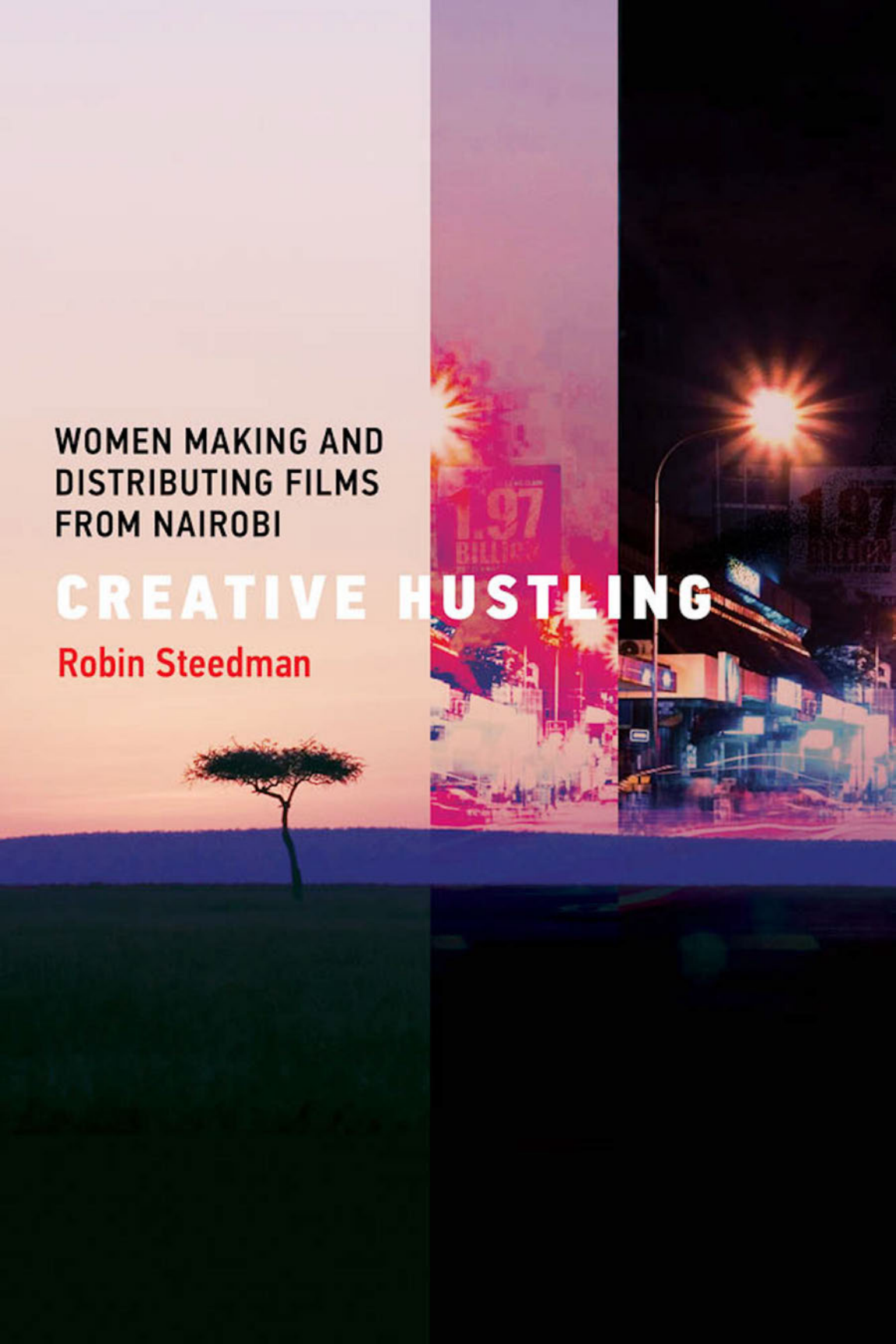
WOMEN MAKING AND
DISTRIBUTING FILMS
FROM NAIROBI
CREATIVE HUSTLING
Robin Steedman

CREATIVE HUSTLING

Distribution Matters

Edited by Joshua Braun and Ramon Lobato

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CREATIVE HUSTLING

WOMEN MAKING AND DISTRIBUTING FILMS FROM NAIROBI

ROBIN STEEDMAN

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INTRODUCTION:
FEMALE FILMMAKERS AT WORK IN NAIROBI

It is November 2018 and I am sitting in a sold-out cinema in London waiting for the opening credits to roll on Wanuri Kahiu's latest film, *Rafiki*. The excitement in the crowd is palpable and the room buzzes with conversations. Some viewers no doubt came because *Rafiki* had the cachet of a Cannes Film Festival premiere, while others were likely drawn by the controversy, as this teen romance was banned in Kenya for daring to show a love story between two women. Perhaps some in the audience were longstanding fans of Kahiu's work—after all, her 2010 short film *Pumzi* was widely acclaimed as a first in African science fiction cinema, but no doubt others saw that the screening was part of the Film Africa festival (a London-based festival celebrating African cinema) "Afrobubblegum" strand and were intrigued at what a film described in these terms would be like. As I sit waiting, I think about the journey the film took to make it to this cinema screen and the entrepreneurial labor that was involved for Kahiu to transform Monica Arac de Nyeko's short story "Jambula Tree" into such a daring film that could travel so far. Understanding how this came to pass requires we take a trip to Nairobi.

This unlikely city, capital of Kenya, is home to something extraordinary. Here, the most critically acclaimed filmmakers—both directors and producers—are women. Yet women make up less than 10 percent of film directors globally.[1] To give only two examples of the troublingly small participation of women in global film industries, the British Film Industry's 2018 *Statistical Yearbook* noted that women directed only 16 percent of films released in the United Kingdom in 2017, and Martha M. Lauzen's contemporary "Celluloid Ceiling" report indicated that women were directors of only 11 percent of the top 250 grossing films of 2017 in America.[2] Against this backdrop of sobering statistics, the success of female filmmakers in Nairobi is all the more significant. Yet Nairobi is not an easy place to be a filmmaker, as Kahiu herself indicated in a 2010 interview with CNN where she said, "I am a filmmaker

when I'm outside the country—in Kenya, I'm a hustler."[3] Her words struck me and throughout my research I asked each filmmaker I met whether they agreed filmmaking in Nairobi is a "hustle." In response I received an almost unanimous, immediate, and enthusiastic "yes." Nairobi-based female filmmakers face many challenges in their careers, the biggest of which is finding a profitable and sustainable way of distributing their films. How female filmmakers "hustle" to rise to this challenge is the focus of this book.

Already Kahiu brings to our attention the importance of location as well as the politics of transnationalism for women working in film in Nairobi, and throughout this book I will pay careful attention to the dynamics of their working location and how that work is informed by transnational forces—whether that is evaluating their relationships with international funding bodies as they work to produce movies, or the politics of film distribution in the international film festival circuit. These women hustle in Nairobi, but transnational forces are part of local experiences and both must be studied together. To understand the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, I adopt two key critical frames throughout this book. First, I approach these women as filmmakers and entrepreneurs, thus moving beyond an "auteur" approach to one focused on their complete body of work and the full scope of their creative and entrepreneurial experimentation. This means closely studying how production and distribution are intertwined. My second critical frame is an intersectional approach focusing on the interrelationships between gender, class, and race, and how the filmmakers' careers are shaped specifically by being women, African, and middle-class. Female filmmakers have been marginalized, and African female filmmakers more so. This book contributes to rectifying this imbalance by spotlighting an extraordinary case of female filmmakers at work.

Creative Hustling contributes to the task of de-Westernizing media studies and thinking from an "ex-centric" perspective where theorizing is grounded in the experiences of places outside dominant centers of power,[4] through an in-depth study of Nairobi-based female filmmakers' work producing and distributing films.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Nairobi is the unquestionable center of film production in Kenya. Indeed, while filmmakers work across the country and local industries exist in other

cities, Nairobi's position is so dominant that film production in the country is best described not as Kenyan filmmaking but as "Nairobi filmmaking"—to use the words of veteran film producer Appie Matere.[5] To understand why, we need to know more about the city. Mainstream visions of Nairobi usually fall between two poles: the "Nairobbery" of crime and poverty and the leafy luxury of colonial-era estates made famous by Karen Blixen and later Sydney Pollack in various iterations of *Out of Africa*. But these dichotomous narratives obscure what makes Nairobi "sexy as hell," to borrow the expression of filmmaker Hawa Essuman, and why women have found a unique success here.

Nairobi is a dynamic business center, and in particular is an emerging information and communication technology hub—sometimes called the Silicon Savannah.[6] It is also the central location in East Africa for international businesses, banks, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).[7] Nairobi has been marked by extreme precarity and inequality since its founding as a colonial city in 1899, and Nairobi as an urban space exists as a microcosm of Kenya's wider context as one of "the top five countries in Africa with the worst income distribution rate, and among the top ten most unequal in the world."[8] Nairobi is also home to a significant and growing middle class, and Kenya's population as a whole is now 44.9 percent middle-class, according to the African Development Bank.[9] Further, confidence and entrepreneurialism in creative industries echo a wider context of optimism in Kenya linked to social and political developments such as the increasing return of diasporic Kenyans and the new constitution.[10] As Hawa Essuman said, Nairobi "has all the elements that a capital city should have," and opportunities exist here for those creatives willing and able to seize them.[11]

Filmmakers working within this space must be highly entrepreneurial to build and sustain their careers. They must take on multiple roles in any given project—from director to writer to editor to producer—and their labor does not stop there, as in many cases they also act as distributors. Of course, production and distribution are deeply imbricated in many contexts: In Nollywood, Nigeria's famous informal video industry, film financing is dominantly provided by powerful distributors (called marketers).[12] Turning to the sphere of international "art" cinema, this same trend exists, as we can see with film festival production funds. Film festivals compete with each other for prestige and standing, and one strategy they use

to gain standing and recognition is to support the production of films they can then go on to premiere and showcase.[13] Within the sphere of Internet-distributed television we see the same, for instance, in how the African subscription video on demand (SVOD) platform Afrinolly attempted to drive the production of short form content more suitable for viewing on mobile phones by holding a short film competition in 2013–2014.[14] While production and distribution are arguably always entwined, they must especially be studied together in the case of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, because the labor of doing both is taking place within the same *bodies*. If an entrepreneur is responsible for both the production and distribution of their film, and we want to understand them *as an entrepreneur as well as a filmmaker*, then both these modes of working (production and distribution) must be studied together.

Filmmaking and the development industry are deeply imbricated in Nairobi with international development organizations, such as the Ford Foundation and Hivos, and European embassies (particularly the German and French embassies) significantly sponsoring films, exhibition spaces, and arts centers in the city. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that this funding directly conditions the creative outputs themselves, overriding the creativity of filmmakers.[15] As we shall see throughout this book and particularly in chapter 2, Nairobi-based female filmmakers skillfully navigate the politics of balancing funder agendas with their own creative agendas and career advancement strategies. While some argue that donor funding shapes the creative product and, in the case of East African film, makes it "issue based, message oriented, agenda defined,"[16] Nairobi-based female filmmakers actively contest the framing implicit in this developmental narrative. Wanuri Kahiu is one director who does so, notably through her "Afrobubblegum" agenda to create films that are "fun and flirty, confident and complex, without the burden of being issue driven,"[17] and her perspective is widely shared.

Where one fits within this city and its media industries has much to do with class position. It is essential to note here that the Nairobi-based female filmmakers studied in this book are all middle-class, and studying the impact of *class* on filmmakers' careers is central to this book. In studying the momentum and entrepreneurialism of creative workers in the middle class, we would do well to heed cultural critic Emma Dabiri's warning to all those seeking to study "Afropolitan" (a trendy portmanteau of African and cosmopolitan) experience: "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."[18] We must study middle classes in Africa because they have received exceptionally limited attention until very recently, but we must do so with a keen eye on context and an intersectional assessment of privilege. In Nairobi, middle-class and working-class filmmakers make their films using different production models, and the films are distributed in different circuits. Working-class filmmakers are associated with Nairobi's video film industry—named Riverwood—but Riverwood is relatively untouched by the Nairobi-based female filmmakers who are the subject of this book, as we will see in chapter 2.

To succeed in Nairobi, filmmakers must hustle. Hustling is a mode of working where individuals must entrepreneurially seek out their own opportunities within precarious contexts. It involves improvisation and strategizing to capitalize on every opportunity—whether that is as a film student seeking to launch a career in Hollywood, as a webcam model looking to make a consistent income in the platform economy, as a creative woman from an ethnic minority background trying to build a sustainable career in the creative industries, or, indeed, as a Nairobi-based female filmmaker.[19] In Nairobi, "hustling"' tends to be used to describe individuals working within the context of Nairobi's informal labor market, where among 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."[20] While the specific strategies of hustling vary immensely, the labor of both Nairobi-based female filmmakers and other workers in Nairobi, such as informal settlement dwellers on the other end of the social spectrum, can be seen through the lens of hustling.

As filmmaker Hawa Essuman said to me, the fact that Nairobi is a good place to be a filmmaker is "evidenced by the fact that lots of other people are starting to make films here," but Nairobi is also a frontier: "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."[21] On this frontier, production and distribution are deeply intertwined, and I consider these two processes together throughout the book.

STUDYING AFRICAN FEMALE FILMMAKERS

Studying the complete careers of these filmmakers—including all their films and screen media productions as well as their other entrepreneurial

ventures—is essential for uncovering the participation of women in filmmaking in Nairobi. Even the most prominent filmmakers—such as Wanuri Kahiu—have highly diverse careers, moving between fiction and documentary, creative and corporate, and television and film productions. Like other Nairobi-based female filmmakers, Kahiu is not easy to classify because she works across a highly diverse range of screen media and other creative forms. She is most known, in addition to *Rafiki*, for her short film *Pumzi* (2010) and feature film *From a Whisper* (2009) but has also directed others. For instance, she was commissioned by South African pay TV company M-Net to make *For Our Land* (2009), a conventional expository documentary about Nobel Laureate Wangari Mathaai for the "Great Africans Series." She is credited as a producer on Nairobi-based male filmmaker Jim Chuchu's short film *Homecoming* (2013), and also runs a production company called Awali with her business partner Rebecca Chandler. She has experimented in television, producing one season of *State House* (2014) for the East African pay-TV network Zuku, 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 cowritten the short story "Rusties." Her authorial activities do not stop there: She also released the children's book *The Wooden Camel* in 2017. An approach that looks exclusively at film (celluloid or otherwise) or at film directing—an auteur study—risks missing the vital *interconnections* between all the diverse kinds of work that filmmakers like Kahiu do as entrepreneurs.

Despite the remarkable fact of their success as women in an industry that is dominated by men globally, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have received very little academic attention. The small amount of scholarship that does exist consists of close readings of their most famous films, and thus fits within the long-standing tradition of focusing on "auteurs" and master creators of cinematic art within film studies.[22] Yet as anthropologist and librarian Nancy Schmidt argues, "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."[23]

By engaging in field-based research with filmmakers, I was able to learn about their "failures" as well as successes, and all the entrepreneurial work

these filmmakers undertake to sustain their careers. I spent eight months in Nairobi (October 2014–June 2015). While in the field, I adopted two main methods: first, I conducted thirty-one semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven different female filmmakers (encompassing both directors and producers); second, I observed film festivals, screenings, and professional events in Nairobi to assess how the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are distributed and exhibited in their local market and internationally. To understand this remarkable industry, we have to look beyond its most famous outputs—its festival films—and examine the *work* of making and distributing films in this space. Rather than focusing on finished films (and more specifically complete "festival" films), *Creative Hustling* will look at the entrepreneurial labor—the hustling—that goes into making and distributing them in Nairobi.

Film and media scholars Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson advocate for an approach to film studies that focuses on the labor of making films, rather than the business of filmmaking or close analysis of film texts. They do so because the conditions of production in the global film industry (and particularly global Hollywood) of making "bigger and more spectacular amusements but at the same price point as last year's model, and in less time" have potentially "dire consequences for the personal and professional lives of media workers."[24] These conditions make it ever more important to adopt an approach to film and media industry studies that centers on workers—to study the conditions in which they work, but also how they creatively hustle to succeed.

This book will both build on and challenge scholarship in the wider field of cultural and creative industries on female creative labor, such as Brooke Erin Duffy's influential theory of aspirational labor.[25] She studies female work in social media (particularly blogs and Instagram) in the U.S. fashion industry, but her conceptualization of success as long-term financial stability is problematically normative and she consequently presents the women entering this field of work as naïve and misguided. Studies of the cultural and creative industries have drawn essential critical attention to the inequalities and hardships of working in the creative industries, and particularly so for workers who face inequality and discrimination based on race, gender, class, and other identities.[26] Deconstructing the "do what you love" narrative of passion, glamour, and fulfillment is important, but in attacking this narrative, some work risks going too far in the opposite

direction. Indeed, much of this research is so critical of working conditions and career chances in creative industries that it leaves little room for understanding how creatives—and particularly creative women—can find value in their professions. But they do find value—be it through the creation of new spaces of belonging and community, for example, or by creating entrepreneurial pathways that allow them to balance career and family goals.[27] This is certainly true of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.

Hustling is a way of understanding this labor not as naïve and misguided but rather as a deliberate strategy for constructing a good life in the present. Hustling does not discount the precarity of creative work or gloss over inequality; rather, it recognizes how creatives build meaningful lives and careers *within* precarity. Since my approach does not regard precarious labor as a deviation from "the good life," I can show how hustling is an innovative and creative form of labor with implications for how we understand creative labor far beyond Nairobi.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This is not a book about auteur cinema focusing on masterpiece films. *Creative Hustling* is about the work and the struggles filmmakers go through to create the kinds of films audiences want to watch, and the labor filmmakers undertake getting those films distributed. Each chapter considers the challenges they face and their innovative solutions from a different angle.

This book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, "The Makings of an Industry," introduces the development of the industry over the last fifteen years. It shows that Nairobi has a vibrant screen media market marked by filmmakers' format shifting fluidly between commercial and creative, short and feature, and television and documentary projects, and that the ability to be flexible is essential to being a successful hustler in this space. It also discusses two crucial obstacles filmmakers face: a lack of state support and little social respect for their profession. Chapter 2, "Making Transnational Cinema," shifts from a local focus to a transnational one. Nairobi-based female filmmakers work with Euro-American film funding and distribute their films internationally in film festivals, but critics worry this "foreign" involvement compromises the "authenticity" of the films. However, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are members of a transnational middle class, with transnational experiences and tastes, and when we account for

this we can see their cross-border relationships in film production and distribution in a new light. Chapter 3, "Entrepreneurialism and Stylistic Internationalization on Screen," examines why films are widely or narrowly distributed from a textual perspective. We will see that the well-traveled films all share a similar style, but that this style is not representative of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers as a whole. These filmmakers' larger collection of films is in fact much more entrepreneurial and experimental than the aforementioned outliers would suggest. Chapter 4, "Circulation and Censorship in Nairobi: On TV and Online," examines the mechanisms of state and market censorship that filmmakers have to contend with to distribute their films and television shows in Nairobi, as well as how they work to overcome these obstacles. It focuses specifically on how they hustle to make television shows and their innovations in online spaces. Chapter 5, "Watching Film in Nairobi," looks at distribution in Nairobi through examining live film screenings (such as film festivals) as a way in which local filmmakers, curators, and exhibition spaces are working to build new audiences for locally made films. Finally, chapter 6, "Precarity, Entrepreneurialism, and Innovation in Nairobi," demonstrates that while hustling is born out of precarity, it is also a creative practice in its own right. It specifically considers two innovations in addressing distribution problems: the activities of the local film fund Docubox and the strategy of "leaning in" to piracy instead of fighting it.

As we will see throughout this book, 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,"[28] and likewise the hustling of Nairobi-based female filmmakers can teach us important lessons about what it takes to produce and distribute film today, in a global age increasingly marked by flexible and precarious work.

