media industries can be found in Chapter Six.

This emphasis on creative labour also underpins a special issue in *The Sociological Review* on gender and creative labour (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015). The special issue focuses on how cultural and creative industries – like the film industry – create and perpetuate gender inequality. Cultural and creative industries scholar Leung Wing-Fai, sociologist Rosalind Gill, and business scholar Keith Randle (2015) specifically link patterns of informal work – such as the dominance of free-lancing – to the marginalisation of women within the film and television industry in the United Kingdom. Importantly, they use an intersectional approach and note that a combination of gender, parental status (they found that motherhood, but not fatherhood is a detriment to career progression), and age work to marginalise women, so that while women are well-represented in early career roles there are significantly fewer women higher up the career ladder in the film and television industry. While offering essential analysis on gender and creative work, a limitation of this special issue is its geographic scope: it only includes analyses of gender and creative labour in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

All of the scholarship discussed so far places an emphasis on individuals and labour conditions, and draws attention to the vital role of individual creativity and entrepreneurialism by workers in addressing the challenges they face in building their careers in ever more flexible and precarious industries. Throughout this thesis, I hope to show that a significant and defining feature of Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a movement is their entrepreneurialism and willingness to hustle in the face of precarious circumstances.

Turning our attention specifically to entrepreneurialism, we can see that in recent years there has been a proliferation of publications on entrepreneurship in Africa (Fick 2002; Makura 2008; Ndemo and Weiss 2017; Röschenthaler and

Schulz 2015a; Spring and McDade 1998). These are generally situated in a business studies framework. For instance, *Africa's Greatest Entrepreneurs* (Makura 2008) is situated within the discipline of business studies and it focuses on "self-starters and patriotic Africans who share the distinction of having made it in Africa" – 'making it' in this case being defined in purely financial terms (2008, xi). This financially oriented approach to success obscures other ways of defining what makes a 'successful' entrepreneur and yields few insights into what constitutes and entrepreneur in the first place (successful or not). The limitations of this approach to entrepreneurship are particularly clear when we note that across its 16 chapters, each devoted to profiling an individual entrepreneur, it includes not a single woman. There is little space to understand Nairobi-based female filmmakers as entrepreneurs within this approach and other models are thus necessary.

Within this context, the edited collection *Cultural Entrepreneurship in Africa* (Röschenthaler and Schulz 2015a) is particularly important for its focus on entrepreneurialism beyond the scope of purely capitalist definitions where success equates with millions of dollars earned (Makura, for instance, explicitly sought to profile people who had started "multimillion-dollar businesses" [2008, xi]). This volume is particularly useful for its intersectional approach to entrepreneurialism and gender. For instance, anthropologist Claudia Böhme argues "female film producers [in Tanzania] still have to fight their way in a male dominated business. Becoming an artist is not considered a suitable career-choice for women in Tanzania" and women who choose to become producers face "the envy of her male counterparts" (2015, 282). African screen media scholar Alessandro Jedlowski (2015) examines key female producers in Nollywood and examines how they entrepreneurially problem solve to address structural issues in Nollywood, such as the prevalence of piracy in Nigeria. These studies – and earlier works on gender and screen media production like *African Video Movies and Global Desires: a Ghanaian History* (Garritano 2013) or *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminism in Africa* (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015a) – are particularly useful because they examine the influence of gender on creative work in Africa and because they foreground the agency of female filmmakers. A further discussion of gender and cultural entrepreneurship can be found in Chapter Six.

3.2 'Art house' versus 'popular' filmmaking in Africa

Power relationships underpin the making of films because filmmaking is such a collaborative process. Postcolonial theory is useful here because, as a field, it is centred on questioning the workings of power. Anthropologist Jean Comaroff reminds us that, as has been noted since the 1990s, the term postcolonial "is only inadequately translated as "after colonialism" (2005, 129). This point bears repeating even now since the field has been criticised for being anachronistic and irrelevant by scholars focused on the era of globalisation and the new world order they believe it has created. The editors of *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), for example, urge us to turn away from the idea of postcolonialism as an organising principle because events such as the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (or the continuing situation in Israel-Palestine or the Western Sahara) make "it more absurd than ever to speak of ours as a postcolonial world" (Loomba et al. 2005, 1). They instead want to apply postcolonial critique to contemporary forms of imperialism and exercises of global power (2005, 10). Feminist scholar Anne McClintock importantly distinguishes between the term 'postcolonial' and postcolonial theory as a field of study. While the term itself is problematic because it "reorients the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial-postcolonial," the theory attempts to challenge Eurocentric power structures and perspectives (McClintock 1995, 10). A postcolonial analysis is not simply an investigation about a place that was once colonised by a foreign power; rather it means a rigorous examination of past and contemporary forms of power in the hopes of servicing a more equitable future.

However, a problematic limitation of post-colonial theory is that it keeps colonialism centred as the most important period of time in the histories of the many and varied places that were once colonised. Literary scholar Patrice Nganang cautions that "the independence of African countries from Europe in 1960 becomes a turning point in the many-thousands-years-old intellectual history of the African continent only because of the paradigm through the frame of which that history is read" (2015, 79). Comaroff points to the dangers of speaking of a postcolonial world: seeing the world in this way tends "to leave unaddressed the political sociology of actually existing postcolonies," which has resulted in

generalisations about the postcolonial state "unencumbered by facts about particular pasts, particular economies, or particular societies", thereby neglecting the enormous diversity that actually exists in and between postcolonial states (2005, 129). The field of postcolonial studies has also been constrained, for instance in the field of literary studies, by an exceedingly narrow definition of what constitutes 'post-colonialism' or 'postcolonial literature' (Orsini 2002; Lazarus 2005). Literary scholar Neil Lazarus even says: "I am tempted to overstate the case, for purposes of illustration, and declare that there is in a strict sense only one author in the postcolonial literary canon. That author is Salman Rushdie" (2005, 424). Expanding this definition would allow for new authors, questions, and methods that would ultimately enrich the field.

African popular art and culture scholarship provides a vital counterpoint to postcolonial theory. In her seminal article "Popular Arts in Africa" (1987), anthropologist Karin Barber laid the foundations of an enduring field of analysis. According to her theory popular art "is made and produced by 'the people,' targeted at 'the people' by addressing topics that are of interest to 'the people,' easily accessible to 'the people,' and it is enjoyed, consumed, and discussed by them" (Bisschoff and Overbergh 2012, 113). Drawing on Chabal, Barber argues that 'the people' are "only thinkable as a category in that they are excluded from the privileges of political, business and military elites" (1997, 3-4). The makers of popular art, "in Barber's view, often bore a tangential relation to political power and embodied the 'emergent' voices and narratives of nonelite social classes" (Newell and Okome 2014b, 5). Popular art and culture analysis focuses on the particularities of local circumstances using rigorous case study approaches (cf. Newell and Okome 2014a). Yet, this emphasis on the importance of local perspectives does not mean popular art and culture analysis cannot account for transnational connectedness. Indeed, Barber comments:

> The distinction between "locally-produced" and "imported"—always problematic—is now increasingly becoming untenable. ... Popular culture, then, is a site in which people understand themselves as part of a global order which nonetheless, in significant ways, operates to marginalize them and their "local" experience. The expression of this disjuncture, not surprisingly, is articulated through imagery drawn from global popular

culture but always contextualized in relation to people's experience on the ground. (2014, xx).

Popular culture analysis may examine local circumstances, but it does so while maintaining a keen eye on relationships and connections that cross borders.

Examining discourses of 'African film' can benefit from insights from popular culture scholarship – and more specifically Nollywood studies – as this field questions processes of canonisation. Nollywood scholars have demonstrated how the idea of 'African film' is a construction and that its borders must be interrogated. The advent of video film also raised some major issues in the study of African cinema. Initially, video and celluloid films were studied by two distinct groups of scholars: video film was the domain of anthropologists of media, whereas African cinema and literature scholars studied celluloid film (Haynes 2010b). *Viewing African Film in the 21st Century: Art Film and the Nollywood Video Revolution* (2010) edited by Africanist historian Ralph A. Austen and anthropologist Mahir Saul, argues that this division is unproductive, and is the first major attempt to bring these two divergent fields into close conversation. Harrow also addresses the problem of artificial categorisations in the study of African film. He argues that African film scholarship has tended to interpret African film within certain parameters – essentially of speaking back to Western discourses about Africa and 'correctly' representing Africa – and that it is time to move beyond these boundaries (2007, xi). The first generation of African filmmakers were explicitly responding to the problematic and racist depiction of Africa and Africans in colonial cinema, and their first movement was to "assert the authenticity of their perceptions of their own reality" (Barlet 2000, 8), so the tendency to interpret African filmmaking in this light is understandable. However, new ways of looking are now necessary in order to understand contemporary developments in African filmmaking.

The rise of video film began in Ghana in 1987 and subsequently in Nigeria in 1989 (Garritano 2008, 21-22). Anthropologist Brian Larkin (2004) argues that the industry was built on the infrastructure and networks that existed to pirate foreign films. Additionally, high crime rates and the impossible expense of celluloid meant the collapse of conventional filmmaking and the opportunity for a new form

of home-based entertainment (Garritano 2008, 21-22; Haynes 2007a, 1). The first video makers had no formal film training and were instead businessmen previously associated with "commercial video reproduction and exhibition" (Garritano 2008, 26) – including the pirating and selling of foreign films. The average budget for a film is $25,000 - $50,000 (£19,000 - £39,000) (Miller 2012, 119) and videos tend to be made as cheaply and quickly as possible and can go from idea to market in a matter of weeks (Haynes 2007a, 3). Nollywood[15] films are both made and distributed locally in Nigeria, throughout the rest of Africa, and into the diaspora. This is dramatically different from the many African 'art' films that, for decades, did not reach African audiences, but were instead isolated in Europe. This is interesting for my purposes here because Nollywood was met with a tremendous amount of resistance from many of the same people who had been hoping for a film industry both produced and watched in Africa without interference or assistance from foreign parties (McCain 2011, 251). Filmmaker Jean Rouch even went so far as to call video the 'AIDS of the film industry' (quoted in Barrot 2008, 3), meaning that video is destroying filmmaking. Literature and cinema scholar Onookome Okome argues that the critics of Nollywood are opposed to this kind of film production because they think Nollywood is representing Nigeria *badly* to audiences all over the world (2010, 28).

These films are often criticised for being profit driven and lacking a political agenda, yet Nollywood scholar Stefan Sereda (2010) argues that seeing Nollywood films as apolitical entertainment is a fundamental misreading. Sereda articulates the connections between 'art-film' and Nollywood and demonstrates that these videos offer lessons in much the same way as Francophone classics. A further point of critique is about aesthetics. Video film experts Birgit Meyer and Jonathan Haynes both argue that video film and FESPACO films must be studied within the same framework (Haynes 2010a, 13; Meyer 2010, 42). Screen media scholar Lindsey Green-Simms concurs, and advocates for using all the methodological tools of film studies when studying video (2010, 222), because ignoring video films

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[15] The term Nollywood, while often used as shorthand to describe a particular genre of video film, actually refers to a specific industry in Southern Nigeria. Garritano cautions against using the shorthand since it obscures complex regional dynamics and differences between video industries (2013, 3) including intense competition (also see Haynes 2007a, 4). 'Nollywood-style' is perhaps the more appropriate term.

because of their 'poor aesthetics' means that their social importance is also neglected. In a concurring argument, Haynes states Nollywood video films "are so fundamental to Africa's self-representation that it is impossible to understand contemporary Africa and its place in the world without taking them into account" (2010a, 21). Yet, Haynes, and other video films scholars (cf. Dovey 2015a, 93; Garritano 2013) also emphasises the importance of taking Nollywood and other video films seriously on aesthetic grounds. It is necessary to think of the term 'African film' "descriptively" rather than "prescriptively" (in the words of Murphy 2000, 47), so as not to artificially confine the artistic production of an entire continent to a predesigned program.

The problem of managing expectations of what an 'African film' will look like is not merely an academic problem, but also a practical one that influences the production and circulation of African screen media. Historically, former colonisers, and particularly France, have been the dominant film funders of African films, and this relationship has frequently been read as neo-colonial. In a visceral and personal evaluation of these dynamics, pioneering Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène asserts that: "co-production with the west is often tainted with paternalism, and it is an economic dependency which, as such, gives the West the right to view Africa in a way that I cannot bear" (quoted in Diawara 1992, 32). Following Sembène's sentiment, in his seminal book *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992), Diawara argues:

> There are two ways to identify neocolonialism in French African film production. One way is through tracing the extent to which the French have tried to assimilate African filmmakers and films, thus making it difficult for them to stand on their own. The other is the Coopération's monopoly of the tools of work by centering them in Paris (1992, 33).

Since Diawara's foundational book, a substantial body of literature has been published discussing the power dynamics underpinning filmmaking ties between France and Francophone West African former French colonies (cf. Barlet 2000; Saul 2010; Dovey 2015a). However, seeing the world of African filmmaking only in terms of neo-colonial dependency is problematic because it simplistically neglects the many different flows of power between countries, companies, and individuals

in our contemporary world.[16] Diawara and others are essential for drawing our attention to power dynamics, but the web of power relations operating in filmmaking in a place such as contemporary Nairobi is more complicated that a post-colonial or neo-colonial relationship can account for.

African literature and cinema scholar Jane Bryce argues that the fact that most films made in East and Southern Africa (except South Africa) are donor funded has given the region's cinema "a particular cast – issue based, message oriented, agenda defined" (2010, 161). Within this context, video technology has been liberating in that it has meant that filmmakers do not need formal training or foreign funding, and they can thus "realize projects that speak directly to a particular constituency on topics far beyond the donor agenda" (Bryce 2010, 161). Within the screen media landscape in Kenya there is also the strong presence of message-based filmmaking. Within this context, the introduction of Nollywood films brought "the idea that films can be made not just for enlightening people about issues such as domestic violence, girls' education or female circumcision, but also for the equally valid goal of 'spectacle' itself" (Ondego 2008, 117).

There have been several published reports since the new millennium that seek to evaluate Kenyan film for the sake of the development of the industry (Edwards 2008; Moggi and Tessier 2001; Wandago 2000). They are all short sketches clearly intended for policymaking, and are thus useful in so far as they draw attention to critical 'problems' in the industry (for instance, the prevalence of piracy). There are a small number of scholarly works on Kenyan film history, but together they only offer a preliminary survey at best. Dramatic arts scholar Foluke Ogunleye's (2014) chapter on the historical background of Kenyan film is poorly researched – relying almost exclusively and uncritically on blogs and websites – and includes many factual inaccuracies. Two other histories (Kinyanjui 2014; Okioma and Mugubi 2015) offer useful starting points for further research into film history. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui's article is useful when read as a personal reflection and opinion piece, but at only six pages in length it hardly has space to delve into any issue in depth. Kenyan film scholar John

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[16] Indeed, "the younger generation [of filmmakers from Africa] feels that it is reductive to speak about 'the French' collectively, and thereby risk falling into the trap of adopting an essentialist approach themselves" (Dovey 2015a, 57).

Okioma and Kenyan media practitioner Nicodemus Mugubi, on the other hand, have written a long article where they divide Kenyan film history into several periods,[17] yet their periodization of history lacks rigour because they do not chart trends over time, and the only information consistently included about any film is a brief plot summary. The historical and industry surveys discussed present a highly fragmented image of filmmaking in Kenya and none considers gender.[18]

There is excellent research on the Nairobi-based film industry Riverwood conducted by media scholar Anne Overbergh (2014, 2015a, 2015b). The type of filmmaking practice in Riverwood is reminiscent of Nollywood-style filmmaking – indeed scholars have described Riverwood as the Kenyan counterpart of Nollywood (Bisschoff 2013, 155; Calvin 2014; Krings and Okome 2013, 15; Tomaselli 2009, 117). However, while there are similarities because Riverwood films are made cheaply and quickly, a crucial distinction between these industries is that, unlike Nollywood, Riverwood films struggle to find popularity with audiences and to become profitable (Overbergh 2015a, 100). A crucial benefit of Overbergh's work is that she interrogates the reasons for these differences and her methodology involves field-based research in Nairobi, where she interviewed Riverwood filmmakers (among other individuals in creative industries in Nairobi). The success of Nollywood or Bongowood (Tanzania's video film industry) might seem to indicate that their production model is a "recipe for success" but Overbergh cautions that seeing it in this way might neglect other explanatory factors such as the size of those markets, or "Nigerian national pride (and/or regional or ethnic groups' interest in their own cultural content, such as Igbo or Hausa stories); and Tanzania's national unity and binding language, Kiswahili" (Overbergh 2014, 209). Kenya, on the other hand, is a highly fragmented society – particularly in terms of regionalism and politicised ethnicity, as I will explore later in this Introduction. The films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers have a very

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[17] Their periodization is as follows: the Colonial Era 1900-1962, the Independence Era 1963-1972, Post-Independence 1973-1978, the New Dawn 1979-1982, the Re-Awakening 1983-1992, the Renaissance 1993-2002, and the Post-Modern Era 2003-2013.

[18] Historical research dominantly focuses on the workings of the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit, as well as colonial era spectatorship (Burns 2000; Reynolds 2009; Sanogo 2011; Smyth 1979).

limited presence within the Riverwood network of film distribution. As Overbergh notes:

> Because of its image, both in terms of shady economic practices as [sic] in terms of River Road being considered a dangerous place, Riverwood remains virtually 'untouched' by the higher end filmmakers and upper-middle class audiences. Kikuyu comedy is easy to find, other Riverwood productions are more difficult (with the exception of vendors selling their own productions), and movies by the – more upper-end – likes of Bob Nyanja, Wanuri Kahiu, or Judy Kibinge, are simply not available along River Road. (2015a, 105)

Riverwood is almost entirely distinct, as an industry, from that populated by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, as Chapter Three will demonstrate.

Media studies scholar Joshua McNamara's PhD thesis is the most sustained study of screen media production in Nairobi. Using a practice-based methodology where he worked as a screenwriter on the feature fiction film project *Wazi?FM* and as part of the festival management team for the Nairobi-based Slum Film Festival, McNamara examines how a cultural development framework informs the creation of content and its exhibition in Nairobi. His approach is particularly well suited to uncovering the politics of content (film) and exhibition (film festival) production, and for understanding how various products develop both over time and through the negotiations of a changing roster of actors. Overbergh and McNamara contribute to re-materialising film studies through a grounded methodology based on research in Nairobi. Their work offers a vital counterpoint to textual research on Kenyan film, and instead offers a nuanced account of the socio-political and economic factors that underpin certain types of film production and circulation within Nairobi. Importantly, neither scholar studies Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and in so doing they leave an important gap that my research seeks to fill.

3.3 From 'African film' to 'African screen media'

Much of the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers shifts between formats and shows a diverse way of creating, and even the most prominent filmmakers – such as Judy Kibinge and Wanuri Kahiu – have highly diverse careers moving between fiction and documentary, creative and corporate, and television and film productions. The group of female filmmakers whose work I am exploring fully

support the wider shift in scholarship from looking at 'film' to the more diverse category of 'screen media.'

This shift in the scholarship was provoked by the challenges posed by Nollywood, and other video film industries, to conventional understandings of what constitutes African cinema. Film critics, scholars, and festivals accustomed to 'art cinema' simply do not know what to do with Nollywood and "the situation is profoundly awkward" (Haynes 2011, 79). This awkwardness exists because the videos do not meet the expectations of festival cinema.[19] The Festival Pan-Africain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) has been a key forum for establishing the borders of African filmmaking. "FESPACO was primarily responsible for curating into existence" a particular kind of African cinema – namely dominantly Francophone art cinema (Dovey 2015a, 104). At FESPACO 2011, several of the "most exciting works of the year" (including Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman's *Soul Boy* [2010]) were separated from the main competition and could only compete in the TV/Video Films program because of their format (Dovey 2015a, 104-105). For FESPACO, "the conflicts around the transformation of analogue to digital formats came to a head at FESPACO 2013, when several films selected for the official competition were suddenly disqualified because the organizing committee discovered they were not on 35mm celluloid film" (Dovey 2015a, 105). The dilemma of analogue versus digital and what the festival should allow is not simply a question of conflicting mediums, but rather the festival was reacting because they felt threatened by "the popularity of Nollywood films with audiences across the African continent and what that means for the festival's future" (Dovey 2015a, 106).

Dovey cogently states "it no longer makes sense to divide African screen media into oppositional categories such as 'FESPACO films' and 'video films' … 'arthouse films' and 'commercial films', or 'serious films' and 'entertainment films'" (2010, 2). These very categories are "being rendered obsolete" by the actual

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[19] One strategy to cope with this awkwardness is to show the film of Tunde Kelani or Kunle Afolayan, both of whom are respected Nigerian directors but are "not really Nollywood filmmakers" (Haynes 2011, 79). Another tack is to screen a documentary about Nollywood, "convene a panel of experts to discuss the Nollywood phenomenon, and only then risk exposing the audience to an actual Nollywood film or two" (Haynes 2011, 79).

filmmakers (Dovey 2010, 2). Dovey gives the example of Mahamat Saleh-Haroun and how he has worked both on celluloid and for television, among other formats. He "is frequently held up as an example of an African art-house 'auteur,' because of his success at Cannes, but this reductive categorization ignores the heterogeneity of his oeuvre" (Dovey 2015a, 105). This diversity is equally present within the career trajectories of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and it is equally reductive to frame them only as 'festival' filmmakers without accounting for their much more diverse creative outputs. Furthermore, African screen media scholar Moradewun Adejunmobi (2015a) suggests that television and film are actually converging in Africa, given the prevalence of watching films on television rather than in conventional outlets such as cinemas. If both film and television are viewed on the same platform than a new method is needed to understand the difference between these screen media forms. Adejunmobi adopts 'television recurrence' as a concept to perform this work, and I will discuss the concept in more depth in Chapter Three.

Studying the *complete oeuvre* of these filmmakers – regardless of format – is essential for uncovering the participation of women in filmmaking in Nairobi. Dividing filmmaking into categories based on technology (either in production or distribution) has repercussions for gender-based understandings of African filmmaking. Bisschoff notes that "film directories, which often exclude television and video work, usually list a very small number of female film-makers in comparison to men" (2012, 159). The history of female participation in African filmmaking is thus hidden in this approach. One example of this phenomenon is the *Dictionary of African Filmmakers* (Armes 2008). In defining the parameters of his dictionary, film scholar Roy Armes chose to include only feature length films made or distributed on celluloid (2008, 3) so as to, in part, avoid cataloguing Nollywood video films. Armes lists only three feature films and three filmmakers in Kenya's *entire history* (Sao Gamba, Anne Mungai, and Wanjiru Kinyanjui). He accounts for all other screen media production in a note, stating "a number of feature-length videos have been shot in Kenya in the 2000s" and an incomplete list of films, including shorts and documentaries, with no account of their importance (Armes 2008, 217). The only African film industry dominated by women is

completely marginalised and obscured through this approach. Furthermore, an approach that looks exclusively at film (digital or celluloid) risks missing the vital *interconnections* between diverse screen media forms. Within this context, *Gaze Regimes* (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015a) makes an important contribution because it includes essays about women working across a range of different filmmaking and artistic modes.

Part 4: Local and Transnational Perspectives: Afropolitanism and African Cities Scholarship

A central contention of this thesis is that to understand how Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a movement they must be considered from both a local and transnational perspective. Many Nairobi-based female filmmakers continually travel outside the country – be it to other countries on the continent or farther afield in Europe and North America – to study and work. This cross border mobility is characteristic of 'festival filmmakers' and the majority of them "spend their lives moving between their homes in Africa and elsewhere" as opposed to "the makers of video movies" who "tend to be based exclusively on the African continent" (Dovey 2015a, 6). As African literature scholar Frieda Ekotto and African literature and film scholar Kenneth W. Harrow argue, new models are necessary to understand the artistic and literary production of contemporary Africans when many of them "do not live in Africa" but rather live in other countries or "travel between Africa and elsewhere" (2015b, 1). Although it is only mentioned in passing in Ekotto and Harrow's edited collection *Rethinking African Cultural Production* (2015a), the theory of Afropolitanism offers some insight into the transnational connectedness of Nairobi-based female filmmakers; however, as I hope to show in this section, Afropolitanism is useful only when complemented by a grounded methodology.

The term 'Afropolitan' usually has its origins traced to author Taiye Selasi, and more specifically to her 2005 article "Bye-Bye Babar" in *The LIP Magazine,* and its academic origins to philosopher Achille Mbembe in an essay in *Africa Remix* (2005) (Santana 2016, 12). Mbembe "warns that paradigms like pan-Africanism have become 'institutionalized and ossified' and can slip easily and dangerously

into nativism" (Santana 2016, 122). Consequently, "Mbembe argues that a new term is necessary 'if we want to revive intellectual life in Africa'" (Santana 2016, 122) – in the place of Pan-Africanism and Négritude he argues for the concept of Afropolitanism, a concept that focuses on "'the problem of *self-explication*'" or self-understanding (Santana 2016, 122; emphasis hers). In the years since 2005, the term 'Afropolitan' has been adopted in both popular and academic circles and with conflicting emphases and agendas. Within this context of contestation the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* special issue "Afropolitanism: Reboot" aimed to create "the beginnings of an activist scholarly agenda in which 'the Afropolitan' is reimagined" to include not just the affluent Afropolitans mentioned by Selasi and others but also "the stealthy figure crossing the Mediterranean by boat, and the Somali shopkeeper in a South African township" (Coetzee 2015, 103). It is the first journal issue to seriously consider the meaning and potential of the concept of Afropolitanism.

Following Mbembe, Afropolitanism can be a politically transformative concept; yet, the term has been heavily critiqued in recent years for its supposed emphasis on elitism and raw consumerism. Emma Dabiri (a prominent critic of Afropolitanism), for instance, cautions that "we should be especially vigilant about any movement that embraces commodification to the extent that Afropolitanism does" because of our increasingly commoditised world (2016, 104). She argues against the concept based on its supposed erasure of non-affluent people:

> At a time when poverty remains endemic for millions, the narratives of a privileged few telling us how great everything is, how much opportunity and potential is available, may drown out the voices of a majority who remain denied basic life chances. (Dabiri 2016, 106)

Afropolitanism in Dabiri's formulation cannot account for the majority of Africans and is simply another 'Africa Rising' narrative naïvely replacing an Afro-pessimistic one. Closely tied with the issue of consumerism and elitism is that of *mobility* and elitism. African literatures scholar Grace Musila argues that "the term Afropolitanism seems to come with a certain glow of access, affluence and mobility in the global north that signals particular class and cultural inflections" and refers to only "a particular kind of affluent mobility in the global north, as opposed to all global mobility" (2016, 111). Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina has critiqued

Afropolitanism for its "perceived 'immunity' to Africa" and instead advocated a "continent-centric" pan-Africanism (Santana 2016, 123). Yet, the forums and institutional spaces where these discussions on Afropolitanism take place must be accounted for. Whereas "cyberspace contributors" "clearly discuss Afropolitanism as a diaspora phenomenon which rather excludes continental Africans," intellectuals "strive to expand the concept through the explicit inclusion of cultural dynamics in Africa itself" (Gehrmann 2016, 66). Adding a final layer of complication, the term is also used for explicitly commercial purposes as a 'brand' (to use Gehrmann's word) in places like *The Afropolitan* (a lifestyle magazine) and The Afropolitan Shop (an online store). Gehrmann thus asks the important question of whether this intellectual project "can stand against the criticism which comes with the now commodified use of the word as a 'brand'" (2016, 66), or, put another way, whether or not Afropolitanism as a critical concept is worth the trouble of its cultural baggage.

While it is essential to keep the potential commercialisation of Afropolitanism in mind, the concept can still be used as the basis for "an activist scholarly agenda" to use Coetzee's term (2015, 103). For, as African literary scholar Simon Gikandi cogently states, Afropolitanism is:

> prompted by the desire to think of African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them. To be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time. (2011, 9)

An Afropolitan "is that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa" (Eze 2014, 240). Further, "one does not need to have crossed geographical boundaries to be Afropolitan; one only needs to cross the psychic boundaries erected by nativism, autochthony, heritage and other mythologies of authenticity" (Eze 2016, 116-117). In this formulation, being Afropolitan is not dependent on any sort of "affluent mobility" (to use Musila's words) and instead is a liberating state of mind and way of relating to the world. As a concept, Afropolitanism helps us to think through mythologies of

authenticity, contemporary patterns of migration, and to move beyond essentialising formations of identity – it is not simply a marker of status, wealth, or consumerism, although it is deployed that way in some circumstances.

The earlier generations (those of the era of Pan-Africanism and Négritude) lived in an "overwhelmingly racist world. Thus their recourse to nativist, relativist, and autochthonous arguments were employed as a means to fight erasure" and "nativism has a political relevance as a stage in the liberatory process of a people" (Eze 2014, 236). Our contemporary moment is also an era of renewed decolonisation struggles by people of colour – such as Rhodes Must Fall, the transnational movement (originating in South Africa) of decolonising university campuses, or the Black Lives Matter movement originating in the United States. Afropolitanism is a concept that can help account for transnational connectedness while not sacrificing a meaningful consideration of Africanness. It is thus useful for conceptualising transnationally mobile filmmakers who move between Africa and elsewhere, and those who exist between any easy conceptions of what being African means in a globalised world. However, while useful up to a point in describing transnational connections, Afropolitanism falls short as a theory at accounting for the material spaces in which filmmakers, and other people, live and work.

In order to begin to understand the material spaces in which Nairobi-based female filmmakers live and work, it is necessary to question my choice of terminology and assess why I have termed these filmmakers 'Nairobi-based' rather than 'Kenyan.' As previously stated, Kenya is a highly fragmented society – particularly in terms of regionalism and politicised ethnicity. There is a large body of scholarship on Kenyan social fragmentation as it pertains to election cycles, and most specifically the post-election violence of 2007/2008[20] (cf. the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2008 special issue on the post-election violence [Branch and Cheeseman 2008]). Additionally, while there is some film production elsewhere in the country (for instance in Mombasa [Overbergh 2015, 99; Matere interview 2015]), Nairobi is the unquestionable centre. Nairobi-based female

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[20] The post-election violence of 2007/2008 was sparked by the disputed Presidential election between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, and it resulted in the deaths of at least 1,000 people and displaced 300,000 more.

filmmaker Appie Matere succinctly noted this when she said rather than Kenyan filmmaking "it's Nairobi filmmaking" (interview 2015).

Given the importance of the centrality of Nairobi as a filmmaking location in Kenya, it is essential to understand some of the city's history and present dynamics. Nairobi has "purely colonial origins" (Owuor and Mbatia 2012, 120). The city began its life as a transportation centre on the Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1899 and later grew into an administrative centre (it became the capital in 1905) and a city (by Royal Charter of Incorporation) in 1950 (Owuor and Mbatia 2012, 121-122). The spatiality of the city is still shaped by these colonial origins. For instance, during colonial rule, "the Employment Ordinance Act required Africans to have passes and salaried employment before they could be permitted to reside in the city" (Owuor and Mbatia 2012, 129). Furthermore, during the colonial era, the city was racially segregated with Europeans living north and west of the railway (which is at a higher altitude and has better soil) and Indians and Africans in the south and east (Owuor and Mbatia 2012, 122). While no longer divided officially by race, contemporary Nairobi still reflects these divisions and is stratified by class – "in terms of the urban economic geography of the capital, all the rich suburbs of Nairobi are on the western side, while the poor ones are in the east" (Wasike 2011, 24).

There is a large body of literature on urban uncertainty pertaining to Nairobi – especially as it relates to the liminality of refugees and informal settlement dwellers (cf. Campbell 2006; Charton-Bigot and Rodriguez-Torres 2010; Lindell and Ihalainen 2014; Turner 2014; van Stapele 2014). Within this literature, a frequent subject of analysis is modes of work and survival in Nairobi's informal settlements, and 'hustling' as a mode of labour has been heavily theorised (Farrell 2015; Thieme 2013; Thieme 2015; Thieme 2017). Here is it necessary to note that while I draw on this theory, my analysis differs significantly because rather than focusing on working classes, I apply the concept of hustling to middle class filmmakers. A full literature review of the concept of hustling can be found in Chapter Six.

Alongside this literature on urban informality and precarity, there is a growing body of literature considering other aspects of Nairobi. For instance, *Fashion Cities Africa* (Pool 2016) includes a chapter on Nairobi looking at it as a style hub in Africa. There is also an increasing emphasis on the study of Nairobi's middle classes. The necessity of this work is neatly summarised by Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman's bold statement that "it's almost like the middle class of Africa feels like a dirty secret. Because you hear so little about them" (interview 2015). Anthropologist Rachael Spronk is a pioneer in the study of Nairobi's middle classes (2002; 2012; 2014; 2016), and publications like Kompreno's research report *(Re)searching the Middle Class in Nairobi* (Boanada-Fuchs, Gez, and Waldmüller 2016) continue this work. A full literature review on middle classes in Africa can be found in Chapter Three. When I term Nairobi-based female filmmakers 'Nairobi-based' the word 'based' is used both as an marker of their middle class privilege, and to indicate that while these women are currently living and working in Nairobi, this may only be for a time. My move to call these women Nairobi-based rather than 'Nairobian' is a political move aimed at not essentialising their identities.

Furthermore, my emphasis on the importance of the city is reflective of a wider turn towards city scholarship within cinema scholarship. Haynes' work is of particular note for its longstanding emphasis on the importance of Lagos to the development of Nollywood industries (2007b; 2016). A city based approach offers a new perspective on screen media from the more conventional national framework. This is not to say that national studies have no relevance – *African Video Movies and Global Desires: A Ghanaian History* (Garritano 2013), for instance, is brilliant – but rather that a focus on cities offers a new lens for studying post-national film industries without falling into the trap of an ungrounded celebration of transnationalism that cannot account for the exact spaces where films are made, circulated, and watched. Tcheuyap (2011) suggests the limitations of a national cinemas approach to African film, but does not put forward a new model. City scholarship is especially useful as a response to a post-national world. Throughout this thesis I hope to demonstrate the productivity of a city based approach for studying transnationally connected and networked 'Afropolitan' filmmakers

without losing sight of the physical spaces where they work and where their films are circulated and watched – and the constraints and possibilities those spaces generate.

Part 5: Research methods

This thesis is author-focused – individual female filmmakers are at its centre – but it is not an *auteur* study. For, "at worst reductive, at best naïve, auteurism privileges the authored text over the complexities of context" (Tasker 2010, 213). Unlike an auteur-focused study, I will follow Dovey and not treat filmmakers as "autonomous artists distinct from sociocultural contexts" (2009, 15). Rather, this thesis aims to ground these filmmakers in material local and transnational spaces, and the circuits in which they live and work. Thus, in order to answer my central research question – that is, the extent to which Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a movement – I undertook eight consecutive months of field research in Nairobi, Kenya from October 2014 to June 2015.

A key challenge during my research was finding copies of films and television shows by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Films that had been recently successful in international film festivals – such as *Soul Boy* and *Something Necessary* – were easy to locate and purchase (for instance in DVD copies from Amazon), but it was much harder to find older films and almost impossible to find television shows after they had aired. A key method in my search for screen media was scouring the Internet in search of links. Major video hosting websites like YouTube and Vimeo were my first ports of call, and, for instance, I was first able to view *Saikati* when a copy was uploaded to YouTube on 2 October 2014.[21] I also found films on online platforms of various degrees of obscurity. To give two examples, I was able to watch Wanuri Kahiu's short film *Ras Star* (2007) via a link temporarily hosted by the women's empowerment website Imagining Ourselves and found *Africa is a Woman's Name* (Sinclair, Pickering, and Kinyanjui, 2009) on the film hosting website Culture Unplugged.[22] Because I knew about these films in advance I was able to hunt them down online, but without this prior knowledge,

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[21] At present (28 August 2017), there are two YouTube versions of *Saikati* available. One was uploaded by DrehbuchWerkstatt Munchen on October 2, 2014 and the other was uploaded by 4th Ark on 26 September 2016.
[22] Imagining Ourselves still hosts a page giving information about *Ras Star*, but the link to the actual film no longer works (Imagining Ourselves 2008).

many of these films would be almost impossible to find. I searched for films periodically because, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, a key characteristic of online film distribution is the instability of links, and films continually appear, disappear, and reappear. Another core method was relying on personal contacts with filmmakers to source their films. For instance, I was able to watch *Leo* (Mutune, 2011) after contacting the director Jinna Mutune directly, and agreeing to pay a $25 (£19) donation to the development of her next film. I was then sent the link and password to a Vimeo account where I could watch the film. Many filmmakers also generously gave me DVDs or loaned me their personal copies, or sent me online links to their films. A final method was looking for film forums and festival screenings in Nairobi and London where films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers were shown.

When I began interviewing filmmakers in Nairobi, and attending film screenings and industry events, my initial assumptions about Nairobi-based female filmmakers were dramatically challenged. Here, there is a strong parallel between my work and that of popular culture historian Laura Fair. She has written extensively about viewing practices among Zanzibaris from the 1950s to the 1980s (2004, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), and her main argument, developed across several articles, is that while many Hollywood films played in the Zanzibar market, it was Bollywood films that really captured local imaginations and impacted lives. The innovation in her research lies in its methodology – rather than speculating about audiences she went into the field to talk with audience members. She used several methods to capture audience preferences, starting with newspaper advertisements and censorship records to get a sense of what was showing in cinemas in the 1950s-1980s (2010a, 92). The significance of her turn to audience interviews is best captured in her own words:

> I had plans to go to Zanzibar and begin interviews and archival research on the project, and assumed that I would return the following September and spend the winter lounging on the couch watching Hollywood classics that had played in East Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Interviews with men and women who went to the show during these decades took my research in entirely new directions. (2010a, 93)

Over the hundreds of interviews conducted and questionnaires distributed (to both men and women and people from different ethnic and class backgrounds) (2010a, 93), her initial assumptions were completely shattered.

While my research developed into a project grounded specifically in Nairobi, it did not begin this way. I initially encountered these filmmakers through the context of my MA African Film Class (at SOAS University of London) and the London-based film festival Film Africa. I was intrigued by the 'success' of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and I saw them as 'successful' because of their participation in the international film festival circuit. Dovey convincingly argues for the "unacknowledged" importance of film festivals in "shaping canons and making certain films accessible to scholars and others not (2015a, 128). This was certainly true in my case. My initial research plan was to interview 'successful' Kenyan female filmmakers – such as Wanuri Kahiu (*Pumzi* 2010), Hawa Essuman (*Soul Boy* 2010), Ng'endo Mukii (*Yellow Fever* 2012), and Judy Kibinge (*Something Necessary* 2013) – as part of my author focused study. Once in Nairobi, my perspective shifted dramatically, as I quickly realised that 'festival' filmmaking was only one part of the work Nairobi-based female filmmakers undertake, and only one way of defining their success as filmmakers. In response, I adopted two main methods.

The dominant method I used while conducting my field research was expert interviews. While in Nairobi, I conducted 30 interviews with 27 different people. I completed one additional interview in London in 2013 with Judy Kibinge while she was in town for the Film Africa film festival. Prior to travelling to Nairobi I contacted four filmmakers – Judy Kibinge, Wanuri Kahiu, Ng'endo Mukii, and Hawa Essuman – and arranged initial interviews.[23] I was initially introduced to these filmmakers through my PhD supervisor Lindiwe Dovey. I selected these four filmmakers to be the focus of my initial analysis because they were the filmmakers with the biggest international profiles – gained through touring their films on the international film festival circuit – and I had read a significant amount of journalistic material on each of them. Once in Nairobi, I realised the phenomenon

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[23] I also contacted Amira and Wafa Tajdin, and despite their initial agreement to be interviewed for my project, I was never able to schedule an interview with them.

of Nairobi-based female filmmakers was much larger than I anticipated and answering my research question would require conducting interviews with a larger number of people.

In order to grow my network of potential interviewees I used several different approaches. First, I relied on interviewees to share contact details or recommend me to their filmmaking contacts, and through this networking approach I was able to conduct several subsequent interviews. I relied heavily on the generosity of filmmakers in sharing their contacts – for instance, Ng'endo Mukii endorsed me to some of her contacts, thus leading to interviews with Toni Kamau, Jackie Lebo, and Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann. At the end of each interview I also asked my interviewees who they recommended I speak with and what individuals they thought were the most important in the industry. I was able to learn about new people in this way as well as gain a further understanding of how important individual people were. For instance, Judy Kibinge was continually mentioned as a pivotal figure in the industry and the importance of Dorothy Ghettuba and Alison Ngibuini was continually affirmed in discussions of the local television landscape. I also emailed potential interviewees who I identified as interesting through reading about them in scholarly sources or journalistic materials. For instance, I wrote Wanjiru Kinyanjui, Anne Mungai, and Dommie Yambo-Odotte after reading about them in materials about the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.[24] Finally, through networking at film events and through chance encounters I was able to meet several more filmmakers or film industry professionals. For instance, while at the launch of *The Last Fight* (Lebo, 2015), I met entertainment and IP lawyer Liz Lenjo and was able to arrange an interview with her.

The process of arranging interviews was challenging, and required persistence and flexibility on my part to seize every opportunity to meet with a filmmaker. For instance, Wanjiru Kinyanjui agreed to be interviewed, but it took seven weeks of back-and-forth emailing before we could set a date. Finally, she

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[24] I interviewed members of the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers who rose to prominence in the 1990s and are still working in Nairobi today (such as Anne Mungai, Wanjiru Kinyanjui, and Dommie Yambo-Odotte), but as my focus in on *contemporary* filmmaking in Nairobi, I did not engage in historical research.

contacted me one morning and we met that afternoon. I was not able to interview every filmmaker I identified as important or interesting and this was most commonly the result of scheduling difficulties. Both Alison Ngibuini and Zipporah Nyaruri agreed to be interviewed, but then it was impossible to find a time when we could meet because of their busy schedules. Only one filmmaker declined to be interviewed for my project, because they believed that they would not be helpful because they were not Kenyan.

Each interview was recorded on audio and was semi-structured.[25] I prepared a list of questions in advance, but rather than surveying filmmakers I let our conversations flow organically. My first four interviews (with Wanuri Kahiu, Ng'endo Mukii, Judy Kibinge, and Hawa Essuman) did not follow the same set of questions, but after conducting this initial set of interviews and reviewing the transcripts I made a list of 18 questions I used as a guide in all subsequent interviews (see Appendix One). At the beginning of each interview I asked each person to tell me about the stage they were at in their career and the projects they were working on currently or had been working on recently. This allowed me to learn more about their work and had the additional key benefit of making them comfortable opening up and talking to me and overcoming initial interview nerves. Each interview varied in length from 45 minutes to two hours, but on average they lasted for 60-90 minutes. I sometimes had to end interviews because filmmakers had to leave for other commitments, but it was more common that I ended the interview once all my questions had been answered and our conversation naturally came to a close.

My second method was the observation of film distribution and exhibition circuits in Nairobi so that I could understand where and why the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers were screened. My observation focused around three main locations - the Goethe Institut, the Alliance Française, and the arts centre Pawa254 - as this is where the vast majority of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers are shown. I did not engage in audience research, but I did make observations about the audiences at the venues I was studying. At each event I

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[25] I conducted one interview (with Hawa Essuman) via Skype while she was in Europe and I was in Nairobi, but this interview was also recorded.

attended at these venues I noted the number of people present, including how audience numbers increased or decreased throughout the screening. A common feature of film screenings in Nairobi is that they host Q&A sessions after the films screen, so I also logged all audience questions and comments in my field notebook. I further noted audience reactions during film screenings (such as laughter).[26] I also noted, as far as possible, the composition of the audience.[27] My study of audiences was observational, and I did not directly ask audience members for their opinions about films or film events. My dominant interest was in factors influencing film circulation – for instance, why the films of Nairobi-based filmmakers were screened more frequently at the Goethe Institut than in commercial theatres – and the strategies Nairobi-based female filmmakers were adopting to find both audiences and markets for their films.

Had I remained in London, my study would have remained focused on the international film festival success of Nairobi-based female filmmakers and would have been unable to account for the true scope of their careers. Anthropologist and librarian Nancy J. Schmidt argues that "information about successful *and unsuccessful* film-makers needs to be collected, both for tracing the development of individual careers and for learning about the specific factors in individual African countries which are relevant for understanding the roles of women film-makers" (1999, 292; emphasis mine). By engaging in field-based research with filmmakers, I learned about their 'failures' as well as successes, and all the projects that these filmmakers undertake to sustain their careers as filmmakers. Ultimately, while this project began as an attempt to study successful 'festival' filmmakers, it became an industry study of Nairobi-based female filmmakers focusing particularly on their modes of work as well as their screen media outputs, from a perspective rooted in Nairobi itself.

This approach follows Dovey's argument that "specific, ethnographic studies of various African film and media organisations and institutions are

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[26] For instance, I noted how at a screening of *Maramaso* (Asherman, 2013) at Pawa254, the audience around me laughed whenever the film's narrator – an American man with a broad southern accent – pronounced a Kenyan name.
[27] For instance, through lively Q&A sessions at the monthly Lola Kenya Film Forum (hosted at the Goethe Institut) I was able to surmise that the audience of this event mostly consisted of filmmakers and aspiring filmmakers.

urgently needed to begin to understand why it is that, in the African context, African women have not enjoyed a sustained presence" and also to understand the circumstances where this is changing (2012a, 21- 23). Methodologically, my thesis aims to show the importance of field-based research to understanding the participation of women in African screen media industries. African languages and literatures scholar Tejumola Olaniyan (2015) argues that scholarly "accents," or perspectives, are determined not by the nationality of the scholar but by their primary working location. Through basing myself in Nairobi for a long period of research, I attempted to change my scholarly accent.

The limitations of a non-field based approach are demonstrated in the methodology of the book *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (White 2015). Film scholar Patricia White acknowledges that only particular films make it to the US (her place of work), but her methods do nothing to address this problem. What remains is essentially a random study of films by women from across the world, with no accounting for the production contexts of those films. Her focus on 'festival' films neglects other circuits operating in the films' origin contexts, and, furthermore, artificially assumes that films that do travel beyond their origin context are higher status artworks than those that are popular locally. She also assumes that directors should be primarily associated with prestige works, neglecting, for instance, that these directors may well create screen media works far beyond the scope of film festivals and foreign art house cinemas. Fundamentally, where we research from matters, and moving beyond Eurocentric approaches that privilege films that gain Euro-American audiences necessitates ethnographic work that considers local spaces and transnational connectedness. As Jedlowski forcefully argues, the dynamism of African media production today "invite[s] us to study media 'from' the south as a way to make sense of wider transformations taking place the world over' (2016, 189).

Furthermore, while our contemporary world is globalised, "global networks are maintained, adjusted, guarded, and configured in the local" (Myers and Murray 2006, 3). Studying these connections requires careful grounding, and here I am inspired by African literature scholar Eileen Julien when she argues that putting the creative productions of Africans in conversation with artists from elsewhere

(as is necessary in an interconnected world) "will require more—not less—'local' knowledge of these multiple places and will recognize both African specificities and Africa's presence in the world" (2015, 26). Thus, while exploring the transnational connections of these filmmakers – such as their use of international funding sources and participation in non-Kenyan film festivals – this thesis is equally focused on how their positions within Nairobi have contributed to shaping their careers.

Part 6: Chapter outlines

This thesis is structured in five chapters, each of which addresses, from a different angle, my central research question, that is: to what extent can the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement? I begin, in Chapter Two, "Questioning Women's Cinema: thematic coherence and stylistic difference in the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers," by examining the aesthetics and themes of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. I argue that these films are strongly connected by a thematic emphasis on class – rather than gender – and that they display a wide range of different styles. This stylistic difference is reflective of the entrepreneurialism of Nairobi-based female filmmakers and their willingness to experiment in multiple screen media forms.

Chapter Three, "To Be Based in Nairobi: Middle class filmmakers in an environment of media convergence," shows that Nairobi-based female filmmakers work in many modes including fiction, documentary, television, and creative and corporate work. It argues that taking advantage of this environment of media convergence requires certain skills and social positioning, and that their status as members of Nairobi's transnationally connected middle class is vital to their benefiting from Nairobi's media environment.