1

THE MAKINGS OF AN INDUSTRY: FILMMAKING ACROSS LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL SPACE

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 returned home to Nairobi from New York City looking to get married who falls for, and then marries, the notorious playboy Murags. When his ex-girlfriend Rose also moves back to Nairobi, the titular "dangerous affair" ensues, and while Rose and Murags end up together in the end, they do so as social pariahs. *Dangerous Affair* was a local success alongside winning Best East African Production at the Zanzibar International Film Festival in 2003.[1] 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 twenty years. Her career has spanned feature fiction, documentaries, television, and commissioned corporate work; 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* (dir. Anne Mungai, 1992) and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (dir. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, 1995), but it was *Dangerous Affair* that marked the start of a filmmaking renewal in which women have taken the lead, a shift made all the more significant because of the historical marginalization of women in African film industries.

A central idea in this book is that to understand the hustling of Nairobi-based female filmmakers we have to adopt local and transnational frames. Notably, an analytical lens I do not adopt is that of national cinema with a corresponding emphasis on the country of Kenya. A national framework is useful for analyzing how policymaking and other government-supported infrastructures shape filmmaking in particular locations, and in the case of auteur cinema, for example, state support has been crucial.[2] However, within the Kenyan context the state has not played this facilitating role. Filmmakers were strongly critical of the government for not having a film

granting system, and instead operating a film loan system that was widely considered laughably impractical.[3] They felt, as Appie Matere said, that the parastatal responsible for promoting the Kenyan film industry—the Kenya Film Commission—has taken the approach of "selling Kenya as a [film] destination instead of really trying to build within the industry"—that is, they have focused on trying more to attract foreign productions to come to Kenya to film than on building the capacity of local filmmakers.[4] Kenya has long been an important film destination, and attracting foreign productions can be valuable for local filmmakers, for example, because they work on these productions and in so doing enhance their skills as well as earn an income, thus leading to up-skilling in the local filmmaking economy.[5] Nairobi-based female filmmakers recognized these benefits, while also being very clear that other interventions in the industry were necessary, particularly grant funding.[6] Commercial funding is often not available to independent filmmakers and also not desired by them because it is seen as too risky, and this was the case in Nairobi.[7] 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. Rather than a nationally bounded approach, this chapter will examine how connections are taking place across national borders, all the while situated in Nairobi.

The vibrancy of Nairobi's screen media market is sustained by a confluence of artistic, commercial, and institutional networks—some local, some transnational—that intersect in the city. Of critical importance is the particular mode of working in this space where Nairobi-based female filmmakers fluidly shift formats between commercial and creative, short and feature, and television and documentary projects to seize any possible opportunity to create. The women filmmakers discussed here are connected by their shared Kenyan nationality, but their more important connection is their choice to live and work in Nairobi.

THE EARLY YEARS: THE CASE OF *SAIKATI*

Pioneering women set the stage for the contemporary era where female filmmakers are flourishing in Nairobi. They opened doors for the next generation, acting as a powerful inspiration. Actress and filmmaker Lupita Nyong'o felt women had such a strong presence in Kenya's contemporary

film industry because of these women: "Women's early success feeds on itself. If you look at Kenya as the paternalistic society that it has become—but still there were women making films from the beginning—chances are high that more women will get into filmmaking as time goes on, right?"[8]

The first noted film by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker is the feature-length fiction *Saikati* (1992), directed by Anne Mungai. The film 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 realize 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 "modern"/urban and "traditional"/rural life is the central tension that structures the entire film. The narrative of the film as well as its production conforms to the conventions and processes of so-called FESPACO cinema (referencing the famed Festival Pan-Africain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou), or "serious" African cinema, and correspondingly *Saikati* has been screened at film festivals all over the world. Mungai had made a number of TV documentaries prior to *Saikati*,[9] but it was *Saikati* that launched her career, and her reputation as a filmmaker is almost entirely based on this production.

Mungai was part of the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and alongside fellow graduates of the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) Jane Murago Munene and Dommie Yambo-Odotte, and German-trained Wanjiru Kinyanjui, formed what African feminist film scholar Beti Ellerson terms "the vanguard of Kenya's female visionaries."[10] KIMC was government-run at the time 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."[11] Mungai was thus making *Saikati* within an institutional context deeply connected to the national development goals and agendas of the Kenyan state.

Mungai faced a great deal of difficulty making the film because of her gender. When she made the film there were very few women working in

the film industry, so she found herself in the position of giving instructions to a male crew that had difficulty respecting female authority. 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.[12]

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."[13] To make the film, as a woman, Mungai had to go through processes of negotiation to navigate the gender norms that structured her social environment while also boldly challenging them through taking up the position of film director. African feminist theorist Obioma Nnaemeka suggests, "African feminism challenges through negotiation, accommodation, and compromise,"[14] and we can interpret Mungai's work in this light.

Despite the challenges she faced, Mungai produced, directed, wrote, and edited *Saikati*. She made the film while working at KIMC, which was funded by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (a political foundation affiliated with, but independent from, the Social Democratic Party of Germany)—and it was through their support of KIMC that Mungai was provided with the materials to make the film. *Saikati* was shot on 16-mm 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. The film's crew was entirely Kenyan. Financing the project was difficult, and she said 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." She also received in-kind contributions from Serena Hotels and Air Kenya—leading to product-placement sequences in the film.[15] These struggles in film financing have been part of the African cinematic landscape since its beginnings in the 1960s.

Within a context of state-supported filmmaking supplemented by transnational resources and corporate donations, Mungai was able to tell a personal and creative story. 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."[16]

Mungai went to the trouble of actually making the film because of her need to tell her own story, assert her experiences, and express her political views about those experiences. Mungai's film and early career are thus intelligible according to African film scholar Lizelle Bisschoff's argument that African women filmmakers often decide to become filmmakers so they can express themselves and that "commonly their main goal is to offer alternative representations of African women as a counter to western and masculinist hegemony."[17] *Saikati* argues against male, gerontocratic control and asserts women's rights to independence through a story based closely on Mungai's lived experiences. African film scholar Melissa Thackway 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."[18] While Thackway's argument may stray toward the utopian, it cannot be simply discarded or we risk neglecting the very real structural inequality women in cinema face. As such, while Mungai is part of a generation of African filmmakers, of all genders, working to assert "authentic" national perspectives and create sociopolitical transformation, keeping gender in focus is essential to understanding Mungai's working context.

Making films has historically been extremely difficult for women in Africa.[19] Pioneering female filmmakers such as Mungai often made very few films—reflecting the difficulty of making them—and they often remain difficult to access and therefore watch even when they do exist.[20] In the 1990s, women tended to be found in editing and distribution positions for television or as actors in film, rather than in the more prestigious roles such as film director.[21]

African film studies long focused on these prestigious roles to the exclusion of other kinds of filmmaking practice—a situation that was thrown in sharp relief by Nollywood. Nollywood films have long been criticized by

scholars as lacking in terms of their sociopolitical messaging and aesthetics in comparison to other traditions of African cinema.[22] Film critics, scholars, and festivals accustomed to "art cinema" simply do not know what to do with Nollywood, and a "profoundly awkward" situation comes about because while Nollywood fulfills the political imperative these critics set of being an industry made by and watched by Africans, it does not meet their *aesthetic* criteria.[23]

It is worth pausing to consider the gender implications of separating video from celluloid production and prestigious from less prestigious roles. A certain type of film has been most celebrated by curators and scholars of African film, and this matters because women have been most active in other kinds of screen media production. This kind of celebration of film in its exclusive association with celluloid (and therefore deliberately not video) has made Nairobi-based female filmmakers invisible. For example, the *Dictionary of African Filmmakers* lists only three filmmakers in Kenya's entire history (Sao Gamba, Anne Mungai, and Wanjiru Kinyanjui), consigning all other productions to a note stating that "a number of feature-length videos have been shot in Kenya in the 2000s" with an incomplete list of films, including shorts and documentaries, and no account of their importance.[24] Nairobi-based female filmmakers and their work is obscured in this approach. Rather than focusing only on masterpiece films, we must also account for the entrepreneurial experimentation of these filmmakers if we want to understand how female filmmakers work both historically and today.

ENTREPRENEURIALISM IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Many features of 1990s-era film productions such as *Saikati* continue to be enduring fixtures of Nairobi-based filmmaking, including the difficulty in finding financing for feature fiction films and the necessity of transnational sponsorship for this endeavor. Yet there are key differences. Rather than being educated by, and working at, state institutions, the new generation has often trained at film schools abroad and frequently run their own small production companies, relying on their entrepreneurial instincts rather than state support. This generation is also 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."[25]

As was mentioned in the introduction, the urban space of Nairobi is central to the emergence of a lively and sustainable screen media production industry in the new millennium. The environment and context of Nairobi conditions the materiality of the films made there, in much the same way as Lagos shapes Nollywood.[26] While there is some film production elsewhere in the country, Nairobi is the unquestionable center. Nairobi's centrality in filmmaking is paralleled by its significance in all business; indeed, "'everyone who counts' has his business there."[27] Nairobi is a center for technological innovation in East Africa with a significant presence of technology companies and digital entrepreneurship.[28] Contemporary Nairobi is an area 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 center of Kenya.

The large presence of NGOs and international organizations in the city is also of crucial importance to filmmakers. NGOs are an essential client for local filmmakers: They are the "bread and butter of this industry," to use the words of Nairobi-based female filmmaker Toni Kamau.[29] Nairobi is also a regional center for producing commercials. Thus, there is infrastructure in place in the city for filmmaking and potential commercial work for industry professionals. This is a key enabling condition because it creates a situation where film industry professionals can be constantly working on screen media, even if they cannot be working on fiction or creative projects. Another key feature of the city for sustaining Nairobi-based female filmmakers is the local presence of international cultural institutions, and more specifically the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française. The Goethe Institut sometimes provides funding for films—the Pan-African projects "Latitude—Quest for the Good Life" and "African Metropolis" are the most important—but the more significant role of these institutions is that they provide exhibition spaces.[30] The auditoriums of the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française, alongside the art center Pawa254, are the most central spaces—both in terms of being spatially located in the center of town and in terms of importance—for local films to be exhibited (almost always for free). Nairobi does have conventional cinemas, but they tend to screen locally produced content only on an ad hoc basis in favor of focusing on Hollywood and sometimes Bollywood films, so the presence of transnational cultural institutions is essential to the local circulation of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, as we will see in more detail in chapter 5.

The career of filmmaker Judy Kibinge has emerged as a result of many of these important shifts in Nairobi-based filmmaking in the last fifteen years. Before embarking on a career as a filmmaker, Kibinge had a successful career in advertising—she was creative director of McCann Erickson Kenya. She has a bachelor of arts in design for communications from Manchester Polytechnic, but never attended film school. In 1999, she left advertising to become an independent filmmaker and began directing commercial documentaries for the American multinational agricultural giant Monsanto (now part of the German pharmaceutical conglomerate Bayer). Subsequently, she made her first fiction film—the short *The Aftermath* (2002)—with M-Net New Directions, a project that is part of M-Net Cares, the corporate social investment group of the transnational media corporation.[31] New Directions is explicitly for early career filmmakers and targets first-time directors and scriptwriters. It then mentors the filmmakers and refines the projects to create thirty-minute dramas it then broadcasts.[32] New Directions initially operated exclusively in South Africa, but it expanded in 1999 to include Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria and became known as New Directions Africa.[33] Kibinge pitched her project to M-Net using the same methods she would use to pitch a thirty-second commercial, and believes it was this level of attention to detail that secured her the position despite her lack of background in filmmaking.[34]

Kibinge's breakout moment came when executive 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.[35] Furthermore, the film also received a great deal of press attention because so few films were being made locally at the time.[36] *Dangerous Affair* was shot digitally (on the professional videocassette technology Betacam) rather than on celluloid, and it is worth pausing to consider the significance of this technological shift. Unlike Ghana where "no Ghanaian women had directed or produced a documentary or feature film before the advent of video movies,"[37] Kenyan women such as Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui had produced films on celluloid, even if for the first decades of production these films were few and far between. Much like other ventures from across the continent signaling a technological revolution, in Nairobi "equipment became cheaper, so barriers to entry were lower,"[38] but unlike Nigeria and Ghana "viable" local production would emerge only after *Dangerous Affair*.[39]

A romantic comedy about the loves, marriages, and affairs of young urban professionals, *Dangerous Affair* explored a subject not yet taken up in Kenyan cinema. The film is set in a middle-class milieu and its dominant locations are upscale bars, parties, and homes where stylishly dressed young professionals unaffectedly discuss sex and romance. 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 characterization.[40] 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. The film depicts what anthropologist Rachel Spronk calls Nairobi's young professionals. These young professionals are generally born and raised in Nairobi with only weak ties to their families' rural homes. They are cosmopolitan and seek to connect with the world outside Kenya, seeing themselves as "the frontrunners of a contemporary identity in which professional pride, progressive attitudes, and a fashionable outlook are important markers."[41] In *Saikati* progressivism meant women holding on to their rural roots while also becoming educated, whereas for the young professionals in *Dangerous Affair* there is no disjuncture between African authenticity and urban cosmopolitanism.

Kibinge has continued to work on commissioned projects, including corporate documentaries, because it has not been financially feasible to sustain her career making only fiction films. In her words: "I've never made any money on any drama. I've never paid rent off any dramatic film. In fact it costs you."[42] 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": "any story, even corporate videos, can be proper feature length documentaries that are gripping."[43] She brought this philosophy to her Transparency International film *A Voice in the Dark* (2005) (which was cut down to *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [2007]) and she continued this approach in her sixty-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."[44] *Headlines in History* blends archival footage and interviews, but

transcends this educational and expository style of documentary making 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 also runs a small production company called Seven Productions.[45] She describes Seven as "really just me and my computer,"[46] but through Seven she has produced a number of films. She made the forty-minute noir thriller *Killer Necklace* (2008) in partnership with M-Net New Directions and two documentaries: *Peace Wanted Alive* (2009), about the 2007–2008 Kenyan postelection violence and *Scarred: The Anatomy of a Massacre* (2015), about the 1984 massacre of Somali men at the Wagalla airstrip in the Wajir County of North Eastern Kenya.[47] *Scarred* is a passion project she developed over the course of four years after she met survivors of the massacre. She received financial support from the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA), the Nairobi-based branch of the American Open Society Foundation, to make the film, but acted as the director, producer, and researcher. *Scarred* is a particularly interesting example of her work. Based on her advertising background she 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 described the 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.[48]

The result of this unusual approach is dignified scar portraits. Each portrait is a close-up black and white photo against an opaque background, and the scars are the focal point. While the idea to have an anchoring visual theme in the film was drawn from her advertising background, the images themselves 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. This sort of creativity and boundary pushing has been evident throughout her career regardless of the genre or medium used to tell a particular story.

As the example of Kibinge shows, binary categorizations of African screen media—such as between film and video or serious festival films and trivial entertainment—do little to explain trends in filmmaking because the filmmakers themselves work across these divisions.[49] As has been shown, much of the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers shifts between formats and shows a diverse way of working that cannot solely be confined to "festival" work. Acclaimed "festival" filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu herself is notable here because while her international reputation is due to her fiction films (*Pumzi* and *Rafiki* most notably), throughout her career she has moved between feature and short fiction films, documentaries, television, production, and writing. In her words:

> I wouldn't have said that I would do documentaries but I started doing them because those were the jobs that were available. . . . I mean all of it is storytelling and I love all of it, it's just that I really did think that I'd be doing more feature films and shorts than documentary projects.[50]

This format shifting is not a matter of artistic compromise—Kahiu made it very clear that she loves the storytelling afforded by documentary filmmaking—but an adaptation to a constantly evolving market. Kahiu is but one example of this trend, and indeed this form of working is completely typical of women operating in film in Nairobi today.

The examples of Kibinge and Kahiu are among wider convergences taking place 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 blurred. As Moradewun Adejunmobi has explained, "cinema" and "television" are meaningfully differentiated not by the "specifics of the platform or the site of spectatorship" 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."[51] This shift happened within the twenty-first-century context of detheatricalization across Africa and the expansion of the popularity of television viewership. Conventional differentiations between film and television are no longer sufficient within this context.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers also seek to have their films broadcast on television, but for broadcasters to buy films instead of conventional television series, "the quality of the movies will have to be consistent and will need to come in numbers."[52] Nairobi-based female filmmakers' films are of the technical quality required for television (unlike the Riverwood filmmakers Overbergh examines), but they are not made en masse, which makes it harder to program them on television. Appie Matere, for example, made 260 episodes for the daily soap opera *Kona*, which demonstrates the scale of difference between an individual film and what could be required to be picked up by a television station. Filmmakers in Nairobi—both Riverwood- and Nairobi-based female filmmakers—face the difficulty of generating the consistent quantity of films required to carve out a space for their films on television.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers work in multiple formats (as previously mentioned), and this multiformat convergence helps explain why even despite a lack of state and social support a vibrant screen media industry of international caliber 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 film producer Appie Matere. Zamaradi undertook a bold filmmaking experiment when they attempted—successfully—to produce fifty-six sixty-minute films for the South African pay TV company M-Net in a five-month period. 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 a variety of interchangeable indoor and outdoor sets were constructed. 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.[53]

The pace of the shoot is reminiscent of Nollywood-style filmmaking,[54] 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 such as *Project Daddy* (dir. Judy Kibinge, 2004) and *Killer Necklace*, to the production of films in another format, and subsequently used the model developed through this project to shoot three TV shows simultaneously.

Adejunmobi's theory provides a space to think of all of Matere's modes of production together, both television and made-for-television movies as well as other aspects of filmmaking. Adejunmobi discusses convergence in modes of viewing and argues that film and television can no longer be meaningfully differentiated based on where and how they are watched. 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 her work, and that of other Nairobi-based female filmmakers, shows that conventional definitions of "African cinema" as embracing only film need to give way to the much wider concept of "African screen media" so as to be cognizant of the vital interplay between formats and modes of production happening in Nairobi today.

THE REEMERGENCE OF FESTIVAL FILMS

The contemporary filmmaking landscape that Nairobi-based female filmmakers must navigate is one marked by the worldwide proliferation of film festivals. Although there are exceptions, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have attracted attention largely because of their feature-length and short fiction films that have received acclaim on the international film festival circuit. Key examples include Anne Mungai (*Saikati*, 1992), Wanuri Kahiu (*Pumzi*, 2010; *Rafiki*, 2018), Hawa Essuman (*Soul Boy*, 2010), Ng'endo Mukii (*Yellow Fever*, 2012), and Judy Kibinge (*Something Necessary*, 2013). Film festivals have played a crucial role in bringing these filmmakers to international attention, and, as such, using African screen media scholar Lindiwe 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," and while these filmmakers have international perspectives and the desire to reach transnational audiences beyond their home locations, they nevertheless remain "marked" by their local contexts.[55] She

argues via de Valck that another characteristic of "festival" filmmakers is the way they value artistry and creativity over commercial concerns, while also maintaining that "art" and "commerce" are always imbricated.[56] 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 character traits and the personal background of filmmakers. As such, it is applicable not only to well-known Nairobi-based female filmmakers but also to rising stars.

Nairobi's "festival" filmmakers continually travel outside the country to study and work, just like other festival filmmakers who are marked by their mobility. This leads to African literature scholar Eileen Julien's important question: "what impact does residence abroad—or the continual shuttling between host country and homeland—have on literature and film by Africans?"[57] The mobility of "festival" filmmakers may be a sign of "these filmmakers' inability to convert symbolic capital accrued outside of the continent into other kinds of capital, particularly back home in Africa."[58] When Wanuri Kahiu made her statement that "I am a filmmaker when I'm outside the country—in Kenya, I'm a hustler,"[59] she not only had released an innovative and highly regarded new film (the science-fiction short film *Pumzi*) but had also received twelve 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" back home in Kenya.[60] A filmmaker may receive symbolic capital from attending prestigious festivals or winning awards, 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.