Chapter Four, "Negotiating Transnational Circuits of Cinema: Locating agency," discusses the transnational connections of Nairobi-based female filmmakers specifically in terms of their involvement in transnational film projects and use of transnational film funds and distribution circuits. It emphasises that examining the impact of 'foreign' funders or distribution circuits (such as international film festivals) on African film requires case study work that

recognises the multiplicity of funder and festival agendas and the agency of filmmakers.

Chapter Five, "Social Lives, Shelf Lives: Screen media circulation in Nairobi," examines how the screen media productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate within domestic, online, and live spaces in Nairobi. Rather than focusing only on successful films and televisions shows, I also show how understanding dynamics of what is not shown – because of state or market censorship – is vital to understanding the local screen media environment as well as audience tastes. I argue that state and market censors create limits on the kinds of screen media products Nairobi-based spectators can encounter, but also stress that local curators, filmmakers, and exhibition spaces are working to build new audiences and markets for locally made productions.

Finally, in Chapter Six, "Creative Hustling: Precarity, entrepreneurialism, and innovation in Nairobi," I discuss how Nairobi-based female filmmakers creatively and entrepreneurially hustle to build their own opportunities in Nairobi. Through situating Nairobi-based female filmmakers in the context of Nairobi-based screen media industries and within transnational film industries, I demonstrate that while hustling is born out of precarity it is also a creative practice in its own right, and that focusing on the entrepreneurial labour of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is vital to understanding how they can be considered to constitute a film movement.

Chapter 2

Questioning Women's Cinema: thematic coherence and stylistic difference in the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers

Celluloid Ceiling: Women Film Directors Breaking Through is an uplifting book designed to celebrate female film directors from around the world; it "documents just some of the incredible talent which exists, and the important legacy of women's filmmaking internationally" (Kelly and Robson 2014, 18). In one of two chapters focusing on Africa, communications scholar Maria Williams-Hawkins makes the following declaration about African female filmmakers:

> From small, dusty villages to sprawling big cities, these women tell African women's, all women's, stories. They do not focus on their experiences exclusively but write scripts with other women from other countries whose experiences bind them emotionally. Their stories come from Northern Africa down to the tip of Cape Town. These stories tell of the trials that women face across the diaspora, rich or poor, pearlescent or onyx, in trials or triumphs, African. African women filmmakers are telling stories their way. (2014, 27-28)

This narrative of African women triumphantly telling their stories and 'breaking through' the 'celluloid ceiling' suggests a unified subject (African women) telling a unified set of stories (women's stories). Yet, is it possible or analytically useful to group African women together as a type of storyteller? Is assuming a connection between African female filmmakers on the grounds of their being African and female putting the cart before the horse? This chapter positions itself in response to these questions by not assuming a commonality between Nairobi-based female filmmakers on the basis of their gender but by throwing this commonality into question. My intention here is to explore to what extent Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be seen as constituting a movement because they share aesthetic and thematic similarities in their screen media work.

Importantly, this discussion does not include 'service contract' projects such as commissioned work for development organisations or commercial advertising. As McNamara emphasises, "under the conditions of a 'service contract', media producers are generally divested of any direct economic interest in the

production itself, and are simply hired to provide production services for a client …
while working within strict project guidelines" (2016, 81). This chapter focuses
instead on the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers where they could assert
artistic and creative control, and thus focuses closely on feature fiction films,
feature documentaries, and short films.[28] However, this is not to say that
commissioned films cannot be works of art in their own right.[29] Ng'endo Mukii's
short animated film *This Migrant Business* (2015), for instance, works with a clear
brief to present a didactic message, but while the content is simple its formal
experimentation is highly unusual.

I will first discuss whether or not it is advisable, or even possible, to group
the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers together on the grounds that their
makers are women, and I will do this through engaging with contemporary
scholarship on women's cinema. In her recent book *Women's Cinema, World
Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (2015), White sets out to undertake a
feminist reading of women's films from across the world. Yet, even on a
definitional level this is a complicated task, for what precisely is 'women's cinema'
in the first place? As she herself acknowledges,

> Is it a category of "authorship" (itself a contested term in cinema) as in films
> by women; or content, as in films about them? Is it defined by prefeminist
> "essence" (the cinema that reflects women's sensibilities), feminist activism
> (the cinema women make by and for themselves), or postfeminist
> consumption (the market for chick flicks)? (2015, 8-9)

The celebration of the emergence of female filmmakers in Africa, and the
transformation this emergence supposedly engenders, shows the centrality of the
female filmmaker in discourses on women's cinema in Africa. The logic goes, "the
emergence of women's filmmaking has enabled women directors everywhere to
deconstruct stereotypical representations of female characters that are generally
filmed from a male point-of-view" (Thackway 2003, 147).[30] According to Bisschoff,

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[28] This chapter only briefly includes mention of television programs. This choice relates heavily to
the methodological difficulty in locating television programs after they had aired (see Introduction).
[29] I will discuss commissioned films and the role they play in the careers of Nairobi-based female
filmmakers in Chapter Three.
[30] "In this particularly charged post-colonial context, filmmaking emerges as a radically political
act—that of appropriating the right to represent oneself and one's concerns on the screen"

African women filmmakers often "enter the industry through a desire to tell their own stories" and that "commonly their main goal is to offer alternative representations of African women as a counter to western and masculinist hegemony" (2012, 168). In this perspective, female presence behind the camera will inevitably lead to different representations of women on screen and act as a challenge to dominant modes of representation. It is precisely this idea that I seek to problematize and nuance in this chapter, for "there are simply too many films by women in the world, all over the world, for female authorship alone to have any predictable effects" (White 2015, 13-14).

Furthermore, feminist film scholar E. Ann Kaplan contends "whereas in the 1970s we needed an embattled stance," this time has now passed and we have now realised "being 'female' or 'male' does not signify any *necessary* social stance vis-à-vis dominant cultural attitudes" and therefore films by women are not "necessarily more progressive or forward looking" than those by men (2003, 25; emphasis hers).[31] An analysis of Anne Mungai's film *Tough Choices* (1998) would certainly militate against any argument that female filmmakers necessarily present 'feminist' visions in their films. The film tells the story of a schoolgirl named Rebecca who accidentally gets pregnant after succumbing to pressure from her boyfriend Peter to have sex. The tough choice referenced in the title is whether or not Rebecca should have an abortion, though within the moral economy of the film, abortion is not a choice at all but tantamount to murder. Furthermore, responsibility for the pregnancy is attributed solely to Rebecca. When Peter learns of her pregnancy he refuses to marry her, accuses her of being promiscuous, and tells her to get an abortion. Meanwhile, her best friend, who chose to remain chaste when given an ultimatum by her boyfriend, discovers he has seen the error of his ways, become a Christian, and now is also choosing abstinence. The film thus presents and aligns itself with a deeply conservative Christian worldview. Yet, a word of caution is

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(Thackway 2003, 179); African female filmmakers experience this perhaps also within the context of *women* taking space on screen being a 'radically political act.'

[31] This point is also demonstrated by Garritano in her discussion of Ghanaian female filmmaker Shirley Frimpong-Manso's *Picture Perfect* (2009). Garritano argues the film centres on three 'independent' women who express their agency only "through sex, sexy talk about sex, and shopping" (2013, 181). The film also ignores "the coercive pressure of gender norms" and ideologies that pressure women into only being happy if they fall in line, by having each woman end up in a conventional relationship because it makes them 'happy' (Garritano 2013, 182).

necessary here because, as I discussed in my Introduction, feminism does not have one unified meaning and rather must be approached from an intersectional perspective; female filmmakers have different needs based on where they are located and other contextual factors. Nonetheless, there are pervasive stereotypes that suggest *all* women filmmakers create in the same way. There are "powerful cultural assumptions" about what women are supposed to create and the areas where they supposedly shine as creators (Tasker 2010, 221), and this usually means emotionally driven films. Tasker elaborates:

> Yet of course, we are not simply dealing here with an expectation that movies directed by women are more likely to operate primarily on an emotional level. It is also a question of the kind of emotional stories women are expected to tell as opposed to those that attract status and critical interest. After all, the telling of elaborate stories of the tortured male psyche; complex rites of passage; male bonding in the context of fear and violence; or melodramas of masculine transformation are rarely regarded as either uncommercial or even unmasculine. (2010, 221)

These stereotypes about films made by women have a profound impact on the production and circulation of films by women, and thus must be interrogated.

The understanding of women's cinema outlined by Thackway above cannot simply be discarded or we risk neglecting the very real structural inequalities women in cinema face. For instance, "many of the great women directors who emerged on the continent in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s – such as Sarah Maldoror, Safi Faye, and Anne Mungai – have made very few films. Those that they have made have not been widely screened, and sometimes do not exist in modern, digital formats" (Dovey 2012a, 22). Keeping the female filmmaker in focus as a unit of analysis ensures that questions of unequal access to cinema cannot be left unasked. An essential question thus becomes: how do we "talk about the work of women filmmakers, while avoiding unthinking celebration, or assuming that the issue of gender is simply irrelevant?" (Tasker 2010, 216).

What is of particular interest, however, is that the filmmaking careers of Nairobi's female filmmakers have not, on the whole, been defined by telling personal stories or 'women's stories' but rather by a diverse range of narratives, as I will show. This chapter thus challenges the idea of African women only telling –

or being able to tell - their 'own' stories. According to Bisschoff, "female directors often deal with issues of femininity and womanhood in their work, and regularly put female issues and characters central to their narratives" while also maintaining that "this is not to claim that women's filmmaking should be limited to women's issues" (2012, 164). For every hagiographic celebration of accomplished women (*African is a Woman's Name*, *For Our Land* [Kahiu, 2009]),[32] there is a suspenseful thriller about betrayal and male criminality (*Killer Necklace* [Kibinge, 2008]) or an urban fairy-tale with a male protagonist (*Soul Boy*); for every story focused on a female protagonist (*Project Daddy* [Kibinge, 2004], *Pumzi, Saikati, The Battle of the Sacred Tree*) there is another that interweaves stories of men and women (*Something Necessary, Dangerous Affair, From a Whisper, Killer Necklace*); and for every documentary about female bodies (*Yellow Fever*) there is one about truth and justice after atrocity (*Scarred: the Anatomy of a Massacre* [Kibinge, 2015]). We must be attuned to "the prerogatives, objectives, and stylistic and thematic choices of female film-makers" (Bisschoff 2012, 164), and this means considering all these varied productions with their diverse subjects.

Part 1: Approaching theme and style

In her analysis of *Something Necessary* and *From a Whisper*, Giruzzi claims these two films "cannot be considered as representative of all contemporary women's film-making from Kenya" and one of her reasons is that "their production values are very high" (2015, 91).[33] She does not mention any other films made by Kenyan women to support her point, and as such, this statement suggests an underlying bias about what the films made by Kenyan women will be like. Importantly, it also reflects a lack of knowledge about the broad range of work being undertaken by

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[32] *Africa is a Woman's Name* is a three part episodic documentary by Ingrid Sinclair (from Zimbabwe), Bridget Pickering (from Namibia, now based in South Africa) and Wanjiru Kinyanjui (from Kenya). In three episodes, it tells the stories of three African women. Kinyanjui's episode focuses on Njoki Ndung'u a leading human rights lawyer, former Kenyan MP, and leader of the fight against sexual violence in Kenya. It presents a prominent public figure and focuses exclusively on her professional achievements, therefore presenting a simple picture of a 'good' woman without depth and complication. *For Our Land* takes much the same approach to the story of Wangari Maathai (aside for a brief reference to her divorce court battle) and thus has the same limitations as *Africa is a Woman's Name.* The other films mentioned in this paragraph will be discussed in more detail in the main text.

[33] Giruzzi's further reason for not considering the films as representative of the work of all Kenyan female filmmakers – that they have received "critical attention from abroad" including film festival screenings (2015, 91) – will be explored in Chapter Four.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers – which I was able to discover because, rather than relying on a textual methodology as Giruzzi does, I adopted a field-based approach where I could meet filmmakers and explore the context in which they work. Giruzzi is correct that these two films do indeed display high production values – each has a carefully composed musical score and the composition of each shot, as well as the narrative of each film, shows the work of two confident and capable directors whose films display an aesthetic standard that would not be out of place in a major movie theatre accustomed to showing Hollywood fare, or on the more prestigious screens of international film festivals. Yet, in direct contrast to Giruzzi's assumption that the high quality of these films is exceptional within the Kenyan context, I will show that the high quality of these films is a central element to an entire segment of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. However, I will also demonstrate that the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers cannot be linked by one singular style; rather, they have many different styles.

Before delving into this analysis, it is first necessary to explore how 'quality' film is to be defined. In a report on the development of Kenyan film industries for the World Story Organization, Justin R. Edwards argues that one way for Kenyan films to attract markets within and outside Kenya is "to be that irresistibly good. This is an inevitable consequence of the development of the Kenyan film industry. Beginning with a solid foundation in film education, the films to come from Kenya's educated filmmakers can't help but eventually be *deserving* of international attention. *A great film will get noticed*" (2008, 14; emphasis mine).[34] Edwards says that good films will get noticed, that making an irresistibly good film will guarantee success. However, Edwards neglects the fact that quality is a matter of perspective and a value judgment. If "objects shift in meaning as they move through regimes and circuits of exchange … [and] the meaning of texts or objects is enacted through practices of reception" (Ginsburg, et al. 2002, 5-6), surely, then, what is of 'quality' about a particular text is also unstable.

Importantly, what is of 'quality' is necessarily a value judgement, but this fact must not be allowed to foreclose discussion of aesthetics and themes in art. In

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[34] This assessment neglects the capitalist system of promoting films and the gatekeepers of global cinemas that decide what is 'great' and what will be seen ('great' or not). I will discuss these dynamics in detail in Chapter Four.

a discussion of film festival curation, Dovey draws on Planet in Focus Film Festival curator Mark Haslam:

> While Haslam acknowledges that "Curation is inherently a matter of personal taste and aesthetics," he also argues that "this can become a problem when one's own tastes are exalted to the level of the absolute. Often along with this comes the attitude that because this set of aesthetic parameters is now considered absolute, it doesn't need to be articulated, defined, or made explicit to others" (2004: 56–57). What Haslam encourages is acknowledgment of one's curatorial criteria so that those criteria are available for critique, and thus vulnerable to *(dis)sensus communis*. (Dovey 2015a, 85)

It is important to make the criteria of judgment visible and open to debate, rather than assuming a coherent definition for the term 'quality cinema' (as Edwards does in his discussion of 'great' films). As mentioned in my Introduction, Nollywood films have long been criticised as lacking in comparison to other traditions of African cinema (cf. Barrot 2008; Okome 2010; McCain 2011, 257; Sereda 2010), but the fact that Nollywood has a massive, and global, audience suggests that "this kind of filmmaking is considered aesthetically superior within certain contexts, however lacking in conventional image and sound quality it may appear to other eyes and ears" (Dovey 2015a, 93). Few Nigerians are concerned "that the movies fail to strive for a more subdued 'art cinema' style" despite their awareness of the "technical and aesthetic shortcomings" of the films (McCall 2002, 88). Debates on Bollywood are also relevant here. Indian film scholar Rosie Thomas examines criticism of Bollywood in "the English language 'quality' press" and notes there is a reluctance "to acknowledge and deal with the fact that Hindi cinema clearly gives enormous pleasure to vast pan-Indian (and Third World) audiences" and instead the films are disparaged (1985, 118-120). The quality of a film must "be judged in context, through the *(dis)sensus communis* that arises through particular screenings of, and discussions around, that film" (Dovey 2015a, 21); it is not a static attribute of a text.

In order to understand the thematic and stylistic elements of the films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, I will now turn to Garritano's pioneering study of Ghanaian video movies (2013), which offers opportunities for revelatory comparative analysis while also ensuring that the broader African identities of

these female filmmakers are not overlooked. I will draw a comparison between the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers and those video movies that Garritano describes as 'professional' in the Ghanaian context. Garritano writes:

> A "professional" movie, it seemed, was defined through difference and aspiration. It was never a movie about witchcraft, and in all cases, the professional movie was one that seemed more suitable to a global audience, one that was thought to be more like a Hollywood film, in part, because it transcended its local context. (2013, 102)

For professional video makers, quality "was synonymous with Hollywood" and they "aspired to a global standard" (Garritano 2013, 102). According to Garritano, "the makers of popular movies have never been principally concerned with authenticity, cultural revival, or cultural preservation, the founding motivations of elite African cinema" (2013, 6); rather they are "lovers of movies, of good stories, and of entertainment. The makers of African popular video come to movies, first, as consumers of global, commercial cinema" (Garritano 2013, 197). Nairobi-based female filmmakers do not neatly fit at either end of this spectrum – they are 'lovers of movies,' often from across the globe and including Hollywood, as well as serious cultural thinkers well aware of their position as African filmmakers operating in a world and cultural marketplace filled with stereotypes about who they are and what they can do (see Chapter Four).[35] I hope to show that they are also entrepreneurs willing and able to experiment in multiple screen media forms.

Professionalism in Ghanaian video movies is not directly correlated with budget or the career biography of the filmmaker in terms of formal training, as "not every high quality movie could be described as professional, nor was every movie made by a trained videomaker considered professional" (Garritano 2013, 102). Garritano characterises professional Ghanaian video moves as 'extroverted,'[36] and, according to Julien (whom Garritano references) extroversion is "correlated with a number of factors: publishing house, place of publication,[37] and explicit engagement with—or a capacity to be read as engaging—broad critical

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[35] I will discuss how Nairobi-based female filmmakers navigate the world cinema and international film festival circuit in Chapter Four.

[36] While not cited by Garritano, Jean-François Bayart's article "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion" (2000) is a seminal text on extroversion and Africa over the *longue durée*.

[37] Extra-textual factors such as these will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

debates" (2006, 681-682). Ghanaian video movies engage in global debates on gender to "perform professionalism," and these "intertextual dialogues with global feminist discourses" show "the movie's cosmopolitanism and inserts Ghanaian voices into worldwide discussions about gender" (Garritano 2013, 115-116). The style of professional movies was extroverted even if "videomakers … had no intention of distributing their movies 'outside'" (Garritano 2013, 102), showing that extroversion is not a function of distribution necessarily but rather a style that can be read from the text. Production values are not the defining feature of 'professional' Ghanaian video movies; rather, aspiring to a 'global standard' and attempting to claim a place in a cosmopolitan world beyond Ghana's borders through their 'extroverted' style is what is essential.

The films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers share some of the features of the Ghanaian professional videos, but also have important divergences. First, they certainly aspire to a 'global standard.' Importantly, however, while many of their films would be familiar to an audience used to the conventions of Hollywood narrative cinema and the appearance of Hollywood films, a significant number of them do not reach this 'global standard.' Second, they share an extroverted style as the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers engage in broad debates on class.[38] Through this engagement with class, however, they also show their key point of divergence with professional Ghanaian videos. Unlike the Ghanaian videos, they do not seek to transcend their local context by ignoring issues of local social and political significance. As Garritano notes,

> what is remarkable about … "professional" movies from this period [the 1990s] is their deliberate obscuring and sanitizing of the social. These videos intentionally mask the privation that was the defining feature of their context. The urban landscape, when made visible at all, is largely devoid of signs of hardship, poverty, or breakdown. Instead, the city is made to resemble a display window, a framed and carefully orchestrated presentation of consumerism and consumption. (2013, 107)

The films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, on the other hand, specifically engage with social issues of local importance. The dominant way they engage with

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[38] Class and precarity in relation to Nairobi-based female filmmakers will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Six.

the materiality of their local context, rather than closing it off as in professional Ghanaian video movies, is through exploring the implications of class difference.

Part 2: Theme: Commentary on class

Explorations of class and inequality can be seen from the beginnings of feature filmmaking by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Anne Mungai's first feature fiction film *Saikati* (1992), the first film by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker, tells the story of a young girl named Saikati from a Maasai village who travels to Nairobi to work and escape an arranged marriage, only to realise that she belongs not in the city but in the Maasai Mara and that she must return home to confront her problems and pursue her dream of getting an education. The dominant theme of the film is depicted visually from the outset. When Saikati first appears onscreen in the opening sequence she is in a neat school uniform of pencil skirt, blouse, and tie. She is on her way to her village and once she arrives she immediately changes into a cloth wrapper and layers of ornate beaded necklaces and headpieces. This visual juxtaposition of urban/'modern' and 'traditional'/rural life goes on to be a tension that structures the entire film.

However, alongside this dominant theme is a powerful critique of material and racial inequality. Saikati goes to Nairobi at the insistence of her Nairobi-based cousin Monica. Once there, Monica transforms Saikati into a fashionable urban woman through a montage makeover sequence, and the two go to a fancy hotel to meet two white British tourists for dinner. Unbeknownst to Saikati, Monica is working as a sex worker and intends for Saikati to do the same. When Saikati realises what is expected from her she flees from the hotel room, and subsequently receives an impassioned speech by Monica that her work as a sex worker results from her dire economic circumstances and need to provide for her baby. The film thus critiques the wealthy men who come to Kenya and take advantage of women whose material circumstances leave them few other options. Following this incident Saikati decides to return home. African film and literature scholar Mbye Cham critiques *Saikati* on the grounds that its second half, where Saikati, Monica, and the two British tourists all go to the Mara (the final three for a holiday and Saikati to go home) "turns into a promotional tourist piece" (Cham and Mungai 1994, 94). However, while the Mara is shown as beautiful and wildlife filled, and

the resorts within it as luxurious, *Saikati* does not promote tourism.[39] Rather, the film as a whole suggests the darker side of affluent tourism where rich foreigners come to Kenya, but remove themselves completely from the social realities of the places they are visiting.

The socio-economic critique of class relationships present in *Saikati* would later become a central theme in a host of feature film productions, this time not set in a conflict between 'tradition' and 'modernity' and urban versus rural life, but firmly in the metropolis and exploring its nuances and contradictions. Judy Kibinge's 2008 stylish noir thriller *Killer Necklace* is emblematic of this trend. The film is based on a graphic novel, and these roots are immediately apparent in its moody blue colouring and the stylised female body on display in its opening scene. The opening establishing shots are of the outside of a mansion in a leafy Nairobi suburb. The only sound is birds chirping until we hear a female voice say: "Hi baby, of course we're still meeting." We do not yet see her on screen, but the camera tilts to a top floor window and when it cuts to the inside of the room we see a bath tub faucet in close up, covered in bubbles, and the camera pans across the tub revealing a woman bathing. We only see a portion of her leg at the knee – the bubbles tastefully obscure the rest of her body. The camera cuts to a close up of her face holding a phone and the scene ends with the words "I can't wait either my love." At first we are led to believe this young woman, Noni, is the wealthy occupant of the mansion, but the film soon reveals she is a maid there and is thus deceiving her boyfriend, Mbugua, who in turn is deceiving her by not revealing that while he is a student, he is not affluent and lives precariously in an informal settlement.

The central tension of the film is structured around the woman's desire for an elegant golden necklace and Mbugua's attempt to acquire it for her – this desire eventually destroys both of them. Mbugua becomes increasingly dependent on a local gangster up to the point that he commits a burglary in whose aftermath an innocent bystander is violently killed. Finally, with the necklace in hand, Mbugua realises that Noni is not who she pretended to be, that she is consumed by desire

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[39] These specific locations in the Maasai Mara were presumably used as set pieces because Mungai received sponsorship from Serena Hotels. For more on the production context of *Saikati* see Chapter Four.

for only the necklace, and he joins the gangster permanently. The film is about greed and betrayal, but played out in a context of dramatic urban inequality. Like the professional Ghanaian video movies, this film displays consumption. In the most professional Ghanaian films, such as Veronica Quarshie's *Stab in the Dark* series, "consumption is seamlessly embedded into their narratives" and the movies "close off the social, representing the good life that very few actually enjoy in Ghana as if it were the everyday experienced by most" (Garritano 2013, 127). *Killer Necklace* differs because its plot is explicitly structured around the inability to attain these goods, and just as it shows prosperity, the film gives equal space to the lack that structures so many urban lives in Nairobi.

While *Killer Necklace* explores the contradictions of the unequal city within the noir thriller genre, *Soul Boy* does so within the bounds of an urban fairy tale. Much like *Killer Necklace*, *Soul Boy* demonstrates polished production values and a smooth visual style, though rather than creating a dark and sinister ambiance fitting a story of betrayal, it is sunny and colourful. The story is straightforward, following the classical narrative cinema structure of a cause-and-effect narrative where a young boy named Abila must complete a series of tasks to save his father's soul. The film is set in the informal settlement of Kibera and drew on crew and actors from Kibera. The departure from 'professional' Ghanaian video movies is immediately clear because rather than closing off the social and situating itself in a stylish middle class milieu, *Soul Boy* is set in one of Nairobi's poorest neighbourhoods. Yet, rather than focusing on this context of obvious material scarcity and fetishizing poverty (as is very common for films set in 'slums' and for journalistic representations of Kibera), *Soul Boy* treats its setting simply as home, making a bold political statement in the process. However, the most revealing scene of the film is set not in Kibera but in the upmarket suburb of Karen, in the home of the wealthy white family where Abila's aunt works. Abila's quest takes him to the house and when an accident leaves the owner's young daughter choking, Abila saves her life. In a subsequent scene the father sits with Abila in his spacious living room surrounded by fine objects and thanks Abila, in the process handing him several thousand Kenyan Shillings. The act of gratitude is genuine from a man who suspects Abila's family could use the money (Abila's family is at risk of

eviction and the money is ultimately used to pay their debt to their landlord, but there is no suggestion that the father knows the details of this situation). Admittedly, the film never dwells on Abila's poverty, presenting him as a happy and precocious child. Nevertheless, the context of a wealthy ex-patriate handing money to a poor African child is deeply uncomfortable and this scene suggests the wider social context in which he lives, and its stark inequality.

Unlike the linear cause and effect narrative of *Soul Boy*, *Leo*, another film about a young boy from one of Nairobi's low income neighbourhoods, has a convoluted plot. For instance, the defining marker of the eponymous protagonist Leo is that he thinks he is a superhero, yet his powers are never demonstrated and his journey to figure out what they might be fades inexplicably out of the plot as the film progresses. The film follows him and his family and the dramas surrounding them. His father is a driver for a rich white journalist and it is perhaps through this connection that Leo receives a scholarship to attend an elite private school. Leo's parents are extremely focused on his education and discourage him from his passion of drawing. His older brother rebels against the hardworking ethos of his parents and works for a local big man land grabber. The central conflicts of the film surround money and social mobility – work positioned against the easy gains of illicit activity (it is unclear if the brother's activities are actually illegal since they are never fully explained; what is clear is that they are considered immoral). Leo is discouraged from following his dreams – whether being a superhero or drawing – because it is an education that will bring him a better life.

Wanjiru Kinyanjui's films *Bahati* (2007) and *Manga in America* (2007), like the other films discussed thus far, engage very distinctly with working class life. *Bahati* tells the story of a recent college graduate named Bahati and his struggle to find work and subsequently provide for his family. Bahati is struggling in an unfair situation where his education means nothing. Manga (of Manga in America) loses his job as a banker when a loan he signed turned out to be fraudulent, and he subsequently goes on to lose his car and his house, resulting in his travelling to Washington DC to seek a new life. Once there he finds out the only job he can get at a bank is as a security guard, and the film ends without resolving his situation (the film ends almost mid conversation). However, as it is, the film does suggest the

precariousness of even middle class life in Nairobi[40] – especially when seen in a global framework through travel to the United States. The film is ambivalent about whether or not Manga deserves his downfall, but, importantly, it is also his wife and daughter who lose everything. Each of Kinyanjui's films shows the unfairness of precarity in contemporary Nairobi.

So far, I have discussed feature fiction films, but a class-based thematic analysis can also be seen in other formats, for instance, in Jackie Lebo's documentary *The Last Fight* (2015). The film tells the story of two famous Kenyan boxing clubs, each striving to return to the glory days of Kenyan boxing while also fighting to survive. The Nairobi-based boxers must fight through poverty and land grabbing attempts at their gym space, and a female boxer based at the Nakuru gym must struggle against the limitations of her gender in the masculine world of boxing. Boxing is a 'way out' and the film digs deeply into what it is the boxers are attempting to escape without pitying them. Their context is one of working class struggle and dire material circumstance, but they are fighters and their struggle is shown with dignity. Class difference is also problematized in Wanuri Kahiu's television show *State House* (2014) where the rich politicians and inhabitants of Kenya's State House are contrasted with the servants and other staff who work there.

Throughout this section, I have shown that while the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are not dominantly connected by concerns with gender, they do share an overwhelming concern with class. Like the professional Ghanaian video movies discussed by Garritano, the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are extroverted, as is displayed by their theme. But they also differ significantly because they engage deeply with their social context rather than ignoring it as the Ghanaian professional movies do. So far, I have argued that the films of Nairobi-based female filmmaker are thematically coherent through their close engagement with class issues, but I have not considered their style. In my next section I will focus on the style of the films, but I will also continue to reference their individual

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[40] Class, and particularly what constitutes a middle class in Nairobi, will be discussed in Chapter Three.

themes as the form (style) and content (theme) of films are imbricated with one another.

Part 3: Style

3.1 Stylistic internationalisation

The centrality of Hollywood worldwide has long been met with scholarly resistance – indeed the sub-discipline of world cinema studies developed precisely to de-centre Hollywood and shine a scholarly light on other cinemas that could otherwise have remained obscured in the shadows (Andrews 2006, 19; Nagib 2006; Smith 2016, 4). Hollywood – and European – cinema has often been seen as the hegemon that African filmmakers must deconstruct in the search for their own authentic film language (cf. Diawara 2010). Yet, in response to this scholarship, film scholar Iain Robert Smith notes, "the key question here is whether bracketing Hollywood's global dominance challenges its status or simply recentres it as the unacknowledged standard" (2016, 4). Thus, in his book on transnational adaptations of Hollywood hits such as *Star Wars* and *The Godfather* (specifically in India, Turkey, and the Philippines), Smith reconsiders the relationship between Hollywood and world cinema. He suggests that "scholarship on world cinema tends to neglect the transnational influence of Hollywood", just as scholarship on Hollywood ignores its "wider impact on world cinema," but this approach is flawed and instead: "we need to address this interrelationship in order to better interrogate the complex cultural dynamics underpinning the transnational circulation of cinema" (2016, 3). Charting interrelationships between Hollywood (and other cinemas) and the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is a vital part of the process of charting "more complex genealogies and revised histories of African film" (Bisschoff and Murphy 2014, 6) set out in places like the edited volume *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema* (Bisschoff and Murphy 2014). Nairobi-based female filmmakers operate in a web of cinematic influences that come from all over the world. Is it not their right to draw on these traditions as they see fit?

One anecdote here will help show my thinking on the subject. In autumn 2013, I was hastily asked to chair a Q&A with Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy

Kibinge after a screening of her film *Something Necessary,* at the London Film School, held as part of the festival Film Africa. I went to the screening that night excited to hear a filmmaker whose work I respected and eager to watch her film again (I had already seen it once during the festival). While I was waiting for the screening and reading a book on African popular culture, the festival director Suzy Gillett asked me to chair the discussion, as she knew I was researching Kenyan film and had been already been helping out at the festival in a minor capacity. I was mildly apprehensive and feeling unprepared, but I agreed. Reflecting my inexperience as an interviewer, I asked Kibinge a thoroughly quotidian question to wrap up the evening: what are your influences as a filmmaker? Ever the gracious interviewee, she took my question seriously. She described her first experience answering that question and how it made her "start to feel really hot and bothered" because she would "have to give a really deep answer, and preferably African," and that now she is "just honest." She then went on to describe her love of *Lost in Translation* and films by Paul Haggis and Quentin Tarantino. Her response reveals a fundamental tension: she felt expected to state African filmmakers as her guiding influences while actually being influenced by auteur cinema from Hollywood. She loves Tarantino[41]; is it wrong for her to draw inspiration from his work? Her response is perhaps even more revealing of the pressure African filmmakers are sometimes under to conform to what is deemed appropriate for them – by external factors, festival curators and attendees, members of the press, and scholars.

A central contention of this thesis is that Nairobi-based female filmmakers must be studied from both a local and transnational perspective. One innovative method for doing so, in the domain of textual analysis, is to consider what McNamara terms "stylistic internationalisation" (2016, 101). He describes a Nairobi-based feature filmmaking project called *Wazi?FM* and how at one point the project's designers[42] changed their thinking about the film from seeing it as "a participatory community led project, to thinking of it as a film for an 'international' audience," but – notably – this "was not at the expense of the primary beneficiary

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[41] "I love Tarantino" is a direct quote (Kibinge Q&A 2013).
[42] *Wazi?FM* was made by the Cultural Video Foundation – a Nairobi-based production company and NGO run by three Italians that focuses on participatory filmmaking and socially conscious documentaries (McNamara 2016, 82-83).

audience of Wazi being thought of as Kenyan" (McNamara 2016, 100). As such, McNamara describes this shift "not as a move from national Kenyan to international distribution, but rather as the stylistic 'internationalisation' of content for a Kenyan audience" (2016, 101). McNamara does not go on to expand on and theorise the idea of stylistic internationalisation, but the concept is productive as a way of seeing films as being for African *and* international audiences simultaneously.

The use of stylistic internationalisation as a lens of analysis is immediately apparent when considering Ng'endo Mukii's debut short film *Yellow Fever* (2012). The documentary animation short explores a global hierarchy of female beauty standards that positions whiteness at its pinnacle and the psychological impact this has on black African women. In a particularly evocative sequence, Mukii interviews her young niece – depicted in animated form – and her niece plainly states "I really want to be American instead of a Kenyan. If I was American I would be white, white, white, white and I love being white." The young girl sits on a carpet next to a television that plays advertisements for whitening cream and shows white pop stars, thus demonstrating a link between the consumption of global media (pop music videos) and advertising in shaping young minds. When confronted with the idea that she cannot simply become white, the young girl, without missing a beat, responds that of course she could through the use of magic – an idea she gained through watching the American television show *Wizards of Waverly Place* (Mukii interview 2014). Animated interviews such as this are placed throughout the film and interspersed with live action female modern dancers who contort their bodies to depict the existential discomfort of trying to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. *Yellow Fever* suggests the instability and interconnectedness that characterises contemporary life, and thus the necessity of local and transnational modes of analysis. Furthermore, the film is of relevance to women in Kenya, where the film is set, but also women – especially black women – far beyond Kenya's borders. *Yellow Fever* thus displays stylistic internationalisation through its theme as well as through its highly artistic and experimental merging of live action and animated sequences.

Stylistic internationalisation is also on display in *From a Whisper.* The film tells the story of two people differently impacted by the bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi in 1998. The first is a young woman (Tamani) who lost her mother in the attack and the second is a police officer (Abu) who was unable to prevent a close friend (Fareed) from carrying out the bombing. Kahiu's motive in writing the film was to engage in serious social commentary on a topic of direct relevance to a Kenyan audience – preventing and responding to political violence in Kenya:

> I was dealing with the idea of forgiveness when I was writing that film… The idea of: how do you forgive yourself, your nation, or people who are exactly like you for such an atrocity, or such a heinous act on human kind? … Unless you actually start to forgive people, you have no idea how to understand them. Or how to understand their capacity to committing such violence … We need to take responsibility for raising the children that are creating such atrocities, or are creating such violence, and how violence in the only language that they can use to be heard … We have to recognize … that we are part of the creation of that world … [If we do not] then we are dooming ourselves to continue the same action and to continue that same violence, and continue the same reactions. (Kahiu interview 2014)

From a Whisper has a neat cause and effect narrative structure and Hollywood-style production values. The film speaks its political message through the conventions of narrative (commercial) cinema. Here we see stylistic internationalisation at work – in its theme it speaks directly to a local audience, but its form ensures that it is legible to an audience far beyond this demographic.

Kahiu furthered her approach in her short film *Pumzi*, which depicts a dystopian future and a post-war apocalyptic landscape where humankind lives underground because the outside is dead. The Maitu community lives entirely inside and its inhabitants are forced to take dream suppressants and to produce the kinetic energy that powers the colony. Water is prized in this environment and all bodily fluids – from sweat to urine – must be carefully collected so they can be purified back into water. Asha, the protagonist, works in the virtual natural history museum, and when she receives a mysterious soil sample containing water (a supposed impossibility since the outside is *supposed* to be dead), she escapes the colony and ultimately sacrifices her life to plant a seed in the source of the hydrated soil. The message of human impacted environmental destruction is clear,

and the film participates in a long history of cautionary science fiction (more on the idea of *Pumzi* as science fiction will come in Chapter Four). *Pumzi* is also a spectacle of stunning visual images, where the composition of each shot is so precise each frame could be a still photograph – an intentional aesthetic strategy (Kahiu interview 2014). Through its 'global standard' aesthetics and universal cautionary theme, *Pumzi* displays stylistic internationalisation.

To turn to a final example, Judy Kibinge's documentary *Scarred: the Anatomy of a Massacre* tells the story of the Wagalla Massacre and its survivors' decades long fight for truth and justice.[43] Kibinge wanted to have a 'visual hook' running through the film and consequently she decided to photograph the scars of Wagalla survivors in a manner reminiscent of a fashion photo shoot (Kibinge interview 2015).[44] The result of this unusual approach is dignified scar portraits that avoid merely aestheticizing or sanitizing the violence. The portraits depict various body parts, but most include the victims' faces, and these portraits are especially evocative because the survivors look directly into the camera in an accusing demand for recognition. The portraits thus work to establish a human connection between victim and viewer, which is especially important given that the Massacre has long been officially denied. The portraits thus boldly challenge the Kenyan government to recognize the Wagalla atrocity through showing the embodied evidence of wrongdoing provided by the scars. The film has a deeply political message directly targeting the Kenyan state and people, but it also deploys a visually appealing and stylised aesthetic that makes it compellingly watchable and interesting for audiences with no prior connection to Kenya.

The films discussed here both aspire to a 'global standard' – like Ghanaian professional video makers – and achieve one. Furthermore, they all display stylistic

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[43] In February 1984, the Kenyan Army forcibly gathered up to 5000 Somali men from the Degodia clan in Wajir Province and took them to the Wagalla airstrip. This location then "became the scene of the worst atrocities and slaughter to be witnessed in Kenya's modern history" after four days of interrogation left hundreds dead (Anderson 2014, 658). The official position is that 57 died, but survivor testimonies account for almost 1000 dead with perhaps 2000 additional people missing (Anderson 2014, 658-659). The exact death toll remains unknown.

[44] Kibinge described her process as follows: "We set up a proper photo shoot and then when we started the photo shoot it was just pushing it a little bit more. Can you look in the camera lens? Which is something a bit strange to ask a victim of a massacre, show us your scars and look in the camera. It's almost like a fashion shoot" (interview 2015). This desire to have a 'visual hook' in the film was informed by her background in advertising, which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

internationalisation by being 'for' local and international audiences at the same time. So far, I have discussed a selection of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers that both aspire to and achieve a 'global standard,' but, as previously mentioned, not all films fit within this category. For instance, *Leo*, as previously mentioned, has an incoherent plot and lacks the cause and effect narrative structure conventional to Hollywood-style films. Yet, in making *Leo,* Mutune aspired to global success. As she says, "I didn't make this film so it can be watched by my family, I made it so it can be enjoyed globally" (interview 2014). Aspiring to international, or even global, success is the goal of many filmmakers, but, as my next section will show, Nairobi-based female filmmakers also entrepreneurially experiment in a range of other styles that are not of a 'global standard.' I will argue for the importance of studying both types of filmmaking – stylistically internationalised 'global standard' films, and films geared towards local markets – and suggest doing so is vital to understanding how Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a movement.

3.2 Entrepreneurial experiments in style

Writing shortly after the turn of the new millennium, Thackway suggested, specifically about Francophone African film, that "filmmaking can play a valuable guiding role in the revaluation and reassessing of postcolonial identities … as it has in the past" and that "the majority of filmmakers adhere to the vision of their works as a means of expressing an African voice, rather than simply being a form of entertainment" (2003, 48). The potential didactic role of African cinema is well known and films can certainly be valuable tools for identity formation and for societal transformation, but what if entertainment is centred as a criterion for analysis and not treated as a simplistic concept? African film scholar Carmen McCain outlines here the problematic division between 'serious and entertaining' film in African contexts:

> The Nigerian video films are often seen as mere entertainment and dismissed for not having the same 'quality' or 'political ideology' as francophone films. For these reasons, Nollywood, despite having grown to be the second largest film industry in the world and sold to a global market, is often disparaged by many of the same critics who had dreamed of a self-sufficient African industry. (2011, 251)

Thus, the video industries in Nigeria, Ghana, and elsewhere "which produce movies meant first and foremost to entertain, have brought pleasure into visibility as a crucial dimension of analysis" (Garritano 2013, 9). In a statement that neatly summarises the debate, Tcheuyap argues, "the ideological functions attributed to African Cinema, especially at its origin in the 1960s, could lead one to believe that thinking about African films as a form of entertainment is paradoxical" (2010, 25). This way of thinking results "less from the content and style of the films themselves than from the discourse that surrounded them" (Saul 2010, 142). Speaking about literature, but in a comment equally applicable to film, Julien argues that readers "ignored or minimized the incoherence and contradiction that are woven into every text" and read the texts as "stable, bound to the continent and associated with the seemingly timeless conventions of decolonizing nationalism" (2015, 19). Seeing African films as entertainment is an important act of re-reading that will contribute to "more complex genealogies" of African film, to use Bisschoff and Murphy's words (2014, 6), for "politics and pleasure have, in fact, not only been present in the earliest African films, but are often represented, in these films, as deeply imbricated with one another" (Dovey 2010, 3).

Before delving into film examples, it is first necessary to note that whether or not a film succeeds in being 'entertaining' is, of course, is in the eyes of the beholder. Gender studies scholar Purnima Mankekar's study of a dramatised version of the *Ramayan* (an important Hindu epic telling the story of Rama and his wife Sita) shown on state-controlled Indian television over seventy-eight weekly episodes starting on January 25, 1987 (2002, 134), offers an ethnographic analysis of the show's reception. She learned that viewers engaged with the material very differently based on their individual subjectivities. For instance, "For many Hindu viewers watching the *Ramayan* was like engaging in a religious ritual" (2002, 137), while some of the Sikh and Muslim women interviewed, who would not engage with the show at a religious level, could find enjoyment watching the show because they could identify with Sita's story of suffering (Mankekar 2002, 138). This example shows that audiences can be entertained by the same story for very different reasons, and that entertainment value, like 'quality,' is not a static attribute of a text.

As a first example I will now turn to a film that has been read as serious, but which I hope to suggest can also be read as entertainment. Wanjiru Kinyanjui's 1995 film *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* tells the story of a woman named Mumbi who leaves her abusive husband in Nairobi and returns to her rural home town to rebuild her life. She initially wants to join a Christian women's association to benefit from their employment activities, but is rebuffed by them for the choices she made leaving her husband. Instead she takes a job in a bar – ignoring detractors who question the morality of her work – and builds a new life for herself and her daughter, in the process finding a loving partner and witnessing the downfall of the bigoted members of the women's group as their campaign to cut down the town Mugumo tree[45] fails. Diang'a argues that the film can be classified in the 'return to source' category (from Diawara's typology) because it lets

> Mumbi find solution to her predicament at the foot of the sacred tree after stern rejection by the Christian mothers. … The film portrays the African traditional religion as a more reliable solace to the dejected than Christianity, whose principles are still not well understood by the African converts. Here, the African is free to explore alternative ways of solving socio-cultural problems that face him/her. One of these possibilities is looking back to his pre-colonial traditions. (2011, 74)

Yet, what this criticism neglects is that the film is also funny; it is, to use Kinyanjui's description, "a comedy about culture" (interview 2015). Rather than a film about recuperating pre-colonial traditions and a conflict between Christianity and an African religion, the film can be read as a comedy that sets up intolerant women as the butt of the joke. In a final scene, the women's group sets out to chop down the tree at night (after failing to win the support of the town to remove the tree) only to be attacked by fire ants as they go to raise their axes. To escape the ants, they strip off much of their clothing and run away screaming. Mumbi is there as witness to this ridiculous spectacle and laughs from the bushes, and the audience is aligned with her subjectivity. The film invites the audience to laugh at the downfall of these women not because they are Christian, and not in order to exult pre-colonial traditions, but because they are narrow minded, prudish, and uppity.

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[45] The Mugumo tree is a Kikuyu sacred tree, and it is also an important symbol in other films by Nairobi-based filmmakers such as *Pumzi* and *Stories of our Lives* (Chuchu, 2014).

In my reading of *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*, I have headed Julien's warning about the perils of seeing texts as "stable, bound to the continent and associated with the seemingly timeless conventions of decolonizing nationalism" (2015, 19), and instead looked at it with fresh eyes. As Harrow so lucidly puts it, "in the early years of African filmmaking, it was assumed that the superficiality of entertainment of subjective feelings, fantasy and emotions should be subordinated to the greater social needs identified by an *engagé* criticism, *engagé* cinema" (Harrow 2007, xiii-xiv). *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* suggests that entertainment and *engagé* cinema are not in conflict, rather, to use Dovey's words, they are "deeply imbricated with one another" (2010, 3). *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* is not only the serious art film it was once thought to be, but also one geared towards entertaining an audience through comedy. Yet, it seems likely that *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* has received academic attention where Kinyanjui's later films have not precisely because it is stylistically internationalised with an appropriately 'serious' theme.[46] I argue that it is vital to explore her entire oeuvre – rather than pigeonholing her as an 'art' filmmaker – because only then is it possible to see that she, like all Nairobi-based female filmmakers – is *both* a filmmaker *and* an entrepreneur.

In addition to making stylistically internationalised films, Kinyanjui has also experimented with ultra-low budget Riverwood filmmaking.[47] She made *Bahati* and *Manga in America* as part of a filmmaking experiment to see what a collaboration between Riverwood and a filmmaker with her training and experience would look like. She said Riverwood filmmakers "have no film education at all [and] they've never been near a serious professional crew" to see how they film (interview 2015). Furthermore, "they don't consider sound. They don't have a director. They just have a photographer, cameraman … But what was good about it is you have to begin somewhere, with or without education, with or

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[46] As noted in my Introduction, *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* has been one of the few films by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker to be subject to close textual analysis (cf. Diang'a 2011; Mukora 1999; Mukora 2003) and it is one of only three films listed in the *Dictionary of African Filmmakers* (Armes 2008). Anne Mungai's films have been treated in much the same way where the stylistically internationalised *Saikati* is widely celebrated (Armes 2008; Cham and Mungai 1994; Diang'a 2015a; Mukora 1999; Mukora 2003), but *Tough Choices*, with its lower quality aesthetics and a socially conservation Christian message, is ignored.

[47] For a further discussion of Riverwood see Chapter Three.

without money" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). The (Kenyan) producer of *Manga in America* "came from America and was very ambitious and said: 'I'm going to do a Riverwood'" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). He was then referred to Kinyanjui to help realise the project because she had been researching the Riverwood phenomenon (Kinyanjui 2008). Riverwood's hasty production process is reflected in the films' aesthetics. *Manga in America* has a washed out colour and *Bahati* has a dull grey tint and uneven sound quality (loud background noise is often picked up, and sometimes to the extent that it obscures the dialogue). The acting is clearly improvised, as can be seen from a scene when Bahati meets a mysterious woman, perhaps a witch, in Nairobi's central Uhuru Park who demands 3000 KES (£22.50) and in exchange promises him a job. When they meet the following day to make the exchange, the scene unfolds as they sit awkwardly next to each other on a small bench both almost directly facing the camera. She demands 1000 KES (£7.50) upfront and while protesting 'oh you better get me a job' Bahati hands over the money. She then declares: 'The first golden rule: take whichever job comes your way be it sweeping the streets, be it washing things anywhere in the hotel, be it whatever it is.' She proceeds to lay out two more golden rules demanding 1000 KES (£7.50) in advance of each one.[48] He seems to believe the woman is cheating him, and logically following this he should be outraged, but he only protests half-heartedly. This weak protest is not driven by narrative necessity, but rather seems to result from an untrained actor receiving little direction and working within the confines of a script whose narrative gaps had not yet been filled in.[49] These two films lack the consistency of vision that was apparent in Kinyanjui's feature *The Battle of the Sacred Tree,* as well as its stylistic polish. However, Kinyanjui *chose* to work in both forms – stylistically internationalised and ultra-low budget Riverwood filmmaking – and this demonstrates that she is a filmmaking

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[48] The second golden rule is 'when you go camping, don't sleep in the valley sleep on top of a hill' and the third is 'when you are sent or you're going somewhere, when you are sent by someone or going somewhere in a hurry, you find a group of people talking or doing something please stop. Say hello to them, talk to them, see what they are doing. It won't be a waste of time. Then you can later on proceed.'