The transnational mobility of filmmakers also impacts the content they produce—which again highlights the need for a local and transnational perspective in studying them. In a statement that typifies the experience and perspective of many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, filmmaker Hawa Essuman 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.[61]

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 according to the formulation of African literary scholar Chielozona Eze, for whom 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."[62] 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,[63] and here Essuman's specific evocation of class is important. Travel and living between multiple spaces has had a vital influence on screen media production by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and we must be alive to the influence of transnational lives as well as the significance of place.

Filmmakers are led to "festival" filmmaking through various trajectories—some through film school training—Wanuri Kahiu did a master's in film directing at UCLA and Ng'endo Mukii trained at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Royal College of Art in London, for instance, but others through a "learning on the job" in Nairobi approach. A key example of this second trend is Hawa Essuman. She began her career in production before realizing 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.[64] Essuman had the opportunity to make her first film, *Selfish?* (2008), when she approached the local Nollywood-style production house Jitu Films—which made "really low budget films"—about creating a film for them. She said there was "barely a script," that it was shot in six days, and that the film has "so many problems it's ridiculous," but that

making the film was "a good education." Subsequently, she experimented with short films, filmed with the help of friends, so she could discover what her "own filmic voice looked like."[65] Following this she was accepted by the film production project One Fine Day Films to direct *Soul Boy*, and at this point her career changed.

Soul Boy (2010) is a simple story of magical realism that follows a fairy-tale quest format; in this instance, a young boy must complete a series of tasks to save his father's soul. It is set in Nairobi between the "slum" Kibera and upscale suburb Karen, and it shows both parts of the city—the richest and poorest—in the same bright color and their respective residents with the same depth and agency. *Soul Boy* had its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam where it went on to win the Dioraphte Award (worth €10,000 or $10, 561), and subsequently went on to win various awards at the African Movie Academy Awards, the Kalasha Awards (based in Nairobi), and the Zanzibar International Film Festival, to name only a few, and to screen at "virtually every other festival worldwide."[66] *Soul Boy* was validated on the international film festival circuit, but its popularity within Nairobi (and specifically in the "slums" of Kibera and Mathare) shows the limits of binary thinking that opposes festival films to popular films.[67] After *Soul Boy*'s successful festival run, Essuman won the Director's Eye Prize at the African Film Festival of Cordoba (FCAT) in 2012—worth €25,000 ($26,402)—to write a feature screenplay (the project is currently titled *Djinn*) and received prestigious international film festival support for two codirected documentaries.[68] Essuman had a diverse career in production, television, and "video film" before *Soul Boy*, but it was unquestionably this film that launched her international career and gave her the status of a "festival" filmmaker.

Soul Boy is but one example of a wider trend in Nairobi-based filmmaking where female filmmakers receive funding (or a combination of funding and mentoring) from transnational partners. Similar dynamics can be observed with the participants of the Focus Features Africa First program.[69] This program helped Wanuri Kahiu make *Pumzi* and also provided a grant for Ng'endo Mukii's film *The Teapot* (in production). "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.[70] Its goal was both to create excellent short fiction films and

to "discover" and support early career African directors.[71] Yet while these circuits have worked to the benefit of many Nairobi-based female filmmakers, this may be only 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.[72]

Of critical importance here is the issue of sustainability: Many of the international 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). Indeed, Bisschoff and Van de Peer forcefully argue that in the field of African cinema there is a specific need for production funding "for mid-career directors who are often locked out of viable funding options."[73] Thus, the need to make films for Kenyan audiences and build profitable markets for their films in Kenya was repeatedly emphasized by Nairobi-based female filmmakers in our discussions just as they seek prestige, audiences, and funding in other markets.

Many films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers have found success internationally, yet locally distribution is the biggest challenge the industry faces. There is essentially no distribution system in place that would enable an upmarket film to make a profit, and it is very difficult to even access many locally made films. Nairobi's few cinemas almost exclusively screen foreign films and there is a pervasive culture of unauthorized film distribution across the city. It is possible to buy a 50 KES ($0.50) DVD of the latest release of films and television shows from around the world almost anywhere in the city. Furthermore, broadcasters in Kenya pay little for local content because they have a very cheap way of filling airtime in the form of imported content.[74] For now, given the very small market for locally produced films in Kenya, reaching international markets both on the continent and farther afield is vitally important. This transnational turn has countless precedents in film industries around the world, for instance, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema and Chinese Fifth Generation cinemas. In circumstances where the state can no longer support creative filmmaking (or chooses not to), filmmakers have looked to transnational sources of funding and circulation. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are no different.

IS FILMMAKING A "REAL" JOB? PROFESSIONALISM IN NAIROBI

Nairobi-based female filmmakers have had thriving careers in Nairobi, 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 Nairobi. This gives us an opportunity to open up debate about what constitutes "good work" and how the hustling Nairobi-based female filmmakers do can be seen as doing such.

When I asked early career 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 into a major television network building alongside a male coworker. He was wearing shorts and had "really ragged hair," and she also had "weird hair." They shared the elevator with a man—presumably an employee of the TV network—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?"[75] In a similar case, filmmaker 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 [thing]. . . . 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.[76]

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 hairstyles (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."[77] 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 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 anthropologist James Ferguson's ground-breaking work on "cultural style" in *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Ferguson draws on philosopher Judith Butler's work to devise a theory of cultural style that emphasizes 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. 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 internalized, nontrivial capabilities acquired over time. Cultural style, then, is first of all a performative competence."[78]

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 choose to cultivate an alternative visual style when they so clearly know that their physical style impacts the way they are seen (as *not* "professional"). Ferguson argues that "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 ways of behaving and social networks.[79] When young filmmaker Lucille Kahara said that "all the creative people, arts people, I guess look a certain way, so you are just seen as being an outcast because you are the one with the piercings, with the tattoos, with the different hair, with the different style,"[80] 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.[81] Being able to decide to adopt a particular style can be a marker of class privilege. As Ferguson says, "Clearly, there are structural constraints on stylistic development, and actors never just freely choose their own style," and these constraints are informed by the complicated intersections of class and gender.[82]

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 looks at only 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 be valued more. Lucille Kahara—reciting a commonly held view—explained that this perception was generational:

> It's just from our parents, and their parents. They never saw anything arts-related as being a real job. And there really isn't that much job security linked to filmmaking, unless you're working for a TV station, that's about it. . . . If you're not a doctor or a lawyer or a pilot, then you're not really doing the proper job, or a manager is okay [laughs]. Yeah, but unless you are doing any of those other ones, you're not doing a real job and they wonder how you are able to survive. Because in their minds trying to do art is just struggling.[83]

It seems, then, that what these filmmakers do not have is *recognition* of their work as professional, legitimate, and worthwhile, rather than not having good work. Here we see a clear difference with the fashion content creators that Duffy has theorized. Given the prominence of her theory, it is worth repeating her definition of aspirational labor in full:

> Aspirational labor is a mode of (mostly) uncompensated, independent work that is propelled by the much-venerated ideal of *getting paid to do what you love*. As both a practice and a worker ideology, aspirational labor shifts content creators' focus from the present to the future, dangling the prospect of a career where labor and leisure coexist. Indeed, aspirational laborers expect that they will *one day* be compensated for their productivity—be it through material rewards or social capital. But in the meantime, they remain suspended in the consumption and promotion of branded commodities.[84]

Nairobi-based female filmmakers certainly seek to be paid for "doing what they love"; however, while there may be the *perception* that they are occupying precarious and "bad" jobs, through their hustling practices they actually carve out meaningful careers *in the present*.

Being "professional" is thus about more than a high income—filmmakers often earn more money than other socially legitimate "professionals."[85]

Rather, it is about displaying and being seen to have the corresponding "professional style." The difference between what you "are" and how others, in turn, see you is of fundamental importance. Professionalism is not a static attribute that can be defined in the abstract, but rather contextual, performative, and in the eye of the beholder.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Nairobi-based female filmmakers hustle in difficult circumstances. They receive no meaningful state support—something that is necessary to support independent filmmakers in many other contexts—and they are looked down on for not having "real" jobs. Yet they hustle to confront these and other obstacles with an astonishing degree of innovation and by making use of the opportunities offered by their local context and their transnational connections, and they have done so since the early years of women's filmmaking in Nairobi when Anne Mungai made *Saikati*. Throughout this chapter, I have called attention to the ways in which filmmakers' patterns of work are shaped by their local context in the city of Nairobi and by transnational connections with funding bodies and distribution networks abroad and, in so doing, explained how this industry developed into the vibrant one it is today.

A key benefit of the city is its environment of media convergence that allows Nairobi-based female filmmakers to shift fluidly 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 internationalized 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.

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 that "it's an exploding middle class," where people have that much more money in their pockets and "new markets are created." 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.[86]

Kibinge's words underscore the dynamism and opportunity of working in Nairobi today. That Nairobi offers opportunities for hustlers 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. They recognize that Nairobi is a place where they can entrepreneurially build their filmmaking businesses and careers if they hustle to create their own opportunities.

Taking advantage of the city's many potential opportunities and avoiding its pitfalls requires certain skills and social positioning. Hustling to succeed in this environment is a balancing act because Nairobi has a specific intense energy. As filmmaker Hawa Essuman put it:

> Nairobi feels like such a battle. . . . Sometimes you feed off of that hustle. You do. But you need a break from it. . . . If I didn't leave Nairobi I wouldn't be able to live in it. Because there is a way it drains you. Like it just drains you. . . . It's a beast unto itself. It's a really grungy, sexy beast that you want to tie and tame in some way, but it's untamable. . . . You can feed off of that energy, and [at] moments, it's incredible. It's incredible. But in others it's just consuming. And you have to find a way to sort of balance it out.[87]

Because of their talents *and* their class 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 organizations.

This chapter has shown 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 for producing and distributing their films in more detail, this focus on Nairobi will prove to be only more important.

2

MAKING TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA

Nairobi-based female filmmakers frequently make use of transnational funding schemes with capital drawn from Europe and North America and distribute their films internationally within the circuit of international film festivals, and to a smaller extent using online platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. This chapter sets out to explore the transnationally connected modes of production and circulation that these filmmakers use as well as the strategies and processes of negotiation they employ when working with "foreign" partners to make and distribute their films.

When I met Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, she was deep into production of her documentary *New Moon* and carefully evaluating the sacrifices she would need to make to complete the film given her time and financial constraints. She had received funding from several international sources, as we will discuss later, but it was still a struggle to finish the film. She had recently received her funding from Docubox and knew she needed to seize the opportunity that funding gave her because financing the film in other ways—for example, through working on commissioned projects and investing her income from them—would be very difficult because she would not have the space to adequately concentrate on the project:

> It's been a financial sacrifice for me concentrating on less projects, but the thing is I realized at one point: I studied as a director and scriptwriter and I want to be a director. That's ultimately my goal. I want to be known as a director and have the respect and stature and all that comes with it. And if I do other things . . . —because I do lots of other things—if I do all that stuff to get money I may end up [with] years passing by and actually supporting other people's projects in a way and not actually getting the name that I want for myself. So, it's been financially difficult, but you have to . . . concentrate and focus.

She has to make financial sacrifices to be a director and try to build her reputation, so getting the right attention is extremely important. Furthering her career requires strategizing on showing the film in the most prestigious and

beneficial outlets, a process of negotiation that inevitably involves the politics of geographic difference and "foreign-ness," as we shall see throughout this chapter.

She hoped the film would screen in prestigious documentary outlets such as the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), but also said, "I wouldn't want it to only be at documentary film festivals." Likewise, she wanted it to travel through the African film festival circuit, but did not want to be limited to that.

> But to be honest, I wouldn't like it to be only limited to film festivals that are about Africa. Because I feel strongly that the film that I will create, or am creating, is a film that could be accessible to a lot of people. . . . It is about Africa, and it is about Lamu, but predominantly it is very heart-centered film. And that will draw people more, and the images will draw people more, and the tempo, and the stillness will draw people more, than it actually being African.[1]

She recognized that these forums could provide a valuable outlet for African filmmakers and felt that her first experimental short film, *Gubi: The Birth of Fruit*, received a good amount of attention because it went to African film festivals and it "wouldn't have got that attention in other film festivals, so in a way I owe a lot to that. And I'm grateful for that."[2] We can see that she wanted the film to travel based not on her identity (African, female, Kenyan) or on the film's category (African, documentary), but rather based on its particular artistry and qualities, while at the same time recognizing that the film was likely to gain the needed attention at least in part *because* of her identity. How her identity is perceived by others matters for the circulation of her film.

The current global media landscape is one where filmmakers from outside Euro-America frequently make use of Euro-American funding to finance different aspects of their projects. This model has been challenged on the grounds that it compromises the artistic independence of non-Euro-American filmmakers by forcing them to comply with genres and styles of filmmaking that the Euro-American funding bodies wish to see.[3] For instance, German film scholar Randall Halle argues that contemporary European co-productions with filmmakers in Africa and Asia 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" and that the resulting "films must offer stories that appeal to European and North American audiences."[4] These

arguments, rather implausibly, position funders as all-powerful, but more importantly they do not account for shared tastes that cross borders and the fact that Euro-American audiences and filmmakers from elsewhere might share a common taste in stories. The balancing act of satisfying funders and maintaining one's artistic integrity may be, in the words of Nigerian-South African filmmaker Akin Omotoso, "the devil you choose to dance with,"[5] but filmmakers do have a choice in these encounters and that choice is influenced by their individual profiles and competencies. Working with transnational funders and distribution outlets is inherently a process of negotiation, and unpacking the nuances, tensions, and particularities of these negotiations is essential to understanding any process of co-production.[6]

Our contemporary world is globalized, but "global networks are maintained, adjusted, guarded, and configured in the local."[7] 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."[8] As we saw in the last chapter, a national framework of analysis offers little insight into the work patterns of Nairobi-based filmmakers because the state provides little support for them; rather, it is through local networks in Nairobi and transnational connections that these filmmakers are enabled to make their films. According to film scholars Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, the term "transnational cinema" "risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images and cultures at the expense of the specific cultural, historical or ideological context in which these exchanges take place."[9] Thus, in order to avoid the perils identified by Higbee and Lim and to ground my study of transnational connections in the concrete spaces where filmmakers work, I undertook eight months of field research in the place where Nairobi-based female filmmakers live and work most: Nairobi. By embedding myself within Nairobi for an extended period, I was able to contextualize the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers within the broader context of both screen media industries in the city and the business and policy context much more broadly. Through observing the film exhibition and distribution circuit in Nairobi I learned that internationally popular Kenyan films had not lost "local" resonance, as critics often assume; rather, audiences in Nairobi share a taste in films with audiences abroad but they have difficulty gaining *access* to them because a large-scale distribution infrastructure does

not yet exist in the local market. Empirical and field-based research showed that there is no essential or insurmountable difference in taste between Nairobian and international audiences. Thus, fieldwork in Nairobi was an essential first step in challenging binary thinking about taste.

WORLD CINEMA AND AFRICAN CINEMA IN THE WORLD

Unlike industries such as Nollywood and Bollywood that circulate globally in large part due to demand from diaspora audiences,[10] the international circulation of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is not fueled by a Kenyan diaspora eager to watch films from home. Instead, these films tend to circulate within film festivals and in other artistic spaces. Europe and North America "have been, historically and until recently, the main regions in which films by Africans have circulated through festivals,"[11] so assessing the politics of their circulation—and discourses about that circulation—in these places is essential. 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."[12] African films from vastly different contexts displaying widely divergent styles and themes are grouped together—as world cinema—based on the shared similarity of Otherness. The expression of each filmmaker's individual creativity is undermined in this homogenizing approach, but filmmakers still can and do assert their agency in these encounters and influence the transnational circulation and interpretation of their films.

World cinema, in the mainstream sense, essentially began in the 1950s when Japanese film was "discovered" by Euro-American audiences.[13] Film scholar Lucia Nagib suggests a definition of world cinema where it encompasses all the cinema of the world,[14] but film scholar Kaushik Bhaumik argues instead that "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."[15] To be considered "world cinema" in the mainstream sense, a film must have "crossed over," which means gaining a viewership in "the West" beyond diasporic audiences.[16] Within world cinema what is valuable or derivative and therefore discardable depends on the terms of cultural exchange, which are unequal and, because world cinema is a Euro-American classification,

slanted in favor of Euro-America. To put it plainly, world cinema is what is simultaneously Other, and rendered familiar, when viewed from the perspective of the Euro-American mainstream.

Film festivals have played an essential role in developing the canon of world cinema since *Rashomon* (dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1951) was screened at the Venice Film Festival in 1951. 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."[17] The implicit assumption in this mode of thinking is film movements from outside "the West" do not count until they have been consecrated by prestige festivals.[18] Because Nairobi-based female filmmakers' films have shown in international film festivals, they have "crossed over" and can now be considered under the rubric of "world cinema."

Crossing over means being seen by audiences in different locations than where the film was made or the filmmaker's home context. Crossover 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. For instance, it has been suggested that Chinese Fifth Generation filmmaker Zhang Yimou's 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."[19] 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."[20] These various examples 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 essentialized national or continental audience and present the national "properly." Within the African film context, filmmakers and scholars have for a long time committed themselves to an "oppositional criticism" explicitly aimed at defining African film against "Western film,"[21] but this criticism has always suppressed recognitions of the true diversity of African cinemas. As film scholar David Murphy so forcefully argues, "the reductive opposition between Africa and the West merely produces a sterile stand-off

between the different cultural influences which are so clearly present in African films."[22] Arguments rooted in authenticity cannot account for contemporary production. As film scholar Alexie Tcheuyap suggests:

> By incorporating new visions, genres, representations and aesthetic expressions, today's filmmakers are not only interrogating sub-Saharan African identities, but are furthermore staking out a place for African cultures in global flows where identity oscillates between "global and local, nation and (non)nation" (Petty, 2008, 1). In a context of transnational, hybrid, shifting and multiple identities, it is difficult to imagine that African productions have remained immune to outside influence.[23]

Nativist criticism both fails to see films as acts of representation, not sociological documents, and suggests a binary division between spectators local and foreign—a division that is too simple to account for transnationally shared tastes, as I will now go on to elaborate.

FILMMAKING AND NAIROBI'S TRANSNATIONALLY CONNECTED MIDDLE CLASS

Understanding transnationally shared taste requires grappling with the complexities of class position, and particularly middle-class identity in Nairobi. Several studies note that class-based inequality has been underexamined in creative and cultural industries research and find that it has significant influence in shaping patterns of work in these industries in the United Kingdom.[24] In her study of gender and creative work in Europe, media scholar Angela McRobbie notes that even if the freelance market is insecure for all workers, middle-class women retain a significant advantage over working-class women,[25] thus highlighting class as an important analytical variable in addition to gender when studying female creatives. In an African context, African film scholar Jonathan Haynes' recent work on market segmentation in Nollywood also points to the growing need to explore the impact of class on shaping patterns of creative work.[26]

Literature focusing on the middle class in Kenya, and in 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: 44.9 percent of the population.[27] Yet the notion of an African middle class—and who is or is not part of it—remains fraught.[28] A Marxist or Weberian understanding of

class where class position is stable across generations is not directly applicable.[29] Yet defining the middle class as a group with the resources, social and financial, to mitigate periods of uncertainty and avoid sliding into poverty does not capture a sense of belonging or identification with the idea of class.[30] While it is true that people do not always identify with the class that most directly matches their economic conditions, how they identify *is important*.[31] Being middle-class is important to the filmmakers in this book, and I take that self-identification seriously.

A helpful concept for understanding these identifications is offered by anthropologist Rachel Spronk, who argues that being middle-class is not easily measurable or quantifiable but rather "the (imagined) goal and result of people's ambition to climb the social ladder."[32] Spronk importantly identifies class-based self-perception as a crucial variable to study, alongside other indicators of material positioning within Kenyan society such as education, profession, and lifestyle choices.[33] The Nairobi-based young professionals of her study enact their middle-class position in relation to global frameworks: "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."[34] Accounting for class-based self-perception, as a perception that identifies itself with middle classes beyond the national border, is particularly important because it suggests a way of thinking about middle-classness in Nairobi that is not geographically bounded.

When Toni Kamau described producing the documentary *I Am Samuel* (dir. Peter Murimi, 2020), it became clear that liberal social views were part of a middle-class self-perception. The film is about a gay man from a low-income group and she described it 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.[35]

Nairobi-based female filmmakers can be defined as middle-class based on easily quantifiable characteristics of class such as house location, job, car

ownership, education, and English-language skills,[36] but it is their self-perception in addition to these material markers that allows for seeing them as part of a transnational middle class.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that "to the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts . . . corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes taste to function as markers of 'class.'"[37] This same function can be seen in Nairobi. The transnational orientation of middle-class filmmakers can be seen, for instance, in their media choices. Barbara Karuana 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 realize 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. . . . 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.[38]

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.[39] 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?"[40] Like Karuana, 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."[41] Scholars have argued that watching "quality" television is a new form of distinction,[42] meaning watching "quality" television—as Karuana and Gatero see themselves as doing—can be status giving. This link between class position and taste in art (in this case, television) is in line with a Bourdieusian understanding of taste. Karuana's 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 self-perception that Spronk would characterize as modern and middle-class.[43]

It is remarkably commonplace for Nairobi-based female filmmakers to have lived, worked, or studied abroad. Wanjiru Kinyanjui's training in Germany

marked 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. 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, she said. Kinyanjui made *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* while training in screenwriting and directing at the German Academy for Film and Television Berlin (DFFB).[44] The contemporary era is filled with similar examples. Zippy Kimundu, for instance, studied for an MFA at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts Asia; Wanuri Kahiu completed a master's in film directing at UCLA; and Ng'endo Mukii studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and at the Royal College of Art in London.

Accounting for filmmakers' transnational middle-class position is necessary in order to understand how they approach working with international funding bodies. When I asked Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann about how she secures funding for her films, she replied:

> 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 okay, actually, I wonder if I could think of something for that. Or you have an idea and you think, how can I apply for that? But usually I always think predominantly about how I can get funding.[45]

She has been quite successful using this approach, considering her film *New Moon* (2018) received funding from the East African documentary film fund Docubox, Göteborg Film Festival, the IDFA Bertha Fund, and through a crowdfunding campaign. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, her strategies would commonly be read by critics as "selling out," but more accurately her strategy can be read as a highly pragmatic approach to funding. She "spins" her ideas and projects so that they appear in alignment with the intentions of funding sources. As is common among Nairobi-based female filmmakers, her ideas are also shaped by her personal experiences outside Kenya, including living and studying in France, the Netherlands, and South Africa.[46] Pioneering African directors may have focused on making postcolonial critiques in their films, but "the new cadre of directors is looking beyond nationalism and situating its discourses in the turbulent

cross-flows of globalization,"[47] where they are also situating their production and distribution processes. When we see Nairobi-based female filmmakers as part of a transnational middle class, it becomes more tenuous to interpret their filmmaking careers as "less authentic" when they involve collaborations with non-Kenyans in either production or distribution phases.

THE CROSS-BORDER CIRCULATION OF FILMS BY NAIROBI-BASED FEMALE FILMMAKERS

Importantly, the filmmakers discussed so far in this chapter are not the only ones operating in Nairobi today. There is another industry, named Riverwood, that exists quite separately from the one populated by the middle-class filmmakers who are the subject of this book. Comprehending how the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers circulate internationally requires that we understand the difference between the work they do and the production and distribution models used in Riverwood. Riverwood films are ultra-low-budget, made in a time span of days or weeks, and are designed to be released on DVD. They are predominantly shot in Kikuyu (and sometimes other vernacular languages) and then target consumers of those ethnolinguistic groups. Scholars have described Riverwood as the Kenyan counterpart of Nollywood,[48] and while Riverwood films are akin to Nollywood-style filmmaking in the production process, they are less so in their distribution. A crucial distinction between these industries is that, unlike Nollywood, Riverwood films struggle to find popularity with audiences and to become profitable. Circulating around the downtown Nairobi street called River Road, Riverwood films can be bought alongside a wide range of international media, but with the exception of films by star comedians, most films sell only 3,000–6,000 copies. They do not have an international market (though they desire wider distribution) and do not receive funding from the sources that Nairobi-based middle-class filmmakers use to finance their films.[49]

Nairobi-based middle-class filmmakers do not consider themselves to be part of Riverwood. Even veteran filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui—who worked with Riverwood filmmakers to create *Bahati* (2007) and *Manga in America* (2007)—draws a clear distinction between herself and Riverwood filmmakers. She describes herself as a "professional" director and those working in Riverwood as "amateurs."[50] Veteran producer Appie Matere

articulated a key difference between her work making films for South African pay-TV company M-Net and Riverwood. She gave a workshop for Riverwood filmmakers and realized in that context that she is not one of them when she mentioned that she was working with a budget of 800,000 KES ($7,000) 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 [maintain the] M-Net standard. Their standard cannot go low.[51]

She also said that her making a film for 800,000 KES for M-Net was the equivalent to a 20,000 KES ($174) Riverwood film in the sense that she has to be incredibly frugal in order to "maintain the standard" M-Net requires—essentially, 800,000 KES is a small amount of money to make a show of the required quality. It is important to note that Nairobi-based female filmmakers have the cultural and social capital (to use Bourdieu's terminology) to attract funding and market themselves in the festival circuit that Riverwood filmmakers so far lack. Gaining access to international projects (such as making films for M-Net) or international distribution circuits such as film festivals requires particular competencies in self-promotion that, so far, middle-class filmmakers have been shown to have but Riverwood filmmakers lack.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers work hard to navigate the complicated terrain of crossing over to reach global audiences and continually assert their agency in this process, as I will demonstrate through the case study of Wanuri Kahiu and her short film *Pumzi* (2010). *Pumzi* is one of her most high-profile films and one of the most celebrated recent films from Kenya.[52] It is frequently invoked in critical discourses because of its original use of genre.[53] *Pumzi* can be easily read through the lens of science fiction—it is set in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic landscape where human society 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. As discussed already, scholarship has tended to interpret

African film within certain parameters—essentially of speaking back to Western discourses about Africa and "correctly" representing Africa.[54] In the circuit of prestigious film festivals, "African film and filmmakers tend to be treated . . . as an *exception*" and outside the purview of mainstream film criticism and discourse.[55] Within this terrain of criticism and reception Kahiu resists the tokenistic praise of her film (as new *for an African* and thus worthy of praise) and insists on situating it firmly within a transnationally shared film canon.

In a 2013 interview, 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."[56] The film's transformation into science fiction came at the behest of her producer, who asked her to choose between science fiction and fantasy. She said that "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."[57] *Pumzi*'s genre was only secondary to its story, and while the producer had a role to play in shaping the final version of the film (as producers typically do), the creative heart of the film remained with Kahiu. While *Pumzi* is continually invoked as "new," Kahiu persistently connects the film and its science-fiction genre back to older storytelling traditions, and thus resists tokenistic praise of her work. 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 presence of futurist discourses in the country, and the African continent more broadly."[58] Kahiu argues that "way before any terms were coined that defined Afrofuturists there were storytellers who composed narratives populated with science, fantasy, mythology and speculative storylines" and that "Afrofuturism and speculative fiction have always existed in Africa. Indeed, they pre-date western images of science fiction."[59] Because science fiction is not actually new in Africa, the laurels bestowed on Kahiu are not as laudatory as they first appear. In this respect, her critical stance is one that actively resists being shallowly categorized. She has similarly expressed ambivalence about being labeled as Afrofuturist and an "African filmmaker."[60] She resists being labeled as *only* Afrofuturist, African, or new. She calls herself "a global African working in science fiction" 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]."[61] She is attempting to move herself and her artwork away from the possibility of easy categorization and into a space where she can be recognized as an artist without caveats.

Kahiu resists attempts by others to pigeonhole her work and markets herself as a "global African" artist making films that fit squarely within a transnationally shared canon of global cinema. Marijke de Valck argues that it is through using words such as "auteur, talent, and personal voice" that "festivals position filmmakers in the art historical lineage of other great masters in the fine arts, literature, theatre, dance and music" and thus reinforce their own legitimacy as artistic showcases.[62] Kahiu can thus be seen as speaking in the "language" of film festivals when she asserts her creativity and innovation and positions herself as an auteur. Marketing is instrumental for priming spectators and critics to interpret films—for instance, to see a film like *Pumzi* as new, as science fiction, or rather as part of long-standing transnational storytelling traditions. Literature scholar Graham Huggan argues that "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,'"[63] and the same may be true that film festivals and critics seize upon the films of African filmmakers for their Otherness. Yet to focus only on the gatekeepers—be they publishers, festivals, or critics—neglects the agency of the cultural producers to also shape the reception and circulation of their products. Yet, as my discussion of Riverwood has shown, the ability to speak the right language and to market one's self is also a class-based competency, and thus the middle-class position of Nairobi-based female filmmakers must be accounted for.

"TARZANISM" AND AFRICAN FILMMAKING: THE CASE OF ONE FINE DAY FILMS

Historically, former colonizers, and particularly France, have been the dominant funders of African films, and a substantial body of literature has been published discussing the power dynamics underpinning these filmmaking relationships.[64] In *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010), African film scholar Manthia Diawara outlines a history of engagements between "the West" and Africa that he regards 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."[65] He goes on to term this type of engagement "humanitarian 'Tarzanism.'" Throughout his book he remains deeply suspicious of any non-African (and particularly French) involvement in the domain of African filmmaking and life more generally, arguing that "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."[66] Yet examining the tensions, compromises, and negotiations in specific partnerships is necessary when evaluating commercial and artistic relationships. Thus, while remaining aware of the history of unequal power relations between Euro-America and Africa that Diawara highlights forcefully, it is nonetheless necessary to test these assumptions against contemporary case studies. The production project One Fine Day Films provides a useful example.

One Fine Day is a philanthropic production and training venture that has successfully generated a series of critically acclaimed feature films since its first project, *Soul Boy* (dir. Hawa Essuman, 2010). In addition to *Soul Boy*, One Fine Day has produced *Nairobi Half Life* (dir. David "Tosh" Gitonga, 2012), *Something Necessary* (dir. Judy Kibinge, 2013), *Veve* (dir. Simon Mukali, 2014), *Kati Kati* (dir. Mbithi Masya, 2016), *Supa Modo* (dir. Likarion Wainaina, 2018), and *Lusala* (dir. Mugambi Nthiga, 2019). The project was started by the renowned German film director Tom Tykwer (*Run Lola Run*) and his wife Marie Steinmann, and is supported by a number of different organizations, including Deutsche Welle (DW) Akademie, a German development organization focused on media capacity building, and Ginger Ink Films, a British-funded production and service company based in Nairobi.[67] During the production of *Soul Boy*, Essuman was mentored by Tykwer. For subsequent projects, One Fine Day expanded its activities to run an intensive two-week-long filmmakers' workshop with participants drawn from across the African continent, before producing a film that would ideally include a crew chosen from workshop participants.

When Judy Kibinge made *Something Necessary* for One Fine Day, she had already been working as a filmmaker in Nairobi for more than a decade after having a successful career in advertising. Kibinge 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."[68] For Kibinge, the experience of participating in One Fine

Day 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."[69] The need for technical quality to make it into film festivals is forcefully demonstrated by the longtime systematic exclusion of Nollywood films from festivals.[70] In Kibinge's assessment, the value of working with One Fine Day (and other transnational film projects) 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."[71] The possibility that working with One Fine Day could lead to a larger platform was aptly demonstrated by *Soul Boy*, as we saw in chapter 1. Kibinge wanted to reach larger audiences (particularly, international ones) and saw participating in One Fine Day as a way to achieve that goal.

Yet attempting to reach this larger platform through One Fine Day meant engaging in a process of negotiation. Kibinge participated in the One Fine Day workshop because she wanted to direct the film, but the screenplay was not revealed until after she was chosen, and she was deeply disappointed that she would be making a film about the Kenyan post-election violence of 2007–2008, stating: "It's not the film that . . . I would have chosen to make."[72] While she could not choose the film's subject, she still attempted to shape the film according to her own agenda and vision, and she was credited with adapting the screenplay by Mungai Kiroga in addition to directing the film. A serious issue she had to negotiate in working with One Fine Day was potential challenges to her authorship through being seen as sharing credit with One Fine Day. 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."[73]

Auteurist discourse is alive and well at film festivals. Kibinge displayed a keen awareness of exactly this dynamic when she described the questioning of her authorial voice, presumably by critics and curators, as "the big minus about being part of an initiative" like One Fine Day.[74] It is "really dangerous" for a filmmaker to look like "the figurehead on a workshop piece," she said, and it was this risk that Kibinge weighed up when deciding whether or not to be part of One Fine Day. She suspects that the reason why the film did not travel to the highest-profile festivals beyond the Toronto International Film Festival is "the cynicism that comes back when the caption

comes up at the end" saying that the film was part of the One Fine Day development program. Of course, it is also possible that the curators of those festivals simply did not consider the film "good" enough to show in their programs. However, given the pervasiveness of a discourse that values authenticity, creativity, and auteur cinema in the operation of film festivals and among world cinema critics, it is likely that even the possibility of impure authorship had a role to play in eliminating it from consideration. Hence there is a double standard at work: "Auteurs" are valued for their creativity, but Nairobi-based female filmmakers, because they are African, are judged and valued for the authenticity of their films.

The same issues facing Kibinge in regard to *Something Necessary* also faced Gitonga and Essuman in regard to their One Fine Day films (*Nairobi Half Life* and *Soul Boy*, respectively). According to one critic, "pinning down the particularly Kenyan contribution" to *Nairobi Half Life* is "difficult" because of Tykwer's participation.[75] 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 "Africanness." 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."[76] Here we find ourselves on familiar, if tired, critical terrain where the question of authenticity and Africanness in film is paramount. A key limitation of the One Fine Day project, then, is not that it is Tarzanist, but rather that it is *perceived* to be.

Barbara Karuana worked with One Fine Day on the production of the film *Kati Kati* and spoke very highly of the initiative, describing it as "extremely bold." She had no time for nativist critiques of the initiative:

> I've heard a lot of opinions on how it's not really a Kenyan film, it's a German film because it's funded by Germans and mainly done by Germans. But I completely disagree with that, because as long as you have the effort of Kenyans in it, the handprint of Kenyans, you can tell that this is a Kenyan story, you can see the Kenyan-ness of it. What does it matter who held the boom mic? What does it really matter? And I really, really acknowledge that and appreciate it so

> much. Maybe it's because I've worked with them. But maybe it's *because* I've worked with them that I have authority to say that it's one of the best things to ever happen to filmmakers here.[77]

The critics of African films that critique the involvement of foreign funds are also importantly ignoring the fact that co-production is often a necessity for independent filmmaking today, due to the difficulty of securing full financing from one individual funder. Adopting a staunch critique on the grounds of African-ness is thus a refusal to see that cinema is underpinned by commercial relationships. When Nairobi-based female filmmakers recognize the value of One Fine Day in their media ecosystem, they are demonstrating an explicit awareness of these relationships and a desire to be integrated into a wider economy of filmmaking.

One aspect of projects like One Fine Day is bringing in experienced filmmakers from outside Africa and giving local creatives a hands-on opportunity to learn from them. Producer Emily Wanja, herself an alumna of One Fine Day, found this particularly valuable:

> When you get a chance to interact with these people, always it's an added advantage. Because they are coming from industries that are more developed. They have loads of experience. . . . It's always just good to know that this is how it's done on a bigger scale and on a higher level. Then you have something to work towards.[78]

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, according to Judy Kibinge.[79] Indeed, after participating in a One Fine Day workshop, veteran 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."[80] The main thing she learned at the workshop was how to pitch her films and capitalize on her current films:

> When we did the festivals with *Killer Necklace* we should have had another project ready . . . because you've got a lot of people asking. And we're like, "Ah, we're writing the script, we're getting ready with it." So that's when I think really, oops, wasted festival. A whole year wasted going to festivals without the next project. . . . I realized as a producer you need to always have the next project ready, if anybody asks you. You actually carry it ready. And I'm looking for this amount of money. And you pitch immediately.[81]

She was already very experienced in the industry and still felt she had something valuable to gain from participating. As we will see in chapter 6, Kenya is not currently home to a major, well-equipped 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 programs that currently exist in Kenya).[82] Intensive master classes like the One Fine Day workshop are thus seen as a vital stopgap measure. On the whole, the Nairobi-based female filmmakers I interviewed perceived One Fine Day not as a "Tarzanist," foreign intrusion in local cinema but rather as a collaborative project of great potential benefit to the local film industry.[83] 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."[84] For those filmmakers with the necessary cultural and social capital to gain admittance into highly competitive projects, such as One Fine Day, the access to resources and skills can be transformative.

The case of One Fine Day Films suggests that what "we all know" about partnerships across borders (to borrow Diawara's expression) needs to be rethought and, at the very least, rendered more complex and nuanced. A more productive way forward is to recognize that in light of its cross-border collaborative approach to filmmaking, *Soul Boy* "is not an 'African film.' It is simply a film in which many Africans have played key roles."[85] The same of course is true of the other One Fine Day films. Categorizing these films as African or not is to impose a closure on the texts that can easily stray into essentialism. The quest for African "authenticity" is a fantasy that neglects the fact that filmmaking is *both* a commercial and an artistic endeavor. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are alive to these tensions, and, as I have shown, they work to overcome them so that they can maximize the benefit they receive from projects like One Fine Day.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the ways in which Nairobi-based female filmmakers negotiate encounters with transnational distribution circuits and funding bodies and offered a challenge to prevalent interpretations in world cinema studies that see these relationships as inherently problematic. As

Hesmondhalgh and Saha argue, "we need an account of indigenous, minority and other forms of cultural production that does not see their interaction with commerce as in itself a sign of aesthetic or political vitiation."[86] This chapter has attempted to provide such an account. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are members of a transnational middle class with interests, experiences, and tastes that are not geographically bound to Kenya. When we account for this class position, it becomes ever more tenuous to interpret their filmmaking careers as "less authentic" when they involve collaborations with non-Kenyans in either production or distribution phases.

Filmmakers must strategically negotiate multiple funding possibilities as they hustle to make their films. Ng'endo Mukii, for example, received $10,000 from Focus Features 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.[87] In the case of *Pumzi*, Kahiu needed funding from Africa First, the Changamoto Arts Fund, and from the Goethe Institut to make the film, and said, after the funding, that "you just put everything else into it yourself."[88] Making films, even with the backing of international partners, still requires hustling to complete them, and for this reason studying transnational connections requires a firm grounding in the milieu of Nairobi.

I have shown how a discourse of authenticity operates within world cinema shaping which films are seen as valuable, and how this discourse is inadequate for explaining the filmmaking practices of contemporary African filmmakers. Much of the criticism has at its core a binary between "Western" and Other audiences, but this structuring of global audiences "hinges on a hypothetical geopolitically monolithic spectator" and ignores the centuries of cross-cultural interaction and interconnectedness that define every local context.[89] The boundaries between producers and spectators are much more fluid than this binary thinking allows. Indeed, popular films often *become* art films when they are shown in prestigious circuits abroad: The process of crossing the right border (into festivals and not, for instance, into diaspora markets) makes a film "art" rather than "popular" cinema.[90] It is noteworthy that *Soul Boy* and *Nairobi Half Life*—to give just two examples—were, in addition to the international popularity already discussed, very popular with spectators in Nairobi across the socioeconomic spectrum, including residents of informal settlements such as Kibera and Mathare.[91] This further suggests the need to rethink critical frames that position African and other audiences as dichotomous.