[49] After all, some of the most famous films movement – such as post-war Italian Neorealism – use non-professional actors. What distinguishes *Bahati* from this tradition (and contemporary films from, for instance, Latin America, such as *Cidade de Deus* [Meirelles, 2002]) is the level of attention paid to *directing* these actors and integrating their performances into an overall directorial vision for the film. In the case of *Bahati*, the scenes instead appear unrehearsed.

entreprenuer willing to experiment in many visual forms and not one wedded to a conception of film as high art or herself as an art film auteur.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers are highly entrepreneurial, and Judy Kibinge's films further demonstrate this fact, as I will show through a discussion of her films *Dangerous Affair*, *Project Daddy*, and *Something Necessary*. Her first feature film, *Dangerous Affair*, is a romantic comedy about the loves, marriages, and affairs of young urban professionals, and it explored a subject not yet taken up in Kenyan cinema. The technical quality of the film is uneven – the sound varies in volume and occasionally cuts out completely, and the editing between scenes sometimes disrupts locational continuity – but these flaws are transcended by the bold honesty of its characterisation. The film's huge local success (McNamara 2016, 24) is testament to this statement, as is its win (Best East African Production) at ZIFF in 2003. The central protagonist Kui opens the film, returning home to Nairobi after working in New York City. The film is set in a middle class milieu and its dominant locations are upscale bars, parties, and homes where stylishly dressed young professionals discuss sex and romance. The characters are imagined as modern subjects – equally at home in 'traditional' marriage rituals as in Christian Dior gowns and business suits – and the film sees the metropolis not as a space of immoral danger (as it is in *Saikati*) but simply as home. Kibinge's subsequent film *Project Daddy* is a romantic comedy where a vivacious heroine named Mumbi breaks up with her fiancée Fred and decides she does not need him to have a baby. She subsequently sets up 'project daddy' to find the ideal sperm donor. Of course, following the conventions of the genre, Mumbi and Fred reunite in the end because their separation has been based on a series of misunderstandings. The aesthetic style of *Project Daddy* is identical to that of *Dangerous Affair.*

Films like *Dangerous Affair* and *Project Daddy* are not concerned with creating an African film language in opposition to Hollywood or European dominance, but rather telling entertaining stories about urban life in Africa. *Dangerous Affair* is revolutionary after all not for being a rom-com about hip, urban, black characters (indeed this has been the subject of much North American

media), but for showing this lifestyle *in Nairobi* for the first time. In an argument about Nigerian video films, Larkin suggests these videos have

> fashioned aesthetic forms and modes of cultural address based on the experiences of the societies they address rather than those of the West—a prime concern of third cinema—but this fashioning has emerged not so much in opposition to Hollywood and Western cultural values, but *through* and *out* of the history of that engagement. (2003, 180; emphasis his)

The style of *Dangerous Affair* and *Project Daddy* may not be oppositional, but through showing urban life and city dwellers as unconflictedly African the films have the same function as the video films Larkin describes. While the films certainly draw on American popular film forms, they use those elements on their own terms. The appeal of Ghanaian video movies "is linked to their enormous capacity to recontextualize and localize forms and styles associated with global mass culture" (Garritano 2013, 14). *Project Daddy* and *Dangerous Affair* can be read in a similar way.

As mentioned in my Introduction, *Dangerous Affair* is a seminal film in the history of filmmaking in Kenya and marks the beginning of a new era of film production. Yet, as I also noted in my Introduction, it has received remarkably little academic attention.[50] Perhaps it has been excluded for lacking a political position in the eyes of scholars focused on *engagé* cinema and oppositional film language, or because it lacks the stylistically international production values that would see it travel widely on the international film festival circuit. Only Kibinge's most recent fiction film, *Something Necessary*, has been subject to in-depth textual analysis in a scholarly journal (Giruzzi 2015). Not coincidentally, this was her first film to gain significant and prestigious attention at international film festivals. Film festivals "play a key, if often underacknowledged, role in the writing of film history. Festival screenings determine which movies are distributed in distinct cultural arenas, and hence which movies critics and academics are likely to gain access to" (Stringer 2001, 134).[51] Thus, it comes as no surprise that Kibinge would begin to receive

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[50] Kibinge's films have been subject to some close reading, but in sources of dubious academic quality (cf. Diang'a 2005; Diang'a 2007a).
[51] As noted in my Introduction, Dovey makes the similar point that film festivals have an "unacknowledged" importance in "shaping canons and making certain films accessible to scholars and others not (2015a, 128).

academic attention from scholars outside Kenya once she had a film travel on the international film festival circuit.

Something Necessary tells the stories of Anne – a survivor of rape and a gang attack on her farm that left it in ruins, her husband dead, and her son comatose – and Joseph, a member of that gang.[52] In one of Joseph's final scenes, we see him attempting to atone for his actions against Anne. It is dusk and we see Joseph framed in the centre of the screen in silhouette against a dusky blue, cloudy sky carrying a fence post and then thrusting it into the ground. He works in silence installing fence posts and attaching strings of barbed wire between them. A pensive and dreamy instrumental track dominated by a simple xylophone beat plays. Through montage editing we see him progressing and the fence growing. In one cut he is shown with Anne's farmhouse in the background, lights on, showing their proximity as he works – firmly establishing the link between his actions and his motivation. He silently works, perhaps through the night, and when his fence is complete he silently leaves. The scene has a quietly beautiful quality projecting a deep pensiveness about what it takes to seek and deserve forgiveness. This scene, and the film as a whole, is poetically and thoughtfully beautiful. Alongside this, through the intertwining character arcs of Anne and Joseph, where the film carefully explores the theme of reconciliation after violence, it engages in social commentary. *Something Necessary* is thus identifiable, in a way *Project Daddy* and *Dangerous Affair* are not, as a stylistically internationalised film.

Kibinge is thus capable of making entertaining films geared towards a local market as well as stylistically internationalised films. Her choice to work in these various forms is highly entrepreneurial. She was approach by Njeri Karago, who had returned home to Kenya after years in Hollywood, and asked to direct and co-write *Dangerous Affair*. She notes, the crew consisted of many "first timers … so things were wrong, I mean the sound was wrong especially, like the sound really

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[52] In her criticism of *Something Necessary* and *From a Whisper*, Giruzzi argues that both films "deal with a rather modern, middle-class Kenyan population; except for Joseph's gang in *Something Necessary*, the slums are not represented" (2015, 90), suggesting this as a limitation of the films. However, I argue that this is a misreading of *Something Necessary*. In the film, material inequality is foregrounded as a reason for the outbreak of the post-election violence (the film is set in the immediate aftermath of the violence in Nakuru). Indeed, it is through telling the story of Joseph that Kibinge creates a political critique where he is revealed as both victim and perpetrator – victim of structural violence and perpetrator through his gang activities.

screwed up. Pictures were sometimes not so great" (interview 2015). Yet, she described the production process very positively saying they could "laugh through" it because there was "no body looking over your shoulder at their money" and it was "the most fun film ever to make" (interview 2015). Importantly, making *Something Necessary* is also a demonstration of her entrepreneurialism. She says, "it's not the film I'd have chosen to make" (interview 2015), but she participated in the One Fine Day Film project in an attempt to reach a larger platform (interview 2014).[53] *Something Necessary* has received the most prestigious attention of all her films, but focusing only on this type of filmmaking obscures a deeper understanding of her career as not only an 'auteur' filmmaker, but also as a screen media entrepreneur willing and able to work in many different modes.

Conclusion

In *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors* (2007), Murphy and Williams select ten directors to represent African film history from the 1950s onwards, and thus necessarily had to be selective.[54] What must immediately stand out about their selection is that they only include one female filmmaker (Moufida Tlatli), a choice they describe as "the most regrettable omission" of the book (2007, 5). They describe how they "wrestled with the competing claims of various representative demands: style, nationality, gender, religion, history" and how to "facilitate" their selection they narrowed their parameters in certain ways (2007, 2). They decided to "focus on fiction films," to "exclude directors who had not yet made feature-length films," and "to focus on what might loosely be called the *auteur* tradition of filmmaking" (thus excluding video filmmaking) (2007, 2). The following question must then be asked: was the "regrettable omission" of female filmmakers one of necessity or the result of an excessively narrow framework of selection and an inadequate methodology?

Most of the films discussed in this chapter were released after Murphy and Williams' book, but key exceptions still challenge their choices. Anne Mungai had made four feature-length fiction films by 2000 (*Saikati, Saikati the Enkabaani,*

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[53] The One Fine Day Films project will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.

[54] The directors selected are Youssef Chahine, Ousmane Sembène, Med Hondo, Djibril Diop Mambéty, Souleymane Cissé, Flora Gomes, Idrissa Ouédraogo, Moufida Tlatli, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, and Darrell James Roodt.

Tough Choices, and *Promise of Love* [2000]) and Judy Kibinge had made two (*Dangerous Affair* and *Project Daddy*) by 2004, to list only two examples that trouble Murphy and Williams' selection criteria. Their choice now looks much less like a necessity and much more of a value judgement – a choice that becomes ever more suspect when we consider that the authors explicitly aimed to be as geographically diverse as possible (2007, 3), and yet include no filmmaker from East Africa. However, perhaps more troubling is their narrowing down of film formats to feature fiction. What this assumes is a hierarchy of film practice with feature fiction – and a particular kind of fiction at that – at the top. For a book that seeks to be representative of African filmmaking, excluding videos from Nigeria and Ghana is deeply suspicious, and again represents a hierarchy of filmmaking practice where videos are "disposable forms of popular entertainment" (2007, 2) in contrast to auteur films with their exalted status as 'art.' As Bisschoff notes, "African women produce more work in video and television than on celluloid" (2012, 159) and thus "film directories, which often exclude television and video work, usually list a very small number of female film-makers in comparison to men" (2012, 159). Her critique can be expanded to include book length studies of African cinema that privilege one form over another. The lack of women in Murphy and Williams' study thus is not one of necessity, but rather the result of a particular critical paradigm that has long excluded African female filmmakers. This fact suggests that there is still a political imperative in grouping female filmmakers together *as women*, making women's cinema studies still necessary.[55]

When I began researching Nairobi-based female filmmakers, I focused on their stylistically internationalised films. It was only through engaging in field research in Nairobi that I was able to learn that this mode of producing films only accounts for a small amount of their screen media production, and that, in addition to being capable of making films able to screen on the international film festival circuit, they also entrepreneurially choose to make films in different styles that are geared towards different markets. Through examining a wide selection of films by

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[55] Within a wider context, White notes: "dominant conceptualization of cinema organized around national movements, waves, and auteurs often minimize or misrecognize the significance of women filmmakers' participation and the questions of representation – both aesthetic and political – that is raises" (2015, 7). Thus, politically, a lot is at stake in studying female filmmakers.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers I am able to show that the dominant link between all their films is a thematic emphasis on class. Significantly, class is a dominant theme over and above concerns with gender. The films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers thus challenge the notion that female filmmakers are defined by telling personal stories or 'women's stories.' Through my field-based approach to textual analysis I am also able to show that Nairobi-based female filmmakers are both filmmakers and entrepreneurs, and that they are willing and able to make the stylistically internationalised films Murphy and William's would celebrate, and locally oriented films geared towards testing new markets in Kenya.

In this chapter I have studied various films - fiction and documentary, feature-length and short, animated and live action - and in so doing, was able to begin to theorise a film movement in a way that Murphy and Williams' approach would simply not allow. Through this chapter, I have suggested that Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be seen as constituting a movement based on a reading of their films, yet I resist the familiar terminology of classifying their movement as a 'new wave.' As African film scholar MaryEllen Higgins puts it, "the notion of a 'wave' represents a habitual conceptual framework for interpreting cinema ... but 'new waves' in cinema history are also subject to the gravitational pull of the French New Wave" (2015, 78). The Eurocentrism of film waves (where all subsequent movements are somehow derivatives of the French) is one reason to avoid them, but I would also suggest that the idea of a 'new wave' suggests a particular way of seeing film history that is too similar to Murphy and Williams' approach given the privileging of auteur cinema inherent in new wave discourses. In my next chapter, I will turn to questioning the idea that Nairobi-based female filmmakers are 'filmmakers' in the conventional sense and explore what a broader understanding of the term might facilitate.

Chapter 3

To Be Based in Nairobi: Middle class filmmakers in an environment of media convergence

Dominant narratives of African migration position Europe and North America as destinations, and within these narratives there is little space to see migration in the opposite direction, from 'the West' to Africa. Yet, this is precisely the trajectory that many Nairobi-based female filmmakers have travelled, as this chapter will show. These filmmakers have, on the whole, *chosen* to base themselves in Nairobi; thus, an important question becomes: why have they chosen to come back and why are they staying to work in this particular city? I focus on Nairobi specifically because while these filmmakers all work in Kenya, they cluster specifically in Nairobi. There is some film production elsewhere in the country (for instance, in Mombasa [Overbergh 2015a, 99]), but Nairobi is the unquestionable centre. Nairobi's centrality in filmmaking is paralleled by its significance in all business in Kenya – indeed, "'everyone who counts' has his business there" (De Lame 2010, 153). Following this lead, this chapter seeks to interrogate whether Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a movement because of where they are based. Furthermore, I will consider to what extent their shared status as members of the middle class is important to constituting them as a movement.

When I first questioned Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman about whether Nairobi is a good[56] place to be a filmmaker, she answered yes and said: "I think that is evidenced by the fact that lots of other people are starting to make films here" (interview 2014). This straightforward statement can serve as the basis for a much deeper interrogation of what is means to live and work in the complex metropolis of contemporary Nairobi. It is a city with many faces: 'Nairobbery' for skittish tourists; "the regional center of East Africa" for international businesses, banks, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Spronk 2014, 102); a city 'under development' (McNamara 2016); an emerging information and communication technology (ICT) hub (Overbergh 2014, 208); the

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[56] 'Good' is of course a subjective word, but what I was looking for with this question was subjective understandings of Nairobi's place as a city in filmmakers' individual lives.

centre for making commercials in East Africa (Muhoho interview 2015); the place with the most potential employment in the country, making it "the most popular aim of migration in Kenya" (Latvala 2006, 15); and a place that "has all the elements that a capital city should have" and that is "sexy as hell" (Essuman interview 2014). Contemporary Nairobi is a space of technological and entrepreneurial growth that is emerging as a significant node in global networks, while at the same time maintaining its historical importance as the business centre of Kenya. Further, confidence and entrepreneurialism in creative industries "resonates [sic] a more general feeling of 'momentum' in Kenya" linked to social and political developments such as the increasing return of diasporan Kenyans and the new constitution[57] (Overbergh 2014, 209). This description of Nairobi's many faces serves to outline some of the reasons filmmakers may find the city a compelling place to work, but this alone presents an incomplete picture. Rather, it highlights the dynamism of the city and suggests that taking advantage of the city's many potential opportunities, and avoiding its pitfalls, requires certain skills and social positioning. Through examining these skills and social positioning, I will begin to shed light on why their being located in Nairobi is so essential to constituting Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a movement.

Part 1: From 'African Film' to 'African Screen Media': media convergence in Nairobi

Arguably, the first step in seeing Nairobi as an advantageous place to work as a filmmaker is contesting a narrow definition of what a 'filmmaker' is and does. As Garritano rightly states, "the technology, or medium, of the text is not incidental to its symbolic life" (2013, 23). As such, she chooses to use the term video movies (rather than video films) throughout her study of contemporary Ghanaian filmmaking since, she argues, "'video movie' retains an emphasis on video as a medium that generates particular material conditions at the level of the artefact, and it more broadly highlights video as a form of technological mediation and commodification that is different from film" (Garritano 2013, 23). However, while bearing Garritano's insights in mind, I propose a different direction. Nairobi-based

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[57] On 4 August 2010, Kenyan's voted 'yes' to a new constitution. Key changes in the new constitution are judicial reform, more rights for women, and new limits on presidential powers (Rice 2010).

female filmmakers work so consistently across formats, mediums, and technologies that describing them based on the filmmaking technology they use – as Garritano does when she says 'Ghanaian videomaker' – lends little insight into their actual work patterns and outputs. As such, I maintain the use of the term 'filmmaker'; however, rather than defining a 'filmmaker' as the creator of 'films' I suggest the more encompassing definition of a 'filmmaker' as the creator of 'screen media.' I have chosen the term 'filmmaker' to carry out this analysis over other potential options – screen media maker perhaps – because, most fundamentally, this is the way these women describe themselves. Importantly, 'filmmaker' is also a label that carries with it a level of prestige globally that cannot be matched as yet by any other description. Denying these women that label would thus seem pejorative and patronising, and would not facilitate comparative analysis between them and other filmmakers and industries across the world.

With this more inclusive understanding of the filmmaker in mind, I will now outline the career biography of one of my filmmakers of focus – Judy Kibinge – so as to show the benefits of this more inclusive definition. Kibinge is one of the most prolific filmmakers who has been working in Nairobi in the last fifteen years. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Design for Communications from Manchester Polytechnic, but has never attended film school. Before embarking on a career as a filmmaker in 1999, Kibinge had a successful career in advertising – she was Creative Director of McCann Erickson Kenya.[58] While knowing she wanted to become a film director, but not sure how to achieve this ambition, she began her second career making corporate documentaries for the American multinational agricultural giant Monsanto:

> I quit [advertising] and then quite rapidly quite a few people approached me and asked me to do corporate documentaries and actually the first was Monsanto. … Next thing I knew … I was going to South Africa, and then to Ghana and to Ethiopia and all these countries shooting … like in the heart of these rural areas just shooting in maize fields in Ethiopia and then shooting in cotton fields in Cameroon. (Kibinge interview 2015)

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[58] A further exploration of the phenomenon of women transitioning into the film industry from other careers can be found in Chapter Six.

Following this, she made her first fiction film – the short *The Aftermath* (2002)[59] – with South African pay TV company M-Net's New Directions program. M-Net New Directions was for "emerging directors and scriptwriters" and it "solicit[ed] proposals from first-time directors and writers" (Tomaselli and Shepperson 2014, 121). It then mentored the filmmakers and refined the projects to create 30-minute dramas it then broadcast (Tomaselli and Shepperson 2014, 121). New Directions expanded from South Africa in 1999 to include Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria and became known as New Directions Africa (Saks 2010, 74).[60] Kibinge 'pitched' her project to M-Net using the same methods she would use to pitch a 30 second commercial, and believes it was this level of attention to detail that secured her the position despite her lack of background in filmmaking (Kibinge interview 2015).

Kibinge's breakthrough moment came when producer Njeri Karago, asked her to direct *Dangerous Affair*, a project that sparked a great deal of excitement because Karago, who had worked as a producer in Hollywood, had raised the money for the film (Kibinge interview 2015). It was a local success and "managed to secure distribution through local cinemas, and even establish a presence within Nairobi's VCD piracy networks" (McNamara 2016, 24) alongside winning Best East African Production at ZIFF in 2003. Furthermore, the film received extensive press coverage because so few films were being made locally at the time (Kibinge interview 2015). *Dangerous Affair* was shot digitally (on the professional videocassette technology Betacam) rather than on celluloid (Kibinge interview 2015), and it is worth pausing to consider the significance of this technological shift. Unlike in Ghana, where "no Ghanaian women had directed or produced a documentary or feature film before the advent of video movies" (Garritano 2013, 17), women like Anne Mungai, Wanjiru Kinyanjui and others (of the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers) had produced films on celluloid. Yet, for the first decades of film production in Kenya, these films were very few in number, so, just as in other cases from across the continent where technological

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[59] Veteran (first generation) Nairobi-based female filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte produced *The Aftermath*.

[60] Many high-profile Nairobi-based female filmmakers have been part of this project, including Wanuri Kahiu who used it to make her short film *Ras Star*.

developments sparked change, in Nairobi "equipment became cheaper, so barriers to entry were lower" (Kamau interview 2015). Without implying undue causal significance, it is important to note that 'viable' local production would only emerge after *Dangerous Affair* (McNamara 2016, 24) and the film can thus be seen as a pivotal moment in Kenyan screen media history. This moment is also pivotal for marking the emergence of a second generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.

Subsequently, Kibinge and Karago collaborated on the romantic comedy *Project Daddy*[61] and an unaired television series called *Pumzika*.[62] However, despite making these popular, for-profit feature films, Kibinge has continued throughout her career to work on commissioned corporate documentaries. She does so because it has not been financially feasible to sustain her career making fiction alone: "I've never made any money on any drama. I've never paid rent off any dramatic film. In fact it costs you" (Kibinge interview 2015). In these circumstances, making corporate documentaries is a way of continuing to work as a filmmaker; yet even in these conditions, she found ways to explore the possibilities of storytelling. In her approach, corporate videos do not have to be "boring" and "any story, even corporate videos, can be proper feature length documentaries that are gripping" (Kibinge interview 2015). She brought this philosophy to her Transparency International film *A Voice in the Dark* (2005) (and its shortened version *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [2007][63]) and she continued this approach in her 60-minute documentary *Headlines in History* (2010) where she transformed a story about the corporate history of the Nation Media Group into "the story of Kenya seen through the eyes of the journalists who wrote the headlines about the nation" (Kibinge interview 2015). *Headlines in History* blends archival footage and interviews, but transcends this educational and expository

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[61] *Project Daddy* was made on a budget of approximately $25,000 (£19,000).

[62] This production will be discussed in Chapter Five.

[63] The films tell the story of David Munyakei, who is described by Transparency International as a man "who helped to expose the Goldenberg scandal, one of the largest and most complex financial scandals in Kenyan history" (Transparency International Secretariat n.d.). Kibinge says "it was just interesting that you could tell the story of a global corporation like Transparency International by pegging their 10 year journey alongside the 10 year journey of this whistle blower living in absolute poverty, and so because of that the film became really gripping" (interview 2015).

style of documentary through a careful focus on character and Kibinge's unique ability to find drama in seemingly ordinary situations.

Like many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, Kibinge runs a small production company of her own, called Seven Productions. She describes Seven as "really just me and my computer" (Kibinge interview 2015), but through Seven she has produced a number of films (*Peace Wanted Alive* [2009], a documentary about the 2007/2008 Kenyan post-election violence and *Scarred: the Anatomy of a Massacre*). She also made the 40-minute noir thriller *Killer Necklace* through Seven in partnership with M-Net New Directions.[64] The film was shot using RED – a professional grade digital camera technology – and had a budget of $100,000 (£77,000) (Kibinge interview 2015). According to Kibinge, M-Net's involvement in the film was almost purely financial: "they just left it to me … they just gave us the money, we shot the film, submitted it to them" (interview 2015). Aside from insisting she cut the film from 40 to 30 minutes M-Net had "no real input" (Kibinge interview 2015). Kibinge described this as "fantastic" because their lack of involvement in creative decisions gave her a heightened sense of ownership over the film (interview 2015). Kibinge's most recent fiction film, *Something Necessary* has the highest international profile of all of her films and is the first of her films to be recognised in the most prestigious international film circuits, as I discussed in Chapter Two. It premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and screened for several months in theatres in Nairobi (Kibinge Q&A 2013; McNamara 2016, 26) – a highly unusual feat for a locally made film.[65]

Throughout her career, Kibinge has worked across formats, genres, and modes of funding. Additionally, she is now the Executive Director of Docubox, the East African Documentary Film Fund, which funds and supports the production of feature length creative documentaries by East African filmmakers.[66] The complexities of Kibinge's career – working at times as a director, producer, and

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[64] She responded to an M-Net call for scripts, and because they wanted scripts presented by a production house, she used her small production company Seven Productions (Kibinge interview 2015).

[65] She was chosen to direct the film after participating in a One Fine Day Films (OFDF) workshop. OFDF is a Nairobi-based, internationally funded filmmaking project and it will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

[66] Docubox will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.

writer and now as the leader of a small production fund – show the limits of a narrow definition of filmmaking. A more encompassing definition of 'filmmaker' – defined not as the creator of 'films' alone but as the creator of 'screen media'– allows us to capture the complexity of a career biography such as Kibinge's, and is a vital starting point for understanding Nairobi's screen media production environment, and in turn why Nairobi is such a conducive place for female filmmakers to work.

1.1 Multi-format convergence: 'film' and 'television'

In the African art-house tradition, "it usually takes a nearly lunatic commitment on the part of an individual to get a film made"; the filmmaker may simultaneously have several positions within the project, and that "there are no supporting, let alone competing structures, no standing machinery of production" (Haynes 2011, 74). Nairobi-based female filmmakers' experiences are certainly intelligible within this frame, as the example of Kibinge demonstrates, and this contributes to their format shifting work patterns. Building on this argument, this section will explore the choice some filmmakers have made to step outside of 'filmmaking' as such and work primarily for television.[67]

The Kenyan television landscape can be broadly divided into two categories: pay TV and free-to-air local broadcasters. In the local broadcast sphere the three major players are KTN (owned by the Standard Media Group), Citizen TV (owned by Royal Media Services) and NTV (owned by the Nation Media Group). The two most important pay TV operators are the East African Zuku (part of the Wananchi Group) and the South African M-Net. M-Net was commonly identified as paying filmmakers the most for content (Ghettuba interview 2015; Likimani interview 2015; Matere interview 2015), followed by Zuku, and then by the free-to-air channels at much lower rates. Correspondingly, M-Net and Zuku were also generally regarded by filmmakers as producing higher quality and more upmarket content. Importantly, each broadcaster – KTN, NTV, and Citizen – is part of a much

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[67] The shift to television is part of a wider global trend. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu was keen to note this point, and to show that her work in television was not an exception, given that many high profile filmmakers are exploring the possibilities of this medium (interview, 2015).

larger media corporation, which contrasts with Nairobi-based female filmmakers who either work independently or as part of small production companies.[68]

The Kenyan broadcasting environment is a challenging arena for filmmakers to work in for several reasons. Rates paid by free-to-air channels are a contentious issue within the Nairobi-based screen media landscape. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Toni Kamau argued that free-to-air stations do not give producers the tools – in terms of production time and budget – to make high quality television. The stations "don't pay enough" and "they should" because

> they get a lot of money. Like Citizen for example, one of their TV anchors earns 800,000 shillings [£6000] a month. And if they commission a show they are going to pay you 150,000 shillings [£1,120] an episode. So I wouldn't say that they don't have the money. I think that they don't think they need to pay for content. (Interview 2015)

I have included this example because it is indicative of a common mode of thinking about free-to-air broadcasters – essentially that they almost deliberately exploit filmmakers by allocating them very small budgets. Furthermore, broadcasters in Kenya can pay little for local content because they can fill airtime cheaply through broadcasting imported content such as Mexican soap operas (Ghettuba interview 2015). However, there is cautious optimism this broadcast situation might change and lead to a boom in locally produced content since President Kenyatta announced, in 2013, that "the required quota for local content on television will be increased from 40 to 60 per cent," which would result in broadcasters having to commission more local productions or make more in-house productions, that is, if the law is enforced (Overbergh 2015a, 109).[69] Nairobi-based filmmakers also seek to have their films broadcast on television, but for broadcasters to buy films instead of series, "the quality of the movies will have to be consistent and will need to come in numbers" (Overbergh 2015a, 110). While Nairobi-based female

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[68] There is a small body of literature on Kenyan television, but none is concerned with television from a cultural and creative industries standpoint. Rather, a core focus is linguistic analysis of television programs (Mose 2013; Mugubi and Wesonga 2012). Additionally, there is a small number of Master's theses written at Kenyan universities that study local television (cf. Gitimu 2013).

[69] According to the East African ICT trade magazine CIO, the local content quota is scheduled to increase to 60% in 2018 (Murugi 2015). Yet, as of June 2016, only KBC (the national broadcaster) had reached the 40% quota threshold. Of the major broadcasters, Citizen had reached 33% local content, KTN had reached 38% local content, and NTV had reached 31% local content (Mungai 2016).

filmmakers are rarely disadvantaged because of the technical quality of their films (unlike the Riverwood filmmakers Overbergh examines), they face the difficulty of generating the consistent *quantity* of films required to carve out a space for their films on television.

However, the distinction between 'television' and 'film' is itself becoming blurred in the wider context of convergences taking places in African screen media production. In Nigeria and Ghana, where most films are viewed on television rather than in cinemas, the distinction between 'film' and 'television' is often unclear. As Adejunmobi has explained, 'cinema' and 'television' are meaningfully differentiated not by the "specifics of the platform or the site of spectatorship" (2015a, 124), but by their "potential for televisual recurrence," which she defines as "the ability to attract similarly constituted publics to the same or similarly themed and styled audiovisual texts on a fairly regular and recurrent basis" (2015a, 121). This shift happened within the twenty-first century context of detheatricalisation across Africa and the expansion of the popularity of television viewership (Adejunmobi 2015a, 124). Adejunmobi shows that conventional differentiations between film and television based on exhibition platform are no longer sufficient for distinguishing these media forms. Building on Adejunmobi's analysis, I hope to show that convergence is also taking place at the level of film and television production.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers work in multiple formats, and this multi-format convergence helps explain why, even despite a lack of state and social support,[70] a vibrant screen media industry has developed in Nairobi. Working across formats can lead to new and innovative business models for making screen media content. A key example of this is Zamaradi Productions, led by veteran Nairobi-based female filmmaker Appie Matere. Zamaradi undertook a bold filmmaking experiment when they attempted – successfully – to produce fifty-six,

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[70] I will discuss the lack of social support for filmmaking – demonstrated by the pervasive assumption in Nairobi that filmmaking is not a 'real job' later in this Chapter. I will discuss conditions of state support – and the lack thereof – in Chapters Four and Five.

60-minute films for M-Net in a five-month period.[71] All the films were shot at Zamaradi's studio, which consists of a large bungalow on an expansive property in a leafy suburb in North West Nairobi, where they constructed a variety of interchangeable indoor and outdoor sets. While sitting outside the bungalow by a dilapidated pool that would soon become the set of a TV show about a hotel under renovation, Matere described the process of shooting the fifty-six films as follows:

> It was so crazy because all the interiors had to be in this house for the films so that we can be able to work within the budget and within the timeframe … we had to build sets here for all of them. So this room now … could be a restaurant, in another half an hour you come back and it's a classroom. And the *fundis* [handy men] are on standby waiting to paint or whatever it was. … It was crazy. (Interview 2015)

The pace of the shoot is reminiscent of Nollywood-style filmmaking, but the interesting element lies in the fact that Matere was able to adapt this mode of filmmaking to make television movies of the standard required by a major cross-continental broadcaster. She brought her skills, gained in the production of slick and successful local films like *Project Daddy* and *Killer Necklace,* to the production of films in another format, and subsequently used the model developed through this project to shoot three television shows simultaneously.

Adejunmobi's theory provides a space to think of all of Matere's modes of production together, of both television and made-for-television movies as another aspect of filmmaking and vice versa. Adejunmobi discusses convergence in modes of viewing practices, but this convergence is also happening at the level of production where the same models can be employed, as the example of Matere demonstrates, to make both film and television. Thus, an in-depth examination of Matere's work, and that of other Nairobi-based female filmmakers, shows that conventional definitions of 'African cinema' as only embracing film need to give way to the much wider concept of 'African screen media' so as to be cognisant of the vital interplay between formats and modes of production happening in Nairobi today. Furthermore, it demonstrates the necessity of studying producers as well as

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[71] At her previous company, Footprints, Matere partnered with another company (called Director's Team) to produce a 260 episode daily soap titled *Kona* (2013). *Kona* was set in a fictional boxing club and was broadcast on M-Net's Africa Magic Channel.

directors in order to gain a complete understanding of Nairobi-based – or any other – screen media industries.

A further example of a female television producer whose work sheds light on the screen media market in Nairobi is Dorothy Ghettuba. Her importance as a producer was continually mentioned to me, particularly in association with her landmark show *Lies that Bind* which aired on KTN (2011- 2014).[72] Her company Spielworks can be classified as what Overbergh calls an "upmarket television house" (2015, 112). Ghettuba left a career in venture capital in Canada to start a production company in Nairobi because she "had to decide; do I want to stay in Canada and do what has already been done and [be] this small fish in a big sea or do I want to come to Africa?" (Mulupi 2013, n.p.). Through leaving a career in Canada to develop an untested business in Nairobi, Ghettuba demonstrated the entrepreneurial drive that is a shared characteristic of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Nairobi is an emerging market, and like any frontier, daring decisions, while risky, can lead to major pay-outs. When Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman said: "we're at the beginning and I think that's why it's great to make films here, and also challenging to make films here" (interview 2014) she touched on precisely this dynamic.

From the outset, Ghettuba attempted to have her productions "make financial sense" (Ghettuba interview 2015), adopting a thoroughly entrepreneurial and business-minded approach to screen media production. With Spielworks she has created a diverse catalogue of content,[73] but, as yet, she has not made feature films because "it doesn't make financial sense. We are better off doing tele-movies as opposed to the big screen movies" (Ghettuba interview 2015). A cornerstone of her business model is making sure she maintains the intellectual property rights to her content, and she emphasised that when Spielworks began this was "a concept that not many people were using" (Ghettuba interview 2015).

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[72] Alison Ngibuini was generally mentioned in the same conversations because of her show *Mali,* which aired on NTV also starting in 2011. It shared *Lies that Bind*'s glamorous aesthetic and production values. Together Ngibuini and Ghettuba are often credited with creating a new type of locally made television using new production models (Achoch interview 2014; Karuana interview 2015; Mutune interview 2014; Likimani interview 2015).

[73] She elaborated, "we realized that producing mass scale is what made financial sense. And that's why we have a huge catalogue of content" (Ghettuba interview 2015).

In creating content we own the rights. So when we produce the show for the first run – for say M-Net – we try to break even. Of late we've been doing a little, a slight mark-up. And they have the rights exclusively for 12 months, then they revert back to us and we're able to sell them. So we've syndicated quite a number of our shows … that's how we have made it make financial sense. (Ghettuba interview 2015)

Part of her strategy for maximising revenue is planning for first and second runs of her television shows from the outset. She first sells her shows to pay-tv stations because, whereas free-to-air channels will buy second run shows, pay TV stations will not. If a show has aired on free-to-air "by the time you are trying to sell it to a pay TV they don't want it … They are saying, if you've exposed it to so many eyeballs in Kenya, why should we bother taking it?" (Ghettuba interview 2015) Wide popularity in Kenya depends on free-to-air showings because "not everybody is on the pay TV platform" (Kilonzo interview 2015), and the way to both capture this audience and maximise revenue is to show second runs on free-to-air channels.

As the cases of Kibinge, Matere, and Ghettuba have shown, Nairobi has a dynamic screen media production market composed of multiple overlapping sectors, such as for-profit creative work, non-profit developmental or issue-based filmmaking, and subsidised creative screen media production. The ability filmmakers have to flexibly move between these various sectors is a core benefit they experience in basing themselves in Nairobi. Yet, additional factors than this highly flexible mode of working must be considered in order to define Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a movement. To continue that argument, I will now elaborate on the contested notion of 'the African middle class' and explore how class status is a strong linking feature between these filmmakers. I will also later explore how elements of class position (and perceptions that work alongside it) influence the very ability filmmakers have to move between industry sectors in the first place. Correspondingly, I will discuss the complex intersections of class standing and expectations of 'professionalism' in the careers of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Ultimately, I will show how an understanding of being 'middle class' is essential to constituting these filmmakers as a Nairobi-based movement.

Part 2: Class and professionalism

2.1 Being middle class in Nairobi

In April 2011, the African Development Bank (AfDB) released a market report on the middle class in Africa titled "The Middle of the Pyramid: Dynamics of the Middle Class in Africa" in which they claimed 34% of Africa's population (350 million people) was now middle class (Mubila, Aissa, and Lufumpa 2011, 1). This report proved to be a catalyst for the emergence of a significant body of literature theorising middle classes in Africa,[74] with much of it using a very different methodology than the report. The first edited collection on the middle class in Africa, *The Emerging Middle Class in Africa,* published by the AfDB in 2015, defines Africa's middle class, just as in the 2011 report, as follows:

> We use an absolute definition of per capita daily consumption of $2 to $20 in 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars, disaggregated into three subcategories. The first and largest of these is the 'floating class,' with per capita consumption of levels of $2 to $4 per day. The second subcategory is the 'lower-middle class,' with per capita consumption levels of $4 to $10 per day. This group lives above the subsistence level and is able to save and consume non-essential goods. The third subcategory is the 'upper-middle class,' with per capita consumption levels of $10 to $20 per day (Ncube[75] 2015, n.p.)

In a scathing criticism of a consumption-based definition of class – and one that summarises much of the response to the AfDB and affiliated ideas[76] – political scientist Henning Melber writes: "it requires substantial creativity to visualize how the defined minimum income or expenditure … allows for a lifestyle and social status that qualifies as middle class even in African societies" (2016, 2). A more nuanced criticism suggests that the AfDB's, and other economic definitions of class, are "purely descriptive" of an income stratum and "they do not refer to the classic sociological concepts that see a link between class and a particular consciousness and a particular position in society with similar livelihoods" (Neubert 2016, 111), which could be one reason why the AfDB's definition has received such scorn from

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[74] Spronk explicitly mentions this report as the point where "the term middle class gained popularity in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa" (2016, 14).

[75] Mthuli Ncube was Vice President and Chief Economist of the African Development Bank at the time the book was written.

[76] According to the 2013 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a middle class person is one with "a daily income or expenditure of between US$10 [£7.70] and US$100 [£77]" (Melber 2016, 2).

disciplines grounded in sociological questions. In her study of debt in South Africa, anthropologist Deborah James states: "economists and anthropologists have existed in an uneasy relationship: less a truce, more a state of studied mutual disregard based on ignorance" (2015, 11). This statement seems to me to capture a key element in the study of middle classes in Kenya – a seeming irreconcilability of economic and anthropological approaches. In contrast to clear-cut economically based definitions, anthropologists have emphasised the importance of studying how people think of and represent themselves, and their own class status (Kroeker 2016, 33; Spronk 2016, 15).

In reflection of the wider trend of studying the middle classes in Africa, literature focusing on Kenya, and Nairobi specifically, has proliferated in recent years. Kenya is an important site for the study of middle classes in Africa because, according to economic definitions, it possesses an unusually large middle class.[77] Yet, despite these figures "it is difficult to speak of social classes in Nairobi. It often seems that 'vertical' links across apparent class boundaries impede the formation of horizontal linkages between those who share the same 'objective' economic situation" (Spronk 2012, 64).[78] Further complicating class based understandings of Kenyan society is the fact that "children and their parents, or adult siblings within the same family, may have different class positions," thus complicating a Marxist or Webberian understanding of class where class position is stable across generations (Neubert 2016, 116). Sociologist Dieter Neubert suggests that Kenya does not in fact have a proper middle class – which for him would require political consciousness as a class[79] – but rather "a middle income stratum enjoying a situation of moderate well-being for the time being" (2016, 117). Nevertheless,

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[77] Geneva-based think tank Kompreno organised a workshop in Nairobi (resulting in an edited collection) on the subject of middle classes in Africa, and their choice of location was dominantly informed "by the 2008 African Development Bank calculation whereby 44,9% of the country's general population qualified as middle class, a figure that is among the highest anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa (AfDB 2011b)" (Waldmüller, Gez, and Boanada-Fuchs 2016, 4).

[78] This is a point she reiterates in almost exactly these words in her most recent publication on the subject (2016, 12).

[79] For Neubert, "the socio-economic middle stratum does not constitute a politically conscious or active class" because class interest plays no role in Kenyan elections (instead political parties are built around regional-ethnic blocks) (2016, 115). There is a long tradition of research on the role of ethnicity in Kenyan elections (cf. Bratton and Kimenyi 2008; de Smedt 2009; Lonsdale 1994; Posner 2007). Recently, political scientist Nic Cheeseman has argued that "middle class Kenyans [are] more likely to support democracy" than lower classes (2015, 660), suggesting both ethnicity and class do, in fact, have a role to play in Kenyan electoral politics.

while suggesting Kenya does not have a middle class, Neubert does make some effort to define one. He suggests international connectedness (in person, online, and through consuming media) through family or professional networks, or through "personal diaspora experiences as students or migrant workers" (2016, 113) is an important aspect of the Kenyan middle class alongside other characteristics like high levels of education (2016, 113). While not suggesting that the concept of class has little relevance in Kenya, anthropologist Lena Kroeker does share a way of thinking with Neubert where time, and specifically the ability to maintain a certain social standing across time, is important. For her, the middle class constitutes a group with the resources, social and financial, to mitigate periods of uncertainty and avoid sliding into poverty (Kroeker 2016).

Sociologist Johanna Latvala's early study of class in Nairobi defines the middle class according to a very specific set of characteristics: "living in the upmarket residential areas, holding a professional job, driving an expensive car, educating the children in private schools, and using English as an everyday language," as well as living in accommodation with modern amenities (2006, 35-36). Her definition offers a useful starting point, but it is not able to capture the complexities of class aspiration or self-perception. For Spronk, the middle class is not "something that we can find 'out there' and measure within the population of Kenya" (2016, 13), not something easily quantifiable, but rather "the (imagined) goal and result of people's ambition to climb the social ladder" (2016, 13). Class-based self-perception is an important variable to study, alongside other indicators of material positioning within society. Within this field of preliminary definitions of being 'middle class,' Spronk's anthropological work stands out as the most complex theorisation of middle class identity in Kenya.

In her 2012 book on young professionals in Nairobi, rather than using class as an analytical concept, Spronk uses it as "a descriptive notion to account for a social group that has gained opportunities by way of education to distinguish itself from those who have no means of progressing up the socio-economic ladder" (2012, 65). However, in 2014 she updated her previous approach, while still not "considering class as a fixed category" (2014, 95) and argued the connections between "(1) access to education and the resulting salaried occupations, (2)

consumption patterns and lifestyle choices, and (3) modern self-perceptions"
result in being middle class (2014, 99). Her idea of self-perception is particularly
important, as it suggests a way of thinking about middle classness in Nairobi that is
not geographically bounded.

> Every generation perceives itself as modern: the interesting issue is how
> they do so … The young professionals see themselves as the frontrunners of
> a contemporary identity in which professional pride, progressive attitudes,
> and a fashionable outlook are important markers. Their self-perceptions as
> "modern" or "sophisticated" are important for their pursuit of upward
> mobility, which directs them beyond the borders of Kenya … They are very
> conscious about their cosmopolitan tastes and practices and are proud to be
> a part of a larger world beyond Kenya, orienting themselves toward South
> Africa and the African diaspora. (Spronk 2014, 107-108)

The Nairobi-based young professionals of her study (her middle class example)
enact their middle classness in relation to global frameworks. Thus it is necessary
to ask: what can be gained from analysing Nairobi-based female filmmakers from a
class-based perspective, and more specifically as part of Nairobi's middle class?
What benefits are there in using a globally comparative approach to the study of
middle classes?

In a statement that typifies the experience and perspective of many Nairobi-
based female filmmakers, Hawa Essuman (director of films such as *Soul Boy*) said:

> I would consider myself an African middle class individual … And there are
> so many people who would consider themselves as such … I mean, we crave
> art like most first world cities, I think it's because we've spent time in them.
> We care about the quality of life, we care about food, we care about
> fashion … It's a very interesting hybrid between - it's not actually, *it's not
> even a hybrid, it's just who we are*. Our education has been all over the world,
> sometimes predominantly the West. Our roots are very much continental,
> and we are looking for ourselves in the middle. (Interview 2015)

Essuman started out articulating a common view of middle class Africans as
somehow less African – a hybrid between African and 'Western,' before correcting
herself and boldly asserting the 'African-ness' of her way of being. Rather than
hybrid, Essuman's perspective might be thought of as Afropolitan – cosmopolitan
but distinctly based in an African city. As discussed in my Introduction,
Afropolitanism is "prompted by the desire to think of African identities as both
rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them" (Gikandi 2011,

9), and this mix between rootedness in Nairobi and transcendent of any essentialised notion of what that means, is what makes Essuman's statement characteristically Afropolitan. A risk of Afropolitanism is that it becomes an empty narrative of stylish affluence and one that 'loses touch' – particularly with those who do not have the same material advantages, and here Essuman's specific evocation of class is important.

To turn to another example, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Barbara Karuana also expressed a middle class self-identification in our discussions. While formulating a critique of local television programming, Karuana told me:

> I ask myself, why is our TV terrible? And then I realise that it is because they don't tell the kind of stories I'm interested in hearing about. And that's not necessarily reflective of the Kenyan society as a whole... I can tell you for a fact that I live a very different life from someone who lives across the road in Kibera. ... Now, sure I could write content that reflects my interests, right, but then my thought process, and my interests, and my concerns are *exactly the same as someone who lives in the States, or in the UK or whatever*. (Interview 2015)

What Karuana demonstrates here is a very clear sense of her position in a distinct Kenyan subgroup with a cosmopolitan orientation and very different material circumstances from those of lower income groups.[80] In a corresponding statement critiquing television, she expressed class issues even more plainly through the rhetorical question: "why would me, a middle class Kenyan, choose to watch something on NTV [a local free-to-air network] and not watch something on Netflix?" (interview 2015) Like Karuana, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Jennifer Gatero also described herself as middle class and articulated her class standing through modes of her screen media viewing: "I, myself am middle-class ... I watch DVDs, I have cable TV, or I have Netflix, a lot of people I know have Netflix, so we've moved out of local TV" (interview 2015).[81] Karuana and Gatero's statements reflect the fact that they see themselves as part of a global network of similarly minded people who share interests and tastes regardless of where they live – a

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[80] In her evocation of Kibera, Karuana expressed class difference in a typical Nairobian way, as commonly "people refer to social classes by quoting a part of the city" (Overbergh 2015a, 102).
[81] According to Gatero, middle class people like her "don't really watch [local] TV as much" (interview 2015).

self-perception that Spronk (2014) would characterise as modern and middle class.[82]

Adopting a globally comparative approach to the study of middle classes becomes essential in interrogating the different dynamics impacting women, and specifically mothers, at the work place. Kenya is one of "the top five countries in Africa with the worst income distribution rate, and among the top ten most unequal in the world" (Campbell 2006, 129-130), and Nairobi as an urban space exists as a microcosm of this wider context. Thus, middle class people exist as a relatively affluent group within a context of radical inequality. This context of inequality may have particularly important implications for middle class women in the work force. Whereas "in most European countries, not being in employment also profoundly impacts on entitlements to maternity benefits, a factor that contributes to the under-representation of women, and particularly mothers, in fields like media, where freelancing or extremely short contracts predominate" (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015, 9), the situation is very different in Nairobi. This is not because of a regulatory environment offering a higher degree of protection to female members of the workforce, but because hired house help is financially within reach of Nairobi's middle classes. In an environment where childcare and house help is affordable, being a career woman – even in an unstable and flexible job like those in the film industry – and a mother, are not irreconcilable goals.

Advanced education is often considered the key marker of middle classness in Nairobi, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers share the key similarity of advanced education. The first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, with the exception of Wanjiru Kinyanjui, were trained at the Nairobi-based Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC). Ellerson terms these KIMC graduates, Anne Mungai, Jane Murago-Munene, and Dommie Yambo-Odotte (with the addition of Wanjiru Kinyanjui) "the vanguard of Kenya's female visionaries" (2010,

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[82] Nairobi-based female filmmaker Toni Kamau characterises herself and her family as middle class because of their liberal social views. This became clear when she described a film she is producing about a gay man from a low income group as follows: "it was a story about sexual minority inequality, but it's also a story about economic inequality because if you are gay in a middle class – like if I was to tell my family 'oh I'm a lesbian' they would be like 'oh seriously' and then they would get over it at some point. But you see, in lower income groups the level of acceptance and tolerance – and I think that cuts across most cultures – it's not as high" (interview 2015).

122).[83] Wanjiru Kinyanjui's training in Germany marks the beginning of an important trend of filmmakers receiving foreign training abroad before coming back to Nairobi to make their films and pursue their careers. This trajectory, as I will show, is common to Nairobi's second generation of female filmmakers. Prior to starting in filmmaking, Kinyanjui studied abroad at the United World College of the Pacific in Canada on a scholarship. She also completed a Master's in English and German literature at the Technical University Berlin, and seeing African films while in Germany "is what actually motivated" her "to go to film school" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). Kinyanjui made *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* while training in screenwriting and directing at the German Academy for Film and Television Berlin (DFFB). She took five years to graduate from DFFB because she had to find additional financing as her school could only finance a short film and she wanted to make a feature (Kinyanjui interview 2015).

While, in the early years of Nairobi-based female filmmaking, training at KIMC was important, other institutions, particularly those abroad, have now gained more prominence.[84] Kinyanjui was the exception in her generation of filmmakers for training outside Kenya, but this is now remarkably commonplace among Nairobi-based female filmmakers. For instance, Wanuri Kahiu completed a Master's in film directing at UCLA, Ng'endo Mukii studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and at the Royal College of Art in London where she made *Yellow Fever*, and Zippy Kimundu studied for an MFA in film from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts Asia. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann studied at AFDA in Cape Town, where she made *Gubi: the Birth of Fruit* (2007)[85] and her statement about why she returned to Nairobi after this education is illuminating: "it is easier to kind of climb up the ladder" in a developing industry like Nairobi as opposed to Cape Town. Filmmakers have many reasons for returning to Nairobi after studying abroad, but whether the main motivation for returning or an unintended

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[83] A more detailed discussion of KIMC, in relation to the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, will follow in Chapter Four.

[84] I will return to a discussion of Nairobi-based film schools in Chapter Six.

[85] *Gubi: the Birth of Fruit* is an experimental short film re-imagination of the Adam and Eve origin story. It travelled to several film festivals including the Brooklyn International film Festival and the Durban International film Festival (Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015).

consequence, the relative easiness of climbing up the career ladder is a benefit of being based in Nairobi.

International connectedness is important to defining a Kenyan middle class (Neubert 2016, 113; Spronk 2014, 108), so it is important to note that Nairobi-based female filmmakers have many transnational connections. They have often lived abroad or are dual citizens.[86] They also frequently travel internationally as part of their work, including travelling to international film festivals and film markets, and to shoot films on location abroad. A full discussion of their transnational connections will follow in Chapter Four.

This section has demonstrated the benefits of analysing Nairobi-based female filmmakers from a class-based perspective, and suggested that they fall within the contested category of a Kenyan 'middle class.' As my examples have shown, they display a modern self-perception (to use Spronk's term), they have transnational connections, and they are highly educated – often at elite international institutions. An international film school education, or any film school education, is not a necessary precondition for success in Nairobi-based filmmaking and there are other paths a select number of entrepreneurial filmmakers have followed to success. However, while I have established that these filmmakers can reasonably be considered middle class, I have not yet shown what impact being middle class has on patterns of creative work in Nairobi. It is to that question that I now turn.

2.2 Filmmaking is not a 'real job': 'professionalism' in Nairobi

Nairobi-based female filmmakers have had thriving careers in Nairobi – as the filmmakers discussed in the last section show. Yet, when I discussed the perception of their work within Nairobi with my interviewees, with overwhelming frequency they reported that filmmaking is not considered a 'real job' in this

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[86] For instance, Judy Kibinge grew up in the United States and has also studied in England, both Natasha Likimani and Jinna Mutune have lived in the United States, Njeri Karago worked in Hollywood before returning to Kenya and making *Dangerous Affair*, and Dorothy Ghettuba previously worked in Canada before starting her company Spielworks in Nairobi. Some filmmakers are also dual citizens, for instance, Lucille Kahara is Kenyan/Canadian, Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann is Kenyan/German, and Hawa Essuman is Kenyan/Ghanaian.

context.[87] This tension between their patterns of work and the perception of those patterns of work by others is what this section sets out to explore. Invariably, an intersectional approach is required here because both class and gender (among other features) significantly impact understandings of what constitutes 'professionalism.'

When I asked early career Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wangechi Ngugi why filmmaking is not considered 'real' work in Nairobi, her immediate response was to point to her physical appearance. She then recounted a story of a time she went to film in the Kenya Television Network (KTN) building alongside a male co-worker. He was wearing shorts and had "really ragged hair" and she also had "weird hair" (Ngugi interview 2015). They shared the elevator with a man – presumably an employee of KTN – who looked at them with complete derision, with eyes that said "I don't even see you. Who are you? How did you even get into this building?" (Ngugi interview 2015) In a similar case, Appie Matere told me about her extended family's perception of her work and how this was intimately bound up with her physical appearance:

> They can't understand the hairdos; they can't understand the wearing jeans and T-shirt [to work] … I'm from a very small community. So for me to look different, it's a very big … I'm sure they pray for me every day [laughs] to change … They will allow me to sit among them because they perceive I have money … but that's the only reason why they allow me to sit with them, but if I didn't? I would be an outcast by now. (Interview 2015)

Unconventional hairstyles (such as dreadlocks) and casual clothes such as jeans were seen as unacceptable choices for a 'professional' working woman. 'Professional' standards of appearance for women in Nairobi include very strict 'rules' about hair-style (braided or straightened hair is acceptable, natural hair is not) and conforming "can make the difference between having a job and not having a job" (Mukii interview 2014). These two examples point to the importance of physical appearance, or style, in the perception of the filmmaking profession in Nairobi and Kenya. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that physicality alone

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[87] Contrastingly, in their special issue on gender and creative labour in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand for *The Sociological* Review, Conor, Gill, and Taylor found: "one common point here [this special issue] and elsewhere, for instance in Florida's now-classic reference to the creative class, is that creative people, creative work and creativity itself are all positively valued" (2015, 4).

dictates this perception. Rather, physicality is a useful starting point for a more holistic exploration of 'professional style' and what it means to be, act like, and be perceived as 'professional' within a given context.

An exploration of 'professional style' in Nairobi must inevitably begin with Ferguson's ground breaking work on 'cultural style' in *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (1999). He draws on Judith Butler's work to devise a theory of cultural style that emphasises its performativity as a way of explaining two distinctly urban Zambian "cultural modes" – the localist and the cosmopolitan – without resorting to the tired binary of 'traditional'/'modern' that has long been used to explain differences in African urban life (1999, 91-92). In his articulation,

> having style is a matter of successful performance under demanding circumstances, and bringing the performance off requires not simply a situational motive but a whole battery of internalised, nontrivial capabilities acquired over time. Cultural style, then, is first of all a performative competence. (1999, 96).

Rather than thinking of culture as 'clothing' he proposes thinking of it as 'fashion': "style, in this sense, is not achieved simply by having certain ideas or adhering to certain norms; it is a matter of embodied practices, successfully performed" (1999, 98). Physical appearance, mannerisms, contacts, and tastes are all components of cultural style, and following Ferguson, they can then be seen as components of what constitutes 'professional style' within the Nairobian context.

Ferguson's theory of cultural style is essential to explaining why some Nairobi-based female filmmakers, knowing as they obviously do (because they could articulate it so clearly to me) that their physical style impacts the way they are seen (as *not* 'professional') choose to cultivate an alternative visual style. He argues "style is a material practice … Cultivating a viable style thus requires investment, in a very literal sense, and the difficulties of cultivating more than one stylistic mode at the same time are formidable," and this includes literal material goods as well as the "investment of talents and energies" in things such as "manners, styles of joking, [and] social contacts" (1999, 100). When young Nairobi-based female filmmaker Lucille Kahara said: "all the creative people, arts people, I

guess look a certain way, so you are just seen as being an outcast cause you are the one with the piercings, with the tattoos, with the different hair, with the different style" (interview 2015) it must be read as a deliberate choice to cultivate a 'creative style' that positions itself in opposition to a mainstream 'professional style.' However, to see this decision as one of entirely personal choice would be to adopt a 'neoliberal rationality' (Garritano 2013, 180-181).[88] Being able to decide to adopt a particular style can be a marker of class privilege. For example, anthropologist Ruth Prince studied volunteers in the health sector in Kisumu who volunteer as an in-road to future gainful employment (though this transition is rarely successfully made) and notes these "aspiring volunteers" always dressed "in the style of Kenyan professionals" (2013, 593) a description she takes as roughly synonymous with that of office workers. These volunteers struggling for their livelihoods choose to dress like 'professionals,' but they do so within a limited range of options dictated by their precarious material circumstances – circumstances that are not shared by middle class Kenyans.

As my discussion of business standards for female dress codes demonstrates, 'professional style' and gender are deeply imbricated. While making her first feature length film, *Saikati*, Anne Mungai struggled initially to direct her male crew. According to Mungai, at the time:

> our culture was such that women don't give instructions. It's only men … So at first it was hard because again it was like going against the cultural norms. Because most of the crew were men. Women had not taken up training in film. So you find then that you are giving instructions to a male cameraman, male sound operator … they would not look at you as a film director, they would look at you as a woman. And as a woman you are not supposed to give men instructions. (Interview 2015)

This experience has parallels with African female filmmaking elsewhere, where "to direct a film would mean, in most cases, to direct a mostly male crew, which could be problematic in patriarchal societies where the authority of women is often undermined" (Bisschoff 2012, 163). It can also be read as a conflict between

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[88] As Garritano notes, "neoliberal rationalities extend the free-market principles of global capitalism into all dimensions of human life and create the individual as an autonomous, rational agent who 'bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment' ([Brown] 6)" (2013, 180-181).

gender and 'professional style' as it would seem, that for the men under command, a fundamental feature of a boss was maleness. "Clearly, there are structural constraints on stylistic development, and actors never just freely choose their own style" (Ferguson 1999, 101), and these constraints are informed by the complicated intersections of class and gender.

Yet, the discussion so far is incomplete. When compared with office workers, doctors, lawyers, and other professions involving advanced education and social prestige, Nairobi-based female filmmakers may be perceived as not having 'real' jobs. However, this comparison only looks at one end of the social spectrum. It is of significance that when Nairobi-based female filmmakers discussed their work not being seen as 'real' the comparisons they made were with white-collar professions. They described how their work did not look like 'real' work to others because it was considered to lack the attributes of white-collar 'professional' work such as regular working hours, a regular salary, and job security. Accordingly, a 'professional' worker whose job meets the conditions of salary, security, and regularity will "get a lot more props from the establishment" even if they make the same amount of money as a filmmaker (Lebo interview 2015). Being 'professional' is thus about more than a high income – filmmakers often make more money than other socially legitimate 'professionals' (Kimundu interview 2015, Mukii interview 2015; Ngugi interview 2015), but displaying and being seen to have the corresponding 'professional style.' 'Professionalism' is not a static attribute that can be defined in the abstract, but rather contextual, performative, and in the eye of the beholder. The difference between what you 'are', aspire 'to be' and how others in turn see you turns out to be of fundamental importance, for being 'professional' designates "the entanglement of individual aspirations to be professional – to be of celebrated quality, to demonstrate skill, and to be able to make a living for this skill – and to belong to a perceived order of other professionals who have succeeded in this task" (McNamara 2016, 218).

Unlike 'professionals' with job security and stability, Nairobi-based female filmmakers must 'hustle' to continually find work. Here there is an important parallel with Nairobi's working classes who also must continually 'hustle' to

survive.[89] All filmmakers, middle class and working class, must 'hustle' to continue working. The difference between these groups rests upon the networks they are able to access to go about their work, and the scope of those networks is largely class determined. I hope to demonstrate this through the following discussion of the respective positions of middle class and working class filmmakers within Nairobi's transnational development networks.

To begin to understand the different working conditions of working class and middle class filmmakers, it is first necessary to see them in their respective relationships to Nairobi's transnational development networks. Nairobi is home to an extensive network of NGOs and international developmental organisations. The United Nations headquarters in Africa are in Nairobi (established in 1996), and additionally Nairobi is a "central hub for connections with an international civil society network" (McNamara 2016, 29 citing Taylor 2004).[90] A further factor shaping the television landscape in Nairobi is the presence of developmental shows. The most famous show in this tradition is *Makutano Junction* (2007), and other prominent programmes in this tradition include *Shuga* (2009),[91] and *Siri* (2009). Notably, while *Makutano Junction* is made in Kenya, it is produced by a global charity called Mediae[92] that works to use entertainment for education. The show "now has 10 million viewers across East Africa" (de Block 2012, 610), thus suggesting its successful merging of education and entertainment. Notably, the goal of Mediae, unlike local broadcasters, is not to turn a profit.[93] Making films and promotional videos for various NGOs and development organisation is a

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[89] A full theorisation of the concept of hustling can be found in Chapter Six.

[90] In recent years, the macro-level economic development approach (which had its heyday in the 1980s with Structural Adjustment Programs led by institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), has given way to a more 'human centred' approach (for instance, female empowerment is a mainstream development strategy). Kenya is a major site of development work, including areas such as health care, HIV prevention and treatment, environmental concerns, and women's rights.

[91] After the first two seasons, production of *Shuga* moved to Nigeria.

[92] Mediae began, in the mid-1990s, by making edutainment programmes for radio broadcast (de Block 2012, 610).

[93] A particularly famous example of edutainment filmmaking in Kenya is the work of the Kenya-based but foreign-funded NGO Sponsored Arts for Education (S.A.F.E.). So far, they have produced three feature fiction films – *Ndoto Za Elibidi* (*Dreams of Elibidi*)(Reding and Wa Ndung'u 2010) addressing HIV/AIDS, *Ni Sisi* (Reding 2013) promoting peace in the wake of the 2007/2008 post-election violence, and *Watatu* (Reding 2015) addressing extremism on the Kenyan coast. They are currently producing a fourth feature, titled *Who Am I?* that is co-directed by Nick Reding and Wanuri Kahiu.

prominent form of employment for Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and, additionally, 'edutainment' television shows and films are highly visible in Nairobi.

The confrontation between working class and middle class filmmaking is aptly demonstrated by McNamara's theorisation of a workshop that took place at Slum-TV[94] in the context of the 2012 Slum Film Festival (SFF). In it, four speakers were invited from different sectors of what McNamara calls Nairobi's professional screen media industries, and "with an audience of young aspiring filmmakers meeting full-time Nairobi-based media professionals, the discussion during the workshops quickly turned toward questions of money" (McNamara 2016, 197). Two speakers – Cajetan Boy and Bonny Katei – advocated for the importance of telling 'Kenyan' stories, yet they were challenged by 'subsistence' filmmakers like Idha Nancy.[95] McNamara narrates, in response to Boy's "commenting idealistically that if young Kenyans wanted to make films, they should simply go out and make them and not be burdened by the interests of funders … Idha Nancy, a member of the Slum-TV cooperative, responded irritably that 'we want to make films. We're just waiting for somebody to give us the money,'" thus reflecting a fundamental tension between the aspiration to make films and material resources to do so (McNamara 2016, 198):

> Boy's idealistic advice that if young filmmakers want to make films, they
> must simply go out and make them, sits at odds with Nancy's recognition
> that, as a filmmaker with no expendable income, limited access to
> equipment, and ambitions of earning a liveable income, simply going out
> and making film is not necessarily possible. (McNamara 2016, 198)

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[94] Slum-TV "is a media NGO" that "was established in 2006 by Kenyan/British artist Sam Hopkins as a local media production group" (McNamara 2016, 179). They are "provided with core funding from Africalia" – a Belgian non-profit launched in 2000 that since 2007 focuses on achieving development goals through supporting culture and art in Africa (McNamara 2016, 178). With this funding, Slum-TV employs "a small group of permanent staff, in exchange for which the group is mandated to produce three short films per year, and run a filmmakers training centre for the Mathare community" (McNamara 2016, 179). Importantly, "Slum-TV is composed of approximately ten other unsalaried members who comprise the bulk of the group's 'media collective', making themselves available for work in the hope of securing a line on future production budgets" (McNamara 2016, 179).

[95] McNamara calls these filmmakers 'subsistence' filmmakers in comparison with 'professional' filmmakers, but I propose that the difference between these two groups is better articulated in terms of class position – as working class and middle class respectively, for, all filmmakers, middle class and working class, must 'hustle' to continue working (and correspondingly to 'subsist'). For a full discussion of hustling see Chapter Six.

While Boy was concerned with the kind of films being made, for subsistence filmmakers: "less pressing is the issue of what kinds of films one makes, but rather the capacity to make a film in the first place" (McNamara 2016, 199). This point must complicate any narrative about the role of NGOs and developmental films in African screen media industries. In this light, being *able* to make an NGO film, and correspondingly an income, looks remarkably like a privilege.

In describing the position of filmmakers in Zimbabwe, filmmaker Rumbi Katedza outlines a common narrative about the relationship between NGOs and filmmakers in Africa: "as an independent filmmaker, if you wanted to continue creating, you created within the framework of NGO buzzwords. If your film wasn't about good governance, HIV/AIDS or human rights, chances were it wouldn't get made" (wa Munga et. al. 2015, 45-46). This is the "double bind" filmmakers find themselves in: the projects with funding are commissioned by NGOs with specific goals, "but these projects are not necessarily the projects with which filmmakers themselves want constantly to be involved in the way that NGOs require" (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015b, xix-xx). NGOs (a shorthand for the development industry more broadly) are an essential client for local filmmakers: they are the "bread and butter of this industry" (Kamau interview 2015). This relationship has been ongoing since at least the 1980s when Anne Mungai made several issue-based documentaries for television (Cham and Mungai 1994, 99), and some Nairobi-based female filmmakers are even development actors in their own right. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, for instance, is the Executive Director of the non-profit organisation Development Through Media (which was founded in 1997 and seeks to effect social change in Kenya through media initiatives). Yet, NGOs are only the clients, the bread and butter, of particular filmmakers, in other cases filmmakers are the beneficiaries of NGO work. A key distinction in determining the 'client' or 'beneficiary' status of each filmmaker is their class position. Unlike working class filmmakers, such as those McNamara describes at SlumTV, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are middle class and have the life experiences and networks that render them familiar to potential clients – be they white collar Kenyans or the expatriates that so frequently work for development organisations. In sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu's terms, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 2011) that working class filmmaker's lack.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers may not be seen as having 'real' jobs in comparison to other middle class 'professionals' in white collar jobs, but this perspective must shift when they are compared to working class filmmakers. The purpose of this discussion of 'professionalism' in Nairobi was to suggest how Nairobi-based female filmmakers occupy a specific space in Nairobi's screen media ecosystem, and it is one that is defined in large part by class position. As opposed to working class filmmakers dependent upon external resources (from development agencies) to make any films, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have the class position and transnational connections to sustain careers as filmmakers (often through working for development organisations) even as they struggle to finance future creative projects.

2.3 Riverwood – limitations on industry intermingling

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised that a key aspect of what makes Nairobi an advantageous place to be a filmmaker is that filmmakers can fluidly move between different sectors of the industry (albeit only if they have the social position to do so). Hawa Essuman's career biography demonstrates this trend in an unusual way. She began her career in production before realising she wanted to be a creator. At this point she joined the local TV drama series *Makutano Junction* in the directing department and worked there for four seasons (Essuman interview 2015). Essuman made her first film, *Selfish?* (2008) in a very unusual way as she approached the local Nollywood-style production house Jitu Film about making a film for them. For *Selfish?* there was "barely a script" and it was shot in six days and the film has "so many problems it's ridiculous," but she described making the film as "a good education" (Essuman interview 2015). For Essuman, the film was an educational opportunity that she subsequently built on through experimenting making short films with the help of friends to discover what her "own filmic voice looked like" (Essuman interview 2015). Following this she was accepted by One Fine Day Films to direct *Soul Boy*. Following the success of *Soul Boy* (as will be discussed in Chapter Four) Essuman won the Director's Eye Prize at the African

Film Festival of Cordoba (FCAT) in 2012 – worth €25,000 (£22,900) – to write a feature screen play, and received prestigious international film festival support for two co-directed documentaries.[96] Essuman has thus had a diverse career in production, television, 'video film', and feature filmmaking.

Many of these characteristics, as is clear from previous examples in this chapter, are common to Nairobi-based female filmmakers. The notable difference is Essuman's involvement with Jitu Films – amongst the prevalence of format shifting that takes place in Nairobi and intermingling between sectors, Riverwood is one section of the industry where Nairobi-based female filmmakers have had remarkably little presence.

Riverwood films are ultra-low budget[97] made-for-DVD movies with "fast production cycles (one or two days for comedy sketches, about two weeks for bigger productions), and largely improvised" and they circulate around River Road on the East side of downtown Nairobi alongside music and "Hollywood, Bollywood or Nigerian filmfare" (Overbergh 2015a, 99). The films are predominantly shot in Kikuyu (and sometimes other vernacular languages) "and produced and consumed along language and, closely related, ethnicity lines" (Overbergh 2014, 210). The industry emerged in the late 1990s (Overbergh 2015a, 99) when pioneering "Kikuyu stand-up comedians started filming their shows and distributing the tapes" (Overbergh 2014, 209). Now, "these comedians have moved from selling recordings of their stand-up performances to low-budget films, largely based on funny dialogue in Kikuyu language" (Overbergh 2015a, 99). In contrast to most Riverwood films that sell 3,000-6,000 copies per film, films by the comedians sell 50,000-150,000 copies (Overbergh 2015a, 99). This genre is the "most popular and most lucrative" within Riverwood (Overbergh 2015a, 99). Within Riverwood the producer of a film often acts as its distributor or "the movies are bought for a flat fee, and are then duplicated and sold through retail" (Overbergh 2014, 209). While "the majority [of Riverwood producers] work largely in the same way as has been described for other circuits of African poplar video film" (Overbergh 2015a, 99), a key difference is unlike Nollywood, Riverwood "does not seem to be widely viewed

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[96] I will discuss these co-directed documentary projects and their funding in more detail in Chapter Four.

[97] They are typically produced on a budget of 20-30,000 KES (£150-225) (Overbergh 2015a, 99).

and is not hugely profitable" (Overbergh 2015a, 100 via McNamara 2010) aside from the pioneering comedians.[98] In my conversations about Riverwood, I encountered a significant amount of rumour about the profitability of this industrial sector (for instance, Nairobi-based entertainment and intellectual property lawyer Liz Lenjo called Riverwood filmmakers "secret millionaires" [interview 2015] – an assertion largely unsupported by Overbergh's studies on the subject). The exclusion of middle class and transnationally connected Nairobi-based female filmmakers from Riverwood does not seem so surprising when we consider that this mode of filmmaking is only profitable for a small number of Riverwood filmmakers.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers praise Riverwood filmmakers, but none consider themselves part of Riverwood.[99] Even Wanjiru Kinyanjui – who worked with Riverwood filmmakers to create *Bahati* and *Manga in America* (as discussed in Chapter Two) – draws a clear distinction between herself and Riverwood filmmakers. She describes herself as a 'professional' director and those working in Riverwood as 'amateurs' (Kinyanjui 2008). Appie Matere articulated a key difference between her work making films for M-Net and Riverwood. She gave a workshop for Riverwood filmmakers and realised in that context that she is not one of them when she mentioned that she was working with a budget of 800,000 KES (£6000) per film and it "was little money":

> and everybody pinched each other - what is she talking about? Eight hundred thousand! That's a lot of money. Then I explained to them and I told them it's not … you think it's a lot of money because where you come from, but look at it as we have to use eight hundred thousand to M-Net standard. Their standard cannot go low. (Interview 2015)

She also said that her making a film for 800,000 KES (£6000) for M-Net was the equivalent to a 20,000 KES (£150) Riverwood film in the sense that she has to be incredibly frugal in order to "maintain the standard" M-Net requires – essentially,

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[98] Overbergh notes that "video clubs in Nairobi do not screen Riverwood" and instead prefer "cheaper foreign fare: martial arts or Hollywood movies" (2015a, 100). In a corresponding statement, McNamara describes the common fare of Kiberan video halls as "Jean-Claude Van Damme films, football league matches and (once the sun sets) pornography" (2016, 182).
[99] Wanuri Kahiu, for instance, said she found Riverwood "really exciting because it so addresses the need of the people, really quickly, really efficiently, and it is mass consumed. And that is an amazing thing. I like the ability to sell, to market, to keep pushing film out … I'm very impressed by Riverwood" (interview 2014).

800,000 KES (£6000) is a small amount of money to make a show of the required quality. It is relevant here that Essuman's work in Riverwood was in the context of Jitu Films, itself an attempt by a more up-market company (Vivid Features) to produce "Riverwood stories with a fresh approach" including higher production values and expanding distribution into upmarket supermarkets as well as the usual River Road network (Overbergh 2015a, 108 via McNamara 2010). Jitu made 24 films and sold four, "but did not make the sales needed to become self-sustainable" (Overbergh 2015a, 108).

Riverwood filmmakers share key differences from Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Critically, they are distinct in terms of class position and their respective transnational connections. Riverwood filmmakers are dominantly working class and do not participate in transnational circuits of funding – for instance, their films do not receive funding from international film festivals, but Nairobi-based female filmmakers do (see Chapter Four). Riverwood filmmakers may wish to expand the distribution of their films (Overbergh 2015a) but lack both the financial capital and networks (or social capital) to expand their businesses to produce the stylistically internationalised films those circuits require.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have suggested that Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a movement because they are based in Nairobi, and moreover because they occupy a particular position within this urban space as part of a transnationally connected middle class. A key benefit of the city is its environment of media convergence that allows Nairobi-based female filmmakers to fluidly shift between producing a very wide variety of content. Nairobi-based female filmmakers may move between producing high quality television for cross continental broadcasters, producing lauded stylistically internationalised films, working in extremely low budget modes, and self-financing their creative projects and sustaining their careers through commissioned fiction and documentary work, alongside many other strategies. The fluidity of Nairobi's media production landscape helps explain why, as I discussed in Chapter Two, the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers display such stylistic difference even as they cohere

based on their thematic emphasis on class issues. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are meaningfully distinct from Riverwood filmmakers and other working class filmmakers, and this is a result of their being members of a transnationally connected Kenyan middle class. This distinction suggests that taking advantage of the city's many potential opportunities and avoiding its pitfalls requires certain skills and social positioning. Because of these skills and social positioning, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are able to take advantage of a flexible screen media ecosystem and effectively follow the money to make sure that they are always working as filmmakers, whether on feature fiction films, television, or making promotional videos for development organisations.

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of class position to understanding the work patterns of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Throughout this chapter I have emphasised the importance of class over gender to explaining the work patterns of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Nnaemeka's theory of 'nego-feminism' (2003) suggests the importance of studying gender in context, and, furthermore, studying the intersections of gender and other factors such as class is essential to undertaking a transnational feminist analysis. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are very aware or their own class positions and the role of class in shaping the local media market.[100] When I first asked Judy Kibinge about why a dynamic new media market seemed to have emerged within the last decade her immediate response was "it's an exploding middle class," where people have that much more money in their pockets and "new markets are created" (interview 2014). She elaborated, "you ask, why is IT exploding now? Why the sudden shopping malls? Why so many cars suddenly? So many radio stations, television stations? They're catering to more people who have more capital to spend" (interview 2014). Furthermore, the fact that Nairobi-based female filmmakers discuss class issues to such a wide extent in their films, suggests that class is a concept they themselves find important and provides another justification for my focus on class in this chapter.

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[100] I will further discuss class in relation to audience segmentation for local television in Chapter Five.

Finally, in interrogating my choice of terminology – Nairobi-based female filmmakers – we come once more to the question of class. As critics of Afropolitanism have shown (see Introduction), only some have the material ability to travel beyond their home contexts and thus the luxury of being 'based' somewhere with the potential that implies to one day move elsewhere. Through my choice of terminology (Nairobi-based female filmmakers) I am deliberately evoking a class-based understanding of these filmmakers, just as I am highlighting the essential importance of where they have chosen to be based: Nairobi. This chapter has hoped to show the vital importance of working in Nairobi and the opportunities this has allowed Nairobi-based female filmmakers. As I now turn to considering their transnational networks this focus on Nairobi will only prove to be more important.

Chapter 4

Negotiating Transnational Circuits of Cinema: Locating agency

The first noted film by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker is the feature-length fiction *Saikati* (1992), directed by Anne Mungai.[101] Mungai was part of the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, many of whom received training at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) (Wanjiru Kinyanjui being the prominent exception). KIMC was government run at the time[102] and its graduates were "automatically absorbed" into the Film Production Department of the Ministry of Broadcasting and Information "where their job was to make documentaries along government lines" (Kinyanjui 2014, 69). Mungai was thus making *Saikati* within an institutional context deeply connected to the national development goals and agendas of the Kenyan state.

Mungai produced, directed, wrote, and edited *Saikati*. She made the film while working at KIMC, which was funded by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation[103] – and it was through their support of KIMC that Mungai was provided with the materials to make the film (Cham and Mungai 1994, 95). *Saikati* was shot on 16mm film and the processing of the film was done in Kenya with the exception of the optical soundtrack which Mungai did at Bavaria Studios in Munich because the necessary equipment did not exist in Kenya (Cham and Mungai 1994, 96-97).[104] The film's crew was entirely Kenyan (Cham and Mungai 1994, 96).

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[101] Mungai had made "short and medium-length documentaries on a number of topics dealing with women, health, youth, religion, agriculture, and education" all for television (Cham and Mungai 1994, 99) prior to *Saikati*, but this was the pivotal film in her career, and her reputation as a filmmaker is almost entirely based on this production (see Chapter Two). *Saikati* also continues to receive invitations to film festivals (Mungai interview 2015).

[102] After Kenya was declared independent from Britain in 1963, the new government nationalised the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and renamed it the Voice of Kenya (VOK). This led to a shortage of qualified manpower as most expatriate employees chose not to work for the VOK. Thus, in 1965, a training school was established for technical staff. Reflecting the need for trained journalists and production workers in addition to technicians, in 1967, construction on the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication began (Nguru 1986, 166-167). Since 2011, KIMC has been a Semi-Autonomous Government Agency (Kenya Institute of Mass Communication 2017).

[103] The Friedrich Ebert Foundation is a political foundation affiliated with, but independent from, the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

[104] While KIMC once had a lab equipped to process 16mm film, the equipment is no longer functional and it is not currently possible to process celluloid film in Kenya (Kinyanjui interview 2015).

Financing the project was difficult and she "managed to get the crew… and the actors to work for only token pay from the school" since she "could not afford professional fees" (Cham and Mungai 1994, 96). She also received in-kind contributions from Serena Hotels and Air Kenya (Cham and Mungai 1994, 95-96) – leading to product-placement sequences in the film. These struggles in film financing have been part of the African cinematic landscape since its beginnings in the 1960s. However, within a context of state-supported filmmaking supplemented by transnational resources and corporate donations, Mungai was able to tell a personal and creative story.[105] Keeping gender in focus is essential to understanding Mungai's working context, but so is the fact that she is part of a generation of African filmmakers, both male and female, working to assert national perspectives and create socio-political transformation. A national cinema framework is necessary to understand the production context of *Saikati*, but significant changes have taken place within the last fifteen years that challenge the usefulness of this mode of analysis for explaining the contemporary film production landscape in Nairobi, as I will show in this chapter.

The concept of national cinema is a longstanding organisational principle in film studies, but one that has also been strongly contested, for, viewing "the world as a collection of nations (as in the United Nations) is to marginalise if not deny the possibilities of other ways of organising the world" (Dennison and Lim 2006, 6). The concept retains its usefulness in certain circumstances, however. Indeed, film scholar Andrew Higson argues for its continuing relevance "at the level of policy" because "governments continue to develop defensive strategies designed to protect and promote both the local cultural formation and the local economy" (2006, 20). In a supporting argument, African film scholar Aboubakar Sanogo observes that "any serious study of world cinema, in particular in its independent auteurist version, must come to terms with the indispensable role of the state as an enabler of that tradition" (2015, 144). Yet, within the contemporary Kenyan

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[105] The film itself closely parallels Mungai's own life, and it was important to her to make a film that reflected her own experiences. She states: "As a woman film-maker, I want to be free to describe what affects a woman from a rural background. After all, I did grow up in a village! … When I make films, I put a lot of myself into them, a lot of my childhood. It is what I want to express because it is what I know and what I've lived" (1996, 65). The need to tell her own story and assert her experiences, as well as political views on those experiences, helps explain why Mungai would go to the trouble of actually making the film.

context the state has not played this facilitating role, and instead the parastatal responsible for promoting the Kenyan film industry – the Kenya Film Commission (KFC)[106] – has taken the approach of "selling Kenya as a [film] destination instead of really trying to build within the industry" (Matere interview 2015).

Kenya has a history of being used as a film location for major international productions, such as *Out of Africa* (Pollack, 1985) and *The Constant Gardener* (Meirelles, 2005), and the KFC actively works to court similar scale productions now because of their financial desirability.[107] The South African film industry, for instance, has a local content sector and a service sector, but "the success of the national industry is based largely on its capacity as a service industry" (Tomaselli 2013, 242). Nairobi-based female filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte captured the issue evocatively when comparing her own film projects to major budget foreign productions, saying "I become the child of a lesser God in this case" because the financial scale of a foreign project would be so much greater than what she herself could spend. Big budget foreign films such as *Out of Africa*, the paradigmatic example, show off the beauty of the Kenyan countryside to audiences and production companies all over the world, and can serve as a major statement about the value of Kenya as a film location and tourist destination (thus garnering future business). Attracting major European or North American productions thus brings the money they invest while producing in country (taxes, hotels, employing local personnel, etc.) but also, and more importantly, it connects Kenya to the *audiences* of these films: namely North Americans and Europeans who might then decide to come as tourists to Kenya. In Kenya, "tourism is one of our biggest foreign exchange [earners] and it's always connected and tied to the film industry" (Yambo-Odotte interview 2015).[108] Attracting foreign productions is valuable for

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[106] In many of my conversations with filmmakers about government influence on filmmaking there was a tendency to conflate the Kenya Film Commission (KFC) with "the government." This terminological slippage is understandable given that the KFC is the parastatal responsible for promoting the film industry, but there are actually several governmental institutions directly involved in the film industry. These include the Department of Film Services (which issues film licenses), the Kenya Film Classification Board (that rates films for exhibition), and the Kenya Copyright Board (which enforces copyright protections).

[107] During the course of my fieldwork this issue was centred on the question of whether Angelina Jolie's film about the conservationist Richard Leakey would be filmed in Kenya or lost to South Africa.

[108] This strategy of "selling Kenya as a perfect filming destination" is currently "a problem because of Al Shabab" (Wanja interview 2015). The Somali-based terrorist group has been responsible for a

service companies who would be hired to service those productions. Additionally, it can provide spill over benefits that indirectly contribute towards industry growth. For instance, producers like Appie Matere and Alison Ngibuini worked in the production departments of major international films and thus gained valuable work experience. However, work on these productions is to the benefit of technical crews much more than creative staff, particularly in high-level roles like directing and cinematography.

Consequently, Nairobi-based female filmmakers, on the whole, are gravely dissatisfied with the KFC and see it as explicitly ignoring their best interests. A core source of discontent among filmmakers is that the Kenyan government has no system for granting funding to filmmakers. They have a loan – called "Take 254" – that is offered through the Youth Enterprise Development Fund. Through Take 254 filmmakers can borrow up to 25 million shillings (£187,000) if they are under 35 (or part of companies where 70% of the employees are younger than 35). The loan has an interest rate of 8%, which must be repaid in full (with interest) within six years, and, depending on the size of the loan, the filmmaker is allowed a two to three month grace period, and the project must be completed within a timeframe of four to six months. The loan is widely considered impractical because of its unrealistic timeframe for film completion and loan repayment, and veteran film and television producer Isabel Munyua went so far as to describe the loan's conditions as "insane" (interview 2015). Furthermore, while the government has taken that step of creating a film-specific loan, they have not taken the corresponding necessary step of "creating an environment for the filmmaker to make money off this film for him to pay you back" (Munyua interview 2015). Without a profitable distribution model in place, financing through impractical and unrealistic loans is unfeasible.[109]

In a situation where the state provides almost no support, it becomes ever more tenuous to hold the nation as the logical boundary of analysis, and instead, a transnational framework becomes more productive. Yet, to see international

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significant number of large-scale attacks on Kenyan soil in recent years, and this has resulted in large parts of the country, including popular tourist destinations on the coast, being put on foreign travel advisories.

[109] I will discuss distribution and exhibition in Nairobi in depth in Chapter Five.

involvement as resulting only from a 'lack' would be to deny recognition of these filmmakers' agency. As I argued in Chapter Three, Nairobi-based female filmmakers share a marked cosmopolitanism as middle class and transnationally connected filmmakers, and this must be taken into account when discussing the international financing of their films.

This chapter sets out to situate Nairobi-based female filmmakers in a transnational framework and its guiding question is: to what extent can these filmmakers be considered a movement because they share common transnational trajectories and connections? As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have almost never adopted a Nollywood- or Riverwood-style video-making approach, but instead rely of a variety of other models to finance their films and sustain their careers. The particular model this chapter will explore is that of relying on international financing and transnational partnerships. In particular, I will examine the Nairobi-based transnational film project One Fine Day Films, 'foreign' funding models such as grants from Focus Features Africa First, and grants from European film festivals. Following this discussion of transnational film production, I will turn to the international circulation of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers.

Part 1: Tarzan and Transnational Convergence: The Case of One Fine Day Films

In *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010), Diawara outlines a history of engagements between 'the West' and Africa, which he sees as deeply problematic. He states: "the West always thinks it can solve Africa's problems just by landing there, hand-picking some people and organizing them to fight against ignorance, disease and corruption" (2010, 76). He goes on to term this type of engagement "humanitarian 'Tarzanism' in Africa" (2010, 76). This line of thought acts as the foundation for his subsequent elaboration of filmmaking relationships between 'the West' (treated as almost synonymous with France) and Africa. Throughout his book, Diawara remains deeply suspicious of any non-African involvement in the domain of African filmmaking:

> we all know by now that "partnership" has become a buzzword for appropriating the concerns of Africans for the purposes of European and American aid workers. It is clear that the North/South relation depends on each party ignoring the other's intentions, whether we look at it from the vantage point of the French philosophy of "*exception culturelle,*" the Ford Foundation's view of capacity building, or the co-production of African films. An equal partnership is always a myth because of the power relation imbedded in the terms of the partnership: as long as there is a donor and receiver, there will be an unequal power balance. (2010, 81)

While remaining aware of the history of unequal power relations between Euro-America and Africa that Diawara highlights so forcefully, throughout this section I aim to test Diawara's assumptions using the case study of One Fine Day Films. Is partnership merely a meaningless buzzword? Are the aims of Africans and non-Africans indeed irreconcilable to the extent that partnerships between them cannot work?

One Fine Day Films (OFDF) is perhaps the most prominent recent film project in Nairobi, as it has succeeded in consistently producing a series of critically acclaimed feature films since its first project – *Soul Boy* (directed by Hawa Essuman) – in 2010. The project is ongoing. The OFDF filmmaking project was started by husband and wife team Tom Tykwer[110] and Marie Steinmann and it grew out of their existing Nairobi-based arts NGO One Fine Day e.V. (Slavkovic 2015, 205). OFDF receives support from a number of different organisations including DW Akademie, a German development organisation focused on media capacity building, and Ginger Ink Films, a British-funded production and service company based in Nairobi (McNamara 2016, 26). *Soul Boy* deployed a system of mentorship where foreign film professionals mentored local talents, for instance, Tykwer mentored director Hawa Essuman. Following the success of *Soul Boy,* OFDF expanded to run a two-part project consisting of a workshop or "two week classroom-like 'mini film school'" (One Fine Day Films 2016a) whose participants are experienced filmmakers from across the continent and a film (whose participants would ideally be drawn from that workshop). This model produced *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga, 2012), *Something Necessary* (Kibinge, 2013), *Veve* (Mukali, 2014), and *Kati Kati* (Masya, 2016). The project's prominence, success at

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[110] Tom Tykwer is a famous German filmmaker known for feature fiction films such as *Run Lola Run* (1998).

producing feature films in an environment where that is a rare achievement, and its foundational transnational connections with 'Western' organisations, make it the ideal case study to test Diawara's assumptions about Tarzanist foreign intervention in African filmmaking.

My expectation when I began interviewing filmmakers who had been working with OFDF in various capacities, based on my academic training in development studies and African studies, was that they would be ambivalent about the project, perhaps pragmatically recognising the benefit of a project that produced feature films in an environment where that rarely occurs, but also treating this 'foreign' intervention with scepticism. The responses of my interviewees led me in an entirely different direction.[111] Rather than ambivalence, I was overwhelmed by the positive emotions the majority of my interviewees expressed for the project. Indeed, the only Nairobi-based female filmmakers I interviewed who expressed a negative view of OFDF were from the older generation, such as Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui, and their criticism was in representational terms. Especially regarding *Nairobi Half Life,* and in the same vein as critics of Nollywood (Okome 2010), they expressed concern that the films were representing Kenya 'badly' to the outside world. An important caveat here is to note the performative nature of interviews, and how it is doubtful beneficiaries of the project – particularly those involved in the most high profile ways as directors (Hawa Essuman and Judy Kibinge) – would speak negatively about it, knowing their responses would be published in my research. Thus, throughout this section I do not take interview responses at face value, and instead consider the positive responses of filmmakers about OFDF as a puzzle to solve. I hope to show that rather than Tarzanism in action, OFDF is a key example of the way a convergence between 'local' and 'foreign' filmmaking is manifesting and producing transnational cinema.

The case of OFDF's first director Hawa Essuman is an instructive example of the potential of this project to transform a filmmaker's career. Essuman had a diverse career in production, television, and 'video film' before *Soul Boy* (see

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[111] This points to the necessity of my methodology and the importance of field-based research in film studies. Like Laura Fair before me (see Introduction), what I found when engaging with actual people was a challenge to what previous scholarship had taught me to expect.

Chapter Three), but it was unquestionably this film that launched her international career and gave her the status of a 'festival' filmmaker. *Soul Boy* had its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) where it went on to win the Dioraphte Award (worth €10,000 [£9,150]),[112] and subsequently went on to win various awards at the African Movie Academy Awards, the Kalasha Awards (based in Nairobi), and ZIFF, to name only a few on its journey, and to screen at "virtually every other festival worldwide" (Wenner 2015, 189).[113] After this successful run, Essuman won the Director's Eye Prize at the African Film Festival of Cordoba (FCAT) in 2012 – worth €25,000 (£22,900) – to write a feature screen play (the project is currently titled *Djinn*). She is also in the process of co-directing a documentary with Malou Reymann supported by a development grant from CPH:LAB (a project of the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival). Her most recent film, co-directed with Anjali Nayar, is called *Silas* (2017) and is set to premiere in 2017 at the A-list TIFF (TIFF 2017). *Silas* received financing from the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) Bertha Fund. Other OFDF films have had similarly successful journeys on the international film festival circuit; both *Something Necessary* and *Kati Kati* premiered at TIFF and subsequently toured the festival circuit, and *Veve* toured film festivals, including the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF). *Nairobi Half Life*, in addition to being submitted as the Kenyan contribution to the Academy Awards (the first ever submission by Kenya) is quite possibly the most popular Nairobi-made film of all time. It was "an enormous local success" (Overbergh 2015a, 105)[114] and one that was even popular enough for pirate vendors to go against their usual caution in selling Kenyan content to "take the chance of mass-distributing" it "openly" (Overbergh 2015a, 104). *Soul Boy*, *Nairobi Half Life*, and *Kati Kati* are all multi-award winning films (One Fine Day Films 2016b).

I have outlined the international and local success of the OFDF films and some of the potential benefits they confer on filmmakers' careers (through the

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[112] The award is given out, by popular vote from the festival audience, to a film that had been supported by the Hubert Bals Fund. It is now called the Hubert Bals Fund Audience Award.

[113] *Soul Boy* was also popular within Nairobi's informal settlements Kibera and Mathare (Dovey McNamara, Olivieri 2013, n.p.; Dovey 2015b, 131-132), as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

[114] Nairobi-based actor and writer Mugambi Nthiga also emphasised that the success of *Nairobi Half Life* was unprecedented (interview 2015).

example of Essuman). Now I will turn to considering the agency of filmmakers in working with the project using the example of Judy Kibinge. Kibinge had directed several feature films before working with OFDF, and was already an experienced filmmaker (see Chapter Three). She approached the workshop as a competition where it "became let the first man or woman win because everyone needs to make that film that will then put you on a certain international platform" (Kibinge interview 2014). For Kibinge, the experience of participating in OFDF was worthwhile because she knows "what it is to be in the trenches" looking for money and making films, yet never having "enough to make a film that has the technical qualities you need to hit the big festivals globally," while at the same time wanting to reach that "larger platform" (Kibinge interview 2014). In her assessment, the value of working with OFDF (and other transnational projects like African Metropolis and Focus Features Africa First, which I discuss below) stems from the fact that "if you make a film that is good enough, [it] will quickly put you on a global platform. The same one that you've been trying to get to for various years" (Kibinge interview 2014). She wanted to reach larger audiences and saw participating in OFDF as a way to achieve that goal. However, the difference between *Something Necessary* and her previous films is not simply a matter of technical quality but of *institutional backing*, and this can be seen through a comparison with her previous film *Killer Necklace*. As discussed in Chapter Two, *Killer Necklace* is a smooth film with polished production values and a compelling story. Kibinge also approached its production with extreme dedication so that it could be her 'big break' (Kibinge interview 2015).

> But it never went anywhere. If I had been with a group of people like the One Fine Day producer Sarika [Lakhani], if I'd had access to that kind of assistance and advice I would have made M-Net the half hour film, but I wouldn't have made the strange 40 minute version which I made. I would have stretched it and done a one hour version ... and then it would have been a film that could have done the circuit. (Kibinge interview 2014)

Of further note is the fact that, in 2015, Kibinge uploaded *Killer Necklace* to Vimeo because:

> I just got tired of no one ever seeing it and M-Net doesn't care about it. They don't want to market it. They're never going to show it again. So I just felt

like, too bad, I'm just going to upload it and if they complain I'll take it down. (Kibinge interview 2015)

In contrast, OFDF continues to promote their films both in film festivals and digitally - including in a new online store where every OFDF production to date can be streamed for a five euro fee (£4.60).[115] M-Net New Directions is also a transnational project financing films made in Kenya, but the crucial difference between New Directions and OFDF is that the support of OFDF continues *after* the film has been made.

Kibinge participated in the workshop because she wanted to direct the film, but the screenplay was not revealed until after she was chosen and she was deeply disappointed with the topic because so many of her other recent film projects had dealt with the post-election violence in some respect.[116]

So it's not the film that … I would have chosen to make … it was very important not to make it a preachy film, but to really make it an observation about two people, and to try and make it a very human … story so that Anne's story, when you saw her you didn't see this Kenyan victim. You just saw a woman who wouldn't give up. (Kibinge interview 2013)

She would not have chosen to make the film, but she did "end up loving" doing it because she was able to re-write it and "untangle" and "build characters" (Kibinge interview 2015). She was able to take ownership of the film and transform it according to her own agenda and authorial vision (in addition to directing the film she is credited with adapting the screenplay by Mungai Kiroga). She reshaped the script so that Joseph would be one of the two main characters – something she saw as essential to depicting the complexity of the post-election violence (Kibinge interview 2013).[117] Yet, despite this fundamental authorial work in composing the

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[115] It was also possible to view OFDF films for a fee on the African screen media video on demand (VOD) platform Buni.tv (via their pay section Buni+) before Buni.tv was sold to French network Trace TV in 2016 (Vourlias 2016a). For a further discussion of Buni.tv and other VOD platforms see Chapter Five.

[116] Her 60-minute documentary *Headlines in History*, an exploration of Kenyan history as told through the corporate story of the Nation Media Group, concluded with the post-election violence. She also made a 12-minute short film for the Steps Why Democracy? series called *Coming of Age* (2008) where the climax is the violence. Finally, she made the 40-minute documentary *Peace Wanted Alive,* which was explicitly about the violence.