3

ENTREPRENEURIALISM AND STYLISTIC INTERNATIONALIZATION ON SCREEN

In autumn 2013, I chaired a Q&A with Judy Kibinge after a screening of her film *Something Necessary*, at the London Film School, held as part of the festival Film Africa. I asked Kibinge a standard 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.[1] 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. 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 festival curators and attendees, members of the press, and scholars. 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.[2] 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?

Kibinge's astute response reminds us of the politics of transnational film circulation and the tightrope African female filmmakers must walk in this space. Understanding the politics of their circulation requires a close reading of the films themselves, because, as Kibinge's response shows, African filmmakers are expected to make films that look a certain way and are about certain things. In this chapter, we will zoom in on a selection of films to understand both their styles and themes. We will see that the films that have traveled widely and been the most discussed outside Kenya—the ones that have been lauded and conform to expectations of world cinema as defined in the last chapter—are only a selection of what these filmmakers work

on. If we are interested in understanding the circulation of their films, we need to look at all the work they actually do—and not just samples that are stylistically internationalized. Making many diverse kinds of films is central to their work as hustlers.

STYLISTIC INTERNATIONALIZATION

As we saw in the previous chapter, some films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers gain international recognition in prestigious circuits such as international film festivals. What characteristics do "well-traveled" Kenyan films share? As we shall see, the winning formula seems to be global standard production values matched with extroverted content—that is, content thematically and politically relevant to audiences beyond the home context.[3] In describing a film project that was initially developed for a Kenyan audience but then transitioned during production to also trying to attract an international audience, media scholar Joshua McNamara wrote that this shift in audience was not "a move from national Kenyan to international distribution, but rather . . . the stylistic 'internationalisation' of content for a Kenyan audience."[4] His phrase aptly captures how a film can be for African *and* international audiences simultaneously and how we can read this from the film text itself. Extroversion is not a function of distribution necessarily but rather a style that can be read from the text.[5] A key component of extroversion is "explicit engagement with—or a capacity to be read as engaging—broad critical debates."[6] Films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers certainly engage in broad critical debates, including many of the films we have encountered thus far, for example, *Scarred: The Anatomy of a Massacre* on human rights, *Saikati* on female empowerment, and *Pumzi* on climate change. These films are also aesthetically beautiful with correspondingly high production values.

Through its global standard aesthetics and universal cautionary theme, *Pumzi* displays stylistic internationalization. *Pumzi* depicts a dystopian future and a postwar apocalyptic landscape where humankind lives underground. 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-perpetrated environmental destruction is clear,

and the film participates in a long history of cautionary science fiction, as we saw in chapter 2. Yet the film gives equal weight to the pleasure of the viewing experience as it does to its ecopolitical message because of Kahiu's intentional strategy of precisely composing each frame of the film to look like a photograph.[7] *Pumzi* is thus part of a long-standing film tradition, going back to the earliest African films, where pleasure and politics are inextricably intertwined.[8]

Stylistic internationalization is also on display in Kahiu's film *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 for 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.[9]

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 internationalization 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.

Her most recent film, *Rafiki*, is also stylistically internationalized. Alongside other recent films from Nairobi such as *I Am Samuel* (dir. Peter Murimi, 2020) and *Stories of Our Lives* (dir. Jim Chuchu, 2014), the film explicitly engages with broad critical debates on LGBTQ rights. *Rafiki* tells the story of two young women in love in Nairobi. It has a bold, distinct aesthetic of cool music and bright pastels, and the production values are extremely

high. The quietly unfolding love story is intercut with stories of the bigotry the young lovers face in Nairobi and how they work to assert control over their own destinies, both as a couple and as individuals in the process of coming of age. In describing how she chose the project, Kahiu said:

> My first and foremost concern was to find a love story. This is what I wanted to do. When I came across "Jambula Tree"—because of the texture and nuances, the profound love that the main characters had for each other—I wanted to tell this story. Even though it's a hard subject because it's taboo—two girls falling in love with each other in a country where this is outlawed—it was very important for me to tell a love story because that's what it is: how true love can triumph above everything.[10]

The subject matter of *Rafiki* strongly influenced its circulation. The film was internationally recognized through its selection within the Un Certain Regard selection at Cannes—an extremely prestigious curated showcase of innovative auteur films. Barlet reminds us that "the Cannes Film Festival has often selected African films for their sociological or realist content rather than for their cinematic originality," and in his view that is what happened with *Rafiki*.[11] The film gained infamy when the Kenya Film Classification Board banned it—continuing their history of homophobia (which we will explore more in chapter 4). However, while the film undoubtedly traveled because of the importance of its subject matter, its "feminine aesthetic," including its use of soft pastel colors, is distinctly original.[12] Much like the queer anthology film *Stories of Our Lives* that told the stories of queer Kenyans, *Rafiki* should be recognized for both its style and substance, and to fail to do so would be to fail to recognize Kahiu's artistry.

Wanuri Kahiu's films are stylistically internationalized, but she is not the only Nairobi-based female filmmaker to make films of this type. Hawa Essuman's urban fairy tale *Soul Boy* also fits within this category. It has a sunny and colorful aesthetic, and with its polished production values, it conforms to global standards. The film has 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. 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),[13] *Soul Boy* treats its setting simply as home, making a bold political statement in the process.

However, to my eye, 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 expatriate handing money to a poor African child is deeply uncomfortable, and this scene suggests the wider social context in which Abila lives, and its stark inequality.

In a similar way, *Saikati* also makes a powerful critique about racial and material inequality alongside its more dominant presentation of female empowerment. 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 realizes what is expected from her, she flees from the hotel room, and subsequently receives an impassioned speech by Monica that her sex work results from her dire economic circumstances and need to provide for her baby. The film thus critiques the wealthy men who come to Kenya to 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."[14] However, while the Mara is shown as beautiful and wildlife-filled, and the resorts within it as luxurious, *Saikati* does more than promote tourism.[15] 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 films discussed so far here both aspire to a "global standard" and achieve it. Furthermore, they all display stylistic internationalization by being for local and international audiences at the same time. 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 as they hustle to build and sustain their careers.

ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIMENTS IN STYLE

The potential ideological and didactic role of African cinema is well known, and films can certainly be valuable tools for identity formation and for societal transformation. Making *Saikati* was a form of political and artistic expression for Anne Mungai, for example, as we saw in chapter 1. However, a tradition of scholarship has overemphasized the political and didactic dimensions of African cinema at the expense of understanding the entertainment value of these films.[16]

Understanding the importance of the works of Nairobi-based female filmmakers requires examining the seriousness as well as the entertainment value of their films. One director whose work exemplifies this tendency is Wanjiru Kinyanjui. Her 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 hometown to rebuild her life. Attempting to join a Christian women's association to benefit from their employment activities, she is rebuffed by them for having chosen to leave 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's sacred mugumo tree fails. Rachael 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[s] 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."[17] Yet what this criticism neglects is that the film is also funny. It is, to use Kinyanjui's description, "a comedy about culture."[18] Rather than a film about recuperating precolonial traditions and a conflict between Christianity and an African religion, the film can also 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 narrative perspective. The film invites the audience to laugh at the downfall of these women not because they are Christian, and not in order to exult precolonial traditions, but because they are narrow-minded, prudish, and uppity. The film exults in the irony of the buttoned-up Christian women being nigh on butt-naked.

The Battle of the Sacred Tree is not only the serious "art film" it was once thought to be, but also one geared toward 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 internationalized with an appropriately "serious" theme.[19] When we consider her entire oeuvre—rather than pigeonholing her as an "art" filmmaker—it becomes clear that Kinyanjui, like all Nairobi-based female filmmakers, is *both* a filmmaker *and* an entrepreneur.

In addition to making stylistically internationalized films, Kinyanjui has also experimented with ultra-low-budget Riverwood filmmaking. 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 that Riverwood filmmakers "have no film education at all [and] they've never been near a serious professional crew" to see how they film. 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 without money."[20]

The (Kenyan) producer of *Manga in America* "came from America and was very ambitious and said: 'I'm going to do a Riverwood.'"[21] He was then referred to Kinyanjui to help realize the project because she had been researching the Riverwood phenomenon.[22] Riverwood's hasty production

process is reflected in the films' aesthetics. *Manga in America* has a washed-out color palette and *Bahati* has a dull gray 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 3,000 KES ($26) 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. He seems to believe the woman is cheating him, and logically following this he should be outraged, but he protests only 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. After all, some of the most famous film movements—such as postwar Italian Neorealism—use nonprofessional actors. What distinguishes *Bahati* from this tradition (and contemporary films from, for instance, Latin America, such as *Cidade de Deus* [dir. Fernando 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.

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 internationalized and ultra-low-budget Riverwood filmmaking—which demonstrates that she is a filmmaking entrepreneur 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. Her first feature film, *Dangerous Affair*, as we saw in chapter 1, is a romantic comedy about the loves, marriages, and affairs of young urban professionals. 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 in order 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—unlike the first generation of African filmmakers who were explicitly responding to the problematic and racist depiction of Africa and Africans in colonial cinema[23]—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."[24] 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 highly popular Ghanaian video movies "is linked to their enormous capacity to recontextualize and localize forms and styles associated with global mass culture."[25] *Project Daddy* and *Dangerous Affair* can be read in a similar way.

Dangerous Affair is a seminal film in the history of filmmaking in Kenya and marked the beginning of a new era of film production, yet it has received remarkably little academic attention. 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 scholarly fora.[26] 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."[27] Thus, it comes as no surprise that Kibinge would begin to receive academic attention from scholars outside Kenya only 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. 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 center 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 poetic and thoughtful. 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 internationalized film.

Her favorite film and the one most emblematic of her as a filmmaker is *Killer Necklace* (2008). In her words:

> *Dangerous Affair* "was fun to do, but . . . if I had my choice that's not the film I'd make. *Project Daddy* was really fun, but it's not the film I'd make. But *Killer Necklace*? It just had darkness in it. And then everybody was cheating everybody. . . . That's the kind of film that I'd like to make again. Yeah, so it's my favorite film. Definitely.[28]

The film is based on a graphic novel, and these roots are immediately apparent in its moody blue coloring and the stylized 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 bathtub faucet in close up, covered in bubbles, and the camera pans across the tub revealing a woman bathing. We see only 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 them both.

Kibinge is thus capable of making entertaining films geared toward a local market as well as stylistically internationalized films. Her choice to work in these various forms is highly entrepreneurial. Importantly, making the stylistically internationalized *Something Necessary* is also a demonstration of her entrepreneurialism. As we saw in the previous chapter, she participated in the One Fine Day project in an attempt to reach a larger platform and strategically grow her career. *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 not only as an "auteur" filmmaker but also as a screen media entrepreneur willing and able to work in many different modes, from popular to auteurist cinema.

Examining the entrepreneurial ambition that underpins each film is vital, rather than focusing exclusively on the finished film. In making her film *Leo* (2011), Jinna 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." She wants to make films where "the story is universally understood but it's culturally rich."[29] Yet, arguably, the film does not reach this standard. It has a convoluted plot and lacks the cause-and-effect narrative structure conventional to Hollywood-style films. For example, 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.

She wanted to use *Leo* as a stepping-stone in her long-term strategy of building a global brand. She screened the film internationally (e.g., on tour between Houston, Dallas, Massachusetts, Berlin, and Copenhagen) with the idea of "introducing an African hero brand globally" in the run-up to another planned film, then titled *Leo 3D*.

> I'm creating a brand, like Spider Man brand. . . . I hope from there to set a standard in terms of fictional superhero making with all the special effects and great stories. The type you see in global super hero films. That's my attempt. Everything I didn't do in *Leo* because of budget constraints I'm going to do it in that one.[30]

Making this attempt requires hustling. As she elaborated,

> To build a brand like *Leo* it must take a huge chunk of your time. For the last six years, since I started writing *Leo*, every day I do something about it. Every day, every day. It's an email, it's a contact it's a network, it's a strategy. Every day. So it's not built over night. You must dedicate a chunk of time to it.[31]

Rather than a failed film, we can see *Leo* as part of a long-term entrepreneurial experiment.

UNTHINKING WOMEN'S CINEMA

Women taking space on screen is a radically political act, and all the more so in postcolonial circumstances. Bisschoff and Van de Peer make the vital point that "as long as the agency of representation remains imbalanced, i.e. if many more men make films than women; or if much more attention is paid to the work of male filmmakers in research than to the work of female filmmakers; or if the canon remains overwhelmingly male, there is a problem."[32] Celebrating the telling of stories by and about women is thus absolutely necessary. In the uplifting celebration of female filmmakers from around the world *Celluloid Ceiling: Women Film Directors Breaking Through*, 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."[33]

While the kind of celebration written by Williams-Hawkins is necessary, this celebratory description does not go far enough. 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). The films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers suggest we need to expand what we see as the purview of women's cinema and female filmmakers.

Reflecting on the representational power of cinema, Wanuri Kahiu described a friend's approach to filmmaking and how she has integrated it into her own filmmaking practice:

> When he makes films, he likes to think of them as his portrayal of heaven. So that he can say, "Here's my heaven" whenever he screens his film. And I really think that's a version of what I want to do. I really think that it's important to portray Kenya and Africa in such positive, beautiful, loving light. Because we are positive, beautiful, loving people. And there is very little of that on a global scale. . . . First, there's not enough love stories across the world; second, there's even less from Africa. So I always want to make beautiful portrayals of ourselves.[34]

Kahiu's description of what she aims to do with her movies shows that we need to be more expansive in defining what counts as one's own story, what counts as a portrayal of "ourselves." Making films that represent "ourselves" and having them distributed and exhibited at home matters. Hawa Essuman spoke eloquently and passionately on the importance of this kind of representation and distribution:

> It's really important that art needs to be consumed where it's made. I firmly believe that because when you interact with it you can see who you are more, and you can either accept, or reject, or contemplate, or whatever. . . . I so vehemently disagree with this idea that art is a luxury. It's not. It's a need. . . . We need to be able to express ourselves, and have ourselves be represented by ourselves. I think that exemplifies human beings. . . . That's why I love film so much.[35]

There are strong expectations about what women are supposed to create and the areas where they supposedly shine as creators, and this usually

means emotionally driven films.[36] It is precisely this idea we must problematize and nuance, 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."[37] The filmmaking careers of Nairobi's female filmmakers have been defined not simply by telling personal stories or "women's stories" but rather by a diverse range of narratives, as is true of African female filmmakers from across the continent.[38] For every hagiographic celebration of accomplished women (*African Is a Woman's Name*, *For Our Land*),[39] there is a suspenseful thriller about betrayal and male criminality (*Killer Necklace*) or an urban fairy-tale with a male protagonist (*Soul Boy*). For every story focused on a female protagonist (*Project Daddy*, *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*). For every documentary about female bodies (*Yellow Fever*), there is another about truth and justice after atrocity (*Scarred: The Anatomy of a Massacre*). These filmmakers boldly tackle a huge variety of subjects.

They also have a wide variety of perspectives. While the majority have a feminist worldview, this perspective is not universal. As feminist film scholar E. Ann Kaplan contends, "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.[40] As an example, consider Anne Mungai's film *Tough Choices* (1998), a film that would certainly militate against any essentialist equation of female filmmakers with feminist visions. *Tough Choices* 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 that her boyfriend 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, at the same time, Anne Mungai's first film, *Saikati*, makes a powerful feminist statement about

young women controlling their own destinies, as we have seen. We need to study the problematic films as well as the feminist ones in order to have a complete picture of the actions of women in film.

CONCLUSION

Nairobi-based female filmmakers have made many lauded stylistically internationalized films—from *Saikati* in the early 1990s to the Cannes premiere of Wanuri Kahiu's film *Rafiki* in 2018. These films have global standard production values and extroverted content: In the case of both *Saikati* and *Rafiki*, the broad critical debate they engage with concerns the capacity young women have to forge their own futures, whether that is pursuing an education or choosing whom to love. Nairobi-based female filmmakers also engage in a wide range of other critical debates—be they about climate change or justice after atrocity. While gender and the representation of women is a clear concern, their films go far beyond what is stereotypically classified as women's cinema.

The well-traveled films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are all stylistically internationalized, but this style is not representative of their filmmaking work as a whole. Rather, as creative hustlers they entrepreneurially work across different filmmaking modes and experiment with multiple styles. This stylistic experimentation must be accounted for. Just as the history of female participation in African filmmaking is hidden when filmmaking is narrowly defined by the technology of production (e.g., celluloid vs. video), so too the participation of women is obscured when one style is singled out for the majority of analysis.

Examining the full oeuvres of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is essential to combating the stubbornly persistent marginalization of female filmmakers in African film studies scholarship. Feminist film scholar Beti Ellerson's *Sisters of the Screen* (2000) concretely demonstrated already twenty years ago that there *are* women working in African film industries through its thirty-six interviews with African and diasporan African female film practitioners, yet major works of scholarship still exclude them. Manthia Diawara, for instance, apologizes in his book *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* for ignoring African female filmmakers, noting that every reason he could come up with for this lack of attention "seemed too easy and sounded like excuses."[41] Likewise, in their work *Postcolonial*

African Cinema: Ten Directors, David Murphy and Patrick Williams state that "the most regrettable omission" of their book is that they included only one female filmmaker.[42] I have shown that narrowly focusing on auteur filmmaking leads to these problems. As such it is no longer justifiable to apologize for ignoring female filmmakers; instead, a new methodology is necessary to write the complete history of filmmaking by Africans of all genders.

4

CIRCULATION AND CENSORSHIP IN NAIROBI: ON TV AND ONLINE

Ng'endo Mukii is a talented animator principally known for her short documentary animation film *Yellow Fever* (2012). The film has traveled the world through film festivals, was shown on the European cultural TV channel Arte, and has been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people on the VOD platform Vimeo as well as other online distribution channels such as YouTube, Buni.TV, and IndieFlix. This is a successful case of distribution for an independent short film. Examining the work it took her to get the film into distribution—and the platforms she has used—is highly revealing.

The film explores a global hierarchy of female beauty standards that positions whiteness at its pinnacle and the psychological impact this has on African women. In a particularly evocative sequence, Mukii interviews her young niece, depicted in animated form. During the interview, her niece remarks: "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, suggesting 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*.[1]

Animated interviews such as this appear throughout the film and are interspersed with live action female modern dancers who contort their bodies to depict the existential discomfort of trying to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. 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."[2] The film is bold, provocative, and stylistically internationalized—both in its theme and in its production process—and this undoubtedly helped the film travel as far as it has.

Yet while the film had been widely seen, Mukii had an ambivalent view about the distribution platforms she had used and the trade-off that was so often made between visibility and remuneration, and the influence this would then have on her (and other filmmakers') ability to produce more films. She was glad her film was on platforms like Buni.tv and IndieFlix, but was cautious, saying, "I don't know how these platforms necessarily work, for short films—especially made by independent African filmmakers." Among her concerns are the limited discoverability of a film like hers, which has to compete with so much other content. Similarly, despite the success of her film at festivals, Mukii was rarely paid for these screenings. In fact, she frequently had to cover costs such as mailing DVDs of her film.