[117] She said: "most importantly of anything for me was just to show that that violence was complicated" and not a simple matter of "two tribes jumping at each other, and the only way to show that was to show perpetrator as victim" (interview 2013). Hence, she wrote a fuller story arc for the character of Joseph.

film, her authorship (or auteur status) has been questioned because of the collaborative nature of OFDF. It "is really dangerous" as a filmmaker to look like "the figurehead on a workshop piece," and it was this risk that Kibinge weighed up when deciding whether or not to be part of One Fine Day (Kibinge interview 2014). Having the authorship of a film questioned simultaneously challenges its status and potential value because "auteurism has always been about cultural capital, staking a claim for cinema's status as art" (Tasker 2010, 216). It would be difficult to verify definitively, but she suspects that the reason why the film did not travel to the highest profile festivals beyond TIFF is "the cynicism that comes back when the caption comes up at the end" saying that the film was part of the OFDF development program (Kibinge interview 2014). She described the questioning of her authorial voice, presumably by critics and curators, as "the big minus about being part of an initiative like" OFDF (interview 2014). In her mind, the challenge that needed to be negotiated in working with OFDF was not an unequal partnership with a foreign agency, but rather the perception that she would not be given full credit for her film.

A key limitation of the project is not that it is Tarzanist, but rather that it is *perceived* to be. Here we find ourselves on familiar, if tired, critical terrain where the question of authenticity and African-ness in film is paramount. The same issues facing Kibinge in regards to *Something Necessary* also faced Gitonga and Essuman in regards to their OFDF films (*Nairobi Half Life* and *Soul Boy* respectively). According to one critic, "pinning down the particularly Kenyan contribution" to *Nairobi Half Life* is "difficult" (Hodapp 2014, 232) because of Tykwer's participation. This framing leaves open the question of whether the film is really *Tom Tykwer's* instead of Tosh Gitonga's while simultaneously questioning the national authenticity of the film. It thus participates in a discourse that defines African films based on the conceptually nebulous quality of 'African-ness.' In a discussion of *Soul Boy,* Berlinale film curator Dorothee Wenner wrote: "it was wonderful to watch this Kenyan success story unfolding. But the joy was not shared by all – some people in Nairobi were highly critical of the project and asked, on the occasion of the [African Movie Academy Award] nominations, whether *Soul*

Boy was really an African film, given the strong German involvement" (2015, 189). As the opening credits roll on *Soul Boy*, we see the following words:

> One Fine Day Films presents
> In association with Anno's Africa [A UK registered arts charity that works with underprivileged children in Kenya]
> In co-production with Ginger Ink Films [a Nairobi-based and British funded production and service company (McNamara 2016)]
> Supported by ARRI Film and TV Services [A German Company]
> And Goethe-Institut Kenya [The German cultural institute], Göteborg International Film Festival Fund [A Swedish fund], Hubert Bals Fund Rotterdam [A Dutch fund]

It is therefore clear that *Soul Boy* came about as the result of collaboration across many different parties and has a "strong German involvement." But does the German involvement in *Soul Boy* mean it is no longer an 'African film,' or actually directed by Hawa Essuman?

In the case of *Soul Boy*, the central issue is focused on the idea of a 'Kenyan voice' – how this is constructed and whether or not it is compromised in the film. In a report for the World Story Organization, Edwards says: "that Kenyan voice is what will imbue Kenyan films with a unique vantage point when presented to the rest of the world" and that filmmakers must face the challenge of working with global filmmaking conventions "while at the same time discerning and maintaining this indigenous, Kenyan voice" (2008, 7). The problem here is Edwards' use of the term "Kenyan voice" as it implies something essential about Kenyans, a voice they all have, and does not account for the multiplicity of voices that make up a society as diverse as contemporary Kenya. This begs the question: in a country as diverse and fragmented as Kenya (see Introduction), what is a *Kenyan* voice? Is it in a particular language? Does the 'speaker' have to be from a particular place or with a particular origin story? Dovey suggests moving beyond a foreign/African binary and instead says of *Soul Boy*, in light of its cross-border collaborative approach to filmmaking: "it is not an 'African film.' It is simply a film in which many Africans have played key roles" (2015a, 66). Categorising *Soul Boy* as African or not is to enact a closure on the text that can easily stray into essentialism.

OFDF clearly has the potential to launch filmmakers into a transnational arena, but an equally large part of its local value comes from its position as a training opportunity within Nairobian screen media industries. A part of projects like OFDF is bringing in "experienced filmmakers from more developed industries" and giving local creatives a hands-on opportunity to learn from them (Wanja interview 2015). These initiatives offer a needed "injection of knowledge and know-how" that can help not just individual participants but the whole industry move to the next level (Kibinge interview 2014). Indeed, after participating in an OFDF workshop, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Appie Matere now encourages others – both her employees and anyone who wants to get into production – to attend the workshops as a way of acquiring knowledge "because the things you learn there, it's amazing" (interview 2015). Kenya is not currently home to a world-class film school, and there are few opportunities for aspiring filmmakers to train locally (both employers and recent film school graduates made the same complaints about the inadequacy of the film training programmes that currently exist in Kenya (Kibinge interview 2014; Muhoho interview 2015; Ngugi interview 2015; and for further discussion see Chapter Six). Intensive master classes like the OFDF workshop are thus seen as a vital stopgap measure. On the whole, the Nairobi-based filmmakers I interviewed do not perceive OFDF as a 'Tarzanist' 'foreign' intrusion in local cinema. Rather, it is seen as a transnational collaborative project of great potential benefit. According to *Soul Boy* director Hawa Essuman, a critical part of these projects is their collaborative dimension because with collaborations "there's a trade of intelligence. Not just expertise, but perspectives," and these resources are "just as important as money is, sometimes more important" (interview 2014).

This collaborative dimension – however much it might be questioned by Diawara (2010) – is essential to re-thinking the relationship between the 'local' and the 'foreign' in African filmmaking. In the context of Rwanda, visual studies scholar Piotr Cieplak argues that "completely isolated and self-sufficient production is currently impossible" (2010, 76). Here the Rwanda Cinema Centre has developed a collaborative model of filmmaking where they work with filmmakers from across the world while "maintaining a strong ideological position

on the need to make film popular and accessible to local audiences" (Cieplak 2010, 76). In this case, collaboration is central to the development of an industry and it can be seen positively because it is for the mutual benefit of both 'local' and 'foreign' participants who must work together. Collaboration, and the syncretism it creates, challenges "the notion that 'African' cinema can only be created by African passport holders" (Cieplak 2010, 79), and collapses the automatic opposition between 'local' and 'foreign' in favour of the 'transnational.' The case of One Fine Day Films suggests that what "we all know" about partnerships across borders (to borrow Diawara's expression [2010]) needs to be rethought and, at the very least, rendered more complex and nuanced.

Part 2: 'Foreign' funding and 'local' agency

In this section I will consider the role of film funding from outside Kenya in the production of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Unlike One Fine Day, which operates a collaborative filmmaking project from Nairobi, the methods of funding considered here are all based outside, and on the whole they provide grants to filmmakers but do not finance entire films (as One Fine Day does).

There is a pervasive assumption in much of the literature that 'foreign' funding will inevitably change the sorts of films filmmakers will create (cf. Diawara 2010; Halle 2010; McCluskey 2009). That the funding structure of a film shapes its outcome seems common sense, but these critics do not approach the matter innocently, rather they seem constrained by old-fashioned media imperialist arguments. [118] Here I refer to arguments particularly about the impact of American media as it circulates transnationally. Fair notes that "much of the media-studies literature published in the United States during the 1990s took the ever-expanding US global hegemony as its premise" (2010b, 108), but this impact was presumed rather than adequately studied. Spectatorship scholarship has been particularly influential in challenging media imperialist arguments. For instance, in her studies of Zanzibari audience tastes, Fair found "African audiences were selective consumers of global cultural flows, as well as active agents in the construction of

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[118] These arguments about the sinister potential of mass media to control society, and where individuals have no agency to resist or repurpose media messages on their own terms, have their foundation in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's seminal arguments about what they term "the culture industry" (2011 [1944]).

meaning from the texts with which they chose to engage" (2010b, 109). Scholars must thus conceptualise audiences "neither as resistant heroes to be celebrated nor as duped victims to be pitied" (Ginsburg et. al. 2002, 13). According to Smith, "globalization should not be perceived simply as American culture dominating over and homogenizing other cultures but as an interstitial process through which cultures meet and interact" (2008, 12). I take my cue from this literature and view filmmakers not as passive victims of hegemonic outside powers, nor as heroes to be naïvely celebrated, but rather as agents.

Furthermore, criticism based on media imperialist arguments can miss what the films themselves actually do. The controversy over the film *Farewell My Concubine* (Kaige, 1993) provides a compelling illustration. Nativist critics "see the very production of the film, which involves Taiwanese capital, Hong Kong writers, a Chinese director, and Western critical approval, as concocting a hybrid cultural commodity for Western consumption" (Xu 1997, 156). But what they miss is that this model of production, which moves filmmaking beyond the realm of pure state control, means "new films in China are gradually being freed from the propagandistic functions they used to serve," and a film like *Farewell My Concubine* "conveys a critical edge that is galling to the dominant ideology in China, as testified by the very hostile official attitude toward it" (Xu 1997, 159-160). By focusing their criticism on assumed foreign influences and 'Western' audiences, these nativist critics missed the impact the film was having in China. To give another example, German film scholar Randall Halle argues contemporary European co-productions are a form of Neo-Orientalism because they support "the production of stories about other peoples and places that it, the funding source, wants to hear" (2010, 314) and "the coproduced films must offer stories that appeal to European and North American audiences" (2010, 317). Halle's arguments deprive filmmakers of all agency and position funders as all-powerful.

Nigerian-South African filmmaker Akin Omotoso says that there is a dilemma in South African co-productions because the films have to address two very different audiences – one in South Africa and another abroad, and, in his words, this creates a "dilution" that does not privilege the local audience (McCluskey 2009, 165). The balancing act of satisfying funders and maintaining

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one's artistic integrity, in the words of Omotoso, is "the devil you choose to dance with" (quoted in McCluskey 2009, 166). Omotoso's statements offer a more productive way forward than those of Halle, through highlighting the *choice* filmmakers have in these encounters. Adejunmobi describes the funding structure of what she terms 'global ethnic films' (or what in other contexts have been called art film, serious film, or FESPACO film) by noting: "thus far, funding has come from foreign governments, foreign media groups, and international non-governmental organizations" then goes on to argue: "the fact is … both African and non-African financial backers have their objectives and are not likely to provide support for film projects that do not fit in with their own larger concerns" (2007, 13). Adejunmobi notes that film funders have their own agendas and produce the stories they want, and in this way is similar to Halle. However, a crucial difference in their arguments is that while Halle closes off these encounters as neo-Oriental, Adejunmobi allows for the agency of filmmakers in negotiating with potential funders. As my examples will demonstrate, this is precisely what Nairobi-based female filmmakers do in practice.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers also use various systems to their own advantage and are not merely passive victims to outside agendas. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Ng'endo Mukii is well aware of how her work fits within existing funding schemes, and she uses that knowledge to her benefit. She states: "I can apply for grants because I know that some of what I want to already do fits into what people are interested in" (interview 2014). She wants to do "artsy" work that is "different" but this is not true of all Kenyan filmmakers, and animators with commercial ideas can work outside the system of transnational film funding. She compares herself to a colleague working on commercializable animation: "he doesn't need to care about getting funds, he doesn't have to write applications, he doesn't have to try to find which strand his film would fit into, or look for co-production – he just does his stuff"[119] (interview 2014). Her artistic agenda is one

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[119] She first compared herself to a friend making very short funny animations of a Kenyan police officer that he then sells, before further comparing her approach to that of Nairobi-based animator Andrew Kaggia, and specifically his short film *Wageuzi: Battle 2012* (2011). The film reimagines prominent Kenyan politicians as Transformers on a literal race through Nairobi to win the presidential election. The film was a passion project – he wanted to contribute to changing Kenyan voting culture in the wake of the 2007/2008 post-election violence – and he quit his job to devote himself to it (Kermeliotis 2013). "People loved it, so they watched it a lot and he went to a lot of

that requires international financial input and is facilitated by it. Similarly, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann is very cognisant of potential funding opportunities for her work. I asked Ndisi-Herrmann about her process of finding funding for her films and she said:

> I think it's a combination of A, having an idea that keeps returning and B, also checking what calls there are. So often you'll read about a call and it will be for a fiction film, or for this or for that, and you think ok actually, I wonder if I could think of something for that. Or you have an idea and you think, oh what can I, how can I apply for that? But usually I always think predominantly about how I can get funding. (Interview 2015)

She has been quite successful using this approach considering her film *The Delayer*[120] (in-production) received funding from Docubox, Göteborg Film Festival, the IDFA Bertha Fund, and through a crowd funding campaign. She thinks about how the projects she wants to do fit within existing funding streams and thinks about her work in relation to existing opportunities. However, this strategy can be read both positively and negatively. First, she could be read as 'selling out' or compromising her ideas for 'foreign' agendas and thus compromising the full expression of her creativity. Second, this can be read as a highly pragmatic approach where she 'spins' her ideas and projects so that they appear in alignment with the intentions of funding sources. Third, and most importantly, however, the idea of 'selling out' in this case, like so many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, is complicated by Ndisi-Herrmann's personal transnational connections. She is of mixed German and Kenyan heritage and has lived and studied in France, the Netherlands, and South Africa (Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015).

Ndisi-Herrmann also spoke about the creative advantages of being answerable to funders outside of Kenya:

> how wonderful, that though we don't have government support, government funding, we do have wonderful film grants in the US and

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festivals, especially [in] Japan, and then he was approached by politicians" to make versions where they were victorious because "they know how they can use the animation to their advantage. So, if he wanted to he could have picked up a lot of cash from this one idea" (Mukii interview 2014). She recognised that opportunities for commercialising ideas in animation in Nairobi do exist, but for the time being she says, "while I don't have children or a mortgage or any of those things, I'm focused on my artsy projects. When I'm a bit older I'll have to be more commercial [laughs]" (interview 2014).

[120] The film was previously titled *The Donkey that Carried the Cloud on its Back.*

Europe that give Africans money. That's really wonderful. The situation could be worse ... the great thing is that, like, with this funding, it means you are answerable to people who live elsewhere, *which means that their ideas are more open.* (Interview 2015)

She then mentioned how the current Kenyan government makes her think about self-censoring to avoid getting into trouble, but having funds like the IDFA Bertha Fund means she "can be more open minded" (interview 2015).[121] This situation – where transnational funding facilitates the creation of content that would not be deemed acceptable within the filmmaker's national context – is replicated in China. Indeed, "while intellectualist, elitist 'cultural reflection' was hushed in post-Tiananmen China, filmmakers are able to carry out their critical project with the support of transnational capital and the global market" (Lu 1997, 132). Adejunmobi argues the fact that much African literature is extraverted can provide "cover for artists to embrace views considered ideologically contrarian and provocative by the general public within Africa but unexceptional for networks of critics and artists localized outside Africa" (2015b, 63). Similarly, receiving external funding can allow for filmmakers to address topics that may not be seen as acceptable within their local contexts.

A central contention of this thesis is that to understand Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a movement we must see them from a locally based *and* transnational perspective. The very premise that 'local' filmmakers must compromise their ideas for 'foreign' funders rests on parochial foundations. As I argued in Chapter Three, Nairobi-based female filmmakers share cosmopolitan backgrounds and identities that are transnational in scope. The Afropolitan middle class sensibility Nairobi-based female filmmakers display makes them part of a movement of young filmmakers on and off the African continent "whose cultural and educational backgrounds do not encourage a simple equation between political identity (as Africans) and artistic orientation" (Adesokan 2014, 248). In an apt statement on contemporary hybridity in relation to identity, Gikandi suggests:

Once upon a time, this kind of hybridity was conceived as the source of deep cultural anxieties and psychological division; narratives and essays were produced to imagine the lives of Africans hopelessly, and sometimes

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[121] State censorship in Kenya will be discussed in Chapter Five.

tragically torn between cultures, languages, and traditions. Not any more.
(2011, 9)

The example of Ng'endo Mukii's short film *Yellow Fever* can help unpack some of the nuances here. Mukii made the film while she was a student at the Royal College of Art in London, but the inspiration for her incisive critique of race and representation was her return to Nairobi after studying at the Rhode Island School of Design and living in the United States. The circular motion of travel and return opened her to a new perspective on issues she had never originally questioned while living in Nairobi and she began "looking at this issue of race and representation in media and trying to figure out where this added value of whiteness had come from in African countries" (Mukii interview 2014). *Yellow Fever* argues the reasons black women are compelled to modify their bodies – through skin lightening creams, hair treatments, etc. – are transnational in scope and rooted in colonial iconographies of beauty. The film thus has a 'nego-feminist' position (Nnaemaka 2003) because it moves beyond the impasse of 'hybrid' versus 'authentic' culture and instead examines cross-border connections and how these impact African women. Both the critical edge of *Yellow Fever* and its production are transnational in scope, making it an example of transnational cinema, and "because transnational cinema is most 'at home' in the in-between spaces of culture, in other words, between the local and the global, it decisively problematizes the investment in cultural purity or separatism" (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 4).

2.1 Focus Features Africa First

One of the most high-profile short film projects for African filmmakers created *outside* the continent in recent times was Focus Features Africa First, which was active between 2008 and 2012 (Cieko 2017, n.p.). Focus Features Africa First helped Wanuri Kahiu to make *Pumzi* and also provided a grant for Ng'endo Mukii's film *The Teapot* (in production). Focus Features is the art-house division of NBC Universal (which in turn is owned by American media conglomerate Comcast). African-American film producer Kisha Cameron Dingle initiated Africa First, and "the premise was to figure out a way whereby this world of African cinema and filmmaking and this world of studio and industry could meet" (Dingle quoted in Sanogo 2015, 141).

As a producer of short fictional films, Africa First had the deliberate intention of "discovering or enabling film directors early in their careers," and they chose five directors per year (Sanogo 2015, 142). "Deliberately inscribing itself in an artcinema context, cultivating a sense of cool cosmopolitanism, and invested in global auteurist cinema discourse," Africa First explicitly intended to make films for the festival circuit and related highbrow outlets (Sanogo 2015, 142). Numerous Africa First films screened at prestigious film festivals "as diverse as FESPACO, Sundance, Toronto, Dubai, Los Angeles, Rotterdam, New York, Durban, and Seattle, and many garnered nominations and won awards" (Sanogo 2015, 143). Africa First may be a program run out of a major American film studio, but the specifics of the project contest any potential media imperialist interpretation. In addition to providing chosen filmmakers with $10,000 (£7,720), Africa First also involved a "summit weekend" in New York City where filmmakers met the advisory board - Imruh Bakari, Mahen Bonetti, Keith Shiri, June Givanni, Jihan El-Tahri, Pedro Pimenta, and Sharifa Johka - and executives of Focus Features (Sanogo 2015, 142), and the founder is an African American woman. The deep knowledge of African film offered by the advisory board challenges arguments based on the premise of the "always already 'being-for-other-ness' of films from outside Europe and North America, simply by virtue of their articulation with the art-cinema and/or film festival circuit" (Sanogo 2015, 142).

I would like to suggest that rather than approaching projects like Africa First in terms of their 'foreignness,' the more generative approach is through the lens of their sustainability as funding mechanisms. Africa First is an instructive example here, for despite producing first rate films (such as *Pumzi*) that lived up to the project's guiding expectations, the project ended once the former head of Focus Features, James Schamus, was fired by NBC/Universal[122] (Sanogo 2015, 143). Sanogo describes "the Hollywood machine" as "always susceptible to the hegemony of bottomline ideology," and in this case it seems that Africa First was a casualty of this kind of thinking (Sanogo 2015, 143). One issue of direct relevance to Nairobi-based female filmmakers is the sustainability of international funding.

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[122] Schamus was fired from Focus Features as part of a wider shake-up at NBC Universal, as they sought to broaden the types of films made and distributed by Focus Features from its previous art house niche (McClintock 2013).

While these circuits have worked to the benefit of many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, this may only be for a time. Essuman spoke with particular clarity on the subject:

> In the international arena I think it is possible for you to find funding for your first and second feature. After that, there is a hope that you know how to do it by now … but if you know how to work a system that is finite you are not equipped to handle another system. You have to find a way to invent a new one. (Interview 2015)

Of critical importance here is the issue of sustainability: many of the funding structures Nairobi-based female filmmakers have used to make their films are for *emerging* filmmakers (Africa First and New Directions are explicitly for emerging voices). They must find new sources of funding to continue creating, and, to this effect, many saw the necessity of developing Kenya into a profitable market for their films. Thus, the need to make films for Kenyan audiences was repeatedly emphasised by Nairobi-based filmmakers in our discussions, just as they seek prestige, audiences, and funding in other markets.

Finally, there is the issue of how much these foreign grants actually do and how much stake they actually have in the films. For instance, Ng'endo Mukii received $10,000 (£7,720) from Africa First to make *The Teapot*, and this is a significant amount of money, but the cost of shooting the film (excluding post-production costs) was already $13,000 (£10,000) (Mukii interview 2014). In the case of *Pumzi,* Kahiu needed funding from Africa First, the Changamoto Arts Fund,[123] and from the Goethe Institut[124] to make the film, and said, after the funding "you just put everything else into it yourself" (interview 2014). According to Dovey, "while there is widespread belief that many African filmmakers whose work is shown at festivals are sustained by European grant funding" her research revealed "that the majority are not, and continue to piece together budgets from a range of sources" (2015a, 105). Furthermore, her research revealed that "very few

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[123] The Changamoto Arts Fund exists as a partnership between the Kenya Community Development Foundation and the GoDown Arts Centre (in Nairobi) and is funded by the Ford Foundation. Projects they support "must appeal to new target groups, and the works must contribute towards the development of new, authentic, high-quality Kenyan art as well as cultural identity" (Contemporary And 2015). Their definition of 'art' is broad enough to include, film, music, theatre, and visual art (Contemporary And 2015).

[124] As is noted in *Pumzi*'s credit sequence: "this film was produced as part of the pan-African short film competition 'Latitude – Quest for the Good Life' which was organized by the Goethe-Institut with the support of the 'Art in Africa' foundation."

have even availed themselves of such funding and that the majority feel they have been able to 'pursue their own vision' regardless of the sources of their funding" (Dovey 2015a, 57). Making films, even with the backing of Africa First or other international partners, still requires 'hustling' to complete them, and for this reason studying transnational connections requires a firm grounding in Nairobi.

2.2. Film festival funds

In Halle's perspective (2010), funders are all-important; however, when considering film festival funds, it is important to note that film festivals also need filmmakers. "[Film] festivals themselves compete against one another to premiere the best films and vie for international recognition" (Falicov 2010, 4) and one way to do this is to support the production of the films they can go on to showcase. Latin American film scholar Tamara Falicov outlines a range of examples:

> Mark Woods, of the Australian film promotion body Ausfilm, notes that these funding mechanisms, such as small grants for production, strengthen the "film festival brand." Related to this is the fact that film funds function as a form of patronage that helps produce content for the festival. Adelaide Film Festival director Katrina Sedgwick acknowledges that festival film financing helps their festival to "secure world premieres and to give the event an international profile" (Barber 2007). (Falicov 2010, 5)

Falicov draws attention to one motivating factor potentially behind festivals supporting the development of new films, and that is so that they remain relevant in a relentlessly competitive market that thrives on having new and original projects. Film historian and filmmaker Jeffrey Ruoff notes, "festivals actively cannibalise each other. Programmers attend film festivals and copy each other. They innovate new strategies to distinguish their festivals which, if successful, are then imitated by others" (2012, 7). Actually creating films (or going some way towards doing that) is one way of ensuring a steady stream of new films to program. There is certainly a commercial imperative here, but it is one that demands continually finding innovative art, and not necessarily driven by orientalist motivations.

Importantly, all festival funds should not be indiscriminately lumped together by virtue of being 'foreign'; rather, each must be considered individually to understand its orientation and objectives. FCAT has, since 2007, "started

developing ... into a highly professional event with large monetary prizes and a focus on workshops and events tailored to contribute to the production, distribution, and exhibition of African film in Spain and elsewhere" (Dovey 2015a, 123). Dovey also notes that FCAT is "characteristic of contemporary African film festivals outside of the continent that pride themselves not only for screening films by Africans, but also for being broader springboards for African filmmakers to develop global careers" (2015a, 123). As previously discussed, FCAT proved highly supportive of Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman. Furthermore, new configurations in the festival landscape[125] undercut the usefulness of a conventional postcolonial lens that privileges the study of relationships between Africa and Europe (as in Diawara's account for African filmmaking in relation to France [2010]); as Dovey forcefully states, "any perspective that remains wedded to the determining power of European countries over their former colonies in Africa starts to feel remarkably out of date and anachronistic" (2015a, 128). To give another example, DIFF provides significant professional opportunities to African filmmakers - including the Durban Film-Mart and the training program 'Talents Durban' run in conjunction with the Berlin Film Festival – and is focused on both "international expansion *and* building the African film industries" in equal measure (Dovey 2015a, 140). This festival, and particularly its market, was frequently mentioned as important by Nairobi-based female filmmakers (Matere interview 2015; Wanja interview 2015), suggesting the importance of studying not in relation to Europe but rather at looking at cross continental filmmaking relationships in Africa.

Part 3: International encounters

Giruzzi suggests that *Something Necessary* and *From a Whisper* "cannot be considered as representative of all contemporary women's film-making from Kenya" and one of her reasons is the international critical attention they have received through film festivals (2015, 91).[126] However, I hope to show that a unifying characteristic of Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a movement is their critical success on the international film festival circuit and related spaces. Key

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[125] Examples include the AsiaAfrica program at the Dubai International Film Festival, the Tokyo African Film Festival, and the Africala film festival circuit in Latin America (Dovey 2015a, 129).
[126] For a further analysis of Giruzzi's arguments see Chapter Two.

examples include Anne Mungai (*Saikati,* 1992), Wanuri Kahiu (*Pumzi,* 2010), Hawa Essuman (*Soul Boy,* 2010), Ng'endo Mukii (*Yellow Fever,* 2012), and Judy Kibinge (*Something Necessary,* 2013). Unlike industries such as Nollywood and Bollywood that circulate globally in large part due to demand from diaspora audiences (cf. Bhaumik [2006] on Bollywood and Adejunmobi [2007] on Nollywood), the international circulation of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is not fuelled by a Kenyan diaspora eager to watch films from home. Instead, these films tend to circulate within film festivals and in other artistic spaces (I will discuss other distribution circuits in the Chapter Five).

Film festivals have played a crucial role in bringing these filmmakers to international attention, and, as such, using Dovey's definition of 'festival' filmmakers as a tool for understanding Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be illuminating. She argues that festival filmmakers generally "come from middle class or upwardly mobile social environments, have had access to professional film training, and have traveled widely" (2015a, 6). These filmmakers also have international perspectives and desire "for their films to *travel* beyond their local contexts" while nevertheless remaining "marked" by those local contexts (Dovey 2015a, 7). She argues via De Valck that another characteristic of 'festival' filmmakers is the way they tend to value artistry and creativity over commercial concerns (Dovey 2015a, 8), while also maintaining that 'art' and 'commerce' are always imbricated (Dovey 2015a, 5). Similarly, while the need to grow a local market for their films was continually mentioned in my interviews with them, Nairobi-based female filmmakers generally make films first as a way of sharing their art and their ideas with the wider world and only second as a profit driven venture. Dovey's concept of 'festival' filmmakers can capture emerging filmmakers, not just those who have already gained acclaim on the festival circuit, because its focus includes the character traits and the personal backgrounds common to 'festival' filmmakers. As such, it is applicable not only to well-known Nairobi-based female filmmakers, but also to 'rising' stars. Following Dovey's arguments about the importance of contextual study (2015a), I do not define Nairobi-based female filmmakers statically as, always and only, 'festival' filmmakers. As I have previously argued, they must be examined from both a local and transnational perspective,

and, when taking this into account, their status as 'Nairobi-based' is an equally important way of conceptualising them as a movement. I use Dovey's concept of 'festival' filmmakers as a lens through which to examine Nairobi-based female filmmakers within a *particular* context – specifically that of the international stage, film festivals, and 'world cinema.'[127]

The benefit of a locally based *and* transnational perspective can be shown through White's study *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (2015). White discusses Iranian filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf's trajectory on the international film festival circuit, and particularly her status gained through her connections to the Cannes film festival. White makes a small effort to contextualise Makhmalbaf amidst other Iranian female filmmakers like Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Tahmineh Milani but focuses on what makes Makhmalbaf unique: the other directors "are best known to Iranian audiences. Samira Makhmalbaf has stepped confidently into an international public role—that of a unique auteur historically characteristic of the prestige festivals" (2015 58). Makhmalbaf is thus read as distinct from these other filmmakers because they are popular in Iran where she is acclaimed internationally. Yet, the vital question that White never raises is Makhmalbaf's popularity *in Iran* (leaving a potential similarity between these three female filmmakers unexplored). This question is important because "it has been widely noted that many films that are understood as popular in their domestic market become art films when exhibited abroad" (Galt and Schoonover 2010, 7). The process of crossing the right border (into festivals, not, for instance, into diaspora markets) makes a film 'art' rather than 'popular' cinema. Furthermore, "if the label 'art film' frequently signifies simply a foreign film at the box office, then it is clear that we are already speaking not only of geography but of the politics of geographical difference. Foreign to whom? Traveling to and from which cultures and audiences?" (Galt and Schoonover 2010, 9). "The politics of geographical difference" (Galt and Schoonover 2010, 9) as they pertain to the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, are important to assessing filmic acts of border crossing.

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[127] In Chapter Five, I will discuss the exhibition of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers at international cultural institutions, such as the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française, in Nairobi.

In order to approach the acts of border crossing staged by the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, I first consider the concept of 'world cinema' and question how theoretical issues in world cinema studies can help illuminate how and why the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate as they do. Importantly, I do not define the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers as 'world cinema,' but rather use world cinema as a lens through which to explore the circulation of their work in international film festivals. But first I must answer the question: what is world cinema? For Diawara,

> World cinema, by which festivals understand everything that is neither American nor European, is a new invention of films from the non-Western world that comfort Europeans in their paternalistic supremacy vis-à-vis the Third World and in their struggle against Hollywood. It is a cinema that Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda called "*cinéma Haute-Couture*," a new genre created particularly by Cannes to boost the French politics of "*l'exception culturelle.*" (2010, 87)

Diawara rightly notes that world cinema as a classification is structured around the principle of difference, but his genealogy is ultimately simplistic for focusing only on one type of world cinema. He also misses the opportunity to explore whether films praised in Europe are indeed a "*cinéma Haute-Couture*" because he never engages with actual African spectators – he merely assumes what they like, want, and need.

There are some critical attempts to read world cinema as *all* the cinema of the world (cf. Nagib 2006), but this is not what the term is usually taken to mean or how it is usually deployed. World cinema, in the mainstream sense, essentially began in the 1950s with "the Euro-American discovery of Japanese cinema" (Bhaumik 2006, 190). *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1951) is the paradigmatic text (Desser 2003, 181). Film festivals have played an essential role in this history since *Rashomon* screened at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, and continue to play a central role in developing the canon of world cinema. Film scholar Julian Stringer importantly notes that film festivals tend to provide the first moment of contact between 'non-Western' cinema and Euro-America, and as such "scholars tend to approach them through the nostalgic invocation of those moments when non-Western industries were 'discovered' – that is, discovered by Westerners – at major international competitions" (2001, 134-135). The implicit assumption in

this mode of thinking is "that non-Western cinemas do not count historically until they have been recognized by the apex of international media power, the center of which is located, by implication, at Western film festivals" (Stringer 2001, 135). "What are ostensibly *distribution* histories of world cinema too often masquerade as *production* histories," in this mode of scholarship (Stringer 2001, 135). Film festivals and the construction of the idea of 'world cinema' are importantly linked.

World cinema not only encompasses cinemas from outside Euro-America, but also allowed "Eastern European and some kinds of Scandinavian cinemas" to enter the mainstream (Bhaumik 2006, 190), which contradicts Diawara's assertion that world cinema is non-European and instead offers a more subtle approach to intra-European continental politics of belonging and Otherness. A major juncture for world cinema occurred in the 1970s "when films from Africa, Asia and Latin America that formed part of a corpus of radical critical national cinemas became fairly staple fare in the repertory cinema houses in Euro-America" (Bhaumik 2006, 190). In the 1990s, art-house films from other parts of the world, notably Iran, became part of world cinema, but "popular films from mainly Hong Kong and Japan and genre films from Euro-America provided the main impetus for world cinema" (Bhaumik 2006, 190). Once world cinema encompassed popular cinema it could "go mainstream and attain substantial economic stability in film markets" (Bhaumik 2006, 190). This is a critical juncture, for it is here, when world cinema includes both art and popular film, that we see "far from being exhaustive world cinema is a category constructed through a process of cultural translation that picks up only that which is familiar or made familiar through particular prisms of interpretation employed in mainstream Western cultural discourses" (Bhaumik 2006, 190). Europe and North America "have been, historically and until recently, the main regions in which films by Africans have circulated through festivals" (Dovey 2015a, 23), so assessing the politics of their circulation – and discourses about that circulation – in these places is essential.

To be considered 'world cinema' in the mainstream sense, a film must have 'crossed over.' Bhaumik's discussion of why Bollywood does not make it into world cinema is instructive here. These films "are shown in considerable numbers in mainstream cinema halls in the west as well as readily available in subtitled video

and DVD formats" but "they have not succeeded in attracting non-diasporic Western audiences" (Bhaumik 2006, 188), in essence they have not crossed over. Furthermore, Bollywood is derided as "merely derivative of Hollywood since the West has not shown its admiration by producing films emulating Bombay film styles," whereas "Japanese cinema is worth talking of since Western influence on Japanese cinema was matched by the West's admiration for Japanese cinema" (Bhaumik 2006, 189). Here we see that world cinema is all about power and perspective: what is valuable or derivative depends on the terms of cultural exchange, which are unequal, and because world cinema is a Euro-American classification and theory, slanted in favour of Euro-America.[128] To put it plainly, world cinema is what is simultaneously Other, and rendered familiar, when viewed from the perspective of the Euro-American mainstream.

The power dynamics underpinning world cinema make it a useful tool for understanding the international circulation of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Because their films have shown in international film festivals they have 'crossed over' and can now be considered under the rubric of world cinema. This is not to say that they fit within the *genre* of world cinema, but rather that they fall within the purview of world cinema discourse. African films are pigeonholed "within genres such as 'world cinema'" largely because of "the sporadic and isolated programming of these films within 'A-list' festivals" (Dovey 2015a, 56). World cinema as a genre can only exist when there is a lack of knowledge, it is only this lack that can allow vastly different films from widely divergent contexts be grouped together based on only the shared similarity of Otherness. This is a world cinema that Dovey aptly calls "bland" and "flattening" (2015a, 53). To see the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers as generically world cinema would be to pigeonhole them.

Crossing over means being seen by different audiences in different locations than where the film was made or the filmmaker's home context, a fact that has frequently been noted with anxiety and suspicion (much like the anxiety

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[128] There are attempts to change this imbalance in world cinema studies. Film scholar Eleftheria Thanouli, for instance, draws on Prendergast's arguments about world literature, to advocate for a definition of 'world cinema' where 'world' means "'international' or 'transnational', entailing structures that arise and transactions that occur across national borders" as opposed to "'global' – in the sense of all the cinemas of the world" (2008, 13).

produced by foreign financing discussed above). By virtue of travelling beyond their home context, the filmmaker must navigate certain representational obstacles. This issue in no way only pertains to African filmmakers. For instance, Iranian filmmaker "Samira Makhmalbaf has had to defend herself from criticisms and accusations of making films that were deemed to collude with a non-Iranian audience's existing prejudices about a country that they might not otherwise know much about" (Spiro 2009, 7). In this discourse, the filmmaker is expected to act as a national spokesperson who teaches 'foreign' audiences about their nation – this both fails to see films as acts of representation, not sociological documents, and suggests a binary division between spectators local and foreign. Diawara puts it plainly when he writes: "Paris, New York and Milan can contribute to the glory of African cinema, but they should not be allowed to take the place of Ouagadougou. Otherwise we will end up with … a cinema tailored to a Eurocentric view of Africa" (2010, 70). For critics like Diawara, targeting non-African audiences over African audiences necessarily leads to Eurocentrism: films may show in Europe, but to seek that audience is somehow distasteful.

Cross over audiences are often treated polemically because of an assumed difference between 'local' and 'foreign' spectators and how filmmakers are assumed to manipulate their work to accommodate foreign tastes. In speaking about Chinese Fifth Generation filmmaker Zhang Yimou, Chinese cinema scholar Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu suggests the films are essentially made *for* "Western" spectators rather than Chinese viewers, and this involves selling out the 'real' China for a manufactured spectacle of "enchanting, exotic stories about the other country 'China' through stunning visual images" (1997, 126).[129] The same can be said of Japanese film, where "criticism of Japanese cinema has often been dominated by an Orientalist construction of 'Japaneseness' as Other to a homogenous West, and has tended to focus on how 'Japanese' or 'Western' a given film or director may be" (Hutchinson 2006, 173). Returning to the context of African film, 'calabash cinema' has been used as a derogatory term "called upon the moment Africans feel an African film is in any way 'pandering' to an 'external' and 'exotic' view of Africa" (Dovey 2015a, 52). I have mentioned these three

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[129] For a discussion of the success of these films in China see Berry (1988).

examples, all from different contexts, to show the pervasiveness of this kind of nativist discourse within world cinema. A commonality across all these discourses is that the artist is not free to create; rather, they must create for an essentialised national or continental audience and present the national 'properly.'

The process of crossing over is particularly fraught, and looking at how Nairobi-based female filmmakers have travelled through this process can be instructive. Hawa Essuman's film *Soul Boy* had its world premiere at the 2010 International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) and its screening included a post-film Q&A with Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp and Rindert De Groot.[130] As recounted by Dovey, at one moment in the Q&A De Groot says to Essuman: "It is *such* a professional film. Light splashes off the screen. What is your miracle? ... How come such a beautiful film could be made?" (quoted in Dovey 2015a, 66; emphasis hers). Dovey rightly states, "the subtext here seems to be, how could such a beautiful film be made in *Africa*? After all, we are sitting in the midst of one of the major international film festivals of the world, where hundreds of beautiful films are being shown" (Dovey 2015a, 66; emphasis hers). I would further add that De Groot's use of the word 'professional' as a compliment is distinctly problematic and reflective of his lack of awareness that Essuman is an experienced full-time filmmaker working within a vibrant industry led by other such successful women (see Chapter Three). Dovey convincingly argues, "unlike representation of certain other regional cinemas at 'A-list' film festivals, such as Iranian and Chinese cinema, which may be exoticized or Orientalized ... African film and filmmakers tend to be treated rather as an *exception*" (Dovey 2015a, 60; emphasis hers). *Soul Boy* and Essuman were taken as 'exceptions' at IFFR, as not embedded in a global circuit of filmmakers making beautiful and 'professional' films (Dovey 2015a, 64-69). I have included this example here because it meaningfully sets out a particular context in which films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate and sets out some of the challenges they have to face if they want their films to travel within these prestigious circuits.

Film festivals remain an essential venue for the international circulation of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, but these are not the *only* venues

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[130] For a full account of the Q&A see Dovey (2015a).

available. Reflecting wider trends, the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers also circulate online. For instance, via YouTube, Vimeo, and other VOD platforms. I will discuss these modes of distribution in Chapter Five, but I mention them here in order to emphasise the value of looking at cross over audiences not from the perspective of art house niches and film festivals, but rather in terms of popular culture.[131] Halle's assertion that "of course not just any film enters into international distribution; generally only 'quality' films travel outside domestic markets, lending the false impression to an 'outside' audience that the other national markets contain only quality products" (2010, 303), ignores the vast spread of popular culture across borders. Here Japanese popular culture proves relevant. In the late-1970s and 1980s in the United States "the circulation of manga and anime was a bottom-up phenomenon, driven almost entirely by fan culture" (Desser 2003, 190). Pop cosmopolitans, the term media scholar Henry Jenkins uses to describe people who seek "to escape the gravitational pull of their local communities in order to enter a broader sphere of cultural experience" through "transcultural flows of popular culture" rather than the "high culture" normally associated with cosmopolitans (2006, 155-156), put the lie to theories that assert a homogenous 'Western' spectator with a monolithic taste regarding films from elsewhere.[132]

In my next section, I will turn to the specific case of Wanuri Kahiu's short film *Pumzi* in order to explore how she makes use of various discourses about her work in order to navigate her border crossings and further her career. Through this example I hope to show that foregrounding the agency of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is essential to understanding the international circulation of their films.

3.1. *Pumzi*: agency in action

Pumzi is one of the most celebrated films to come out of Kenya in recent years and has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly as well as popular conversation (Adesokan 2014; Calvin 2014; Cieko 2017; Dovey 2012a; Durkin 2016; Hairston

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[131] Here my perspective aligns closely with Nollywood scholarship, as it has long emphasised the importance of examining the cross border spread of Nollywood films beyond film festivals and theatrical distribution (cf. Krings 2010; Krings and Okome 2013; Lobato 2010; Ondego 2008).
[132] I will further discuss spectatorship as it pertains to Africa-based spectators in Chapter Five.

2016; Harrow 2015; Higgins 2015; Janis 2013; Nyawalo 2016; Omelsky 2014; Wilson 2014; Womack 2013). *Pumzi* "became instantly known as 'Kenya's first science fiction film'" (Cieko 2017, n.p.). *Pumzi* is frequently invoked in critical discourses because of its newness, which is generally understood in terms of genre.[133] It is cited by Harrow as an example of the new "kinds of films that are now emerging" that demand "new kinds of critical approaches" (2015, 14). *Pumzi* "provides a never-before-seen image of high-tech Africans in the future" (Womack 2013, 135) and displays a "new use" of film genre (Higgins 2015, 85). *Pumzi* can be easily read through the lens of science fiction – it is set in a dystopian future in a post-apocalyptic landscape and human society now lives underground in a tightly policed community governed by a council that carefully controls their movements (through granting or denying exit passes) and even their thoughts through compelling inhabitants to take dream suppressants. The science fiction genre is not new of course, but the hype surrounding *Pumzi* seems to emanate from the fact that this is *African* science fiction. Within this terrain of criticism and reception, Kahiu actively resists attempts to pigeonhole her work, while also making use of the hype that surrounds her choice of genre.

In a 2013 interview (recorded and available on YouTube), Kahiu describes the creation of *Pumzi* and says she "didn't choose science fiction," rather, "because the story is about a girl in the future it became a science fiction film" (XamXam 2013). The films generic transformation into science fiction came at the behest of her producer who asked her to choose between science fiction and fantasy. She says, "so I made a decision at that point to go more science fiction than fantasy. But it wasn't an active choice that I'm going to make a science fiction film to deal with issues. I was just writing a story about something that I felt strongly about" (XamXam 2013). In her account, her step into science fiction was happenstance and her creative process was not motivated by a desire to create the sort of hype that *Pumzi* would go on to generate.

When we consider Kahiu's professional background, it seems that she may be playing it coy, and that this self-presentation as totally unaware of how her

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[133] Not all scholarly criticism of *Pumzi* references genre. Dovey describes it as a film that "display a different kind of confidence, the confidence that seems to say 'Don't make assumptions about what or who I am, or what kind of film I want to make'" (2012a, 34).

work would be perceived in light of its generic approach seems shrewd. After all, she completed a Master's degree in film directing at UCLA and interned at a major Hollywood film studio (Paramount Studios). She had also already completed several films including *The Spark that Unites* (2007),[134] *Ras Star*,[135] *From A Whisper*, and *For Our Land* when she made *Pumzi*.[136] *From A Whisper* received 12 nominations and won five awards at the African Movie Academy Awards in 2009, as well as wining Best East African Picture at ZIFF and Best film at the Kalasha Awards (in Kenya). However, she is not really a calculated filmmaker cultivating a persona through interviews, and public talks, that position her as an artist that does not concern herself with commercial imperatives, such as the potential success and desirability of her film products. Rather, this perspective is undercut by her thoughts on the 'new-ness' of her work and her approach to classifying and labels.

While *Pumzi* is continually invoked as 'new,' Kahiu continuously connects the film and its genre (science fiction) back to older storytelling traditions. In a TEDxEuston talk Kahiu "expresses the concern that science fiction in African cultural contexts is not a new phenomenon and is inherent in African storytelling … To insist that *Pumzi* is the first science fiction film from Kenya downplays the presences of futurist discourses in the country, and the African continent more broadly" (Cieko 2017, n.p.). She argues, "way before any terms were coined that defined Afrofuturists there were storytellers who composed narratives populated with science, fantasy, mythology and speculative storylines" (Kahiu 2016, 167) and "Afrofuturism and speculative fiction have always existed in Africa. Indeed, they pre-date western images of science fiction" (Kahiu 2016, 173). Because science fiction is not actually new in Africa, the main laurel applied to Kahiu is not as laudatory as it first appears. She also stated, "my films have been called un-African. *Pumzi*'s not African. It's not an African film. And I couldn't

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[134] She made her first film, the behind-the-scenes documentary *The Spark that Unites,* about the making of *Catch a Fire* (Noyce, 2006)

[135] As with other filmmakers like Judy Kibinge, she was able to make her first fiction film through working with M-Net New Directions. *Ras Star* tells the story of a young Muslim woman in Nairobi who dreams of becoming a rapper and clandestinely, because of the disapproval of her family, works to perform in a rap competition.

[136] She was commissioned by M-Net to make this documentary about Nobel Laureate Wangari Mathaai for the M-Net Great Africans documentary series.

understand that" (Kahiu interview 2014). In this respect, her critical stance is one that actively resists being shallowly categorised. She has similarly expressed ambivalence about being labelled as Afrofuturist (Kahiu interview 2014) and an 'African filmmaker' (TEDx 2013). She resists being labelled as *only* Afrofuturist, African, or new. She calls herself "a global African working in science fiction" (Kahiu 2016, 172) and stakes a claim that "while African theories of cyclical time may influence my work, I am equally affected in the idea of multiverses being explored in the [Large Hadron Collider]" (Kahiu 2016, 172). This positioning moves her out of easy categorisation and into a sphere of transnational connections where she can be recognised first and foremost as an artist.

Furthermore, like other Nairobi-based female filmmakers, she is not easy to classify because she works across a highly diverse range of screen media and other creative forms. For instance, she is credited as a producer on Nairobi-based male filmmaker Jim Chuchu's African Metropolis[137] short film *Homecoming* (2013), and also runs a production company called Awali with her business partner Rebecca Chandler. She has experimented in television, first filming a pilot for a show called *Sauti*,[138] and then producing one season of *State House* for Zuku. Currently, she has two documentaries in production,[139] and is working with the South African Triggerfish Animation Studios Story Lab project to make a feature film called *The Camel Racer* with Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor – with whom she has also co-written the short story "Rusties" (Okorafor and Kahiu 2016). Her authorial activities do not stop there: she has also released the children's book *The Wooden Camel* (Kahiu 2017). Given the breadth of her creative and entrepreneurial portfolio, it is ever more absurd to pigeonhole her as a filmmaker into any shallow categorisation.