While *Yellow Fever* has received some compensated screenings on the channel Arte, generating income through TV distribution has been a challenge for Mukii. She continually had to navigate requests for her film where she was offered exposure rather than payment:

> You always get emails: "Your film was in this festival, our people really enjoyed it, we'd like to put it on our television locally, you're going to get 5 million viewers, you're not going to get any money, could you say yes?" And it's like, well, if you have 5 million viewers you just need one advert to pay, you know, for mine and the other films that will be shown.[3]

She railed against the exploitation in a model like this, where a powerful entity that could pay would *choose* not to. She saw the same problem as pervasive in Kenyan television:

> If the TV station was willing to pay or had 1.5 million [KES] to pay [for] half an hour of TV, then we would be generating so much more content. Instead, they pay for that Mexican series from ten years ago that's a thousand bucks per episode, and they pay for Nollywood—and that's probably two cents an episode [laughs]. They don't care.[4]

Either in the distribution of already made content or in the production of bespoke content for distribution, television stations had a powerful

influence on filmmakers in Nairobi and how they hustled to make and sell movies and other content, because it remains true that filmmakers need both financial rewards for selling their films *and* exposure to help them develop future projects.

Television and online space are particularly important for the distribution of Nairobi-based female filmmakers' work. Home viewing is by far the most popular way of watching films in Kenya and thus offers a useful starting point for examining issues in the circulation of films and television shows by Nairobi-based female filmmakers within Kenya.[5] This is also a space with key tensions. For instance, platforms like Vimeo and YouTube offer filmmakers a way to distribute their films and potentially reach larger audiences without going through traditional gatekeepers like television networks, but this comes with important trade-offs: Gaining exposure can mean foregoing direct economic returns, and there is no guarantee that films uploaded to these platforms will ever be watched. Filmmakers also must contend with issues of state and market censorship that limit the kinds of local content audiences can encounter on television in Nairobi. Finding profitable and sustainable ways of distributing their films is the biggest challenge Nairobi-based female filmmakers must overcome in their careers, but as we shall see, it is one they face with innovative strategies.

HUSTLING TO MAKE TELEVISION

In this section I will look at a particular type of media—television—and how production and distribution dynamics work together to influence the sort of material that gets made and shown, and how Nairobi-based female filmmakers hustle within this space. Before delving into how Nairobi-based female filmmakers work within the space of local television, it is necessary to know who the major broadcasting players are. 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 major players are KTN, Citizen TV, NTV, and KBC (the national broadcaster). The two most important pay-TV operators are the East African Zuku and the South African M-Net.[6]

Many filmmakers are looking at television for potential opportunities, and a key challenge to overcome is that of being a small player in a market of major corporations and, correspondingly, how to maximize success in

a market characterized by power asymmetries and the resulting potential for exploitation. Each major broadcaster—KTN, NTV, and Citizen—is part of a much larger media corporation, which contrasts with Nairobi-based female filmmakers who work either independently or as part of small production companies.[7] They also have to contend with foreign content, including American movies, telenovelas, and Nollywood films, and compete with these often much cheaper products. Both supply of and demand for content must be accounted for in assessing the local screen media viewing landscape and the role of foreign content within it.[8]

Rates paid by free-to-air channels are a contentious issue within the Nairobian screen media landscape. 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 a month. And if they commission a show, they are going to pay you 150,000 shillings 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.[9]

These statements are indicative of a common mode of thinking about free-to-air broadcasters: that they almost deliberately exploit filmmakers by allocating them very small budgets and that they have the means to pay more. Filmmakers want their films to be shown on television, or want to produce series for television, but it can be difficult to make an adequate income from these choices.

Intellectual property rights issues are widely acknowledged as a problem facing filmmakers in Nairobi—particularly in terms of negotiations with broadcasters. For instance, 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." TV stations will pay producers to make content, but this is 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 reruns. In order to address this unequal power dynamic between stations and filmmakers, Munyua was fervent that filmmakers must be made aware of the fact that "we are not just filmmakers—we are businessmen."[10] Other filmmakers, such as Wanuri Kahiu, learned this

lesson the hard way. She produced a Downton Abbey–esque drama about the politicians and employees of Kenya's State House with the TV station Zuku, and, despite the idea for the show being hers, the show itself actually belongs to Zuku. It is up to them to distribute it—or not—and to her knowledge, Zuku has released it only once. While Kahiu benefited from the experience of making the show, which, as she says, "is amazing," she cannot further monetize that experience, and if she could do it again, she would not have given up the rights to her idea.[11]

One example of a filmmaker with strong business savvy in this area 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).[12] Her company Spielworks Media can be classified as an "upmarket television house."[13] 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?"[14] Through leaving a career in Canada to develop an untested business in Nairobi, Ghettuba demonstrated the entrepreneurial drive that is a shared characteristic of so many Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Ghettuba described herself as focusing right from the outset on having her productions "make financial sense," and thus adopted a thoroughly entrepreneurial and business-minded approach to screen media production at Spielworks. She elaborated: "We realized that producing mass scale is what made financial sense. And that's why we have a huge catalogue of content" and why she has made TV movies rather than "big screen movies." A cornerstone of her business model is making sure she maintains the intellectual property rights to her content, and she emphasized that when Spielworks began, this was "a concept that not many people were using."[15]

Planning the full distribution run for any of her outputs is essential to her business so that she can both capitalize on every possible distribution platform available and build an audience and fan base in Kenya. She described her strategy as follows:

> 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 markup. And they have the rights exclusively for twelve 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.[16]

Part of her strategy for maximizing 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 pay-TV stations will not buy second runs, but free-to-air channels will. 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?"[17] Yet wide popularity in Kenya depends on free-to-air showings because only a minority of consumers can afford to watch pay TV. The way to both capture this audience and maximize revenue is to show second runs on free-to-air channels.

Ghettuba is particularly entrepreneurial and continually thought about how to get the most from her content and how to push the boundaries of current business models. For example, she said:

> 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 $4,000 then they make $12,000 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.[18]

Kenya moved from analog to digital terrestrial broadcasting in June 2015, and a key opportunity posed by this digital migration is the potential for a significantly greater number of television channels.[19] She is also exploring recutting her drama series into short segments so they are better suited for mobile phone viewing.[20]

The battle over what audiences want to watch and what broadcasters should correspondingly program is raging in Nairobi, and some filmmakers had a clear disdain for existing local content on free-to-air television. In my interviews, Nairobi-based film professionals constantly mentioned that there is a lack of innovation in local television programming and that local television is "dumbed down" or "terrible." Entertainment and intellectual property lawyer Liz Lenjo said, "When you look at a majority of the TV productions, they've been dumbed down terribly," and filmmakers Barbara Karuana and Jennifer Gatero each expressed similar opinions.[21] Yet, as we saw in chapter 2, taste functions as a marker of class, and these film industry professionals articulated their own position as middle-class through critiques of local television. By expressing their preference for foreign rather than local television, some of my interviewees performed middle-classness.

Dorothy Ghettuba saw the situation differently. 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:

> They're very clear about what they want. They want light-hearted comedy, they want simple stuff, they want slapstick humor, 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.[22]

When Citizen began showing local shows in 2007, they were met with a dramatic increase in viewership.[23] 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 popular local television. In fact, other broadcasters are interested in copying Citizen's programming and creating their own versions of Citizen's shows.[24] Broadcasters seem to be intent on targeting one segment of the population—those who obviously enjoy Citizen's programming—whereas many middle-class filmmakers were keen to explore other segments, and particularly those that were more like themselves in taste.

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 its website, it was "established with the aim of making quality home entertainment and communication services accessible to a rapidly growing, choice conscious African middle class."[25] In 2016, the sub-Saharan African market for pay TV was 24 million people.[26] M-Net and Zuku were generally regarded by filmmakers as producing higher-quality and more upmarket content than free-to-air channels. Not surprisingly, M-Net was also commonly identified in my interviews as paying filmmakers the most for content, followed by Zuku, and then by the free-to-air channels at much lower rates.[27]

However, the digital migration may engender a transformation in this media landscape because of the costs associated with the technological switchover from analog to digital television. After the analog switch-off, "audiences will be required to either purchase a (very expensive) digital television set, or a digital decoder or set-top box."[28] When we met, 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.'" She was adamant this perspective was wrong because the cost of the digital migration would necessarily mean that lower-income Kenyans would be priced out of watching television and broadcasters would then have to target those in the 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 3,000 KES. 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.[29]

It seems likely the technological transformation caused by the digital migration will have a wide-reaching impact 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. The increasing market segmentation in Nollywood offers an instructive example here. A growing middle class and returning diaspora have influenced the Nollywood production landscape in Nigeria, and now there is an increasingly segmented spectrum of filmmaking practices. "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.[30]

Local content quotas are one policy strategy for protecting and growing local industries, and this is an approach Kenya is trying. In 2013, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta announced 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.[31] This promise has been met with skepticism by the local industry. Filmmaker Jennifer Gatero, for instance, dismissed the 40 percent local content quota, saying: "But that's not being reached. So why do I care? . . . It means nothing to me."[32] In the absence of enforcement, the quota was meaningless rhetoric to her. According to the East African ICT trade magazine *CIO*, the local content quota is scheduled to increase to 60 percent in 2018.[33] Yet, as of June 2016, only KBC (the national broadcaster) had reached the 40 percent quota threshold. Of the major broadcasters, Citizen had reached 33 percent local

content, KTN had reached 38 percent local content, and NTV had reached 31 percent local content.[34]

Much like Gatero, Judy Kibinge also did not believe the government's line about how quotas would benefit the industry. In her opinion, if the government wanted to support the industry, the best way would not be local content quotas but rather through "a very strong national broadcaster that is imaginatively programmed with great commissioners" to act as a leader in the market. She saw this as possible based on the marked success of Citizen in programming local shows: "I think half of our problem in Kenya is a lack of imagination at a certain level. It's not the money. . . . 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* (2007), which, despite being "kind of basic, a bit slapsticky," was "well done compared to anything else that had been on TV previously and everybody is reacting to that. That's just a commissioner who had a head and just used his imagination." But broadcasters are obliged to serve their shareholders rather than local filmmakers, and this sort of imagination is lacking in her view.[35] Kibinge suggested that curation and imagination, rather than quotas, are the key to building audiences for a diverse range of local content, and that the state's role to play in this area was acting as a market leader in public broadcasting, thereby pushing other broadcasters to expand their offerings to remain competitive.

STATE AND MARKET CENSORSHIP

As we have seen, broadcasters act as important gatekeepers, determining what content will be aired on television. 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 [in Poland, Hungary, and 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*."[36] Filmmakers in the West and the Eastern

Bloc were both constrained; the difference was whether that constraint was due to commercial or political imperatives. She suggests that Western films that are not picked up by a distributor can be seen as shelved and that there are more films that have been inadequately distributed in this geographic area because of low expected profits than were censored during Communism in Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia.[37] Shelving films because of commercial imperatives can be read as market censorship.

We can see an example of market censorship in the Nairobian context in 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."[38] She and her team shot thirteen episodes, and yet, on the day of the launch, the network canceled the show, at the request of the sponsor, and it never aired. The marketing manager of the sponsor had changed, 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 twenty 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 twenty-one he has this enormous party. . . . So it had some subtle messaging.[39]

In a similar instance, another network, NTV, gave Kibinge a budget of $100,000 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.[40] 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 skillfully 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. 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 and were effectively shelved. We can thus see the power of broadcasters and powerful brands to act as cultural gatekeepers, determining which content does, and does not, make it onto local screens.

In addition to the problems they face with the market, Nairobi-based female filmmakers occasionally have to contend with outright state censorship. The Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) is mandated to "regulate the creation, broadcasting, possession, distribution and exhibition of films" in Kenya.[41] The KFCB actively exercises its right to ban films, notoriously banning Hollywood films such as Martin Scorsese's 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, stating in a post on their official Facebook page that "there is a limit to everything and we believe the Kenyan public deserves better" (January 14, 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 the pirate vendors who sell DVDs from makeshift stands all over the city—to say nothing of the ability of audiences with access to 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.

As was discussed in chapter 3, Wanuri Kahiu's latest feature film *Rafiki* was banned in Kenya because it depicted a love story between two women. But *Rafiki* is not the only film that has been recently banned in Kenya because of its theme. On October 2, 2014, the KFCB issued a letter to the production company The Nest banning their latest film *Stories of Our Lives* from distribution in Kenya. The letter stated that "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."[42] 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 eyes of the censors, it contravened public morality. Alongside the banning of the film, executive producer George Gachara was arrested for filming without a license.[43] These charges against Gachara would eventually be dropped, but the film remained unavailable in formal or informal distribution circuits within Kenya. 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 because its *Kenyan producers* were unwilling to risk the potential legal consequences of making their film available in any way in contravention of the ban.[44]

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.[45]

Banning the film in Kenya also meant closing off the opportunity for the conversations that would inevitably surround it. It also stopped the film from being able to influence Kenyans. Media scholar Minou Fuglesang's 1994 ethnographic study of young women viewing mostly Bollywood videos in Lamu, Kenya, found that the films, watched at home, gave young women "a 'language' for dealing with issues such as romance, sexuality and marriage."[46] Likewise, Maurice Amutabi shows how discussing the popular American soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* created a new discursive sphere where it was acceptable to talk about taboo subjects such as divorce and sexuality.[47] These findings suggest that onscreen representations of sexuality and gender can have real world impact. In the cases explored by both Fuglesang and Amutabi, the filmic narrative, and the social practices surrounding film viewing, contributed to local practices of love. *Stories of Our Lives* was kept from having this kind of influence in Kenya.

Importantly, audiences outside Kenya were able to see *Stories of Our Lives* 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 through my position as a submission advisor of the Film Africa festival, 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."[48] 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.

The *potential* for censorship also has an influence on local production culture. At the time of my interview, one filmmaker (who asked to remain

anonymous) was seriously questioning whether or not she would be able to make her next film because the moralizing censorship environment made it imprudent, if not impossible, to shoot the film in Kenya. She spoke eloquently about the affective toll of making media under these sorts of constraints:

> I think my heartbreak is because I felt like I was good. I played the game. I'm the right person. I feel like I'm the good citizen. . . . I'm an ideal citizen up until the point that I make the film I want to make. Then I stop being an ideal citizen. Who does that make me? I feel like I'm having to reevaluate my whole relationship with my country.

But filmmakers, while recognizing these conditions, continually work to find ways around them. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann mentioned how the current Kenyan government makes her think about self-censoring to avoid getting into trouble with her films, but she mitigates this worry through the support of non-Kenyan funders like the IDFA Bertha Fund (a film fund for world cinema that is part of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam). This funding is "great" because "it means you are answerable to people who live elsewhere, *which means that their ideas are more open*."[49] This situation—where transnational funding facilitates the creation of content that would not be deemed acceptable within the filmmaker's national context—is by no means exclusive to Nairobi.[50] Receiving external funding, and the frequently corresponding access to external distribution circuits, can allow filmmakers to address topics that may not be seen as acceptable within their local contexts.

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 powers 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 it controversially tried to regulate Netflix based on the supposed immorality of some of its content.[51] The board was unsuccessful, as 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."[52] 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. Ultimately, the Kenyan regulatory environment is highly volatile and filmmakers and media companies must work hard to turn the situation to their advantage.

DIGITAL INNOVATIONS AND DIVIDES

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.[53] 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. Infrastructural conditions such as Internet networks and consistent electricity provision vary highly by location and correspondingly influence both the access that consumers in various geographies have to digital distribution platforms and the development of local production industries.[54] The infrastructure required to stream content (including SVOD content) includes electricity and an Internet connection, but it also includes "soft" infrastructure such as systems to collect payment from subscribers.[55] In African markets, credit card–only payment options are not sufficient, and success in this market means offering consumers options better suited to their circumstances—in this case, especially, paying with mobile phone airtime.[56]

The Kenyan media landscape was immediately transformed when fiber optic cables reached Kenya in 2009, and changes included 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.[57] According to the Communications Authority of Kenya, in the first quarter of the 2015–2016 financial year, 88.1 percent of Kenyans now have mobile phone subscriptions, and the magazine *Business Daily* reports that 60 percent of Kenyans now have smartphones.[58] Thus, Kenya is undergoing a technological shift in mobile phone and Internet access—as is much of the rest of the African continent, where the Internet is dominantly accessed through smartphones—and the number of people with access to mobile Internet is predicted to increase dramatically in the coming years.[59]

Historically, watching the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers has been no easy task. Their films tend to screen in film festivals scattered

across the globe and are held in university library collections, but they are not widely commercially available. Here the potential of Internet distribution becomes apparent. Dina 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."[60] But does Iordanova's vision hold true for viewers of Nairobi-based female filmmakers' films?

Rather than relying on conventional gatekeepers such as broadcasters, filmmakers can now share their content freely online. We can see this in the case of Judy Kibinge's noir thriller *Killer Necklace*. Kibinge made the film through her production company Seven in partnership with M-Net New Directions—a program for emerging filmmakers where M-Net mentors the filmmakers and refines the projects to create thirty-minute dramas it then broadcasts.[61] 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." Kibinge described this as "fantastic" because their lack of involvement in creative decisions gave her a heightened sense of ownership over the film, and she approached the film with extreme dedication so that it could be her "big break." Yet, according to her, "it never went anywhere."[62] M-Net promoted the film in a limited way and to a much smaller extent than Kibinge would have liked. This is likely because the goals of M-Net New Directions and of Kibinge were quite different—New Directions as a project aimed to *make* films within the framework of developing new African film talents, so once a film was finished and aired on M-Net, their goal had been achieved. Kibinge, as a director, on the other hand, wanted the film to have the broadest possible exposure so as to grow her fan base and increase her chances of gaining financing for a future film. In response to the lack of distribution, she took matters into her own hands and uploaded the film to Vimeo in 2015. As she says:

> 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.[63]

As of March 2019, the film was still on Vimeo, which seems to indicate that Kibinge was correct in her original assessment that M-Net did not care about the film (or at least not enough to protect its copyright and have the film removed). However, over the course of four years that film attracted only 538 views, which suggests that despite being available to view, potential audiences have not found or potentially been able to find the film.

As the example of *Killer Necklace* shows, making content freely available to potential audiences does not mean that the film will actually be *watched*. Other interventions are often necessary to guide viewers to content. We can see this in the case of Ng'endo Mukii's short film *Yellow Fever*. She shared *Yellow Fever* on Vimeo, and when it was selected as a "Vimeo Staff Pick"—which led to additional celebrity and press coverage—viewership jumped by a dramatic 80,000 people in a two-week time span.[64] Over time, the film received more than 150,000 views. Half of the views the film has received to date are a direct result of a curatorial intervention guiding viewers to the film. As African screen media scholar Lindiwe Dovey cogently notes, "the sheer amount of film material online calls for new forms of curatorship to guide viewers to and through content," while at the same time "just as the digitization and streaming of films is proliferating, so too are cultural festivals of all kinds."[65] 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 (as we will explore in chapter 5) or strategies of Internet curatorship (such as Vimeo Staff Picks) that pull particular films out of the avalanche of available content.

Entrepreneurs and established media companies are increasingly exploring the potential opportunities of SVOD services in Africa. The African screen media VOD platform Buni.tv—founded in Nairobi in 2012 by Marie Lora-Mungai and online until it was sold in 2016—was particularly valuable as a platform for curating East African screen media. Buni.tv aimed to distribute high-quality African content and had a large selection of East African films, but despite its innovations in online distribution, it did not generate enough subscribers and was sold to the French network Trace TV.[66] Similarly, the pay-per-view African Film Library (a subsidiary of M-Net) operated only from 2009 to 2013.[67] While initially exciting for offering more than 600 previously difficult-to-find African films so easily to audiences globally, the future of these films is now uncertain and the library is offline.[68]

As the examples of Buni.tv and the African Film Library show, the online market is highly volatile and individual videos as well as entire platforms disappear, reshape, and are introduced. Furthermore, revenues generated through online distribution services (such as Netflix and iTunes) are minor in comparison to more conventional outlets such as cinemas and broadcasters, suggesting that online distribution is still truly a frontier and one likely to change as various entrepreneurs seek their fortunes in digital spaces.[69]

In addition to new opportunities for film distribution, the Internet offers potential new models of film financing in terms of crowdfunding. Some Nairobi-based female filmmakers have successfully used this method to raise funds for their films. Filmmakers Amira and Wafa Tajdin raised $19,147 in 2012 to fund the production of their feature film *Walls of Leila* (in production) through the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, and Wanuri Kahiu also successfully raised $12,113 through a campaign on Kickstarter in 2011 to fund her documentary *Ger: To Be Separate* (in production).[70] However, the labor involved in capitalizing on this new revenue stream is not to be underestimated. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann raised €8,500 ($8,977) to put toward her feature documentary *New Moon* using the Dutch film-specific platform CineCrowd. With the money raised, she was able to buy a camera and therefore own the equipment she would use to shoot the film. But the process of raising funds through CineCrowd was rigorous because, as she says, CineCrowd is very serious about what they do:

> They were consulting us most of the time, at least initially. So when we actually wanted to start crowd funding week, they were like you need to have this, and this, and this, you need to have, like, already have your videos that are going to be unleashing during the month, you need to have your emails ready, you need to have this ready, what are your awards? . . . So when we submitted all the stuff they were like "sorry, these awards are not good enough, this information doesn't suffice." . . . So it took us about two months to be able to actually be completely ready.[71]

She thus had to undertake a substantial amount of work to run a successful crowdfunding campaign. Behind-the-scenes labor is a pervasive feature of digital media industries, and "making it" in these industries involves a significant amount of invisible and unpaid labor for those aspiring to succeed in these spaces.[72] Like the fashion bloggers in Brooke Erin Duffy's study who undertake unpaid work in exchange for the promise of exposure and

potential future success, Ndisi-Herrmann invested time and energy in her campaign in the hopes of being successful: CineCrowd releases funds only if campaigns meet their stated fundraising target.[73] Finally, while Ndisi-Herrmann was successful on the CineCrowd platform, she was ultimately only able to make the film with the combined financial support of the East African film fund Docubox, the Göteborg Film Festival, and the IDFA Bertha Fund.

Fundraising and distributing films online is only one option in an arsenal of strategies that Nairobi-based female filmmakers use to make their films and sustain their careers. Hustling to make films in Nairobi involves exploring every possible option: making use of the Internet to crowdfund, 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.

CONCLUSION

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. We have to be aware of the gatekeepers that decide which products become visible to potential audiences and which remain marginalized. State and market censors create limits on the kinds of screen media products Nairobi-based spectators can encounter, but hustling filmmakers are continually working to find new ways of distributing their films and other media. Nairobi-based female filmmakers are not passive actors in these encounters. Rather, they continually innovate to create new opportunities for themselves and to reach new audiences for their work.

A considerable challenge during the course of researching this book was finding copies of Nairobi-based female filmmakers' film to view. A few, such as *Soul Boy* and *Something Necessary*, were easy to locate in various forms, including on streaming platforms and in DVDs available in select stores in Nairobi and on Amazon. Most films, including classics such as *Saikati*, were much more difficult to locate. I continually scoured the Internet in search of links to films. Films continually appear, disappear, and reappear online. Because I knew about these films in advance, I was able to hunt them down online, but without this prior knowledge, many of these films

would be almost impossible to find. Another core method was relying on personal contacts with filmmakers to source their films, where, again, access to the films depended on my prior and insider knowledge. Gaining an audience online cannot be taken for granted. Furthermore, many films available online are illicit. The illegal release of rare films on platforms like YouTube can be read in multiple ways: From an audience-centered perspective, this development is very positive, as many more people have access to the film; however, this sharing is in violation of intellectual property rights.[74]

We need to look at the context in which audiences see films and other media content—be that in the sea of content that makes up YouTube or the restricted mediascape of Nairobian television. As Carmela Garritano demonstrates in her study of Ghanaian video movies, at the time video filmmaking emerged in Ghana (the late 1980s), audiences were accustomed to watching old and degraded celluloid prints in cinemas.[75] Critics of video films have disparaged video film aesthetics, but for early Ghanaian audiences the low-quality aesthetics of these early video movies were not such a radical departure from film aesthetics. Acknowledging this context is thus necessary to understand audience taste. How far films and television shows travel has as much to do with context as it does with content, as I have shown in this chapter. Finding audiences involves hard and careful distribution and curatorial work. It is to this curatorial and distribution work in "live" settings that we turn in the next chapter.

5

WATCHING FILM IN NAIROBI

I am on a bus from Yaya mall to the center of Nairobi (colloquially called "town") to see a new documentary at the arts center Pawa254. If traffic moves consistently, this journey should take about twenty minutes. The journey starts in the usual 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 neighborhood 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 stops 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 twenty-five-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. Indeed, I was telling 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, six o'clock, seven o'clock. I'm not going to sit in traffic for an hour for [a film screening] . . . no."[1] 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 center of town, but access to these spaces depends on the ability to pay for transport to get to them, which is not always easy and in some cases is impossibly expensive.[2] To turn to another important center of film exhibition in Nairobi, Pawa254 has a regular schedule of film events, yet, despite the center's location near State House and the center of the city, transit connections to the center are inadequate. There are bus stops nearby, providing a convenient and relatively inexpensive way of accessing the center 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.[3]

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 ninety minutes of their day, walk in the rain down a highway, sit in a cramped bus with a leaky roof, and run through the streets before the dark sets in, all to see a new documentary?

In the previous chapter, I examined conditions of state and market censorship that limit the kinds of local content that audiences can encounter in Nairobi and the innovative strategies Nairobi-based female filmmakers employ to gain wider exposure for their films on television and in online spaces. In this chapter, I aim to emphasize the circumstances of circulation in Nairobi of the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Film distribution scholar Ramon Lobato reminds us that "conditions of distribution are crucial in determining how audiences read films."[4] Meaning is not fixed in a text; rather, "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."[5] It is important to talk about *where* films are screened because, in the words of Hawa Essuman, "how you present something informs how you value it."[6]

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—namely,

the auditoriums of the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française and the art center Pawa254.[7] Traditional commercial outlets for film viewing—namely, devoted movie theaters—are relatively unimportant outlets for the exhibition of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and cinema-going is a relatively expensive pastime.[8] 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 in live settings.

CULTIVATING AUDIENCES

Nairobi's cinemas mostly screen international movies, so I was thrilled one night to see that Planet Media Cinemas in Prestige Plaza was screening an evening of Riverwood films. It was the first of such events organized by the Riverwood Ensemble (a Riverwood film producers association). I was excited to see these films up on the big screen, but evidently, my enthusiasm was not shared: I was one of only nine people to attend that evening. As I sat there in the near-empty cinema, I thought about why hardly anyone else was there. Riverwood films are dominantly distributed for home use and viewing on television screens, so perhaps their usual audience simply did not expect to find the films in a cinema and thus never looked at the cinema's advertising, or could not afford to attend even if they did see it. Similarly, perhaps the relatively affluent patrons of the cinema had no interest in local movies, instead preferring big-budget Hollywood cinema. Bisschoff and Overbergh suggest that the "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)."[9] Perhaps, then, the pricing and delivery system of Planet Media Cinemas was unsuitable for Riverwood films at that time. To test the popularity of a film requires engaging both with the object itself (to assess its content) and with its circumstances of screening. Vitally, conditions of distribution and exhibition must be accounted for.

An obstacle for building a new film culture is, of course, competing with the existing film culture. Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood almost undoubtedly provide the frame of reference for the majority of film viewers in the city. French scholar Anjali Prabhu argues that "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."[10] Prabhu draws on the problematic metaphor of being "hooked," which calls to mind both addiction and fish caught on the end of a line—and I mention this view here because it is surprisingly pervasive.[11] I spoke with Hawa Essuman about audiences in Nairobi and she said:

> I was having this conversation with someone a few years back, [about] the value of production value. They were like, "As long as you make the film." I'm like, "No." Because the thing is, our history of having watched films is international. Our fodder has been Latin American telenovelas, and Hollywood films, and English television. So we are used to seeing a very specific standard. . . . Having said that, we also consume an inordinate amount of Nollywood films. So there is that. And whilst we are really pleased to see ourselves sort of represented in some fashion on the big screen, we also wish that is was of better quality. . . . So, production value is important. Regardless of what anyone says. It's important. And that will determine how [the film] stands.[12]

While foreign films are a major competitor, the metaphor of addiction to foreign films ignores the agency and individualism of audience members, as well as the media context in which they are situated and how past viewing shapes expectations. Film scholar Iain Robert Smith, who suggests that media globalization should be seen as "an interstitial process through which cultures meet and interact," puts forward a more productive line of thinking.[13] Essuman was clear that production values are essential and that the standard of what makes a quality film is set internationally. This is the context Nairobi-based female filmmakers must contend with as they work to develop the film-viewing culture in Nairobi.

EUROPEAN CULTURAL CENTERS AND NAIROBIAN FILM FESTIVALS

The Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française are important spaces for the local exhibition of films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, particularly through hosting small film festivals, as we shall see. They also host important events that promote and develop the local film industry. For example, the Lola Kenya Film Forum is hosted the first Monday of every month in the Goethe Institut auditorium, and has been running for more than a decade. 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. Similarly, while I was in Nairobi, the local production company Lightbox began hosting a monthly film viewing and discussion forum at the Alliance Française. Both these initiatives work to build audiences for locally made film as well as to develop the skill of Nairobi-based filmmakers.

The Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française are both major European cultural centers 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. Each has a mission to promote the language of their home country through language classes (German for the Goethe Institut and French for the Alliance Française), to promote German or French culture more broadly, and to support local artistic scenes. The terms of exchange between the cultural centers and their partners (for instance, film festival organizers) are contentious, and the self-presented mission 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.[14]

The cultural institutions deliberately intend to promote their respective languages and cultures beyond their national borders and, through this exercise of soft power, to 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,'" and yet these exchanges "must take place within the parameters of these cultural centres."[15] Art and cultural studies scholar Will Rea suggests a danger in external funders gravitating only toward 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."[16] This line of critique suggests that because of their financial and institutional power, external organizations 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 of 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."[17] 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 organizer to just "invite people in."[18] Jackie Lebo described organizing an event with her company Content House where they would show an exhibition of approximately fifty sports photographs during the Olympics. Other venues wanted to charge them 300,000 KES ($2,600), but the Alliance Française provided them with the venue free of charge.

> 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, because they've done it a long time. We want it to be supplemented with local organizations. And I hope people like Pawa[254] are going to start doing something like that.[19]

However, given that the downside of a free venue is that the subsequent screenings must often be noncommercial in nature, the long history of the decommercialization of African film screenings in Africa must be considered here.[20] For instance, most African films that receive funding from France are "rarely visible in francophone Africa."[21] Historically, French funding for African film came with many "strings attached," including in the realm of film distribution: 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."[22] 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.[23] 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.

The current market in Nairobi is one where cultural centers provide a key venue for films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers to meet audiences in the city. At these centers, 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.[24] A particularly important example is the Udada Film Festival, both because it is codirected by Nairobi-based female filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui and because it is a women's film festival devoted to celebrating African female filmmakers. 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, and the Michael Joseph Centre.[25] 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 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.

Udada had a very broad mandate. 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's mandate was simply to show films by and about women. Running a film festival is difficult both logistically and artistically, especially in a context of limited resources. Kinyanjui herself noted several difficulties she had to confront in selecting and programming films. 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 (although they allowed films by men so long as the films were "women oriented"). 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?"[26] While this curation may appear slapdash, it is also true that festivals that use online submission portals (and particularly ones that do not charge a fee to submit)

can receive an unmanageable deluge of films leading to difficult choices of what to watch and what to skip.

It was also apparent that the festival faced organizational difficulties. The hard copy festival program listed a very different festival schedule from the version made available online: The online version stated that events would run from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily, when in fact events started at 9:30 a.m. each morning. Workshops and film screenings were also moved around without prior notice. Audiences thus *already* had to attend the festival to know when events would be held. Due to curatorial and logistical difficulties, the festival had trouble fulfilling the ambitions stated in its mandate.

The idea for the Udada Film Festival originated with Wanjiru Kinyanjui, and it took her significant effort to launch the festival. 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."[27] Eventually, Kinyanjui was able to work with Barbara Reich (an employee of the Goethe Institut in Nairobi) to start the festival. Rather than run the festival as the sole director, Kinyanjui invited her former student Matrid Wanjah Munene to codirect the festival, and eventually the third codirector, Naomi Mwaura, joined the organizational team. Kinyanjui described the festival's organization as "very difficult at first because there was hardly any money."[28] Eventually, they received the promised money from the Goethe Institut, and found other sponsors, including the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Alliance Française (who co-supported the closing ceremony with the Goethe Institut), and other small companies that provided them with materials or discounts.[29] The difficultly of organizing and financing a film festival must not be glossed over, and most film festivals require significant subsidy to operate.[30]

On the penultimate day of Udada, the Spanish Embassy hosted a cocktail party and film screening at the Michael Joseph Centre where they showed *Blancanieves* (dir. Pablo Berger, 2012), a black and white silent film reimagining 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 while attending I was struck by how little the event—given that it celebrated the work of a Spanish man—had to do with supporting African female filmmakers, especially since

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. The Spanish Embassy became involved with the festival because, while reviewing submissions, the festival directors realized there was a mass of Spanish films, and thus thought they could "get the Spanish embassy to do something."[31] 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 onstage so frequently). Interestingly, the filmmakers honored 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 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 considering that film festivals are an essential venue for African films to be screened in Africa.[32] The Film Africa Documentary Festival in Nairobi (November 10–15, 2014), directed by Charles Asiba (former director of the now defunct Kenya International Film Festival), 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" (where the students were grade school students from the local Agha Khan school), Bosscher revealed in the Q&A that he had traveled from the Netherlands with the bulk of the films for the festival. The complete disjuncture between the mission and the happenings of the festival was perplexing.

Other festivals were removed from local filmmakers, but for different purposes, as was apparent with the Out Film Festival. This festival was organized 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. The 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. Through showing films about LGBTQ communities and having a public discussion, the festival sought to create a space to talk about issues that are taboo in Kenya and thus lay a foundation for positive change in how LGBTQ people are treated in Kenya both socially and before the law. It seems likely that the curators would have shown *Stories of Our Lives* during the festival since it so clearly fulfilled their mandate, but this option was not available because the film had been banned in Kenya.

We must question what each person, venue, and partner involved stands to gain from participating in a film festival. The Slum Film Festival can provide an interesting example. The festival intends to show films made by slum-dwellers, particularly in Nairobi, to audiences of other slum-dwellers in Mathare and Kibera.[33] In writing about the 2012 edition of the Slum Film Festival, McNamara notes that "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.[34] This is shown even more clearly by the fact that no one attending the festival's closing ceremony at the Alliance Française (aside from festival organizers) had actually attended the festival screenings in the informal settlements of Mathare and Kibera.[35] What happened at the festival itself—such as number of audience members attending the festival or less easily

quantifiable factors such as impact on the local community—was not as important as the fact that the festival *happened at all*: "as a project for 'cultural,' rather than economic development, the event's mere existence is sufficient pre-condition for its success."[36] Thus, looking at the intention of each partner involved becomes essential in analyzing why festivals play out as they do, just as examining curatorial and logistical challenges is important.

ACTIVIST FILM SCREENINGS

Pawa254 is an art and activism center that opened in Nairobi in November 2011, and events hosted there often play out very differently from those hosted at the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française. Much like other creative organizations in the city—such as the film fund Docubox, the literary organization Kwani?,[37] and the production collective The Nest—Pawa254 is founded and run by Kenyans, but also receives funding from external development organizations. Each of these organizations 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 organizations 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" align with Pawa254's own goal of creating social change in Kenya through increased citizen participation.[38]

Pawa254 was started by famed local photojournalist and activist Boniface Mwangi, and the organization, according to their website, "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, free-thinking youth, in and beyond our immediate location."[39] Pawa254 thus has an intensely national focus in its work, and it intends to shape the future of Kenya through the merging of art and activism as "artivism." According to its 2015 promotional video (screened before every one of its film screenings), 30,000 people have received training in various capacities since November 2011. Pawa254 focuses specifically on engaging youth and aims to use media to promote progressive social change in Kenya.

Thus, it comes as little surprise that a film festival hosted at this venue, and about human rights, would focus on both art and activism specifically as they relate to the local community. In Pawa254's special Human Rights Watch Film Festival affiliated screening, four films were shown: Zippy Kimundu's short film *Burnt Forest* (2013), which tells the story of two teenagers from different tribes falling in love amid 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 postelection violence; *No Humanity Here* (2014) by InformAction,[40] which was about human rights abuses against Somalis and Somali-Kenyans in Eastleigh, Nairobi; and, finally, *Maramaso* (2013), 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. 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 screening of *Big Men* (dir. Rachel Boynton, 2013), every seat was filled. As part of their regular calendar of events, Pawa254 hosts a weekly film forum where a film (almost always a documentary) is screened and a discussion convened around the issues it raises, almost always with a sizable audience. Pawa254 has a clear agenda with its programming to screen socially conscious documentaries about topics of relevance to the local community, and particularly ones that speak to a youth audience, and speakers are brought in—such as the directors, but also activists on the subjects of the documentaries—to foster discussion around the films. For instance, it screened *In the Shadow of a Gold Mine* (dir. Zahra 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 instance, a local film journalist convened a discussion following

the screening of *Beautiful Tree, Severed Roots* (dir. Kenny 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, film screenings were turned into events. These kinds of regularly scheduled live programs are one vital way for films to engage citizens; these programs can "help to facilitate and stimulate important public debates that can impact society."[41]

A particularly noteworthy event was the premiere of Jackie Lebo's documentary *The Last Fight* (2015) on April 30, 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 presented as 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.

The evening began on Pawa254's rooftop event space—an area complete with a lounge, a bar, an outdoor screen, and an empty space that can fit approximately sixty chairs or a large reception tent—and people shared drinks and talk as we waited for the film to start.[42] (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. 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 onstage to say a few words. Many of them were uncomfortable speaking in English and instead spoke in Swahili.[43] 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 honor and made a speech onstage. However, rather than a formal encounter where the audience listened quietly and then clapped at 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 publicly confront a powerful representative of an institution that had been denying him justice.

Pawa254's ability to turn film screenings from solitary viewing experiences into social events is critical to its ability to successfully draw large crowds. Lindiwe Dovey argues that "it is the 'liveness' of festivals—the coming together, in person, of audiences, filmmakers, curators, and festival organizers—that attracts enthusiastic support and participation."[44] 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.

CONCLUSION

Judy Kibinge's film *Scarred: The Anatomy of a Massacre*, which tells the story of the Wagalla Massacre and its survivors' decades-long fight for truth and justice, premiered to a packed audience at the Louis Leakey Auditorium of the National Museum on February 10, 2015. The audience included Members of Parliament and survivors of the Wagalla Massacre. 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.[45] 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," but Kibinge, because of her commitments with Docubox, does not have the time to fully promote her film, for example, by undertaking the labor-intensive and expensive work of submitting it to film festivals abroad.[46] 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.

Building a culture around watching locally made films involves careful curatorial work as well as planning to attract audiences to the physical spaces that screen films. This is something that both filmmakers and curators are passionate about. Wanjiru Kinyanjui—famed for *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*—was clearly passionate about developing audience appreciation for women's films, hence the formation of the festival Udada. As I have shown in this chapter, the event was only partially successful because its curation was haphazard. More deliberate curation was necessary to make sure that the best films that would fulfill its mission would be shown.

Developing physical spaces to attract new audiences is also vital, as we have seen in this chapter. During my time in Nairobi, Pawa254 undertook extensive renovations and built a movie theater (named the Mageuzi Theatre), complete with comfortable, plush chairs. As with the previous viewing space, the room is L-shaped. Additionally, unlike a movie theater 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. The material spaces of film viewing are important, but equally important is the atmosphere these spaces have, and programming is essential to this atmosphere. The regular programs at Pawa254 were most often completely packed because Pawa254 works to turn their screenings into events. At Pawa254, film viewing is also a social activity, which helps to cultivate audiences for locally made films.