Marketing is instrumental for priming spectators in various places to interpret films – for instance to see a film like *Pumzi* as, new, as science fiction, or

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[137] The African Metropolis Project is executive produced by Kahiu's long-time collaborator South African producer Steven Markovitz.
[138] They only produced the pilot for *Sauti* "because the company that commissioned it decided not to roll out in Africa. They were using it for a pilot for an African show, but they decided not to roll out in Africa. So, we just shot a pilot and that was it" (Kahiu interview 2015).
[139] The first is called *Ger* and tells the story of actor and former child soldier Ger Duany, and the second is about the Kenyan music group Just A Band.

rather as part of longstanding storytelling traditions.[140] There are important lessons to be learned from the marketing of post-colonial and African literature in Euro-America. That books from outside Euro-America are marketed within specific frameworks using "various exoticist maneuvers" has long been acknowledged (Huggan 1994, 26). "For every aspiring writer at the 'periphery,' there is a publisher at the 'center,' eager to seize upon their work as a source of marketable 'otherness'" (Huggan 1994, 29). However, in the context of debates over Afropolitan literature, Gehrmann rightly notes, "books that sell well are not necessarily bad books" (2016, 66). Publishers, and other cultural gatekeepers, may well want books or films for their 'marketable otherness,' but to focus only on the gatekeepers neglects the agency of the cultural producers. Filmmakers also actively market themselves. Regarding the question of whether or not Africa specific film festivals are a 'ghetto' or a valuable niche in a crowded market, Dovey suggests that while the 'older generation' was suspicious of being "ghettoized," "the younger generation (those generally under 45) is far more flexible and strategic when it comes to the problematic category of 'Africa' itself" (2015a, 113). For instance, "using marketing vocabulary, [filmmaker Rungano Nyoni] says that 'Africanness' can be exploited as one's 'unique selling point'" (Dovey 2015a, 113). As I have shown, Kahiu resits attempts by others to pigeonhole her work and instead markets herself as a 'global African' artist.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Nairobi-based female filmmakers negotiate encounters with 'foreign' funds and distribution circuits, and how they are impacted by these transnational encounters. Much of the literature treats cross-border engagements with suspicion, but as I hope to have shown, foregrounding the agency of filmmakers in these encounters paints a very different picture. According to film festival scholar Marijke De Valck, among scholars interested in "European (festival) funds" and their impact, "one of the assumptions is that

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[140] For instance, the codes used to market the Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*) change based on which market is being targeted: the Brazilian promotional poster relies on a common Brazilian proverb and accompanying illustration, whereas in the North American version "the poster establishes the distance between the audience and what they will see in the movie" (Lino 136-137). The film is made legible to broader audiences specifically through its marketing strategy.

European tastes dominate the new global economy that has emerged for art cinema, resulting in a situation in which world cinema has to comply with cosmopolitan standards in order to be eligible for funding (2014: 42–3)" (quoted in Dovey 2015a, 57). What I hope to have shown here is that Euro-American projects financing films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers do not have singular agendas, and those multiple agendas are further complicated when the agency of every filmmaker is taken into account. Nairobi-based female filmmakers make strategic and entrepreneurial use of various transnational funding schemes, filmmaking projects, and exhibition circuits and this is a key characteristic of what constitutes them as a movement. However, these connections on their own are not enough to explain how this movement emerged or to define it completely; doing so still requires reference to the screen media production context of Nairobi where these filmmakers hustle to make their films and develop their careers.

Much of the criticism I have referred to in this chapter has at its core a binary between 'Western' and Other audiences, but this structuring of global audiences "hinges on a hypothetical geopolitically monolithic spectator" (Xu 1997, 163). Assuming this kind of spectator fails to account for the fact that the context of the spectator always matters. This is to say, the person doing the watching and interpreting is a specific person with a personal and institutional biography and a location that informs how they approach any given text. According to film scholar Mark Betz, in his arguments on parametric narration 'beyond Europe,'

> to isolate the formal as purely so, without taking thoughtful account of the generative mechanisms for it ... is to provide only a partial picture of not only *how* such formal operations work but also how for certain, and potentially different, *audiences.* In other words, the cognitive perceptions of these operations are not separable from the cultural codes available to the spectator—and it is here that the question of global versus local knowledges and histories comes to the fore. (2010, 41)

Even the act of close textual analysis must be done contextually. It thus seems problematic for the final verdict on any film to be given without studying its production context (who made it? how? where? when?) and also for judgement to be pronounced based on assumptions about spectators. Furthermore, while "each film requires a particular epistemological and referential framework in order to be

'fully' readable, increasingly these frameworks are losing the national and cultural particularity they once had" (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 4).

It is often assumed that once a film is popular on a particular international circuit (namely film festivals) it loses 'local' resonance with audiences in the filmmaker's home country (see Diawara 2010). Yet, "the value and meaning of films are contingent on their contexts of distribution, exhibition, and reception" (Dovey 2015a, 3), and therefore their value and meanings must always be multiple. That a film is successful in a film festival abroad does not mean that it will not be meaningful or popular locally; *both* contexts must be studied before any such conclusions can be drawn. In this spirit, in my next chapter I will explore the circulation of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers *within* Nairobi.

Chapter 5

Social Lives, Shelf Lives: Screen media circulation in Nairobi

I am on a bus from Yaya mall to the centre of Nairobi (colloquially called 'town') to see a new documentary at the arts centre Pawa254. If traffic moves consistently this journey should take about 20 minutes. The journey starts in the normal way. The bus moves slowly, but continuously, yet, once we reach Valley Road - the stop just before mine - the bus driver makes a sudden and unannounced detour. He loops through a nearby neighbourhood before retracing his route back the way we had come. It seems clear that he thought traffic was too bad along our scheduled route and decided a detour would be more effective. Our detour takes us through heavy traffic to Ngong Road, which has perhaps even more traffic than our original Valley Road route. We then crawl slowly along to an entirely new destination as rain starts falling and the bus roof starts leaking. Nearly an hour later our bus terminates just before Uhuru Highway and the Railway Station. I must now run down the highway through the rain jumping over the puddles that form in the holes in the sidewalk pavement hoping I can make the 25-minute walk before the sun sets and the film starts.

This account of a Nairobi 'traffic experience' may seem dramatic, but it would be all too familiar to a Nairobian.[141] This is simply the nature of traffic in this congested city. There are too many cars for the available infrastructure and too few transit options to convince car owners they should travel in a different way. When I think about my experience sitting in traffic quagmires waiting to get to film screenings I am struck by the paradoxical nature of Nairobi's film culture. On the one hand, there are excellent spaces, events, and creatives that provide the foundation for what could become a world-class film culture; yet on the other hand, these spaces almost always seem slightly out of reach because of the logistical difficulty of accessing them. The Goethe Institut and Alliance Française host a roster of free cultural events from their locations in the centre of town (see figure

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[141] Indeed, I was telling Nairobi-based female filmmaker Lucille Kahara about a monthly film forum being held at the Alliance Française and she responded: "why are these things in town? I don't go to town! It's always such a headache trying to get to town when the hour is like, what, 6/7. I'm not going to sit in traffic for an hour for [a film screening] ... no" (interview 2015).

two), but access to these spaces depends on the ability to pay for transport to get to them, and "for someone living in Kibera or Mathare, commuting to central Nairobi to watch a free film at the Alliance Française, for example, is prohibitively expensive" (Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri 2013, n.p.). To turn to another important centre of film exhibition in Nairobi, Pawa254 has a regular schedule of film events; yet, despite the centre's location near State House and the centre of the city (see figure two), transit connections to the centre are inadequate. There are bus stops nearby providing a convenient and relatively inexpensive way of accessing the centre during daylight hours, but options dramatically decline once the sun sets as it is widely considered dangerous to walk outside after sunset. Film screenings at Pawa254 are almost always free, but returning home after a film screening requires a car, motorcycle, or the financial ability to pay for an expensive taxi.[142] These logistical problems pose a significant obstacle to the development of a public film viewing culture at the places where the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are most likely to screen. After all, why would anyone but the most dedicated cinephile lose 90 minutes of their day, walk in the rain down a highway, sit cramped in a bus with a leaky roof, and run through the streets before the dark sets in all to see a new documentary?

In this chapter, I aim to emphasise the materiality of circulation in Nairobi of the film and television productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. My intention in this chapter is not to describe all screen media viewing culture in Nairobi, but rather to focus on the specific locations where screen media productions by Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate. My guiding question here is to what extent can Nairobi-based female filmmakers be considered to constitute a movement because their creative works circulate in the same way in Nairobi?

The meaning we take from films is conditioned by where and when we see them, as Larkin shows in his discussion of the materiality of cinemas in Hausa Northern Nigeria. Within this context, "the immoral connotations of sexual

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[142] My bus fare to Pawa254 was approximately 40 KES (£0.30), but a taxi the same distance could cost 600 KES (£4.50). The difference between bus and taxi cost was similarly sharp between my home and town. Of course, as Dovey McNamara, and Olivieri point out (2013, n.p.), even this bus fare would make access to these locations difficult if not impossible for many low-income Nairobians
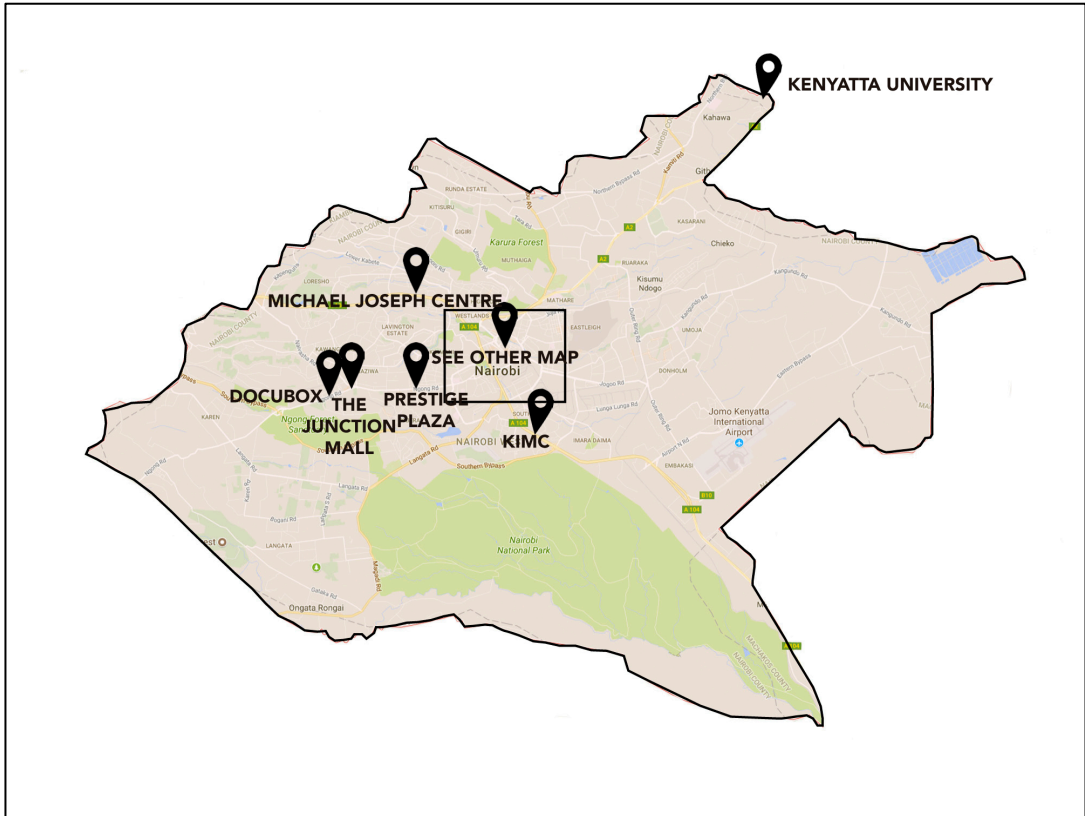
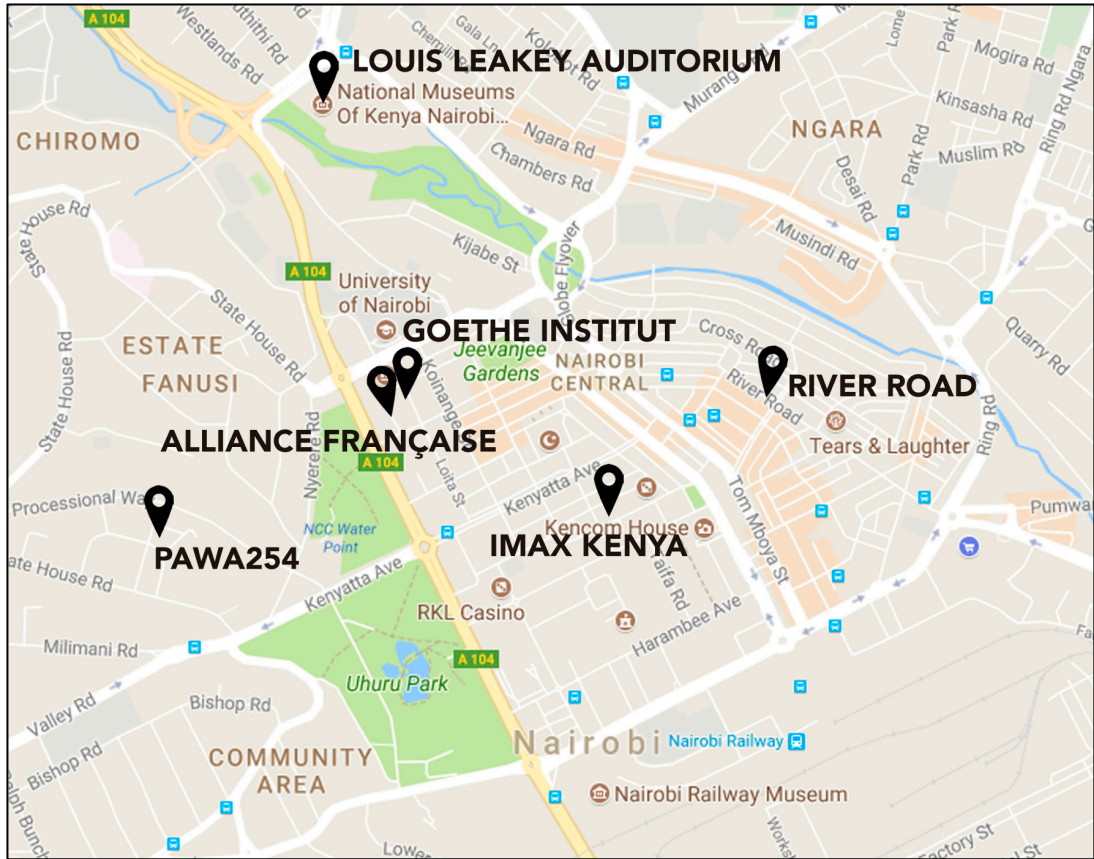**Figure 1. Film screening venues in Nairobi and major film schools**

Figure 2. Film screening venues in Nairobi's central business district

intermixing were so intense that cinema theaters never became socially acceptable for women" (Larkin 2002, 323). Video technology created new spaces for women to consume film and popular media since, all over Nigeria, cinemas were not seen as respectable places for women and videos could be watched within the home (Haynes and Okome 1998, 116; Larkin 1997, 424). Furthermore, it is also important to question *how* films are screened, as Garritano demonstrates in her study of Ghanaian video movies (2013). At the time video filmmaking emerged in Ghana (the late 1980s), audiences were accustomed to watching old and degraded celluloid prints in cinemas (Garritano 2013, 67). As such, the low-quality aesthetics of these early video movies were not such a radical departure from film aesthetics, thus helping explain the early popularity of the video movies in a way that could not be accounted for when comparing original film prints with video movies.

It is important to talk about *where* films are screened because, in the words of Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman, "how you present something informs how you value it" (interview 2014). Film distribution scholar Ramon Lobato reminds us that, "conditions of distribution are crucial in determining how audiences read films" (2007, 116). He further argues that:

> Elite or cinephile audiences are even more susceptible to such semiotic realignments than other audience segments: the 'high' modes of distribution with which film scholars are familiar (i.e. museum, gallery and festival screenings) are particularly potent in their ability to situate and stabilize the textual encounter. What we watch is often less important than where and how we watch it. (2007, 116)

However, the film viewing context is not a matter of venue alone, and is also informed by wider geopolitical trends and relationships. For instance, Bollywood films are popular in Hausa Nigeria because they "offer Hausa viewers a way of being modern that does not necessarily mean being western" (Larkin 2003, 172), demonstrating that the film viewing experience is also informed by the perception the spectator has of their place in the world and their broader geopolitical context. Building on the insights of Lobato, Larkin, Garritano, and other distribution, exhibition, curation and audience scholars, I hope to show how conditions of distribution – or the lack thereof – are crucial to understanding which screen media products audiences in Nairobi are able to encounter. Examining these

conditions is a vital first step in unpacking the question of audience taste, as the types of film and television programs audiences like is necessarily predicated on what they are able to access. I observed audiences in these spaces in Nairobi, but as mentioned in my Introduction I did not conduct audience research, my purpose rather was to study the *venues* and *channels* of screen media circulation so as to understand how the productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate in these spaces.

In my last chapter, I discussed how a frequent assumption in the literature is that filmmakers compromise their ideas for success in 'foreign' markets, and in so doing they create films that lose resonance with local audiences in their home contexts. I argued that analysis based on this assumption cannot adequately explain the transnational connections of Nairobi-based female filmmakers or how their films circulate transnationally. In their introduction to *Global Nollywood: the Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (2013), Krings and Okome grapple with the old dichotomy separating Nollywood from other African cinema (for previous work on the subject see especially Austen and Saul [2010]). Their discussion begins with the assertion that binary distinctions – "high-low, elite-popular, art-business, political-entertaining, progressive-regressive, celluloid-video" – have never been as clear-cut as they were made to appear (2013, 14). They acknowledge that a filmmaker like Wanjiru Kinyanjui, with her Riverwood and "auteur" work makes classification problematic (2013, 15), yet their subsequent analysis aims to maintain a division between Nollywood (and Nollywood style) filmmaking and auteur cinema, instead of grappling with how filmmakers like Kinyanjui necessitate a thorough rethinking of this division. In a particularly problematic assertion they state: "Nollywood filmmakers are proud to cater to the African masses and distinguish their products from 'embassy films,' as they call African auteur cinema (for the reason that it caters only to the niche audience of cultural programs run by embassies)" (2013, 19).[143] This of course neglects the fact that, as I mentioned in Chapter Four, popular films often *become*

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[143] Interestingly, while much scholarship has maintained this binary as a way to denigrate Nollywood as a "disposable forms of popular entertainment" (Murphy and Williams 2007, 2), Krings and Okome use it to affirm the importance of Nollywood over 'auteur' cinema (which they present as out of touch).

art films when they are shown in prestigious circuits abroad. Bisschoff and Overbergh suggest that:

> key to determining whether a form of African cinema can be deemed "popular" will be whether it is made by "the people" and/or targeted at "the people," either through its content (topical relevance, cultural proximity) and/or because of an economic fit (appropriate pricing and delivery systems). (2012, 114)

They note that "the video genres are widely regarded as the first forms of African popular cinema" (2012, 116) and their analysis includes a discussion of the Tanzanian video film industry Bongowood; yet, they broaden the definition of "popular" cinema from an exclusive association with "video genres" as they discuss cellphilmmaking and digital documentary filmmaking in South Africa as forms of popular cinema. To test the popularity of a film requires engaging both with the object itself (to assess its content) and with its materiality. Vitally, in Bisschoff and Overbergh's argument, conditions of distribution and exhibition must be accounted for.

Perhaps this point is best illustrated with an example. As previously mentioned, *Soul Boy* was a success in the prestigious circuit of international film festivals; however, it was also viewed and appreciated locally. When Lindiwe Dovey conducted focus groups with young women from Kibera Girls Soccer Academy she found they responded enthusiastically to the film and praised its creativity, which went against her prior assumption that they "would respond most enthusiastically to 'popular' African video movies and not to an acclaimed 'festival' film such as *Soul Boy*" (2015b, 131). Furthermore, in the context of the Nairobi-based Slum Film Festival in 2012, audiences preferred films like the humorous *Ndoto za Elibidi* and *Soul Boy*, which the projectionist spontaneously showed instead of following the pre-set schedule (Dovey, McNamara, Olivieri 2013, n.p.). As Dovey argues, *Soul Boy* is therefore a "cross over" film and its position of being validated both on the international film festival circuit and within communities "generally marginalized from this circuit" (specifically Nairobi's informal settlements of Kibera and Mathare) shows the limits of "any easy dichotomy of festival cinema and popular film" (2015b 131-132). Thus, contrary to Kring's and Okome's assertion that African popular and auteur filmmaking "hardly

ever cross each other's path" (2013, 19), the example of *Soul Boy* suggests that a film can be an example of both popular and auteur cinema simultaneously.

In order to explain the circulation of film and television shows by Nairobi-based female filmmakers within contemporary Nairobi, I will begin by elaborating on conditions of state and market censorship. During this discussion, I will outline how Nairobi-based audiences do encounter film and television and also examples of how they are prevented from doing so. Following my discussion of the circulation of films in domestic spaces (both on television and on the Internet), I will move on to considering how the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate through live film screenings in the city.

Part 1: State and market censorship

Audiences encounter locally made screen media content in Kenya through home viewings on television (among other methods, as I will discuss below). The Kenyan broadcasting landscape is divided into free-to-air local broadcasters and pay-tv, and, according to a 2016 report for the Communications Authority of Kenya, 85% of households with televisions – approximately 32% of Kenya households – watch free-to-air primarily (Intelecon 2016, x). According to the most recent report on audience trends in Kenya, the market breakdown of favourite TV stations among audiences is as follows: 60% Citizen TV, 15% KBC, 9% KTN, and 8% NTV (Strategic Public Relations and Research Limited 2010,7).[144] Home viewing is also by far the most popular way of watching films in Kenya and accounts for 85.1% of film viewing in the country (Strategic Public Relations and Research Limited 2010, 7).[145] Kenya has a total of 22 movie theatres (18 of which are in Nairobi) that can collectively seat 7000 people, and in 2011 (the most recent year studied) approximately 850,000 people attended these theatres (Emerging Market Economics Africa Limited 2013, 28-29). Additionally, there are approximately 364 licensed informal theatres (video halls) in Kenya (112 of which are in Nairobi),

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[144] Throughout this section I draw on statistics compiled for the Kenya Film Commission in two reports, one from 2010 and one from 2013 (the most recent report). There is no section assessing the favourite TV channels of Kenyans or the locations where they most frequently watch films in the 2013 report, and as such I have gathered these figures from the 2010 report.
[145] Audiences in Kenya watch films in the following locations predominantly: 85.1% home viewing, 18% movie theatre viewing, 4.7% video hall viewing, and 2.8% mobile cinema viewing (Strategic Public Relations and Research Limited 2010, 7).

though the actual number of video halls is likely to be much higher given their informal nature (Emerging Market Economics Africa Limited 2013, 28-29).

So far, I have set out the broad context in which audiences in Kenya do encounter film and television. However, there are important obstacles that impede the circulation of screen media works in the city, and some never meet an audience within Nairobi despite being produced there. Perhaps the most obvious place to start in examining obstacles to unimpeded film circulation is with state censorship. The Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) is mandated to "regulate the creation, broadcasting, possession, distribution and exhibition of films" in Kenya (Kenya Film Classification Board 2012, 3). There are five tiers: General Exhibition, Parental Guidance, 16 (unsuitable for audiences younger than 16), 18 (unsuitable for non-adult audiences), and Restricted/Banned. The KFCB actively exercises its right to ban films, notoriously banning films such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Scorsese, 2013), stating in a post on their official Facebook page "there is a limit to everything and we believe the Kenyan public deserves better" (14 January 2014). However, while the ban may have impacted formal distribution of the film (such as theatrical distribution) it did little to regulate the informal transmission of the film, and it remained available on the streets of Nairobi through pirate vendors – to say nothing of the ability of audiences with suitable bandwidth to find it online.

However, it would be too simple to assume, based on the ineffectiveness of censorship in the case of the foreign film *The Wolf of Wall Street,* that the KFCB lacks the power to influence the local media environment through its banning powers. The production of at least one major feature fiction film was halted in 2014 because the moralising censorship environment made it imprudent, if not impossible, to shoot the film in Kenya. The catalyst for this incident was the banning of the Nairobi-made film *Stories of our Lives* on 2 October 2014. In their official letter to the production collective who made the film (The Nest) the KFCB stated: "the decision to decline approval to the said film was because the film has obscenity, explicit scenes of sexual activities and it promotes homosexuality which

is contrary to our national norms and values."[146] The KFCB guidelines on restricting films based on sex, obscenity, and nudity read:

> Restricted in this thematic area [Sex, obscenity, and nudity] is a film, poster or program that portrays, encourages, justifies or glorifies perverted or socially unacceptable sex practices such as incest, pedophilia [sic], homosexuality or any form of pornography; content showing women as tools of sex; content endorsing sexual violence. (Kenya Film Classification Board 2012, 8)

Yet, the one sex scene in the film is no more explicit than any to be found on broadcast television, so rather than being rejected on the grounds of explicit sex, the film was obviously banned because, in the minds of the censors, it contravened public morality. Alongside the banning of the film, Executive Producer George Gachara was arrested for filming without a license (these charges would eventually be dropped).[147] These serious accusations meant that The Nest did not release the film in Kenya and it remained unavailable through formal and informal channels. Unlike *The Wolf of Wall Street,* the KFCB banning of *Stories of our Lives* meant that audiences in Kenya would be unable to see the film.[148]

The producer of *Stories of our Lives*, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wangechi Ngugi, expressed a keen disappointment about the banning:

> When I got an opportunity to produce *Stories of Our Lives* it was like a dream come true. Because I've always wanted to tell stories that open up dialogue [about taboo subjects]… so I thought finally we're going to show a film that is going to get people to start talking. But, it's not happening. (Interview 2015)

Banning the film in Kenya also meant closing off the opportunity for the conversations that would inevitably surround it. Importantly, audiences outside of Kenya were able to see the film so long as they could travel to any of the many film festivals that programmed it. Indeed, I was able to watch the film in London

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[146] The Nest posted a copy of this letter to their website www.thisisthenest.com on 4 October 2014. The Nest has since redesigned their website and the link to this page is no longer active. However, it is still visible through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine through the full link http://www.thisisthenest.com/news/2015/1/13/storiesofourlivesnotinkenya I viewed it in this way on 8 June 2016.

[147] In Nairobi, filming in public locations requires licenses from the "local regional council, Nairobi City Council, and Kenyan [government]" (McNamara 2016, 108).

[148] Interestingly, The Nest was not stopped from releasing a book version of the research they undertook that resulted in the film. They self-published *Stories of Our Lives: Queer Narratives from Kenya* in 2015.

through my position as a submission advisor of Film Africa (a London-based festival celebrating African cinema), and again to watch it at a public screening during Film Africa. Ngugi was similarly disappointed with this trajectory, because, as she says: "I feel like we should be able to show our stories here first. So that we can have those conversations here where it matters" (interview 2015). Through this example we can see a state apparatus at work, attempting to control both what is physically shown on screens and the corresponding conversations and debates that could potentially result from those screenings.

State censorship, however, is not the only factor preventing content by Nairobi-based female filmmakers from reaching audiences in Nairobi. Dovey cautions, "we must keep in mind a sense of the inequalities in power arrangements that also determine what is available (or not) to audiences at any particular moment" (2015a, 106). Broadcasters act as important gatekeepers determining what content will be aired on television, and in choosing what to screen and what to avoid they enact a form of market censorship. When talking about market censorship I rely on film scholar Dina Iordanova's work on East Central European cinema under Communism. Her discussion of Communist era censorship is particularly useful:

> The elaborate censorship mechanisms of Communism are notorious; but then, thinking of the number of daring and serious works of art that were completed here [Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia], we also need to explain how was it possible to make and release films of superb artistry and aesthetic quality under such a repressive system. *In the West many of these films would not be censored – they simply would not have been made.* (Iordanova 2003, 33; emphasis mine)

She goes on to explain that filmmakers in the West and the Eastern Bloc were both constrained; the difference was whether it was for commercial or political imperatives (Iordanova 2003, 33). Indeed, "one could also argue that many films in the West are effectively 'shelved' due to the functioning of market forces since they never find a distributor. Currently, about 30 per cent of the films that are made in the UK never make it into distribution" (Iordanova 2003, 181). Some argue that more films have "not been properly distributed" because of low expected profits than were censored during Communism in Poland, Hungary, and the former

Czechoslovakia (Iordanova 2003, 181). Shelving films because of commercial imperatives can be read as market censorship.

An example of market censorship in the Nairobian context can be traced to the mid-2000s, when Judy Kibinge developed a television series for the network KTN called *Pumzika*. The show "was about a pub called Pumzika and the multiple characters who go to this pub. And just the life and activity around it" (Kibinge interview 2015). She and her team shot thirteen episodes, and yet, on the day of the launch the network cancelled the show, at the request of the sponsor, and it never aired (Kibinge interview 2015). The marketing manager of the sponsor had changed (Kibinge interview 2015), suggesting a difference in brand visions between those who approved the show's development and those who were ultimately in charge at the time of the launch. The reason given to Kibinge for the cancellation was that the show:

> was encouraging people to drink because it didn't have any obvious anti-drink messages in it. So they wanted characters to say 'oh, that's a great thing that you're having one beer,' 'you know, you're not meant to drive.' .... They wanted a lot of that in, and of course we didn't put any. And the morals in the stories were told through the characters and their lives. And nothing was pushed. So for instance, the kind of underage drinking thing was told through one guy, Ted, who was 20 who comes in to drink. He tries to. He's kicked out on different episodes. But nothing is ever said. And then finally when he turns 21 he has this enormous party... So it had some subtle messaging. (Kibinge interview 2015)

In a similar instance, another network, NTV, gave Kibinge a budget of $100,000 (£77,150) to make *Headlines in* History, a film that charted the corporate history of the Nation Media Group, yet they also never aired the completed film (Kibinge interview 2015).[149] In both the examples of *Pumzika* and *Headlines in History,* corporate interests meant that finished works were never shown to audiences in Kenya or elsewhere, but were effectively shelved. We can thus see the power of broadcasters and powerful brands to act as cultural gatekeepers, determining what content does, and does not, make it onto local screens.

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[149] Kibinge did not explain to me why the film was never aired, perhaps because that information is confidential. However, there is little in the form or content of the film that suggests a reason. The film itself is skilfully produced and weaves the corporate history of the media house together with the history of Kenya into a compelling narrative and a flattering portrayal of the company.

Perhaps more strikingly than shelving completed products, the cost calculations of broadcasters determine the television landscape. In a discussion of the local television landscape, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Ng'endo Mukii noted,

> If the TV station was willing to pay, or had 1.5 million [£11,275] to pay half an hour of TV, then we would be generating so much more content. Instead, they pay for that Mexican series from 10 years ago that's 1000 bucks [£772] per episode, and they pay for Nollywood - and that's probably 2 cents an episode. [Laughs] They don't care. (Interview 2014)

Kenyan television is "dominated by Western entertainment programs" (Spronk 2012, 236) and "local broadcasting companies KBC, KTN and Nation TV feature older American films on a daily basis" (Spronk 2012, 264). Latin American soap operas are also part of the local television landscape and have been since they were first screened in 2000 (Spronk 2012, 236). But, Spronk writes, "the dominance of US films and soap operas has also been influenced by supply as opposed to demand" (2012, 237). In support of her arguments for why films shown at FESPACO are not widely popular across the continent, Dovey quotes the following from Elizabeth Bird:

> Are U.S. soap operas successful around the world because they are instantly appealing in all cultures, as local audiences busily reinterpret them within their own contexts? Maybe, up to a point. But we all know that the central reason they are shown worldwide is that they can be bought much more cheaply than local programming can be made. Viewers "choose" them, but often it is a Hobson's Choice (2003: 172). (Dovey 2015a, 106)

Both supply of, and demand for, content must be accounted for in assessing the local screen media viewing landscape.

Adding a further level of complication to assessing the position of Nairobi-based female filmmakers in the local television production landscape, is the fact that local television stations do also screen content they self-produce in house. In 2007, the broadcaster Citizen "started airing locally-made series, leading to a sharp increase in viewer rates" (Overbergh 2015a, 106). They make slapstick comedies that are very popular (the pioneering example is *Papa Shirandula* [2007]) and seem to have found a successful model of producing local television. Kibinge describes how "Citizen Television came along and terrified all the other

broadcasters by simply putting on some basic local programming" such as *Mother in Law* (2008) and *Papa Shirandula*, and other stations are reacting to this model (interview 2014). In fact, other broadcasters are interested in copying Citizen's programming and creating their own versions of Citizen's shows (Gatero interview 2015; Likimani interview 2015). Thus, filmmakers who seek to sell shows to television networks must work in a creatively constraining environment because broadcasters are only interested in very specific types of programming. We can see market censorship at work here because the 'different' programs that Nairobi-based female filmmakers seek to create are met with disinterest from broadcasters who would rather choose a formulaic but profitable model.

Intellectual property rights issues are widely acknowledged as a problem facing filmmakers in Nairobi – particularly in terms of negotiations with broadcasters. For instance, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Isabel Munyua noted that "the problem with the individual filmmaker is that he is so desperate … to do whatever it costs to make that film, or that whatever it is, that he's willing to sell it for a song to a TV station" (interview 2015). TV stations will pay producers to make content, but in exchange for owning the rights to that content, "which means they are going to reap all the benefits of it" including the possibility of Internet distribution and re-runs (Munyua interview 2015). In order to address this unequal power dynamic between stations and filmmakers, Munyua notes that filmmakers must be made aware of the fact that "we are not just filmmakers we are business men" (interview 2015). Wanuri Kahiu noted that "it's important to have ownership of your idea" (interview 2015), and she learned this through working on *State House* with Zuku. If she could do it again, she would not have given up the rights to her idea (Kahiu interview 2015). The show belongs to Zuku, and it is up to them to distribute it – or not – and to her knowledge, Zuku had only released it once (interview 2015). While Kahiu benefitted from the experience of making the show, which, as she says "is amazing," she cannot further monetise that experience.

Within this context, digital migration offers potential new opportunities, as Nairobi-based filmmaker Dorothy Ghettuba expresses here:

> We've [her company Spielworks] just recently gotten into [digital] broadcasting. Now I want to own the platforms. I no longer want to just give

broadcasters my content. I want to own. Because you give them ... a show, they pay you $4000 [£3,065] then they make $12,000 [£9,190] in advertising. On my show, and they're not giving me advertising? Okay I'm just going to own the platform. And now it's affordable because of the digital migration. (Interview 2015)

Kenya moved from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting in June 2015 (Overbergh 2015a, 110). A key opportunity posed by this digital migration is the potential for a significantly greater number of television channels (Overbergh 2015a, 110). Ghettuba is not alone in thinking about a digital future. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Lucille Kahara was also exploring the possibility of starting a channel when we met in 2015 (interview 2015). A further potential benefit of the new digital broadcast landscape is the potential to address more targeted markets and thus create a wider variety of content. The increasing market segmentation in Nollywood offers an instructive example here. Haynes describes how a growing middle class and returning diaspora have influenced the Nollywood production landscape in Nigeria and suggests: "Nollywood was always complex and the segmentation is far from complete, but several distinct kinds of markets and of filmmaking have emerged" (2016, 84). 'Asaba' films and 'New Nollywood' – each end of the spectrum of low to high budget productions – cater to the needs of different groups of people with desires for different kinds of stories.

Following on from Haynes' work on market segmentation in Nollywood, it is possible to read Nairobi-based female filmmakers' frustration with local networks in terms of class. In my interviews, Nairobi-based female filmmakers constantly mentioned that there is a lack of innovation in local television programming and that local television is 'dumbed down' or 'terrible.'[150] I asked Nairobi-based female filmmaker Dorothy Ghettuba for her opinion about the idea that Kenyan TV networks only want 'dumbed down' content and she said: "I don't think that networks want dumbed-down stories. I think networks want simple stories" and this is because these free-to-air networks (and Citizen especially) know their audience:

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[150] For instance, Nairobi-based entertainment and intellectual property lawyer Liz Lenjo says, "when you look at a majority of the TV productions, they've been dumbed down terribly" (interview 2015). Nairobi-based female filmmakers Barbara Karuana and Jennifer Gatero each in turn emphasised that Kenyan television is terrible and that broadcasters desire highly simplified content (Gatero interview 2015; Karuana interview 2015).

They're very clear about what they want. They want light-hearted comedy, they want simple stuff, they want slapstick humour, they want to entertain the Kenyans. Because they know who their target audience is. They know what these people do all day. They know that they're tired. They know that they are exhausted. The economy is crazy. Make them laugh. (Ghettuba interview 2015)

Broadcasters seem to be intent on targeting one segment of the population – those who obviously enjoy Citizen's programming – and not exploring what other possible segments may exist. Pay-tv platforms M-Net and Zuku are a different matter, and this is likely to do with the fact that pay-tv is a luxury good, and by virtue of its cost it targets a middle class audience. Indeed, as Zuku advertises on their website, they were "established with the aim of making quality home entertainment and communication services accessible to a rapidly growing, choice conscious African middle class" (Zuku 2017).

However, digital migration may engender a transformation in this media landscape because of the costs associated with the technological switchover from analogue to digital television. After the analogue switch-off, "audiences will be required to either purchase a (very expensive) digital television set, or a digital decoder or set top box" (Overbergh 2015a, 110). When we met, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Natasha Likimani was shopping around a pilot she had developed for a show called *Vows and Veils*, which targets a middle class demographic. She had made presentations to networks, but "a lot of them are saying, 'oh it's too high class'" (interview 2015). She was adamant this perspective was wrong because the cost of digital migration would necessarily mean that lower-income Kenyans would be priced out of watching television and broadcasters would then have to target middle classes. As she says,

When it comes to digital migration we are supposed to buy these [digital decoder set-top] boxes, and these boxes on average cost 3000 KES [£22]. Who's watching TV? It's people who can afford to buy a TV and buy a digital box. … My market is the people who can afford a TV. (Likimani interview 2015)

It seems likely the technological transformation caused by digital migration will have wide reaching impacts on the local media landscape, though it remains to be seen whether it will affect the ability of Nairobi-based female filmmakers to successfully sell their television shows to broadcasters.

1.1 Online Distribution

New distribution platforms have the potential to challenge existing practices of gatekeeping and screen media access – and the changes wrought by the new digital media environment are global in scope (cf. Crisp 2015; Crisp and Gonring 2015; Iordanova and Cunningham 2012; Lobato 2012). Dovey notes that "in the past few years, the African media landscape has been transformed" by platforms like YouTube, and television channels, VOD platforms, and apps devoted to showing African screen media content (2015a, 13). Iordanova argues the changes wrought by the new digital environment are "immense" and fundamentally transform how scholars and other viewers can access films:

> Online availability makes travel less important—archives need no longer be visited and attending festivals is not essential. Availability is one thing, but coupled with instantaneity, ubiquity, and accelerated access, the change is immense: we can now see what we want to see wherever we are without delay. (2013, 49)

However, what Iordanova's argument fails to recognise is that access to the Internet cannot be taken for granted. As cultural and creative industries scholar Virginia Crisp importantly reminds us, "new distribution platforms are unevenly distributed across the globe and, where they are available, they are subject to the vagaries of access to high-speed Internet connections, not to mention reliable access to electricity" (2015, 56-57). Material factors enabling and constraining access to digital content must not be disregarded, and the impact of new digital platforms on spectators must be studied in context. According to the Communications Authority of Kenya, in the first quarter of the 2015/2016 financial year, 88.1% of Kenyans now have mobile phone subscriptions (2015, 8) and the magazine Business Daily reports that 60% of Kenyans now have smartphones (Omulo 2017). Kenyan entrepreneur Mark Kaigwa notes that there were immediate transformations in the Kenyan media landscape once fibre optic cables reached Kenya in 2009 – such as dramatically increased mobile phone Internet usage and correspondingly the introduction of new phones aimed to specifically target the new users generated by the greater accessibility of the Internet (2017, 189). Thus, Kenya is undergoing a technological shift in mobile phone and Internet access.

Given this environment of technological transformation, the Internet offers particularly interesting opportunities for film distribution in Nairobi and worldwide for the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Rather than relying on conventional gatekeepers such as broadcasters, filmmakers can now share their content freely online. To give an example, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Ng'endo Mukii shared her short film *Yellow Fever* on Vimeo and as of July 2017 it has received 148,000 views. Importantly, the dramatic surge in viewership took place after the film was selected as a Vimeo Staff Pick, which led to additional press and celebrity coverage – this increased viewership by 80,000 people over a two-week time span (Boshoff 2015). Similarly, Dovey notes how between January 2012 and June 2014 *Sambizanga* – the seminal film by Sarah Maldoror and the first to be directed in Africa by a woman – had accrued almost 45,000 views on YouTube meaning that "perhaps more people have viewed *Sambizanga* online in the space of a few years than in the 40 years between when it was made and when it first appeared on the web" (2015a, 12). She argues that this situation can be read in multiple ways: from an audience-centred perspective, this development is very positive and the digital format has meant the film is now available to thousands of people; however, "one could argue, from Maldoror's perspective, that after many years of struggle to make the film more broadly available and in ways that would also recognize her authorship, this piracy has compromised her intellectual property" (Dovey 2015a, 12-13). Here one of the most important trade-offs in this kind of online distribution is made visible, and that is that platforms like Vimeo and YouTube offer filmmakers a way of distributing their films and potentially reaching larger audiences, as they did successfully in the cases of *Yellow Fever* and *Sambizanga*, but this often means foregoing direct economic returns.

Additionally, making content freely available to potential audiences does not mean that the film will actually be watched. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy Kibinge uploaded her film *Killer Necklace* to Vimeo because she "just got tired of no one ever seeing it and M-Net doesn't care about it" (interview 2015), but it has so far attracted only 292 views. As Dovey notes, "the sheer amount of film material online calls for new forms of curatorship to guide viewers to and through content" (2015a, 82). Furthermore, "just as the

digitization and streaming of films is proliferating, so too are cultural festivals of all kinds" (Dovey 2015a, 13). These two points together suggest that there is something important about activities and events that guide potential audiences to particular kinds of content presented in particular ways – whether through the "liveness" of a film festival setting that works to attract "enthusiastic support and participation" (Dovey 2015a, 14) or strategies of Internet curatorship (such as Vimeo Staff Picks) that pull particular films out of the avalanche of available content.

The online distribution sphere is very volatile and individual videos are likely to disappear and reappear on the web – particularly when the contents are copyright infringing. Iordanova notes the instability of YouTube and how films appear and disappear from the platform consistently, yet, she also cautions that these films never truly disappear – "a film's availability online is predicated on its digitization, and therefore, even if withdrawn or missing, it is out there somewhere and, so, available" (2013, 48). Nonetheless, finding this content requires prior knowledge that these films exist or curation to help guide potential viewers. The African screen media VOD platform Buni.tv – founded in Nairobi in 2012 by Marie Lora-Mungai – while it existed, was particularly valuable for its curated approach to African screen media. Their platform aimed to distribute high quality African content and they had a large selection of East African films. For instance, it was possible to view OFDF films for a fee via their pay section Buni+. Buni.tv is described in the magazine Variety as "one of the first [companies] to recognize the untapped potential of the online market on the continent" but that "the company's subscriber base never took off" (Vourlias 2016b). Buni.tv was sold to the French network Trace TV in 2016 (Vourlias 2016a). As the example of Buni.tv shows, the online market is highly volatile and individual videos as well as entire platforms disappear, reshape, and are introduced. Lobato importantly notes, that revenues generated through online distribution services (such as Netflix and iTunes) for "studios and other rights holders" are "still a fraction of what they make from their traditional partners (cinemas, DVD retailers, pay-TV providers and broadcasters) (2012, 99), suggesting that online distribution is still truly a frontier and one likely to change as various entrepreneurs seek their fortunes in digital spaces.

Changes in distribution models also challenge the Kenyan regulatory environment, and correspondingly the state's ability to censor and otherwise control who can access content and on what terms in Kenya. The KFCB's power to regulate film viewing, and associated public morality in Kenya, are increasingly being challenged as modes of film exhibition change and new platforms – such as the streaming service Netflix – deliver content to audiences in ways that are more and more difficult to regulate. The KFCB rose to prominence in early 2016 when they controversially tried to regulate Netflix based on the supposed immorality of some of its content. The KFCB "called the streaming service a threat to the country's 'moral values and national security' and said it would seek to block the service if inappropriate content was not dealt with" (Kuo 2016). Yet, the Communications Authority of Kenya "ruled that the streaming service does not require a broadcasting license, as it is an internet TV network, not a traditional broadcaster" (Barnes 2016). As this example demonstrates, media companies (such as Netflix) and government agencies (such as the KFCB and the Communications Authority of Kenya) each struggle for control over the online frontier creating a situation that is highly volatile and in constant flux.

Various obstacles face Nairobi-based female filmmakers as they try to distribute their screen media productions in Nairobi. The state, broadcasters, and other cultural gatekeepers are powerful entities that influence screen media distribution and exhibition, just as new opportunities and challenges posed by digital distribution further reconfigure existing circuits of distribution. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are not passive actors in these encounters. Rather, they continually innovate to create new opportunities for themselves, as I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

Part 2: Live Screenings in Nairobi

In this section I intend to give a systematic overview of the venues where the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are likely to be screened. The auditoriums of the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française, alongside the art centre Pawa 254, are the most central spaces – both in terms of being spatially located in the centre of town and in terms of importance – for local films to be exhibited. They are also the

dominant spaces for screening art cinema and documentary films in the city. Putting aside Pawa254 for now, I will begin with analysing the European cultural centres.

The Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française are both major European cultural centres that work globally. They work in a transnational way, but at the same time are intensely national cultural institutions, so these political dynamics must be unpacked. In their promotional material, the Goethe Institut states its mission as follows:

> The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany with a global reach. It promotes knowledge of the German language abroad, fosters international cultural cooperation and conveys a comprehensive picture of Germany. In Kenya, our focus is on strengthening cultural scenes, libraries and the teaching of German … [151]

Their promotional material also says, specifically about their cultural activities: "a variety of cultural events are hosted by the Goethe-Institut, from visual arts to drama, dance, literature, film, and others. Our goal is to support the local cultural scenes and strengthen pan-African dialogue through the arts." The Alliance Française in Nairobi[152] describes itself as follows:

> Each Alliance Française is a local non-profit organization operating autonomously with no political or religious commitments. All Alliance Françaises aim the following objectives: Offering French classes for all, both in France and abroad; Develop an appreciation and understanding of French and francophone cultures; Promoting cultural diversity; To assist Kenyan students who want to further university studies in France (Alliance Française 2017)

The terms of exchange between the cultural centres and their partners (for instance, film festival organisers) are contentious, and the self-presentation of each institution cannot be taken at face value. They work to promote local culture, but a simultaneous core objective is in promoting their own *national* culture and furthering their influence in Kenya through the exercise of 'soft power' (Nye 1990).

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[151] I am quoting specifically from a 2014 catalogue of events that was free in hard copy at the Goethe Institut and available online. I have chosen this version since several of the film events discussed in this chapter were included in this particular catalogue.

[152] There are now 1,016 Alliance Française operating globally in 135 countries (Alliance Française 2017).

The cultural institutions deliberately intend to promote their respective languages and cultures beyond their national borders, and through this exercise of soft power, increase their global standing and power. In interviews literature scholar Raoul Granqvist conducted in 1998 with the directors of the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institut, they "project their institutes as philanthropic venues for local cultural production or 'intercultural exchange'" (Granqvist 2004, 34). Yet, "the 'merging of cultures' (here: 'Western' and 'African') must take place within the parameters of these cultural centres…" (Granqvist 2004, 34-35). Art and cultural studies scholar Will Rea suggests a danger in external funders only gravitating towards what is already familiar to them – "forms of culture that are recognizable within the terms of Western cultural industry" – and therefore "ignoring wider and more loosely constructed forms of cultural entrepreneurship" (2014, 63-64). This line of critique suggests that because of their financial and institutional power, external organisations unduly influence the kinds of content created locally, and, extending this argument, the kinds of events that find exhibition space in locally based foreign cultural institutions. However, Granqvist nuances this argument by noting that the users and visitors to the Goethe Institute and Alliance Française "may also have their own agendas, in that they employ their own subjective and collective persuasions for both coming and working there. They do not see themselves necessarily as being submerged or dominated" (2004, 35). It is therefore essential to foreground the agency of each participant in negotiating these encounters.

The Goethe Institut and Alliance Française provide vital exhibition space in Nairobi. They provide a free venue, as well as associated benefits like security and publicity, leaving the event organiser to just "invite [their] people in" (Lebo interview 2015). Nairobi-based female filmmaker Jackie Lebo described once organising an event with her company Content House where they would show an exhibition of approximately 50 sports photographs during the Olympics.[153] Other venues wanted to charge them 300,000 KES [£2,250], but the Alliance Française provided them with the venue free of charge (Lebo interview 2015).

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[153] Content House focuses on sports media and journalism and has made a film, called *Gun to Tape* (Forbes, 2012), about Kenyan Olympics runners David Rudisha and Edna Kiplagat.

They have a role. I'm like, people can complain of foreign foreign whatever whatever, but where's the other outlets? ... So they definitely have a role. If you just need to have a screening, you need to have a discussion, if you need to launch a book - you don't have to think of 'I have to pay for a venue'... So it's very useful, the role that they play. But we'd like to see that role being supplemented. We don't want them to go away, cause they've done it a long time. We want it to be supplemented with local organisations. And I hope people like Pawa[254] are going to start doing something like that. (Lebo interview 2015)

However, given that the downside of a free venue is that the subsequent screenings must often be non-commercial in nature, the long history of the de-commercialisation of African film screenings in Africa must be considered here.[154] For instance, most African films that receive funding from France are "rarely visible in francophone Africa" (Rollet 2012, 141). "Until recently" French funding for African film came with many "strings attached," including in the realm of film distribution (Haynes 2011, 69-70). The money "was fronted in exchange for the rights to distribute the films in non-commercial venues such as French Cultural Centers; after such screenings, it was unlikely that commercial distributors would be interested in the films" (Haynes 2011, 69-70). French technicians were also imposed on African film productions - as a way of ensuring they had work – and it was mandatory that post-production work was carried out in France (Haynes 2011, 70). Thus, a national imperative is visible in this kind of French funding, where France supported the production of African films, but did so with the central intention of developing their own national film industry, and not with the intention of developing profitable and sustainable industries within Africa.

Traditional commercial outlets for film viewing – namely devoted movie theatres – play quite a small role in film viewing behaviour in Nairobi, and a particularly small one for locally made films. During my eight months in Nairobi, no film by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker had a theatrical premiere or

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[154] Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui describes the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française's role in local media industries as "mainly for exhibition" because "if they are giving you the room for free you don't get money" (interview 2015). However, the Goethe Institut advertised that the Udada Film Festival, organised in part by Kinyanjui and hosted in the Goethe Institut auditorium, would charge audiences for attending. The fee to attend each screened was billed at 200 KES (£1.50) for regular admission and 50 KES (£0.50) for students. However, the festival organisers never set up the necessary infrastructure to collect this admission fee.

screening.[155] However, this is not to say that they never screen in these venues. *Something Necessary*, for instance, screened at Century Cinemax in Nairobi's Junction Mall (see figure one) for almost two months (Kibinge 2013 Q&A) and "across many of Nairobi's major cinemas" (McNamara 2016, 26). Nairobi's cinemas focus on screening Hollywood blockbusters, and additionally, show Bollywood films targeting Indian Kenyans (Spronk 2012, 264). As previously mentioned, only 18% of Kenyan's watch movies in movie theatres (Strategic Public Relations and Research Limited 2010, 7). Cinema tickets at theatres in locations such a Prestige Plaza and the Junction Mall cost approximately 400 KES (£3), but tickets at the IMAX in town (see figure one) can cost 800 KES (£6), making cinema going a relatively expensive past time in the city. Thus, the current market in Nairobi is one where cultural centres provide a key venue for films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers to meet audiences in the city. At these centres, the most prominent way films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers are screened is in the context of film festivals that use the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française as venues. In the following section I will discuss this film festival screening context. Following this, I will return to Pawa254 through a discussion of activist film screenings.

2.1. Film Festivals in Nairobi

"Since the late 1990s, new cultural festivals of all kinds—including international film festivals—have proliferated in Africa, sometimes enduring, sometimes fading away as quickly as they appear" and this is part of a "global phenomenon of festivalization" (Dovey 2015a, 131). Nairobi fits within this much larger trend and the city hosts numerous film festivals throughout the year.[156] The Kenya International Film Festival ran from 2006-2012 (Dovey 2015a, 187). During my time in Nairobi (October 2014 – June 2015) no such large scale festival was running, but there were numerous small film festivals such as The Udada Film Festival (24-29 October 2014), the Film Africa Documentary Film Festival (10-15

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[155] I did, however, have the chance to attend an evening of Riverwood films organised by the Riverwood Ensemble (a Riverwood film producers association) at Planet Media Cinemas in Prestige Plaza (see figure one). It demonstrated the work necessary to build audiences in new venues (Riverwood films are dominantly distributed for home use) as I was one of only nine people who attended the screening evening.

[156] In January 2017, the Nairobi Film Festival held its first edition. Unusually, it was hosted by commercial movie theatres. This represents an interesting new development in the local film festival landscape, but is beyond the scope of this analysis.

November 2014), the Out Film Festival (23-25 January 2015), and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival (10-14 November 2014) held at the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française.[157] I will focus my analysis of film festivals in Nairobi using the example of the Udada Film Festival. I have chosen to analyse this festival for two reasons: first, because it advertised itself as a women's film festival devoted to celebrating African female filmmakers, and second, because it was co-directed by Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui.

The idea for the Udada Film Festival, the inaugural edition of which took place in Nairobi from 24-29 October 2014, originated with Wanjiru Kinyanjui. She describes how the Goethe Institut was interested in the idea of supporting a women's film festival but initially the idea never amounted to anything: "we could never get it off the ground because of dates, because of money, because of this and that and the other" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). Eventually, Kinyanjui was able to work with Barbara Reich (an employee of the Goethe Institut in Nairobi) to start the festival.[158] Rather than run the festival as the sole director, Kinyanjui invited her former student Matrid Wanjah Munene to co-direct the festival, and eventually the third co-director Naomi Mwaura joined the organisational team (Kinyanjui interview 2015). The festival's main venue was the auditorium of the Goethe Institut, but various events also took place at the Alliance Française, the National Museum,[159] and the Michael Joseph Centre.[160] The festival program billed the event as follows:

> The first edition of UDADA (UDADA means sisterhood [in Swahili]) Film Festival will be held from the 24th – 29th October 2014. This film festival will be the first in the region to feature women's fiction and documentary

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[157] I focused my attention on attending film festivals that billed themselves as including films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers or other Kenya-made content, and it is these festivals that will form the basis of my analysis in this chapter. There are other film festivals in Nairobi that are held annually, but not during the months I was in Nairobi. These include the Lola Kenya Screen festival (directed by Ogova Ondego and held annually in August since 2006 [Dovey 2015a, 188]) and the Slum Film Festival (held annually in August/September since 2011 [Dovey 2015a, 190]).

[158] At the Udada Closing Ceremony, Barbara Reich spoke about how the idea for Udada was formed two years prior when, at the retrospective *Homage to Kenyan Filmmakers* (held at the Goethe Institut), she and Kinyanjui started talking about organizing a film festival.

[159] The National Museum of Kenya has a full sized auditorium – called the Louis Leakey Auditorium – complete with a stage and terraced seating capable of hosting several hundred people (see figure two).

[160] The Michael Joseph Centre is an exhibition and event space within the Kenyan telecommunication giant Safaricom's business complex (see figure one).

productions. The Festival will screen short, feature length and documentary films made by, or about women from all over the world. The festival will also feature films made by students. Women filmmakers, especially in Africa, have customarily been relegated to the periphery. We believe that through this initiative we shall provide a platform for established and emerging female talent in this industry to exhibit their work, discuss and exchange ideas. The festival will also be a forum for broad networking. (Printed festival programme)

As is clear from the program, and was clear throughout the event, Udada lacked clarity of purpose. On the one hand, the festival saw itself as specifically promoting the work of African female filmmakers and providing a platform for female filmmakers to network and share knowledge. Yet, on the other hand, in terms of curation the festival had an extremely broad mandate to simply show films by and about women.

It is "important that festival organizers and curators alike take the authorial, creative work of running and shaping a festival seriously" (Dovey 2015a, 156), but as I will show, this sort of serious and difficult work did not take place to a sufficient degree at the Udada Film Festival. First, it seems that films were selected for the festival without necessarily ever being watched by a member of the festival team. The festival used the online platform Click for Festivals to accept submissions and Kinyanjui described not always knowing if the filmmaker attached to the film was male or female (though they allowed films by men so long as the films were "women oriented") (Kinyanjui interview 2015). She later described how they did not "really have time to go through each film to decide" what would be screened in the festival, "so it's good if you have a synopsis, what it is about. Is the main character a woman or what?" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). The second factor undermining a consistent curatorial vision for the festival was that, in including a session of the Lola Kenya Film Forum,[161] it took over part of the Goethe Institut's regularly scheduled programming without integrating it into its overall festival vision (the films shown at the forum were not necessarily even by or about women). Third, the hard copy festival program listed a very different

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[161] The Lola Kenya Film Forum is hosted the first Monday of every month in the Goethe Institut auditorium, and, as of June 2017 has hosted 100 forums. Passionately run by Ogova Ondego, it screens films and hosts discussions with local filmmakers with an eye to developing local screen media industries. It attracts a large crowd of industry professionals and aspiring filmmakers who discuss each film screened in minute detail. Ondego moderates a corresponding Facebook group that he diligently updates to foster discussion and share opportunities with filmmakers.

festival schedule from the version made available online – which was problematic considering one had to *already* attend the festival to know when events would be held. For instance, the online version stated that the events would run from 2-9pm daily, when in fact events started at 9:30am each morning. The festival program, in addition to listing incorrect screening times, also listed the wrong content. On the first day of the festival a workshop by Dr Marisella Ouma, CEO of the Kenya Copyright Board, was cancelled without notice, and the scheduled screening of *Saikati the Enkabaani* was replaced, without explanation, by *Tough Choices*. Similarly, on the third day of the festival, the advertised workshop by Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy Kibinge was replaced with a workshop on telling stories through social media that was given by a digital strategist from the company Millennial Consult. As I have hoped to show through these examples, the festival paid insufficient attention to undertaking the necessary curatorial and programming effort to fulfil its stated mandate.

I will now go on to discuss some of the factors that contributed to the discrepancy between the mandate of the festival and what actually took place during the festival. Kinyanjui described the festival's organisation as "very difficult at first because there was hardly any money" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). Eventually, they received the promised money from the Goethe Institut, and found other sponsors including the Heinrich Böll Foundation,[162] the Alliance Française (who co-supported the closing ceremony with the Goethe Institut), and other small companies that provided them with materials or discounts (Kinyanjui interview 2015). Udada also partnered with the Zimbabwean International Images Film Festival for Women (IIFF), where Tsitsi Dangarembga[163] did a "mini IIFF" at Udada where IIFF brought their own films and provided the funding for their events (Kinyanjui interview 2015). The difficultly of organising and financing a film festival must not be glossed over. As Dovey notes, "except for a handful of 'A-list' film festivals, which fund themselves through a mixture of public money, corporate sponsorship, and accreditation/box office returns, most film festivals in the world

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[162] The Heinrich Böll Foundation is a think tank focusing on policy reform around key issues such as environmental sustainability, gender equality, and human rights, and it is affiliated with the German Green Party.

[163] Tsitsi Dangarembga is a Zimbabwean writer, filmmaker, and activist and she is the director of IIFF.

need to be thoroughly subsidized to survive" (2015a, 150). Turning to the most established film festival in East Africa, ZIFF, ZIFF CEO and director Martin Mhando "laments the difficult financial position in which ZIFF currently finds itself, with its total budget down from $400,000 [£308,780] (in 2004–2005) to $200,000 [£154,400] (in 2014). The main issue, [Mhando] says, is with the short-term nature of funding from European and North American donors" (Dovey 2015a, 149-150).[164] Nevertheless, financial difficulties cannot simply excuse inadequate curatorial effort and the individuals involved as organisers, curators, and directors must be held accountable for their work.

There are many examples of innovative curation taking place in challenging circumstances. Romeo Umulisa, the director of the Rwanda Film Festival, for instance, is deeply committed to supporting the local film industry and, as such, "attempts to screen every single Rwandan film submitted to the festival—the officially accepted ones within the main festival program, and the others in cafés and bars—to give exposure to a broader group of local filmmakers" (Dovey 2015a, 154). On the other hand, there are also directors seemingly content with being associated with festivals, but who do little to develop their festivals. For instance, the Film Africa Documentary Festival in Nairobi (10-15 November 2014), directed by Charles Asiba, was advertised in hard-copy promotional material as "celebrating Kenya's long and rich history in filmmaking through screening documentaries made by Kenyans, and about Kenya." Yet, the festival included only two documentaries by Kenyans and repeatedly screened fiction films. The program also included a 'Dutch Night' and the only filmmaker present at the festival was the Dutchman Hans Bosscher. At the 'Students Forum' on 12 November (where the students were grade school students from the local Agha Khan school), Bosscher revealed in the Q&A that he had travelled from the Netherlands with eleven films for the festival. Asiba was also director of the now defunct Kenya International Film Festival (KIFF). Writing about her experience at the 2010 KIFF, Dovey notes "it became clear ... that the programming had been a haphazard affair, with many of the films screened at the festival not even vetted by a curator or committee beforehand" (2015a, 156-157).

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[164] The problem of sustainable long term funding is not unique to African festivals on the continent. African film festivals in Europe face similar problems (cf. Dovey 2015a)

We must question what each person, venue, and partner involved stands to gain from participating in a film festival. In unpacking the politics of Udada, and what each partner stood to gain through their participation, it is useful to consider another local film festival: the Slum Film Festival (SFF). In writing about the 2012 edition of the festival, McNamara notes: "there were several important departures … between the event organisers' stated aims and goals, and what 'actually happened' during the event itself" including large deviations from the scheduled programming, and nepotism in programming and awards "in favour of films produced by facilitating partners" Hot Sun and SlumTV (McNamara 2016, 160). McNamara argues "this distinction between the 'intentions' and 'actualities' of the SFF 2012 raises interesting questions about who the SFF's *actual* beneficiaries are, and what funders and facilitators in fact gain through their involvement in the project" (2016, 160). Rather than measuring success, for instance, in terms of number of audience members attending the festival, or even less easily quantifiable factors such as impact on the local community,

> It seems that, at one level at least, to the donors and facilitating partners the successes of the event itself were irrelevant. … the 'success' of the SFF in the eyes of the donors is measured not in terms of the practical, everyday impact and effect of its screenings. As a project for 'cultural', rather than economic development, the event's mere existence is sufficient pre-condition for its success. (McNamara 2016, 214)

Further, Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri note that "the ceremony was attended by funding representatives from the Belgian and Spanish embassies, as well as by heads of various associated organisations, mostly non-governmental organizations with development aims" and ordinary people there for the Alliance Française's regularly scheduled film screening, but "apart from the festival organizers themselves, … nobody attending the closing ceremony had actually gone to the screenings in Mathare and Kibera" (2013, n.p.).Thus, looking at the intention of each partner involved becomes important in analysing why events play out as they do.

Returning to Udada, on the penultimate day of the festival the Spanish Embassy hosted a cocktail party and film screening at the Michael Joseph Centre where they showed *Blancanieves* (Berger, 2012), a black and white silent film

reimagining of the Snow White fairy tale where the titular character is a matador. The film was shown without any English translation of the Spanish intertitles. It was an enjoyable evening of food, drinks, and an interesting film (and it gathered a good sized audience of 50-60 people), but I was struck while there about how little the event – given that it celebrated the work of a Spanish man – had to do with supporting African female filmmakers, especially given that the tagline of the festival was "celebrating African women in the arts." While interviewing Wanjiru Kinyanjui she revealed that it was someone from the Spanish Embassy who selected the film and that the Spanish Embassy "came up with their own thing" for the event (interview 2015). The Spanish Embassy became involved with the festival because, while reviewing submissions, the festival directors realised there was a mass of Spanish films, and thus thought they could "get the Spanish embassy to do something" (Kinyanjui interview 2015). Clearly, the Spanish Embassy cared little about the premise of promoting African women in film, and their goal was instead to promote Spanish art and culture in Kenya.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Udada was the extent to which it was divorced from contemporary film production by women in Nairobi. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the closing ceremony. The Udada festival ended with a party and a closing ceremony at the Alliance Française. Prior to the ceremony guests gathered for drinks in the Alliance exhibition space and garden – a space often used for parties and concerts that includes an outdoor stage and devoted catering facilities. After the cocktail mixer, guests gathered in the auditorium to watch the closing ceremony. At the ceremony, representatives of the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française spoke about the need to support women in the arts and a long list of awards was handed out. Specifically, pioneering Nairobi-based female filmmakers were given certificates and trophies to celebrate their achievements in the arts. Each filmmaker present made a short speech (the CEO of the Kenya Film Commission, Lizzie Chongoti, accepted awards on behalf of those filmmakers not present, which lead to some awkwardness since she was on stage so frequently). Interestingly, the filmmakers honoured were all part of the generation trained at KIMC who started make films in the late 1980s and early 1990s – no mention was made of the thriving film production industry currently

being led by women in the city. These contemporary filmmakers were a glaring absence at the film festival as, in addition to being fully ignored in the closing ceremony, not a single one of their films was screened.

As with Udada, I was continually struck, in my attendance at local festivals, at how removed these festivals tended to be from local filmmakers. This is particularly unfortunate given that "within Africa, film festivals remain one of the few venues through which filmmakers can actually meet African audiences" (Dovey 2015a, 9). The Out Film Festival included a lively post-screening panel discussion on its final day, but rather than convene a group of filmmakers, the purpose of the discussion was thematic. The festival was organised by Gay Kenya Trust and its purpose was to engage local audiences in debates about sexuality through the medium of film, not to engage with film as a creative and entertaining medium per se. As such, their panel consisted of a group of local activists and journalists. The Film Africa Documentary Festival did not include members of the local filmmaking community and only screened three Kenyan-made films (two documentaries and one fictional short). As previously mentioned, Udada completely ignored contemporary Nairobi-based female (and male) filmmakers, though their program was scheduled to include a handful of older films by the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.[165] The one significant exception to this rule was the special day of events, held under the auspices of the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, at Pawa254 (15 November 2014).[166] They screened four films produced in Kenya and convened a panel discussion with representatives from each film. In my next section I will go on to explore this different context, and why events at Pawa254 play out so differently from those hosted at the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française.

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[165] As previously mentioned, there were many disjunctures between what was scheduled and what actually took place during the festival. I was unable to be present at every screening at the festival, so cannot confirm definitively that these screenings in fact took place. However, it is notable that they were at least included in the program, and this demonstrates that the organisers at least intended, at some point, to include these films in the festival.

[166] The main film festival was held at the Alliance Française from 10-14 November 2014.

2.2. Activist film screenings

Pawa254 is an art and activism centre that opened in Nairobi in November 2011. Much like other creative organisations in the city – such as Docubox,[167] Kwani?[168] and The Nest[169] – Pawa254 is founded and run by Kenyans, but also receives funding from external development organisations. Each of these organisations has a mandate of being socially and/or artistically transformative, and it would be simplistic to assume that this agenda is undercut by their funding. Arguably, the views of the funders and organisations might closely align. For instance, Pawa254 receives support from the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) – the Nairobi-based branch of the American Open Society Foundation – and OSIEA's "strategic priority areas" of "participation of citizens" and "human rights" (Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa 2017) align with Pawa254's own goal of creating social change in Kenya through increased citizen participation.

Pawa254 was started by famed local photojournalist and activist Boniface Mwangi, and the organisation

> espouses the belief that a better Kenya can be realised. Therefore, as a movement of young social conscious artists and activists, we audaciously follow our hearts in the hope of seeing a better country ...Our work has resulted in the growth of highly skilled *artivists* and the movement of active, freethinking youth, in and beyond our immediate location. (Pawa254 2017)

Pawa254 thus has an intensely national focus in their work, and they intend to shape the future of Kenya through the merging of art and activism as 'artivism.' According to their 2015 promotional video (screened before every one of their film screenings), 30,000 people have received training in various capacities since November 2011. They focus specifically on engaging youth and aim to use media to promote progressive social change in Kenya.

Thus, it comes as little surprise that a film festival hosted at their venue, and about human rights, would focus on both art and activism specifically as they

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[167] Docubox will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.
[168] Kwani? is a Kenyan literary organisation that has been in operation since 2003. They publish a magazine alongside other books and short stories, and are famous for their steadfast promotion of contemporary African writing.
[169] The Nest is a Nairobi-based production collective. They are most famous for their 2014 film *Stories of our Lives*.

relate to the local community. In their special Human Rights Watch affiliated screening, they showed four films: Nairobi-based female filmmaker Zippy Kimundu's short film *Burnt Forest* (2013), which tells the story of two teenagers from different tribes falling in love amidst the backdrop of the 2002 General Election; Nairobi-based male filmmaker Sam Soko's short film *Ririkana* (2014), which is about a woman learning to move on after the death of her husband in the 2007/2008 post-election violence; *No Humanity Here* (2014) by InformAction,[170] which was about human rights abuses against Somalis and Somali-Kenyans in Eastleigh, Nairobi; and, finally, *Maramaso*, a film made by Americans about the local band Sarabi and their activist work in the run up to the 2013 Kenyan presidential election. Following the screenings, there was a panel discussion with representatives from each film. The discussion included questions about the themes of each film, but was more focused on their *production*, and included questions about film budgets and production schedules, as well as questions about why the directors made certain representational choices.[171] This merging of focus on art production and social themes is characteristic of film events at Pawa254.

These screenings took place in a medium sized L-shaped room with a small screen on a raised platform in the corner, meaning that not all spectators would be able to sit directly facing the screen. Despite the limitations of the space, Pawa254 was able to attract a large audience, and by the end of the day every seat was filled. As part of their regular calendar of events, Pawa254 hosts a weekly film forum where they screen a film (almost always a documentary) and convene a discussion around the issues it raises, almost always with a sizeable audience. Pawa254 has a clear agenda with their programming to screen socially conscious documentaries about topics of relevance to the local community, and particularly ones that speak to a youth audience, and they bring in speakers – such as the directors, but also activists on the subjects of the documentaries – to foster discussion around the films. For instance, they screened *In the Shadow of a Gold Mine* (Moloo, 2014) and brought in the director as well as several activists working on questions of community empowerment in relation to extractive industries in Kenya. In another

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[170] InformAction is a civil society organization that deliberately tries to engage communities in Kenya and create social and political change through its films and film screenings.
[171] The day also included a spoken word performance section and ended with a screening of *Big Men* (Boynton, 2013).

instance, they had a local film journalist convene a discussion following the screening of *Beautiful Tree, Severed Roots* (Mann, 2014), an autobiographical documentary about a family of Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution and their subsequent life in Kenya. Through screening films and convening lively discussions on topics of relevance to their constituent community, they turn film screenings into events.

A particularly noteworthy event was the premiere of Jackie Lebo's documentary *The Last Fight* on 30 April 2015. As discussed in Chapter Two, the film is about two Kenyan boxing clubs and their struggles – notably including one where a club is fighting a legal battle against land grabbing in Nairobi. The evening began on Pawa254's rooftop event space – an area complete with a lounge, a bar, an outdoor screen,[172] and an empty space that can fit approximately 60 chairs or a large reception tent – and people could share drinks and talk as we collectively waited for the film to start. (Events almost never start according to the posted schedule, and instead begin once a critical mass of people has arrived). The screening was held in the newly built Mageuzi Theatre.[173] The audience included high profile Kenyans (such as the Chief Justice), members from funding bodies, and, crucially, the boxers and coaches featured in the documentary. After the screening, the boxers and coaches were called on stage each to say a few words. Many of them were uncomfortable speaking in English and instead spoke in Swahili.[174] After the boxers had spoken, and following convention, there were several speeches that included thanking sponsors, and one speech Judy Kibinge read on behalf of the film's funder (the Ford Foundation). Crucially, the Kenyan Chief justice was invited to the screening as a guest of honour and made a speech on stage. However, rather than a formal encounter where the audience listened quietly and then clapped at

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[172] Pawa254 often hosts screenings on its rooftop. For instance, I attended the 17th edition of Pawa Film Forum on 11 March 2015 (the first of 2015 because of the renovation of the indoor theatre). They partnered with InformAction to show *Kenya: A Guidebook to Impunity* (Hannan, 2015), a film about elections and corruption in Kenya, and following the screening InformAction facilitated a lengthy discussion to a packed audience.

[173] During my time in Nairobi, Pawa254 undertook extensive renovations and built a movie theatre (named the Mageuzi Theatre) complete with comfortable movie theatre style plush chairs. As with the previous viewing space, the room is L-shaped. Additionally, unlike a movie theatre with tiered seating making the screen equally visible to all rows, the screen becomes partially obstructed from view as spectators get farther and farther from the front row.

[174] I was very lucky in that, during the pre-screening socializing, I made friends with a local lawyer who generously translated the Swahili comments for me.

the end, the Chief Justice engaged in a dialogue with the audience specifically about the issues raised in the documentary. The coach featured in the documentary said he had written to the Chief Justice about their legal case but had never received a reply – the two men then engaged in a conversation onstage where the Chief Justice invited the boxers and coaches to the Supreme Court the following week and said it could be possible to fast track their case. This encounter could be read as simply the Chief Justice telling the audience a nice story about helping the boxing club without the intention of ever following up. However, a more positive reading would suggest that the film premiere created the opportunity for this coach to directly and publically confront a powerful representative of an institution that had been denying him justice.

Dovey argues "it is the 'liveness' of festivals—the coming together, in person, of audiences, filmmakers, curators, and festival organizers—that attracts enthusiastic support and participation" (2015a, 14). Following Dovey, I would like to suggest that Pawa254's ability to turn film screenings from solitary viewing experiences into social events is critical to their ability to successfully draw large crowds. Pawa254 runs both a regularly scheduled calendar of film events and one-off festivals (like the Human Rights Watch Film Festival special day), but the atmosphere surrounding each screening is consistent. Audiences looking to watch documentaries, and audiences wanting to discuss pressing social and political issues facing Kenya, can count on finding these events at Pawa254. This sort of regularity and consistency in programming is crucial to building audiences and developing a film viewing culture around locally made documentaries.

The need for this audience building work is perhaps best demonstrated through the example of the distribution and exhibition of Judy Kibinge's film *Scarred: the Anatomy of a Massacre.* As mentioned in Chapter Two, the film tells the story of the Wagalla Massacre and its survivors' decades long fight for truth and justice. The film is a passion project Kibinge developed over the course of four years after she met survivors of the massacre (Kibinge interview 2015). She received financial support from OSIEA, but acted as the director, producer, and researcher of the film. The film premiered to a packed audience at the Louis Leakey Auditorium of the National Museum on 10 February 2015, and the

audience included Members of Parliament and survivors of the Wagalla Massacre.[175] This fact of a major event drawing attention to the massacre is particularly significant given that the massacre has long been denied by the Kenyan government and, usually, events commemorating the massacre are scarcely attended by anyone outside the immediate Wagalla community (Kibinge interview 2015). However, following this successful premiere the film was almost never screened. It screened for the African Commission in Gambia, and showed in Eastleigh, and "people have asked for it quite a lot" (Kibinge interview 2015), but Kibinge, because of her commitments with Docubox, does not have the time to fully promote her film. Crucially, as the producer and director of the film, she is fully responsible for bearing the burden of distributing the film. The distribution of films in Nairobi relies very heavily on individual filmmakers taking the initiative to promote them, and thus demands filmmakers be both creatives and entrepreneurs responsible for screening and selling their films.

Throughout this section, I have discussed the conditions under which films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers are likely to meet live audiences in Nairobi. Crucially, however, none of these screenings directly generate revenue for the filmmakers. As such, Nairobi-based female filmmakers must hustle to finance and build markets for their films (I will discuss the ways in which they do this in Chapter Six).

Conclusion

The tastes of African audiences – what they currently like, and what they 'should' like – have been the focus of a significant amount of critical conversation. French scholar Anjali Prabhu argues "African directors, in decolonizing Western images of Africa presented to Africans, face the problem of Hollywood-hooked audiences and escapist entertainment-seeking in their own countries" (2014, 233). Prabhu draws on the problematic metaphor of being 'hooked,' which calls to mind both addiction and fish caught on the end of a line. This line of thinking – of the need to correct audience behaviour – goes back to colonial era film projects. For instance, for Major Leslie Allen Notcutt of the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE)

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[175] DVDs of *Scarred: the Anatomy of a Massacre* were on sale at the premiere. Half the proceeds from DVDs sold go to the Wagalla Massacre Foundation.

"one of the aspects of 'European' culture descending 'too rapidly' upon the African was commerical cinema itself. The BEKE, therefore, was partly designed to 'capture' African viewers and correct the 'falsehoods' perpetuated by the Hollywood dream machine" (Reynolds 2009, 61). This discourse of being addicted to foreign films is one that ignores the agency and individualism of audience members, as well as one that ignores the gatekeepers that influence what content makes it onto particular screens.

A key argument for why Nollywood is popular is that "the 'vernacular modernity' ([Comaroff and Comaroff 2004] 200) Nollywood forges is perceived as the same but different enough from African contemporary life elsewhere on the continent to allow for both identification and fascination prompted by alterity" (Krings and Okome 2013, 5-6). The meeting point between similarity and difference goes some way towards accounting for the popularity of Nollywood; yet, this is not the whole story explaining audience preferences because "there is a lot of interest in 'foreign films' among members of video film audiences. For this audience, it is neither one nor the other. Interest in 'foreign films' does not amount to a depreciation of the avid attachment to video film. Members patronize 'foreign films' as much as they do local ones" (Okome 2007, 5). Furthermore, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the distinction between 'local' and 'foreign' is inadequate to explaining the contemporary Nairobi-based screen media production landscape. As Spronk notes, in a discussion of the popularity of Hollywood movies among young middle class adults in Nairobi, "certain parallels between the narrative of a movie like *Save the Last Dance* and the reality of the young adult's daily lives explain the popularity of Hollywood movies. Issues of love and sexual relating are central in many movies as well as in middle class Nairobi" (2002, 229).

Throughout this chapter I have discussed various ways in which the screen media productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers do and do not reach audiences in Nairobi. Rather than assuming a dichotomy between 'local' and 'foreign' film preferences I have examined the specific ways spectators in Nairobi are able to encounter the screen media productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Rather than simply existing, audiences for particular content must be

built, and this involves hard and careful curatorial and distribution work. Indeed, at the early editions of FESPACO, "instead of immediately gravitating towards films made by Africans, audiences at FESPACO—accustomed to international cinema— questioned their quality, contradicting Burkinabé filmmaker Gaston Kaboré's well-known adage that, after years of being subjected to foreign films, Africans were 'thirsting' for African images" (Dovey 2015a, 100). We have to be aware of the gatekeepers that decide which products become visible to potential audiences and which remain marginalised. Dovey, in speaking about the popularity of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood (and the cliché that they are popular because audiences like them) makes the point that we need "a more nuanced understanding of how greatly cultural products rely on press and marketing visibility in a capitalist world saturated with things for sale" (2012b, 117). State and market censors create limits on the kinds of screen media products Nairobi-based spectators can encounter, just as local curators, filmmakers, and exhibition spaces work to build new audiences for locally made productions.

The market for locally produced films is very small in Kenya, making international markets both on the continent and farther afield vitally important. Yet, audiences exist in Nairobi for the screen media productions of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers entrepreneurially seek to develop them into markets. It is to this entrepreneurial activity that I now turn in my final chapter.

Chapter 6

Creative Hustling: Precarity, entrepreneurialism and innovation in Nairobi

In their edited collection, *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labour* (2016a), film and media scholars Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson outline an activist approach to what they see as the increasing and global precariatisation of film industry workers. While "media globalization has garnered significant attention … there remains a relative paucity of research on labor issues" (Curtin and Sanson 2016b, 8). Their focus is global in scope – including case studies from China, Nigeria, the USA, India, and the Czech Republic among others – and their approach is deliberately global "in order to avoid the provincialism that has too often characterized labor and policy debates" (Curtin and Sanson 2016b, 15). They note that "today's increasingly mobile and globally dispersed mode of production thrives (indeed, depends) on interregional competition, driving down pay rates, benefits, and job satisfaction for media workers around the world" (Curtin and Sanson 2016b, 2), meaning that workers in distinct contexts are connected through shared labour struggles. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are part of this global filmmaking system, and, as such, it is essential to situate their creative labour within this global framework.

Precarious labour is not simply a condition of cultural and creative industries; rather, "the term 'precarity' has come to refer to insecure employment in the neoliberal era," that is, work that "is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and that cannot support a household" (Kleinhans 2011, n.p.). Drawing on the work of a range of scholars, geographer Tatiana Thieme outlines how the concept of precarity has come to be used in discussions on work:[176]

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[176] Philosopher Judith Butler "makes a careful distinction between 'precariousness'—the corporeal vulnerability shared by all mortals including the privileged, and 'precarity'—the particular vulnerability imposed on the poor, the disenfranchised, and those endangered by war or natural disaster. Corporeal fragility both equalizes and differentiates: all bodies are menaced by suffering, injury, and death (precariousness), but some bodies are more protected and others more exposed (precarity)" (Watson 2012, n.p.). Scholarship on labour precarity does not make use of Butler's distinction between precariousness and precarity, so her work on precarity is not directly relevant to this thesis.

Precarity or '*précarité'* has since the 1990s been associated with conditions of exploitation in contexts of urban adversity and scarcity of waged employment (Bourdieu, 1998). Since the early 2000s, precarity has grown as a conceptual and political platform for social struggles associated with times of austerity across industrialized and post-industrial contexts (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Associated with the structural inequalities of neoliberalism, particularly the retreat of a welfare state and the casualization of labour (Vosko, 2000), precarity has become a proxy for in-work poverty. (2017, 8)

In a much wider neoliberal context than simply cultural and creative industries, "workers are now encouraged to find happiness in many jobs, and to be thankful not to be weighed down by regular salaries, health insurance, or the possibility of pensions" (Jackson 2012, 22). It is now increasingly recognised, in a post-Financial Crisis world, that precarity is "the other side of a coin that used to be celebrated as 'flexibility'" (Jackson 2012, 22). Drawing on the work of Ross, Curtin and Sanson suggest that all workers, globally, from the most marginal to elites, "must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency as standard employment and its associated entitlements become artifacts of a bygone industrial era. Precarious livelihoods are indicative of a new world order of social and economic instability" (2016b, 5-6).

However, this era of precarity is not one devoid of opportunities. Feminist studies scholar Heather Berg and feminist film and media scholar Constance Penley's study of the adult film industry in California's San Fernando Valley is particularly instructive in this regard. They employ the term 'creative precarity' to describe "the resourceful ways porn workers resist, navigate, and exploit the precarity they confront" (2016, 159), and also suggest that while precarity is something these workers struggle with, "some porn workers describe precarity as both a potential job benefit and what allows them to be creative" (2016, 167). Because, "like other industries in advanced capitalism, the adult film industry more and more relies on a flexible, itinerant, and deskilled workforce" (2016, 163), porn performers rarely make a living off of performing alone, and instead survive this precarious situation by creatively manipulating other potential profit streams.

In a statement that can help explain the relationship between precarity and creative entrepreneurialism, Butler insists: "our acts are not self-generated, but

conditioned. We are at once acted upon and acting ... Being acted upon is not fully continuous with acting, and in this way the forces that act upon us are not finally responsible for what we do" (2004, 16). Thus, it is possible to keep human agency in focus while still exploring the underpinning structural conditions that may inform our choices. Nairobi-based female filmmakers exist in a precarious situation where, for instance, they receive little state support or social respect for their work, but they are also creative actors within this system. This chapter will focus on the creative precarity of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and will explore the discourse of hustling as a unique way that these women negotiate their precarity.

Part 1: Hustling in Nairobi

While promoting her now classic science-fiction short film *Pumzi*, Wanuri Kahiu said: "I am a filmmaker when I'm outside the country – in Kenya, I'm a hustler" (Kermeliotis 2010). At the time she made her statement Kahiu had not only released an innovative and highly regarded new film, but had also received 12 nominations and won five awards at the African Movie Academy Awards in 2009 for her film *From A Whisper*. Her statement reflects, in Dovey's terms, a failure to make the symbolic capital gained from success in prestigious international circuits "operative" (2015a, 5) back home in Kenya.[177] A filmmaker may receive symbolic capital from attending or winning at prestigious festivals and award shows, but a lack of recognition of that achievement within Kenya leads to a failure to find financial backing within the country to continue making films. Kahiu's use of the word 'hustler' struck me, and throughout my research I asked each filmmaker I met what they thought of Kahiu's articulation – whether or not filmmaking in Nairobi is 'a hustle.' In response I received an almost unanimous, immediate, and enthusiastic yes.[178]

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[177] South African female filmmaker Xoliswa Sithole argues that a similar phenomenon exists in South Africa where many black women "are doing phenomenal work and being recognized internationally [but] are not acknowledged at home" (McCluskey 2009, 214).

[178] Kahiu's personal hustling journey has changed over time from when she was "trying to just make ends meet and trying to make *Pumzi*" to now, where she states: "I don't feel like I have to hustle as much. I am hustling, in the sense that I am looking for jobs, and I'm looking for ways to kind of maintain a certain, just life, just to pay bills, and to live. But that kind of frenetic energy isn't necessarily there in the same way ... it's more of a balance now, and that at that time it was more

The term 'hustle' has been used to connote practices of uncertain legality and morality since the 1960s, to describe specific contexts of informality in post-colonial Africa, and (since the 1980s) has been central to the vocabulary of American hip-hop artists (Thieme 2017, 10):[179] "the term 'hustle' has held a connotation of individualistic rogue practices performed by a trickster operating within or in relation to the criminal underground economy" (Thieme 2017, 10). These definitions of hustling seem to have little resonance with Nairobi-based female filmmakers given that they are middle class and transnationally connected, and neither live in 'ghettos' nor work in modes involving questionable legality. However, as I will show, certain definitions of 'hustling' nevertheless allow us to think of these filmmakers as 'hustlers.'

In a discussion of black West Indian life in London in the 1950s, Stuart Hall et al describe the formation of West Indian enclaves, or what they call 'colonies' (1978, 350-351). In their discussion of living and survival in these places they argue:

> 'Colony life' also opened up the possibility of modes of survival *alternative* to the respectable route of hard labour and low wages: above all, that range of informal dealing, semi-legal practices, rackets and small-time crime classically known in all ghetto life as *hustling* (Hall et al 1978, 351; emphasis in original)

Similarly, in his book on urban nightlife in Philadelphia, *On the Make: the Hustle of Urban Nightlife* (2008), sociologist David Grazian suggests:

> A combination of hard-nosed aggression and stylistic finesse, the art of the hustle requires the smooth magician's skills of sleight of hand and deceptive trickery. The hustler relies on the seasoned politician's self-confidence and golden tongue, the hungry gambler's appetite for profit and risk, and the calculated, manipulative machinations of the con artist. (2008, 13)

As opposed to the informality, and questionable legality of the hustle described by Hall et al and Thieme, Grazian describes hustling as a practice individuals can employ for various sorts of gain – in this case picking up romantic or sexual partners – not necessarily one of survival. What emerges in all these uses of the

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tipped towards like anxiety and heart-attacks and not knowing where your next meal is coming from, like that kind of really basic grind" (Interview 2015).

[179] See also Harkness (2014) for a discussion of hustling in relation to the Chicago rap music scene.

term 'hustle' is a creative practice where individual actors make use of their various skills to achieve their goals, though the goals, skills, and legal context of each hustle may differ.

Turning specifically to the context of Nairobi, 'hustling' tends to be used to describe individuals working within the context of Nairobi's informal labour markets (Farrell 2015; Thieme 2013; Thieme 2015; Thieme 2017; Wasike 2011), and "in Nairobi, the term 'hustle' (used from English and not in translation) has become folded into the 'creolized argot' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005) of Sheng, a combination of Swahili, English, and neighbourhood-based badinage" (Thieme 2017, 11). While the discussion of hustling by these scholars focuses on life in 'ghettos,' "hustling transcends class and geography and in the city almost everyone hustles for something" (Farrell 2015, 218). Hustling is a mode of working where individuals must entrepreneurially seek out their own opportunities, and these individual can come from all social classes. Thus the labour of both Nairobi-based female filmmakers and workers in informal settlements can be seen through the lens of hustling.

As Berg and Penley's work has shown, hustling can also be viewed as both a symptom and an opportunity. In the Nairobi context, for example, Thieme analyses the "hustle economy" of waste management in Mathare, an urban informal settlement (2013). In the 1990s, the government's failure to collect the trash, and ever increasing unemployment, led to a situation where youths realised "trash was everywhere" and that "waste could be gold" (Thieme 2013, 394) if they formed businesses to collect it, which they did. Thus, trash was "both a problem and an opportunity" (Thieme 2013, 394). Essentially, in the context of a complete lack of attention from the state, youths organised themselves and solved their own problems, thus 'turning waste into gold.' Thieme sees hustling as a productive and calculated choice where youth focused on obtaining "work that fit their terms" (2013, 397).[180] Like youths in Mathare, those in the informal settlement of Kibera also "took pride in finding ways to move through informality—an action they refer to colloquially as 'hustling'" (Farrell 2015, 53). In this case, they strategically

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[180] Literature scholar Bhekizizwe Peterson describes a similar story in South Africa where kwaito artists hustle as a way of reclaiming their agency and succeeding on their own terms (2003, 210).

manipulated the many NGOs operating in Kibera for their own material benefit. Amongst the many different forms of hustling, "the only universal in hustling was that someone was getting money for a kind of work that was ambiguously defined, sporadically obtained, and occasionally morally suspect" (Farrell 2015, 128).

Thieme's most recent work on hustling seeks to use the specifics of the case of Mathare's waste workers to theorise modes of work and precariousness far beyond this specific context and including both the 'global north' and 'global south' (2017). She suggests that "youth navigating uncertain urban terrain today must be examined as a phenomenon not only prevalent in makeshift urbanism of post-colonial cities but also in austerity urbanism of post-industrial cities" (Thieme 2017, 8). Essentially, she sees 'hustling' as a potentially transportable theory that can be used to explain global conditions of labour precarity. Though she keeps her focus on youth, this idea also applies to workers of all ages in the creative and cultural industries. Thieme argues: "the 'hustle' infers a constant pragmatic search for alternative structures of opportunity outside formal education, employment, and service provision" (2017, 9), and while workers in creative and cultural industries may not all face a lack of education and service provision, they increasingly do have to search for employment that is ever more short term, unstable, and precarious (cf. Curtin and Sanson 2016a). "Pervasive insecurity and precariousness" are "the norm" for many workers in these industries and these workers must live "in a mode that requires constant attentiveness and vigilance to the possibility of future work" (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015, 9); in essence, these workers must hustle.

A parallel discourse to that of hustling, and one with more positive connotations, is entrepreneurship. As I noted in my Introduction, in recent years there has been a proliferation of publications on entrepreneurship in Africa (Fick 2002; Makura 2008; Ndemo and Weiss 2017; Röschenthaler and Schulz 2015a; Spring and McDade 1998). Of particular importance for my purposes is the edited volume *Cultural Entrepreneurship in Africa* (Röschenthaler and Schulz 2015a). Anthropologists Ute Röschenthaler and Dorothea Schulz argue that since the late 1980s "Africans have witnessed an effervescence of new and diverse forms of cultural entrepreneurship" (2015b, 9). They define 'cultural entrepreneurs' as

individuals who quickly perceive the chances of the moment and seize novel opportunities to initiate new forms of generating income in the realm of cultural production. What distinguishes these entrepreneurs and their initiatives from that of other inventive individuals is that they purposefully take chances in situations of uncertainty, when failure seems to be as likely an outcome of their activities as does success. Entrepreneurs positively embrace the risk of failure. What matters to them is their strong belief that they will succeed and surmount any obstacles that will come their way. (2015b, 1)

Röschenthaler discusses a popular Malian radio presenter Mande Massa in terms of entrepreneurship, but notes "his vision for his ventures, however, always reached beyond mere capitalist entrepreneurship in the sense of producing commodities or services to make money to reinvest in order to expand his enterprise. He used his skills to realise his social vision," which was to use his radio program and related enterprises to help Malian women and "preserve Mande traditional values" (2015, 240). Röschenthaler thus moves beyond limited definitions of entrepreneurship that define success and entrepreneurial achievement in terms of financial gain (cf. Makura 2008). Anthropologist Inès Neubauer (2015) explores a tension sex workers in Mali face where, on the one hand, their work is socially stigmatised and their social standing in their home communities (sex workers are usually migrants to the cities in which they work) rests on their ability to keep their profession hidden, while, on the other hand, in their working locations they are considered business women and respected for their ability to generate income and manage their careers. In each of these cases, local versions of success counter any universal definition of what constitutes successful entrepreneurship, and suggests the importance of studying entrepreneurial activity in context.

The necessity of a contextual study of entrepreneurship is further demonstrated by Thieme's work on Mathare's waste workers. In a curious case, Thieme shows how an (unnamed) American company developed a sanitation project in Mathare where they employed cleaning teams in the hopes they would form small entrepreneurial businesses (2015). Yet, the project did not go to corporate plan and conventional capitalist model because the workers (the hustlers previously described by Thieme) did not attempt to grow their small enterprises vertically. Rather, "each enterprise stayed strategically small in scale,

and profits from one were used as seed capital to invest in another, allowing the diversified portfolio to expand laterally" (Thieme 2015, 233). The American company expected that the local cleaning teams would seek to expand their small cleaning businesses; however, the members of these teams had a different aim. Rather than focusing on growing one business they diversified their assets (in this case time and labour) amongst various kinds of waste work (such as collecting trash) in a deliberate and strategic attempt to mitigate uncertainty in their precarious lives. In order to understand the business decisions of Mathare's waste workers, it is necessary to study them in the context of their broader experiences of precarity. This suggests the utility of speaking about hustling and entrepreneurship in tandem when discussing Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Bringing these concepts together ensures that entrepreneurial discourses of innovation, flexibility, and daring risk taking remain firmly grounded in a recognition of the precarity through which Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and indeed creative and working class workers around the globe, must hustle.

Nairobi-based female filmmaker Zippy Kimundu's career biography can help to demonstrate the value of using the concept of entrepreneurship in conjunction with the concept of hustling. Throughout her career she has boldly seized unconventional opportunities. Kimundu began studying mass communication and TV production and, following her education, moved to Uganda. She realised that working in Kenya, she was getting jobs where she would be "someone's assistant, first learning, an intern getting coffee, but I knew if I went somewhere I would step right in and work … So I moved to Uganda for that reason" (interview 2015). And once in Uganda she worked as an editor and head of post-production for a company. She says: "I was doing mostly social documentaries … and then little bit by bit [I] got also into directing" (interview 2015). While in Uganda she also studied for another degree, in public administration, as a backup plan given the uncertainty of her film career (interview 2015). A pivotal moment in her career came when she attended Maisha Film Lab as an editor. Maisha Film Lab is a non-profit film training initiative run by filmmaker Mira Nair. It is based in Kampala, Uganda and supports emerging filmmakers in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda through providing training in the disciplines of "screenwriting,

directing, producing, cinematography, editing, sound recording and acting" (Bisschoff 2015, 75).

While at Maisha, Kimundu met and was inspired by "amazing people from all over the world" and was taught by "Spike Lee's crew based in Uganda" and producer Lydia Dean Pilcher (who is Academy Award nominated and has a long working relationship with Mira Nair). She also credits her attendance at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts Asia to Mira Nair's support in recommending her. She also spoke about the kind of exposure Maisha gave her – both in the sense of working with international calibre crews and getting into important film schools, but also at the level of creative storytelling:

> I guess before I went to film school I didn't know what kind of stories I wanted to tell basically. Because my background was basically social documentaries, which means a lot of NGO stuff ... But just for me, like, the interaction and the exposure to the outside world made me realise that I had unique stories. I appreciated more where I came from, and everything that I think of now felt special. (Kimundu interview 2015)

This exposure was essential to the development of her unique creative voice and for realising that her stories and experiences could make interesting films. She has since been involved in a wide variety of projects – as befits an entrepreneurial hustler. For instance, she worked as co-director with Mira Nair on the short documentary *A Fork, A Spoon, and a Knight* (2014). She was thrilled by the learning opportunity posed by being on set with Nair ("this amazing big time director"), the symbolic capital she would gain because of her new status as co-director with Nair, and also from the connections and opportunities that have come out of the project (interview 2015). The second major project is the Disney film *Queen of Katwe* (2016) directed by Mira Nair, in which Kimundu was the assistant editor to Barry Brown. She sees herself primarily as a director, but being a creative hustler in Nairobi means seizing every possible opportunity for growth and career advancement. She had never been on a Hollywood film set previously and that opportunity was worth pursuing even though it meant temporarily side-lining her directorial skills (Kimundu interview 2015).

Throughout her career she has entrepreneurially seized "novel opportunities to initiate new forms of generating income in the realm of cultural

production," (Röschenthaler and Schulz 2015b, 1), particularly through building networks with other filmmakers and film organisations from across the world that can potentially help further her career. Alongside this entrepreneurialism, she has diversified her possibilities to lay out a safety net – whether through studying an alternate degree or building additional skills (like advancing her editing skills instead of purely focusing on directing) – that would see her through potentially precarious times, as befits a hustler. Zippy Kimundu is not alone in this approach, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers are united by their shared approach to work: creative and entrepreneurial hustling.

Part 2: Hustling through precarity

As I have shown, hustling means building opportunities within precarious contexts. For Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy Kibinge, being a 'hustler' is a function of the environment: without cultural grants and commissioned work from broadcasters where are filmmakers supposed to get their money? As Kibinge says:

> If you are getting your money from many sources that are not predictable then you're hustling. It doesn't matter how people put it. The minute you are chasing many different sources of unpredictable money you are definitely a hustler. (Interview 2014)

Nairobi-based female filmmakers have responded to this precarity by building their own opportunities. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Nairobi-based female filmmakers often have very diverse careers spanning different formats, mediums, and genres of screen media production, and this results from their entrepreneurial approach to screen media production. Some filmmakers (such as Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui) also work at local universities teaching filmmaking, but they are the minority and they are usually of the older generation – most younger filmmakers hustle for business opportunities. In the words of Nairobi-based female filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte, "for me hustling is good because you know you can't just sit and wait for nothing [laughs] you have to go out … seek something out" (interview 2015). Here, hustling is positive; it means being proactive in a precarious situation and 'making things happen.'

Nairobi-based female filmmaker Natasha Likimani self-identifies as a hustler, and describes part of the hustle as constantly questioning herself with

questions such as "where am I getting my income from?" and "am I going to have to think of changing careers?" (Interview 2015). This precarity clearly has an affective toll, as she says:

> I'm in my 30s, I'm not gonna start changing careers, it's too late. Starting a business you need income, am I going to get a loan? Because I'm an artist I can't get a loan, I'm not employed. And my skills are just limited to the screenwriting and the acting. Now I can go back to news [she was a TV news presenter], but I've gained a lot of weight and that's not a good thing. But I've been thinking about it. Maybe I should go back to news. You know? That's how it is… all of us are wondering what the future is and it's pretty unsure. So that's why I say it's a hustle, it's not a career. (Interview 2015)

She described getting opportunities like writing the script for *Veve* (produced by One Fine Day Films) as amazing, but at other times deeply questioning her choice of careers. Nevertheless, she continually hustles to advance her career, and while when we met she was not working, she had "decided to be proactive" about developing her own projects, and thus started a company and had shot a pilot for a television show (Likimani interview 2015).

In Nairobi and elsewhere, creative workers must constantly be attuned to the possibility of future work, especially considering that "increasingly, cultural and media workers are freelancers or work on extremely short-term contracts that are counted in days or weeks rather than months or years" (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015, 9). In Nollywood, "with modest pay from any individual movie, workers make a living mainly through quantity, and some can be found working nearly every day, ending one movie project to begin another" (Miller 2016, 153). Nairobi-based female filmmaker Emily Wanja echoed that, in Nairobi, it is common to jump from filmmaking department to department "because you think that's where you got a chance of getting the next gig" (interview 2015). Productions "come and go … Here you've got no time to relax man. You need that money" (Wanja interview 2015). The need for work, and the precarity of not knowing where your 'next gig' might come from, can also breed a 'jack-of-all-trades' approach to creative work. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Isabel Munyua insisted that:

> The problem with us here is that we do business under the umbrella of 'I do everything.' Ok. There's no specialising. There's no say, you know what, I'm going to focus on foreign film productions. That's my niche. That's what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. Because, as you know, once there is a

travel advisory issued it kills it completely, so then you realise that you are actually forced to keep switching from place to place. (Interview 2015)

Both Munyua and Wanja point to the need to maintain a diverse portfolio of skills so as to seize every potential opportunity for work. Different roles in the film industry have different degrees of precarity associated with them, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers often diversify across different roles. According to Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy Kibinge, "if you are in a supplier's role you will always be fine because there will always be people who need things, who want to rent things, who need your services," but on the other hand, "it is much more vague if you are writing, if you are actually the creative, or you want to own a creator's role as opposed to a supplier's role" (interview 2014). Many Nairobi-based female filmmakers create opportunities for themselves to diversify through running their own small production companies.[181] For instance, Toni Kamau and her partners at On Screen Productions run a diverse business that allows them to work on creative projects – such as television shows for Zuku or the documentary Kamau is producing that has received funding from Docubox – as well social documentaries for clients such the M-Pesa Foundation[182] and other corporate and NGO work.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers must innovatively use new methods to develop and disseminate their projects, and opportunities posed by the Internet are particularly interesting in this regard. I discussed Internet distribution in Chapter Five, so here I will focus on production. The Internet offers potential opportunities in the realm of crowd funding film projects, and this is a mode that some Nairobi-based female filmmakers have tried successfully. For instance, Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann raised €8,500 (£7,770) to use towards *The Delayer* using the Dutch film-specific platform CineCrowd (Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015).

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[181] Examples of Nairobi-based female filmmakers running their own production companies include: Judy Kibinge (Seven Productions), Lucille Kahara (B9 Studios), Dorothy Ghettuba (Spielworks Media), Njoki Muhoho (Zebra Productions Kenya), Appie Matere (Zamaradi Productions), Wanuri Kahiu (Awali Entertainment), Toni Kamau (On Screen Productions), Dommie Yambo-Odotte (Development Through Media), Jinna Mutune (Pegg Entertainment), Jennifer Gatero (Insignia Productions), Jackie Lebo (Content House), Zippy Kimundu and Emily Wanja (Afrofilms International), and Isabel Munyua (Dreamcatcher Productions).

[182] The M-Pesa Foundation has been operating in Kenya since 2010 and "integrates the use of mobile technology in its investments while focusing on areas of greatest need and impact" such as health, education, and the environment (M-Pesa Foundation 2017). They specifically give out only large scale grants worth more than 50 million KES (£371,000) (Kamau interview 2015).

With the money raised she was able to buy a camera and therefore own the equipment she would use to shoot the film (Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015).[183] Nairobi-based female filmmakers Amira and Wafa Tajdin raised $19,147 (£14,690) in 2012 to fund the production of their feature film *Walls of Leila* (in production) through the crowd funding platform Kickstarter (Kickstarter 2017b), and Wanuri Kahiu also successfully raised $12,113 (£9,295) through a campaign on Kickstarter in 2011 to fund her documentary *Ger: To Be Separate* (in production) (Kickstarter 2017a). Crowd funding offers opportunity – both in terms of immediate financial gain, as these examples show, and as a potential way to identify the audience of a film before it is even made (Kibinge interview 2014) – but it is currently only one strategy among many that filmmakers employ to raise money for their films. Ndisi-Herrmann, for instance, was successful with her campaign, but still needed to seek out additional funding from Docubox, the Göteborg Film Festival, and the IDFA Bertha Fund. Thus, hustling to make films in Nairobi involves exploring every possible option: making use of the Internet to crowd fund, applying to transnational film festival funds, running diversified businesses to generate a constant stream of work and potential income to invest in new films, and building many other networks – both local and transnational – to seize opportunities.

As emphasised throughout this thesis, understanding Nairobi-based female filmmakers requires adopting a local and transnational perspective. Once more we see that these filmmakers are deeply involved in transnational networks that they deliberately cultivate, but also that their work is grounded in the unique opportunities offered by the city of Nairobi. That Nairobi offers opportunities for hustlers with the right skills and social positioning is reflected in the fact that many Nairobi-based female filmmakers have thrived in the city after taking the risk of leaving established careers in other industries and countries. To give just three examples, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Alison Ngibuini started her successful production company Al Is On Productions – famed for producing the soap opera *Mali* – in 2003 after quitting a career in advertising (BBC 2012), and as previously mentioned, both Judy Kibinge and Dorothy Ghettuba left successful careers, in

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[183] Ever the entrepreneurial hustler, after her filmmaking degree in directing and writing Ndisi-Herrmann learned to shoot her own camera as a way of diversifying her skills so that she could always keep working (interview 2015).

advertising (in Nairobi) and venture capital (in Canada) respectively, to try their luck in filmmaking. Nairobi-based female filmmakers recognise that Nairobi is a place where they can entrepreneurially build their filmmaking businesses and careers if they hustle to create their own opportunities.

2.1. Leaning in to piracy

A cornerstone of hustling is dealing with existing problems in innovative ways. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, finding profitable markets for the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is very difficult – as I mentioned in Chapter Three, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy Kibinge, for instance, has never made money off a dramatic project. In this section I will examine the challenges posed by piracy and explore how Nairobi-based female filmmakers work around those problems.

Nairobi is a city where you can buy pirate copies of any new release for 50 KES (£0.40) while waiting in your car, in DVD shops, or from street hawkers at the entrances to shops and malls across the city – from the Central Business District to the upscale suburb of Karen. Not only that, you can also have – for a slightly higher price – specially selected pirated DVDs delivered to your home or office, meaning you can easily access any film content through making a simple phone call or sending an SMS.[184] Then there is the phenomenon of Internet movie piracy, where anyone with a fast enough broadband connection can freely and easily access pirated content. Interestingly, despite the ease of accessing pirated foreign films, "piracy of local movies is contained, done very cautiously, or as part of a pragmatic agreement" between producer and pirate (Overbergh 2015a, 105). As is apparent from the sheer number of pirate DVD hawkers and fixed location shops devoted to selling pirated content, "illicit sales of foreign movies are tolerated"; however, this situation is not the same for local content, and regulators make some effort to ensure pirates of local content are punished (Overbergh 2015a, 104). According to Overbergh this has led to a situation where "vendors can keep prices of Hollywood, Bongowood or Nollywood movies artificially low while being compelled to sell local movies – at least officially – at a higher price, making them the less attractive

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[184] While in Nairobi, I had one friend who acquired 200 DVDs in this way.

choice for budget-conscious shoppers" (2015a, 104). While pirated films almost always sell for 50 KES (£0.40) in Nairobi, local films sell for 100-200 KES (£0.75 - £1.50) (Overbergh 2015a, 104).[185]

In a critique of Hollywood industry estimates about the impact of piracy on their businesses, Lobato makes the important point that arguments that "presumed that for each movie accessed illegally, a legitimate version of the same film went unsold" are "dubious" because they disregard "the influence of pricing levels and distributive contingencies in media consumption" (2012, 73). Pirated content can also be a means by which consumers who are unable to afford legitimate copies can watch films. Speaking about Delhi in the 1990s, media scholar Ravi Sundaram argues "piracy's indifference to property laws produced a significant resource for subaltern populations unable to enter the legal world" (2009, 12). In Nigeria, pirated and legitimate films cost the same amount, so getting people to buy legitimate films is a matter of making them more accessible than pirated copies, and accordingly, the issue in Nollywood piracy "is not social deviance but distributive accessibility" (Lobato 2010, 347). Thus, "for billions of people around the world, piracy is an access route to media that is not otherwise available" (Lobato 2012, 82). Many consumers in Nairobi may buy pirated content because it is what is available and what they can afford.

A pirate media economy (of mostly foreign content) is flourishing in Nairobi, with great impact on local content production because the pirates "make content too cheap" (Karuana interview 2015).[186] As Nairobi-based female filmmaker Barbara Karuana says:

> And that effects how people value local content. Cause they're thinking, why should I pay 800KES [£6] to watch *Nairobi Half Life,* when I can watch what's the biggest movie right now? *Birdman*, or *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, or *Selma* for 50 KES [£0.40]? Why would I do that? … So, distribution becomes a problem because if we were to seriously produce stuff for the purpose of distribution in this country it would come to a certain cost,

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[185] In some cases, DVDs of locally made films can cost as much as 800 KES (£6), as was the case when I acquired a copy of *Nairobi Half Life* from a small video rental store and shop in Prestige Plaza.

[186] Karuana also immediately acknowledged that her Internet access means she can easily illegally download or stream film content from her home.

which would always, always, always be more than that 50 KES [£0.40] disk, and that's a problem. (Interview 2015)

The problem with film piracy is that it makes the market uncompetitive. Legitimate producers are pushed out because they cannot compete with cheap DVDs sold by pirates and free Internet copies. Similarly, in Ghana, the importation of pirated Nigerian films also created a crisis in local film production in the early-2000s because producers could not compete with the far cheaper Nigerian products (Garritano 2013, 158). The Nollywood distribution system has long been recognised as having a problematic relationship with piracy, and Nigerian producers actively develop new strategies to counter its effects. Nigerian female video entrepreneur Emem Isong's response, for instance, was to develop "what could be defined as an informal windowing strategy" (Jedlowski 2015, 252). Because soon after a video is released in Nigeria it is pirated and "quickly sent (via internet and bootleg copies) to other African countries as well as to Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean," Isong first releases her films in "more formalized markets (such as the U.S. and Ghana)" and leaves Nigeria for last (Jedlowski 2015, 252). Using this strategy "she managed to protect what she considers her best market (the U.S.) from the interference of Nigerian bootleggers" (Jedlowski 2015, 252).

Piracy is seen by local filmmakers as a significant obstacle to profitable film distribution in Nairobi, but it is also something that filmmakers are working to innovate around. For instance, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Appie Matere has used a film distribution model that recognises that piracy can be matter of accessibility, where some consumers can only afford to access content at pirate prices. In her model, a producer would cater to two markets – one that can afford legitimate DVD prices and one that cannot, and networks of pirate film distribution would be used to serve those who cannot afford legitimate DVDs. While working with Baraka Films on *Project Daddy* she used this 'two markets' model to address the issue of piracy. She suggested essentially 'pirating' their own film by bringing DVDs to some of her merchandiser contacts and selling copies for about 20 KES (£0.20). By her recollection, they sold about 1000 tapes that way. Then, they took the film to Simon Nduti of Nduti One-Stop Shop (see Overbergh 2015a for a further

discussion of Nduti), who, according to Matere, is "a distributor in Riverwood and I think one of the biggest pirates" (interview 2015). They gave him the master DVD in exchange for 200,000 KES (£2,000) and left him to make and distribute copies as he saw fit. Alongside this pirate model addressing the needs of a low-income market, they also made a higher quality tape for distribution in more upscale markets like Textbook Centre and the upscale grocery store Nakumatt where it would be sold for a higher price (Matere interview 2015). As Overbergh says, "because of its image, both in terms of shady economic practices as [sic] in terms of River Road being considered a dangerous place, Riverwood remains virtually 'untouched' by the higher-end filmmakers and upper-middle class audiences" (2015a, 105). This means that the upper middle class audiences who frequent more expensive shops are unlikely to ever be in the places that sell the cheaper DVDs. Using the 'two market' distribution model is something she intends to do in the future: as she says "I think that can work. I'm going to try that on my next film" (Matere interview 2015).

Nairobi-based female filmmaker Jackie Lebo, like Matere, also seeks to find a way to 'cash in' on piracy. At her company Content House they have "adopted the 'lean in' strategy where you … work with the piracy" (Lebo interview 2015). Her plan for distributing their latest film, *The Last Fight*, was to sell DVDs in "uptown areas" where people can afford to "buy the DVDs at market price," and the festival circuit, and adopt what she described as a "controlled release on the Internet" where she would presumably attempt to reach pay-tv platforms. Thus far, this distribution strategy is standard. The interesting part of Lebo's plan is what she intends to do next, and this is to give the film to pirates "to have them distribute it around. Because we have to balance between at least getting some money from the film, but also having it seen very widely" (Lebo interview 2015). In the first phase of distribution they would attempt to make money from the film, but in the second their focus would be on audience building and they would encourage viewers of pirated copies to engage with the film on social media through talking about it on Twitter or liking the film's Facebook page. This is a solution to the challenges posed by piracy that takes place over the long term. She said:

> Because you are not going to stop piracy by yourself right now, and the government does not show an appetite for changing that right now. So I think you just, you work with it. Lean in. And as long as you get your first run, as long as you understand where you're going to get at least your first revenue back, then just make sure that you are building an audience though piracy. Like the musicians, they've stopped following the pirates, because the more piracy you have the more people come to your concert. You just transform the piracy into a revenue stream, which is your concert. So that's what we are trying to do. Transform them into numbers [so] that you can demonstrate numbers are behind me when you go to someone who has money. (Interview 2015)

Lebo is adopting what Lobato would call a *laissez-faire* approach to piracy. In this perspective "copyright protects one kind of economic activity but, in doing so, stifles the possibility of other, perhaps more creative, revenue-generating arrangements" (2012, 74). For instance, Lobato argues "piracy is ultimately a mode of consumption which can be monetised in numerous ways" and then goes on to give the example of product placement in movies where "brand value is increased through unauthorized circulation" (2012, 74). Crucially for the Nairobian context, piracy "also breeds demand for cinema in demographics that may one day ripen into viable formal markets" (Lobato 2012, 74).

Lebo is clearly hoping for the Kenyan market to 'ripen' and that her strategy will breed audiences in the long term:

> We'll try to make as much money as we can, especially from the people from this side of town who can buy it.[187] But once it's done that cycle, we just give it away. There is no point in holding on to it ... just build audiences so that you can be ready for that day when it somehow translates into revenue. (Lebo interview 2015)

Crucially, however, the potential in this model exists in part because of the funding models for many of the film by Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Most films made in East and Southern Africa (except South Africa) are donor funded (Bryce 2010, 161). As Lebo says, "we're still at a place where most of our projects are funded because they're important" (interview 2015), not because they will be profit making entertainment. *The Last Fight* was funded by the Ford Foundation, so making a profit through the film was secondary to making a social impact with it. In this case, demonstrating the ability to reach wide audiences within the

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[187] I interviewed Lebo in the middle class neighbourhood of Kilimani, which is in the more affluent west side of Nairobi.

community the film could 'help' is essential to generating future income through future grants from other developmental organisations.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers, as the examples of Matere and Lebo show, are hustling on the line between formal and informal, licit and illicit practices in their responses to piracy. They rely on networks built to profit from copyright infringement to distribute their films as widely as possible – and reap the financial rewards that can come from that increase in spectatorship. As Lobato argues throughout *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (2012), the formal and informal are vitally interconnected in all film industries. Even the production of Hollywood studio films, a highly formal enterprise, "still involves many kinds of informal activity, including unpaid cameo appearances, shooting in unregulated third world sites and harnessing the promotional power of fans" (Lobato 2012, 41). He gives the further example that "Warner Bros.' subsidiary in the PRC even chose as its first home video licensee a well-known piracy outfit" (Lobato 2012, 75). Nairobi-based female filmmakers are thus working within a global filmmaking context where formal and informal practices are imbricated with one another. Yet, they display a distinct entrepreneurialism in approaching the (global) issue of film piracy, because rather than relying on the state or other institutions to change the regulatory environment or clamp down on piracy, they hustle to transform their own circumstances and, correspondingly, both cope with and profit from the precarity caused by piracy.

2.2. Docubox

Nairobi-based female filmmakers – like workers in creative and cultural industries across the world – experience job precarity and they work to address these circumstances through their individual hustling practices. They hustle in an environment where there are few institutional mechanisms designed to support them. For instance, as I discussed in Chapter Four, the Kenyan state does very little to support Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Within this context, a significant development in the industry in recent years has been the formation of Docubox – the East African Documentary Film Fund, an institution that provides funding and non-financial support to local filmmakers. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Judy

Kibinge is the Executive Director and she became involved with Docubox because she "understands what it is to be stuck" (Kibinge Q&A 2013). The Docubox model works by granting filmmakers various amounts of money to develop documentary film projects. In Docubox's first year, 12 film projects were selected and each grantee was given $2,500 (£1,920) to make a trailer of their project. After that, six films were shortlisted to be given up to $25,000 (£19,185) (Kibinge Q&A 2013). However, the 'value' of Docubox extends far beyond the financial support filmmakers receive through the fund. Docubox collaborates with their filmmakers including such events as master classes, informal get-togethers to workshop ideas and get feedback, and taking them to the Sheffield Documentary Film Festival in the UK in 2014 to pitch their films. Docubox, through various initiatives, directly addresses key issues in the filmmaking hustle of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.

The idea for an East African documentary film fund began with Joyce Nairo. Nairo is program manager at the Ford Foundation in Nairobi and a Kenyan academic. Through the Ford Foundation, Nairo had raised $380,000 (£291,600) and gave Kibinge "such an open brief" to develop the fund so that it responded to "our situation" rather than modelling it after another film fund (Kibinge interview 2015). Kibinge's research on creating the fund involved meeting with people from the IDFA Bertha Fund and from Hot Docs, "and then at some point you realise, okay, it's really great to have these, like, points of reference, but you can be your own thing … you can do it with heart, you can have fun" (Kibinge interview 2015). Kibinge initially agreed to do the research necessary to set up the film fund believing that she was not suited to running it given that, as she puts it, she "[didn't] know anything about running funds" (Kibinge interview 2015). She describes initially being "entangled" with Docubox because she had researched it and set it up, but then realising "what just an amazing honour it is to set up a thing which is exactly the thing that you need as a filmmaker. … you're actually setting up a thing to answer the thing you've been looking for, for 10 years, but now for other people, which is pretty cool … over time it's evolved more and more into the thing that I think we need" (Kibinge interview 2015).

A consistently mentioned benefit of Docubox is that it has created a supportive community of filmmakers who can then learn and grow together and

help each other (Kibinge interview 2014; Kimundu interview 2015; Lebo interview 2015; Mukii interview 2015; Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015). Nairobi-based female filmmaker Jackie Lebo stated: "we all support each other. We hang out. But in terms of just an informed perspective on your work, I think Docubox has been the most helpful" (interview 2015). Docubox filmmakers are able to give informed opinions on each other's work because they share the common knowledge base that was provided through Docubox training (Lebo interview 2015). "Docubox has been so wonderful" because Kibinge "has been very inclusive, very supportive, she's encouraged a lot of group meetings and film screenings … It has meant that, as a spin off, we are able to call somebody up who is part of the Docubox family and say 'can you give me advice on this?' Or 'what do you think about this?'" (Ndisi-Herrmann interview 2015). Making Docubox a collaborative space where filmmakers help and learn from each other is obviously by design, and this atmosphere is fostered because of local industry conditions where, according to Kibinge "people need to collaborate" because in

> this kind of market, you just can't do this thing by yourself because you'll never have that free camera you need, you have to have some people who you are like 'you guys, are you free? Can we shoot thing things for a little bit? Or just look at my idea and tell me truly, truly is it making sense?'" (Kibinge interview 2014).

The structure of Docubox is one formed to be responsive to the conditions of the local filmmaking hustle, and while one way is through creating a supportive and collaborative space, another is through providing training to filmmakers. In order to understand the value of Docubox training it is first necessary to examine the film training landscape in Nairobi.

Throughout my interviews with Nairobi-based female filmmakers, a common narrative I encountered was that the existing film schools in Nairobi offered inadequate training, leaving recent graduates with few useful skills and producers looking to hire with a shortage of qualified talent. Despite the recent proliferation of film schools and departments in Nairobi,[188] in describing the

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[188] "There has been a dramatic increase recently in the creation of film schools on the African continent" (Dovey 2015a, 6), so the proliferation of film school in Kenya is part of a continent wide phenomenon (cf. also Adesokan 2014, 247).

quality of film education at university level in Kenya Nairobi-based female filmmaker and KFC member Njoki Muhoho said:

> What's the quality of your education? Crap. I use the word crap to describe it. They don't have the resources. How can you teach film and you don't have cameras? How can you teach film and you yourself have never made a film? They have theatre people. People from the National Theatre, from the Phoenix Theatre, are the ones that are heads of departments. (Interview 2015)

Nairobi-based female filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte stated: "if you can compare the quality of training today and the quality of training when I trained [in the 1980s at KIMC], of course they are worlds apart" (interview 2015).[189] And this is because "the population has exploded of people who are interested in trying the film industry" but at the same time "the infrastructure hasn't really grown" and people "who want the quick bucks will set up a film school" (Yambo-Odotte interview 2015). Film training echoes the wider tertiary education market in Kenya where, "in the last decade, the number of profit-driven tertiary institutions in Kenya has risen. Instead of improving the quality of workers they issue certificates and diplomas that mean little" (Farrell 2015, 126). In Yambo-Odotte's class there were nine students and "it was a seriously hands-on kind of training" but now, she said, perhaps a touch hyperbolically, "they graduate without ever handling a camera and they are DOPs" (interview 2015). Much like other established producers running companies, her knowledge of the current film training environment in Nairobi comes from hiring recent graduates.[190] Njoki Muhoho similarly described having to teach the students that come to her production company for work "from scratch" because "they know nothing" (interview 2015). Nairobi-based female filmmaker Isabel Munyua pointed to a lack of engagement between training institutions and filmmaking businesses and a resulting disconnect between the skills taught and those required to work. She works with college student interns at her company Dream Catcher Productions,

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[189] In Yambo-Odotte's era, KIMC had a lab fit to develop celluloid, but it has since broken down and now film schools in Kenya teach on video (Kinyanjui interview 2015).

[190] She says: "After they finish school they are looking for employment so they will come to institutions like ours. So you say like okay, I was given chances myself when I was growing, let me try and give a chance here. But then you realize, gosh, it will take about a year or two before somebody really gets to the level of the kind of quality we are looking at" (Yambo-Odotte Interview 2015)

and describes having to train them for the first six months of their work because they lack specialised skills and instead can do a little bit of everything (interview 2015). [191]

Similarly, recent graduates also point out the inadequacies of their film school training and how this makes them unprepared for the local job market. Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wangechi Ngugi studied at a local college called Nairobi Institute of Business Studies to study mass communication. She said: "initially I didn't want to go into a college because the local colleges here are all about making money" and there will be classes of "50 students, or seventy, and there's one camera, and then there's a small studio [laughs] to go and experiment" (Ngugi interview 2015). While working, after a time:

> it got to a point I stopped sending out my CV because I realised I've done all these modules, right, but they are all theoretical. ... so when someone looks at your resume they're thinking oh wow! This person has done so much. You know, I need an editor you should probably call her in, but I don't know how to edit. [Laughs] Because you didn't get a chance to be taught properly.

She describes how "it was embarrassing" to have such a discrepancy between the education she could list on paper and the skills she had actually been taught. In response, she started approaching internships explicitly asking for training, and it was that on the job training, rather than her formal education that 'got her where she is' today. Given the lack of adequate film schools in Nairobi, aspiring filmmakers must hustle to develop their skills in alternative ways. For instance, Screenwriter Natasha Likimani got her start in writing working for *Makutano Junction* and developed through on the job training (Likimani interview 2015). Mediae (the producers of *Makutano Junction*) would bring in film professionals from outside the country to train local filmmakers (Kamau interview 2015; Likimani interview 2015). Working on the sets of television commercials is also an important training mechanism (Kamau interview 2015; Muhoho interview 2015).

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[191] Of course, not all training programs are the same, and Nairobi-based female filmmaker Toni Kamau described her education at the now defunct Mohammed Amin Foundation as "amazing" because it was "hands-on training" in "small classrooms" with "really good teachers" (interview 2015). She also said, "I'm not saying it's the only film school that produces good guys, but there are a lot of really good people that came out of the Mohammed Amin Foundation" (Kamau interview 2015).

And, as discussed in Chapter Four, One Fine Day Films also acts as an important masterclass further developing the skills of experienced filmmakers.

Docubox also actively seeks to mentor its filmmakers by bringing in international talent to give masterclasses and workshops. Nairobi-based female filmmaker and Docubox grantee Ng'endo Mukii stated "the value of that mentorship is immense" because it involved "having people with eyes that have gone through so much refinement" giving "personal critique" on their films (interview 2015). It is important to keep in mind here that at the point she became involved with Docubox, Mukii had trained at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Royal College of Art in London, so was already a highly skilled and trained filmmaker. Mukii described that what they learned through Docubox workshops, "you're not even going to learn in an art school or film school" (at least not art focused ones like the ones she attended) (interview 2015). At these schools "you're not learning about what you're meant to do when you go to a film festival, how you're meant to organise meetings with people, kind of hounding producers, you don't learn about that stuff. You don't learn about the funds, where you can get funds" (Mukii interview 2015). But Docubox does address these skills, so through Docubox "you're just opening your mind to something beyond you making stuff" (Mukii interview 2015). Docubox took its grantees to the 2014 Sheffield International Documentary Festival, and as Mukii says:

> I did not know what to do at a festival before then. I've been to many festivals and networked supposedly, and met people. But I think some of the benefit I've gotten from doing that was by chance … When we went to Sheffield with Docubox we were armed: with our films, little pamphlets, little DVDs to give to people. We had practiced what our synopsis was, what our film was about, what strands our films could possibly fit into. We had meetings set up. (Interview 2014)

Previously she would attend festivals that showed her film (*Yellow Fever*), but would not be prepared to pitch her next project. She described people asking to see her next project with a mind to developing collaborations, but when she did not have anything to show them she could "see them turning off" (interview 2014). She incidentally met a producer at Sheffield and at the time of our interview was actively developing a project with them (interview 2015), and even though she met him by chance, and not as part of an arranged meeting, she was prepared to

capitalise on the chance opportunity specifically because of the preparation she received through Docubox (Mukii interview 2015). This example shows how much being a successful filmmaker *is not* about being an artist capable of creating beautiful films, but rather about being a hustler capable of producing, promoting, and distributing them.

As previously discussed, Nairobi-based female filmmakers must hustle to seize every possible opportunity to work and make their films. Funding from international film festivals abroad is one important opportunity, yet it is also a very competitive environment to navigate. Zippy Kimundu described going to IDFA and Sheffield to fund raise, "but it's crazy because you go there and it's all these people going for the same pots of money! It's really hard" (interview 2015). Navigating this competitive market requires a specific skill set, and these are business skills not necessarily creative ones.

Docubox develops both the creative and business skills of its grantees, and through its various programs is working to change the landscape of documentary film production in East Africa. Bisschoff describes the East African documentary film environment as developing out of British colonial filmmaking policies "such as through the didactic and patronizing instructional films of the BEKE," and notes that "this legacy of documentary film-making still exists today" through the prominence of NGO documentaries about various social and development issues (2015, 73). These documentaries have a social purpose and creativity is often completely side-lined. Kibinge described Kenyan filmmakers as not knowing how to make good documentary films, and they "make really bad" documentaries because they "make a lot of NGO films" and "a lot of corporate films" (interview 2015). Importantly, however, she insisted that this situation "is no one's fault" because good documentaries are not available for local viewing (interview 2015). In a final important initiative, Docubox hosts monthly screenings of creative documentaries at Pawa254. Initially, Docubox hosted screenings at Shalom House (see figure one), the location of their office, which is a compound that includes a bar and restaurant and space to set up an outdoor screen, but they relocated because it was difficult for the audience to reach Shalom House because of Nairobi's traffic (Shalom House is on the busy thoroughfare Ngong Road).

Eventually moving to Pawa254 also recognised the potential of collaboration in the industry because, as Kibinge says, "we're all in the same boat. We are. And we're all trying to grow the same thing. And we're all struggling with the same issues, so why not kind of get to know each other better and support each other's work" (interview 2015).

Conclusion

Nairobi-based female filmmakers work in a precarious labour market where they must be constantly attuned to the potential of new opportunities to develop their ideas into films. Their process has precedents, Sembène's practice of "'mégotage'— scrounging for cigarette butts, raising bits of money wherever possible, through personal or family savings or loans, perhaps from local businesses or the government" (Haynes 2011, 69) – certainly comes to mind. But hustling is more than 'scrounging' in the absence of better opportunities and more cultural support (for instance from the state in terms of cultural grants); it is a creative practice in its own right. The link between precarity and innovation is also demonstrated in studies on urban precariousness. For instance, in their pilot project on understanding creativity in South Africa, business studies scholar Ken Dovey and writer and curator Lizzie Muller argue "the challenges of the 'edginess' of everyday life in South African society generate the artistic energy with which South African artists are attempting to make sense of their lives in that context" (2011, 626). In a similar vein, anthropologist Till Förster argues for the creativity of African cities saying rather than existing because of urbanity, "creativity grows out of human agency" (2014, 36) and "creativity is about how the actors individually or collectively try to overcome the inherent contradictions, antimonies, and paradoxes of urban life as they perceive and conceive it" (2014, 37).

As I have shown in this chapter, hustling is born out of precarity, but as a practice it transcends those conditions in an innovative way to constantly adapt to local and transnational forces that shape Nairobi's filmmaking environment at any given moment. Keeping both local and transnational perspectives in focus is vital to understanding the creative hustle of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. For

instance, in comparison to hustling waste workers in Mathare (Thieme 2013; Thieme 2015; Thieme 2017) or NGO hustlers in Kibera (Farrell 2015), the middle class, and transnationally connected Nairobi-based female filmmakers appear remarkably privileged. However, when contextualised within the global filmmaking economy (cf. Curtin and Sanson 2016a) a very different picture emerges. The vital issue that comes to mind here is that of sustainability – particularly in regards to different film funding mechanisms. Zimbabwean female filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga describes how age and experience have directly worked against the development of her career, a paradox informed by developmental imperatives operating in Zimbabwe. She states: "when I was younger, being a woman was advantageous in the profession. There was certainly a move to promote [young] underprivileged African women in the medium" (Dangarembga, Mistry, and Schuhmann 2015, 207). When she was no longer considered as such, because of the success of her novel *Nervous Conditions* and studying film in Germany she "quickly hit the glass ceiling" (Dangarembga, Mistry, and Schuhmann 2015, 207-208). She states: "I found that there were exceedingly few opportunities for me. … and even when I do get funding for these projects, the amounts I receive are fractions of what other organisations [with] more demographically acceptable individuals receive" (Dangarembga, Mistry, and Schuhmann 2015, 208). Having more experience disqualified her from modes of film funding specifically designed to empower a particular kind of filmmaker (young, underprivileged, and female). Similarly, as discussed in Chapter Four, many film funds Nairobi-based female filmmakers have used are explicitly for emerging talents. Filmmakers must strategize to reduce the instability caused by such unpredictable funding, and this is where they hustle to create opportunities that will reduce their instability in the long term – be that through developing audiences using the mechanisms of piracy, training filmmakers to be business people as well as better creatives through Docubox, or exploiting the opportunities newly available for production through the Internet.

Stuart Cunningham et. al. suggest that "culture that is beholden to government for support is often unable to sustain itself commercially. This is one of the standard rationales for subsidy. Alternatively, straight subsidy has come

under increasing attack as it often leads to dependency and stymies entrepreneurial spirit in the creative industries" (2008, 72). Through hustling, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have created a vibrant screen media industry without state support, and thus challenge conventional wisdom about how to support independent filmmaking. Lobato outlines a trend in the literature where the suggestion is for "developing nations and regions to effectively leverage their cultural assets and integrate them into global economic networks, thus providing new sources of revenue, employment and growth" (2010, 338). He examines Nollywood's informality as another way forward to creating a profitable and sustainable film industry violating all these norms, and concludes that "national film industries in the First World have much to learn from this example" (2010, 350). Similarly, there is much to learn from examining Nairobi-based female filmmakers from the perspective of their working conditions. From this perspective we can see labour precarity as something that can be creatively and financially generative for those willing and able to hustle.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have considered the extent to which Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a film movement. In so doing I have challenged the validity of assuming a commonality between female filmmakers on the basis of their gender, and instead dug deeper to interrogate, from various angles, the ways they may or not be connected. Through this approach, I have shown that Nairobi-based female filmmakers can indeed be considered to constitute a movement. Their shared willingness to be flexible and experiment in screen media production, their common position as middle class workers in the city of Nairobi, their rigorous attention to class issues in their careers and films, their transnational connections to funders and exhibition circuits abroad, and their willingness to hustle are all key linkages between them and show that they are meaningfully connected. Their shared gender is a starting point, but as I have shown throughout this thesis, gender must be approached intersectionally and in context.

As I argued in my Introduction, gender has received remarkably little attention in the scholarship on African film and most of what does exist looks at gender analysis from a textual perspective. Rather than adopting this approach, throughout this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate how a gendered and feminist framework can be applied to studying the labour of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. The filmmakers in this study are united by shared gender, but a postcolonial feminist analysis suggests thinking about identity in a way that notes that racial, class, and gendered identities are not separate from one another but rather exist "as part of a permeable interwoven relationality" (Shohat 2006, 2). As such, throughout this thesis I have taken an intersectional approach and particularly emphasised the way class status impacts the life and work chances of Nairobi-based female filmmakers and how they hustle to succeed in an extremely precarious situation.

I began by examining a wide selection of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers including their stylistically internationalised films that are usually the subject of close textual analysis – such as *Something Necessary*, *Pumzi*, *The Battle of*

the Sacred Tree, and *Saikati* – and those films that do not reach a global standard and are correspondingly usually neglected by scholars. Through this non-hierarchical approach to their films, I was able to show that Nairobi-based female filmmakers are *both* filmmakers *and* entrepreneurs willing and able to make stylistically internationalised films and locally oriented films geared towards testing new markets in Kenya. Furthermore, this analysis uncovered the fact that rather than being linked by a thematic emphasis on gender or telling 'women's stories' the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are in fact most dominantly linked by a shared preoccupation with interrogating class issues.

Examining the full oeuvres of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is essential to combatting the stubbornly persistent marginalisation of female filmmakers in African film studies scholarship. Diawara, for instance, apologises in his book for ignoring African female filmmakers noting that every reason he could come up with for this lack of attention "now … seemed too easy and sounded like excuses" (2010, 161). To give another example, Murphy and Williams state that "the most regrettable omission" of their book is that they only include one female filmmaker (2007, 5). I have shown that narrowly focusing on auteur filmmaking leads to these problems, and as such it is no longer justifiable to apologise for ignoring female filmmakers, instead a new methodology is necessary to write the complete history of filmmaking by Africans – both female and male.

A central argument of this thesis is that in order to understand the extent to which Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be considered to constitute a film movement they must be approached from both local and transnational perspectives. My grounded approach of long-term fieldwork in Nairobi was central to uncovering the actual extent of this movement. When I began this research project my purpose was to examine the trend of successful Kenyan female filmmakers, and I saw them as successful because of their participation in the international film festival circuit. I intended to focus my research on the directors Judy Kibinge, Wanuri Kahiu, Ng'endo Mukii, and Hawa Essuman. However, once I began examining these filmmakers in context I was able to uncover the true scope of the movement that they are part of. These filmmakers exist alongside women like Appie Matere and Dorothy Ghettuba who undertake bold experiments in

producing film and television that are reshaping the local production landscape on their own terms, and other up and coming filmmakers such Wangechi Ngugi, Philippa Ndisi-Hermann, Jackie Lebo, and Zippy Kimundu that all work across a wide range of formats and entrepreneurially experiment in order to realise their creative visions. Each of these filmmakers, and the others analysed across this thesis, is deserving of further scholarly attention.

A key intervention in my research is to examine *both* directors *and* producers. Once I began to do so – and correspondingly distanced myself from a conception of filmmakers as 'auteurs' – I could see that far from a movement of auteur directors with success on the international film festival circuit, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are a movement of entrepreneurial hustlers capable of experimenting in multiple screen media forms. Their working location of Nairobi is essential to constituting them as a film movement. A key benefit of the city is its environment of media convergence that allows Nairobi-based female filmmakers to fluidly shift between producing a very wide variety of content. Nairobi-based female filmmakers may move between producing high quality television for cross continental broadcasters, producing lauded 'festival' films, working in extremely low budget modes, and self-financing their creative projects and sustaining their careers through commissioned fiction and documentary work, alongside many other strategies. Through an intersectional approach that examines gender in context, I have shown that the middle class position of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is essential to allowing them to profit from Nairobi's environment of media convergence. Throughout this thesis I have argued that rather than focusing on only directors – or only the directorial works of filmmakers who also work in other ways – it is necessary to consider filmmakers much more holistically and include the full scope of their work. For instance, Judy Kibinge has directed several films, but she also runs a small production company, writes, and runs a documentary film fund, has worked in television, and made corporate and creative documentaries. Knowing this, it becomes increasingly untenable to segregate her directorial projects from the rest of her work. My research has shown the necessity of considering all aspects of her career to understanding how *any* of this screen media is made and circulated.

A key feature linking Nairobi-based female filmmakers is their shared transnational connections. Through an approach that foregrounds the agency of filmmakers in negotiating encounters with 'foreign' funds and distribution circuits I have shown that cross-border filmmaking relationships are not inherently suspicious, Tarzanist (Diawara 2010), or Neo-Oriental (Halle 2010). Rather, the Euro-American projects financing films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers – such as Focus Features Africa First and One Fine Day Films – do not have singular agendas, and those multiple agendas are further complicated when the agency of every filmmaker is taken into account. Furthermore, I have contested the common assumption that once a film is popular on a particular international circuit (namely the film festival circuit) it loses 'local' resonance with audiences in the filmmaker's home country. I have shown, through examples like *Soul Boy*, that the fact that a film is successful in a film festival abroad does not mean that it will not be meaningful or popular locally; *both* contexts must be studied before any such conclusions can be drawn. To that effect, I have examined the circulation of screen media productions by Nairobi-based female filmmakers transnationally as well as within Nairobi. I have demonstrated that far from being 'festival' films pandering to foreign audiences, there are local audiences for the films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers are hustling to develop those audiences into markets.

Importantly, a key aspect of my research was to examine films that have had a wide circulation, such as *Pumzi* or *Saikati*, as well as those that have never been aired, such as *Headlines in History* or *Pumzika*. I have specifically examined the capitalist machinery that decides what products become visible and those which remain marginalised through the concept of market censorship. I have shown that both state and market censors create limits on the kinds of screen media products Nairobi-based spectators can encounter, but also emphasised that local curators, filmmakers, and exhibition spaces are working to build new audiences for locally made productions. As with transnational funding bodies, here it is again essential to examine the agency of each filmmaker in negotiating with powerful gatekeepers such as broadcasters and state censors. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are united because their work circulates within the same

distribution and exhibition channels in Nairobi, and that they share a similar desire to change this landscape so that it is more open to the kinds of content they want to create – for instance, through producing creative documentaries at Docubox, or exploring the possibilities of digital and online distribution to make the kinds of television programs that broadcasters are not currently interested in purchasing.

Through an approach that pays careful attention to filmmaking work (labour) I have shown that more than being auteurs wedded to a conception of filmmaking as high art, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are entrepreneurial hustlers capable of enormous creative experimentation. I have shown that understanding the hustle of these filmmakers – and the fact that they self-designate themselves as hustlers – requires keeping both local and transnational perspectives in tension. In relation to Nairobi's working classes the middle class and transnationally connected Nairobi-based female filmmakers look remarkably privileged, yet, once situated within the global filmmaking economy a very different picture emerges. I have shown that their practice of hustling is born out of precarity, but also that it is a creative practice in its own right. Through hustling Nairobi-based female filmmakers have created a vibrant screen media industry without state support, and worked to overcome many of what they see as the most pressing challenges facing their industry, such as piracy or a lack of viable markets for their films. Not all of their projects are successful – for instance Wanjiru Kinyanjui's experiments in Riverwood did not lead to a radical new production model for locally made films – but the point is that Nairobi-based female filmmakers are willing to undertake these experiments and that their flexibility and entrepreneurship is a defining feature of their career biographies.

Throughout this thesis I have hoped to demonstrate that understanding how Nairobi-based female filmmakers work requires an intersectional feminist framework of analysis. For instance, the first fiction film directed by a Kenyan woman, *Saikati*, was highly influenced by director Anne Mungai's gender and her desire to tell a story that narrated some of her own experiences; yet, understanding how the film was produced and how the content took shape also requires situating the film in the context of the development goals of the Kenyan state and Mungai's own perspective that film could be a valuable tool for nation

building. In the contemporary period, class status and gender are deeply imbricated in the hustle of filmmaking in Nairobi. Working for NGOs and the development industry more broadly is 'the bread and butter' of many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, but accessing these clients is dictated in large part by the class status of a given filmmaker. All filmmakers in Nairobi work in precarious conditions, but those of a middle class rather than working class status, such as Nairobi-based female filmmakers, are able to access these 'bread and butter' networks and jobs and corresponding continue to work as filmmakers even as they struggle to finance their creative projects. An intersectional approach accounting for gender, but more importantly one that recognises that other identities might supersede the importance of gender as an explanatory variable in some instances, allows for a full understanding of the dynamic of creative hustling in Nairobi and how Nairobi-based female filmmakers have been able to hustle to success.

This thesis is a necessarily a modest contribution and much work remains to be done in the fields of women's cinema studies, African screen media studies, transnational film studies, and creative and cultural industries. I hope through this thesis to have demonstrated the value of a contextual approach to gender and film scholarship. I hope to have shown that automatically linking female filmmakers together for analysis because of their gender is problematic, and instead demonstrated the utility of an approach that studies female filmmakers in context. One tendency in the literature (cf. White 2015) is to select female filmmakers from across the world and group them together for analysis in the assumption that they are most meaningfully connected to each other – as opposed to, for instance, men from their local working contexts – because of their gender. Further research is needed on African and other female filmmakers that adopts a field-based approach to studying their patterns of work, and I suggest that in addition to focusing on their films it is necessary to focus on their labour. Furthermore, through grounding itself in cultural and creative industries, transnational film studies, and African screen media studies, my thesis aimed to speak back to world cinema scholarship, and I hope to have shown the use of a city-based approach in world cinema scholarship, and particularly the kind that seeks to understand transnational connections in film production and circulation. Through studying how female

filmmakers work in the city of Nairobi I have been able to show the necessity of defining filmmakers not has the creators of 'films' but rather much more holistically as the creators of 'screen media.' There is much to be learned through examining filmmakers within their local screen media production ecosystems. A grounded approach using long term fieldwork in the locations where the filmmakers work is necessary for yielding these insights.

Through long-term study of Nairobi-based female filmmakers in their working contexts, this thesis has demonstrated the true extent of this hitherto marginalised filmmaking movement. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are truly inspiring and are a revolutionary movement within the field of African filmmaking for building a vibrant industry, despite their precarity, through their willingness to hustle. I humbly hope that this thesis offers a foundation for a further examination of their work and encourages further contextual and field-work grounded scholarship on female filmmakers.

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Yellow Fever. 2012. Dir. Ng'endo Mukii. Independent production. Short documentary animation.

Appendix 1: Sample Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about the work you are doing now?
2. Is Nairobi a good place to be a filmmaker?
3. I often hear creatives say that filmmaking isn't considered a "real job" in Kenya. Why?
4. Do you think there is a supportive community of filmmakers and film professionals in Kenya?
5. Do you think the film industry has taken off in the last 15 years? Why or why not?
6. Can you tell me about your process of getting an idea from thought to screen?
7. How do you find funding for your projects?
8. What do you think about the role of international/foreign institutions and funds in the Kenyan industry? How about the role of transnational film projects?
9. What do you think about quotas for local content on TV?
10. Who is your intended audience, and how does this correspond to your actual audience?
11. How does piracy impact you and the industry?
12. Is filmmaking a hustle in Kenya?
13. What role does the government have to play in supporting the industry? Is the KFC helping the industry? Why or why not?
14. It seems that nature of the industry here is to have multiple projects on the go at once. Is this true for you? Why do you think this is?
15. Where did you do your film training? What do you think about the state of film training in Kenya?
16. Where has your work been shown and how do you feel about these respective outlets? (E.g. film festivals, online platforms, TV stations, theatres)
17. Has leaving and coming back impacted your artistic process?
18. How supportive are broadcasters for creative content?