The market for locally produced films is very small in Kenya, making international markets both on the continent and farther afield vitally important. Crucially, the spaces where Nairobi-based female filmmakers' films are most likely to meet live audiences in Nairobi are noncommercial in nature and thus do not directly generate revenue for the filmmakers. As such, these filmmakers must hustle to finance and build audiences and markets for their films.

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PRECARITY, ENTREPRENEURIALISM, AND INNOVATION IN NAIROBI

Throughout her career, Zippy Kimundu has boldly seized unconventional opportunities. Kimundu began studying mass communication and TV production and, following her education, moved to Uganda. She realized 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." 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." While in Uganda she also studied for another degree, in public administration, as a backup plan given the uncertainty of her film career.[1]

A pivotal moment in her career came when she attended Maisha Film Lab as an editor. 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 an Academy Award nominee 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 spoke about the kind of exposure Maisha gave her—both in the sense of working with international caliber 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, the interaction and the exposure to the outside world made me realize that I had unique stories. I appreciated more where I came from, and everything that I think of now felt special.[2]

This exposure was essential to the development of her unique creative voice and for realizing that her stories and experiences could make interesting

films. She has since been involved in a wide variety of projects—as befits a creative hustler. For instance, she worked as codirector 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 codirector with Nair, and also the connections and opportunities that have come out of the project. 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 had never been on a Hollywood film set previously, and that opportunity was worth pursuing even though it meant temporarily sidelining her directorial skills. She sees herself primarily as a director, but being a creative hustler in Nairobi means seizing every possible opportunity for growth and career advancement.

Throughout her career, she has entrepreneurially seized "novel opportunities to initiate new forms of generating income in the realm of cultural production,"[3] as befits a cultural entrepreneur, particularly through building networks with other filmmakers and film organizations 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 for an alternate degree or building additional skills (such as advancing her editing skills instead of purely focusing on directing)—that would see her through potentially precarious times, as befits a hustler. Kimundu is not alone in this approach, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers are united by their shared approach to work: creative and entrepreneurial hustling.

Entrepreneurial activity in cultural and creatives industries is highly gendered. Reimer's study of U.K. design agencies, for example, shows how "understandings of creativity, knowledge, innovation and craft may be presented in a gender-neutral guise but in fact often rest on assumptions about a distinctively masculine subject."[4] Definitions of successful entrepreneurship disproportionately focus on measuring success financially, and studies of African entrepreneurs often exclude women entirely because of this.[5] Entrepreneurial discourses, in general, have an implied masculine subject and thus position women at a deficit; because of this, "entrepreneurship cannot be adequately analysed from a gender neutral perspective."[6] We need to explicitly foreground women's experiences as entrepreneurs, and how they hustle to succeed in their industries.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers work in a precarious labor 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"[7]—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.

HUSTLING IN NAIROBI

To get their films made in Nairobi, filmmakers must hustle. The filmmakers we have met in this book are middle-class and transnationally connected, so at first they seem rather different from the classic hustlers described in the cultural studies canon. For example, Stuart Hall and others locate hustling in urban ghettos and describe it as "that range of informal dealing, semi-legal practices, rackets and small-time crime" that are an "*alternative* to the respectable route of hard labour and low wages" usually open to workers in these spaces.[8] In subsequent years the concept of hustling has migrated to describe a much larger variety of activities that are not shady or semi-legal—such as educated young Kenyans starting farms alongside other occupations, the performance that aspiring social media influencers do to make themselves visible to brands, the hopeful work of creatives in Accra, or how young people in Ghana use their mobile phones as a tool for navigating precarity.[9] Socioeconomically marginalized young people in Nairobi also manage their precarious circumstances through hustling. For example, young people in the informal settlement of Kibera strategically manipulate the many NGOs operating in Kibera for their own material benefit.[10] Similarly, young people in Mathare created trash-collecting businesses as a way of profiting from the government's failure to collect trash. They saw a potential profit opportunity that they could exploit in the pervasive garbage if they formed businesses to collect it, which they did.[11] These hustlers reclaimed their agency in precarious circumstances.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers neither live in "ghettos" nor work in modes involving questionable legality, but they do entrepreneurially negotiate precarity. This allows us to see them as hustlers even when the degree

of precarity they experience is very different from Nairobians living in Kibera or Mathare, for example.

It is possible to keep human agency in focus while still exploring the underpinning structural conditions that may inform our choices. As philosopher Judith 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."[12] Jennifer Gatero, for example, had done most of her work in television but had also produced corporate videos and documentaries because she had to. She said:

> If I was so flooded with TV series work then I wouldn't really have to do anything else, but you see in between projects—maybe I finished a project in February and my next project is in June—what am I going to do in the meantime? You know what I mean? So maybe in a way the industry is not big enough for specialization.[13]

The industry may be too small for specialization, but Gatero could still hustle within it to try to create the kinds of projects she wanted to work on. She had previously done only corporate documentaries—"nothing exciting," in her words—and was enthused to be embarking on her first independent documentary project about a group of people in Majengo (an informal settlement in Nairobi). She described it as "a reality show where we follow them around. Sort of *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, or keeping up with people who live in absolute poverty." She was clearly excited at the prospect.

> I'm looking forward to doing more of the stuff that I'm passionate about. And that's going to be so exciting for me. . . . I'm just going to run myself to the ground until I have to take up a paid project again. Until I have to be at the point where I'm like, "Okay, if I don't take up a paid project now I'm going to starve to death." I'm going to get to that point.[14]

She was confident in her success and was willing to take the risk of embarking on a new kind of production to create the kind of career she wanted.

Hustling is an activity, but hustlers must have a particular attitude in order to succeed. In his book on urban nightlife in Philadelphia, sociologist David Grazian suggests what this attitude looks like: "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."[15] As opposed to the informality and questionable legality of the hustle described by Hall et al., 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. Hustling 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. Self-confidence and a stomach for risk are vital for the hustler.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers are artists, but as screen media entrepreneurs they must also be business people. Thinking like a business person is then also vital, as the example of Isabel Munyua will show. Isabel Munyua, and her company Dream Catcher, which she runs with her husband Martin, are deeply committed to creating screen media content "that will put Kenya in a positive light" and doing what it takes to make a successful business out of creating this kind of work. A particularly interesting example of their work is the TV show *Dads Can Cook* (the show's principle was "to put men in the kitchen for a change"). It was first bought by Kiss TV and then by M-Net, and she wanted to duplicate it "for other markets around Africa." To be successful in this endeavor requires careful thought and planning:

> When you are creating, it's a business. Let's be honest and look at it from a business-side point of view. . . . So first things first is research. If you are going to do it for [the African] Continent then you need to get some statistics on what the Continent actually watches. What may work for Kenya may not necessarily work for Ethiopia, for instance. Or may not work for West Africa. So, the issue of finding a common thing, a common denominator for all these regions is what is actually needed, is research. . . . Which is why with something like *Dads Can Cook*, we actually did ask.[16]

Rather than hoping the show would be popular, she set out to study those markets. She passionately emphasized the business of creativity and felt that Nairobi-based filmmakers needed to think more carefully about the business of what they create.

> You are creating content for an audience and it needs to sell. For it to sell it needs to appeal to people. So they can watch it. So others can pay for it. You know what I mean? It's a whole cycle. But until we get that aspect of it we will be forever making films to put on our shelves. And watching them with our families. For personal use.[17]

Addressing problems in distribution meant careful planning in production, that is, doing research on how to make content for the broadest distribution possible.

In Nairobi and elsewhere, creative workers must constantly be attuned to the possibility of future work, especially considering the increasing pervasiveness of short-term contracts in the creative industries over long-term employment.[18] They must always be on the lookout for future work opportunities, both during work and in their leisure time.[19] In Nollywood, for example, "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."[20] Diversifying their skill sets can be critical to being able to continue working. Ever the entrepreneurial hustler, after her filmmaking degree in directing and writing Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann learned to operate her own camera as a way of diversifying her skills so that she could always keep working.[21] When we met, she was also exploring how to integrate her practices as a writer, photographer, and painter into her work. Hustlers need to be comfortable improvising and finding new ways to generate income, and a key marker of the hustler is that they are someone "who relies on their own resources and must not only be comfortable with, but thrive as they juggle multiple vocational roles."[22]

We can see this mode of working in multiple ways. Veteran filmmaker Dommie Yambo-Odotte felt moving from job to job could affect industry growth because it made it hard to learn from each project. She described the perspective of cameramen always looking for the next job (as an example):

> You're constantly on the move. You don't stop for one moment to say, "How did I perform?" You know, view the film. "Dommie [Yambo-Odotte], what did you think about the images? Did I do it right? Next time maybe before we go can we try . . . ?" You see, because . . . the more you work the better skills you should grow. . . . Because we are hustling we are not looking at every assignment as another platform of growth. It's every assignment as a platform for the next assignment.[23]

On the other hand, young filmmaker Lucille Kahara felt that the industry condition where "you can't just focus on one thing" (e.g., fiction film, documentary, or music videos instead of all three) was actually beneficial for her personally:

> I try to do different things simply because it will keep me interested. I don't know about other people. I think for other people it might be a pure financial thing where you have to do commercials in order to . . . pay your rent, pay your bills, and all that stuff. Then if there's something extra then you can focus on doing some more creative things. But, for me, I just want to learn different things and meet different people, and that's how I feel like I'll learn and I'll grow.[24]

Again, we see that having a particular attitude is important for women engaged in hustling work—they must be someone who thrives on juggling different ventures. For the hustler, precarity is a constraint that can generate creativity, learning, and growth.[25]

Creatives must adapt to the artistic constraints posed by their working environments, and the ability to find financing is one such constraint.[26] Ng'endo Mukii—famous for her short film *Yellow Fever*—is well aware of how her work fits within existing funding schemes, and she uses that knowledge to her benefit. While it is undoubtedly true that "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,"[27] these objectives are not necessarily in opposition to the concerns of the filmmaker. As Mukii noted about her own work, "I can apply for grants because I know that some of what I want to already do fits into what people are interested in." Furthermore, she wants to do "artsy" work that is "different" and knows that her artistic agenda is one that requires international financial input and is facilitated by it. This is not true of all Kenyan filmmakers, and animators with commercial ideas can work outside the system of transnational film funding. She compared 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 coproduction. He just does his stuff."[28]

She wanted to work on "artsy" projects and made the calculated tradeoff to pursue a business model (using transnational funding) that would allow her to do so. She would have to think about funder agendas and navigate complicated grant systems, but doing so was worth it to her, at least for the present.[29]

The creative industries are inherently risky because every creative product is new, and thus it is uncertain how consumers will actually value new creative products (e.g., films) in advance of actually seeing them.[30] However,

risk and opportunity are not spread evenly and we have to account for this inequality. We can see this particularly in how various filmmakers in Nairobi negotiate work with NGOs and other development organizations. 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.

Making films and promotional videos for various NGOs and development organizations is a prominent form of employment for Nairobi-based female filmmakers. NGOs (here a shorthand for the development industry more broadly) are an essential client for local filmmakers. Making NGO films is frequently framed as creating a "double bind"' where the film 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."[31] Part of the reason why this type of work is seen negatively is because it does not fit with the romantic conception of creativity because it is not about self-expression.[32] All filmmakers can gain skills and experience through working on these projects (at least in the early stages of their careers), and this training is particularly important for female filmmakers.[33]

However, this is not to say that commissioned films cannot be works of art in their own right. 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. Mukii described balancing her artistic process with the demands of a commissioner who wants a specific piece of work. Sometimes the process is an easy partnership, but at other times it is much more difficult. Her signature style is experimental animation, and the process of making it involves experimenting and testing out different techniques.

> When I'm working for other people it becomes a bit mysterious and irritating for them. They can't really see what the final thing will be. . . . Right now I'm working on this NGO film. It is a short piece on migration. I'm sort of playing with it and experimenting with it. But at the same time they want something solid. How's this going to look? And I find that very constricting in terms of how I think. And at the same time I understand that they don't know what I'm doing. And it's a waste of time from their perspective to keep doing this exploration. It's a bit of a balance, I think. When I'm working I just think: "Let me test this out and see if it works."[34]

This relationship between filmmakers and the development industry has been ongoing since at least the 1980s when Anne Mungai made several issue-based documentaries for television,[35] 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 nonprofit organization Development through Media, which was founded in 1997 and seeks to effect social change in Kenya through media initiatives. Yambo-Odotte was extremely passionate about the value of filmmaking work for creating social change in Kenya and had devoted herself to the task across decades:

> It's been many years and there have been many trials, many failures, many heartaches, but right now in my career I know one thing for sure: I'm completely convinced that as a medium of expression film is the way to go, especially in Africa. . . . Because film as a medium of expression can either . . . support positive development or it can actually destroy. We know in Africa, for example, you know that some of the radio programs we have had have caused genocide, have caused postelection violence even in our own country. But how can we steer away from that, there, by looking at film as a medium of expressing gender issues, development concerns, and just really providing civic education so that the population can become strong enough to engage almost at an equal level with decision makers? So that's really where I want to go. So the work that I'm working on right now will really be supporting that kind of engagement.[36]

Message-based filmmaking or "edutainment" can be highly valuable both as a way of generating an income and for expressing creative and intellectual goals, as the examples of Mukii and Yambo-Odotte show.[37]

Yet NGOs are only the clients 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. All filmmakers, middle-class and working-class, must hustle to continue working. The difference between these groups rests on the networks they are able to access to go about their work, and the scope of those networks is largely class-determined.

The distinction between working-class and middle-class filmmaking is aptly demonstrated by McNamara's discussion of a workshop that took place at Slum-TV in the context of the 2012 Slum Film Festival.[38] In it, four speakers were invited from different sectors of what McNamara calls Nairobi's professional screen media industries. 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. McNamara recalls, 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 the material resources to do so. While Boy was concerned with the *kind* of films being made, the "subsistence" filmmakers were concerned with being able to make *any* film.[39] As the examples from Nairobi show, sometimes being *able* to make an NGO film, and correspondingly an income, is a privilege. Unlike working-class filmmakers, such as those McNamara describes at Slum-TV, 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 who so frequently work for development organizations. In sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's terms, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have the cultural and social capital that working-class filmmakers lack.[40]

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 on 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 organizations) even as they struggle to finance future creative projects.

LEANING IN TO PIRACY

A cornerstone of hustling is dealing with existing problems in innovative ways. As I have suggested throughout this book, finding profitable markets for the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers is very difficult. The challenges posed by piracy reflect how Nairobi-based female filmmakers work around or "lean in" to 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, for a slightly higher price you can have 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. Then there is the phenomenon of pirate film distribution over the Internet, where anyone with a fast enough broadband connection can freely and easily access pirated content. Interestingly, despite the ease of accessing pirated copies of foreign films, "piracy of local movies is contained, done very cautiously, or as part of a pragmatic agreement" between producer and pirate because, while piracy of foreign movies is evidently tolerated, this situation is not the same for local content, and regulators make some effort to ensure unauthorized distributors of local content are punished.[41] While pirated copies of films usually sell for 50 KES in Nairobi, local films sell for 100–200 KES. In some cases, DVDs of locally made films can cost as much as 800 KES ($7), as was the case when I acquired a copy of *Nairobi Half Life* from a small video rental store and shop in Prestige Plaza. Local films must thus compete in an uneven market where they need to justify their higher cost.

A pirate media economy (of mostly foreign content) is flourishing in Nairobi, with great impact on local content production because, as Barbara Karuana succinctly put it, the pirates "make content too cheap." She elaborated:

> And that effects how people value local content. 'Cause they're thinking, why should I pay 800 KES 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? 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, which would always, always, always be more than that 50 KES disk, and that's a problem.[42]

The problem with film piracy is that it makes the market uncompetitive. Legitimate producers are pushed out because they cannot compete with cheap pirated DVDs and free Internet copies, as is the case elsewhere in Africa. In Ghana, the importation of pirated copies of 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.[43] The Nollywood distribution system has long been recognized as having a problematic relationship with pirate film distribution, and Nigerian producers must actively develop new strategies to counter its effects.[44]

In a critique of Hollywood industry estimates about the impact of unauthorized film distribution on their businesses, Ramon 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."[45] Pirated content can also be a means by which consumers who are unable to afford legitimate copies can watch films.[46] In Nigeria, illegitimate and legitimate films cost the same amount, so getting people to buy legitimate films is a matter of making them more accessible than unauthorized copies, and, accordingly, the issue in Nollywood piracy "is not social deviance but distributive accessibility."[47] It thus seems likely that many consumers in Nairobi buy unauthorized copies of movies because they are what is available and what they can afford.

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. Emily Wanja thought about piracy pragmatically: "piracy is a problem everywhere in the world" and because "you can't eliminate them by yourself" you need to find a way to do something like "pirate your own stuff or work with the pirates." She felt "you got to keep going even when you know [piracy is] there and do what you can to fight that. But in the meantime also just see how much you can maximize your returns even with its presence."[48]

Appie Matere has used a film distribution model that recognizes that buying pirated film copies can be a 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 market" model to address the issue of pirate film distribution. She suggested essentially "pirating" their own film by bringing DVDs to some of her merchandiser contacts and selling copies for about 20 KES ($0.17). By her recollection, they sold about 1,000 tapes that way. Then, they took the film to Simon Nduti of Nduti One-Stop Shop, who, according to Matere, is "a distributor in Riverwood and I think one of the biggest pirates."[49] They gave him the master DVD in exchange for 200,000 KES ($1,735) 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. The upper-middle-class audiences who frequent more expensive shops are unlikely to ever be in the places that sell the cheaper DVDs.[50] 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."[51]

Jackie Lebo, like Matere, also seeks to find a way to cash in on unauthorized film distribution. At her company Content House they have "adopted the 'lean in' strategy where you . . . work with the piracy." 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." 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 this was

> 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.[52]

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," for example, product placement deals.[53] Crucially for the Nairobian context, pirate distribution "also breeds demand for cinema in demographics that may one day ripen into viable formal markets."[54]

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. 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.[55]

Importantly, 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.[56] As Lebo says, "we're still at a place where most of our projects are funded because they're important," not because they will be profit-making entertainment.[57] *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 community the film could "help" is essential to generating future income through future grants from other developmental organizations.

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 pirate film distribution. 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. The formal and informal are vitally interconnected in all film industries.[58] 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."[59] Nairobi-based female filmmakers are thus working within a global filmmaking context where formal and informal practices are imbricated with one another. Their case suggests that normative approaches to unauthorized distribution—where piracy is seen as inherently bad—are limited. Rather, we should be attuned to how film entrepreneurs cope with informality to generate unique new business models that address their specific local circumstances.[60]

Filmmakers can and have made use of pirate film distribution to further their own agendas, and particularly to cultivate new audiences for their films. This does not mean, however, that they do not seek more formal structures to help generate other profitable distribution pathways. In 1993 Dommie Yambo-Odotte made the documentary *If Women Counted* about women in elected positions. The film needed to be distributed to its planned beneficiary communities, and an initial distribution of 200 copies "was the seed" that generated thousands of pirated copies. She said at the time that this pirate distribution "didn't matter to me so much because it was a donor-funded project; it wasn't supposed to be a profit-making one." Over the years she has changed her mind and now believes that "funding of films . . . should be connected to a distribution plan as well. That I can tell you for a fact." Now, even for donor-funded films, she believes plans for profitable distribution are essential.[61]

Nairobi-based female filmmakers 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 this mode of distribution, they hustle to transform their own circumstances and, correspondingly, both cope with and profit from the precarity caused by piracy.

WORKING THROUGH PRECARIOUS MEDIA INDUSTRIES

Workers in creative and cultural industries are often described as caught between their desire for self-fulfillment—doing something they love—and the precarious drudgery of work in creative professions.[62] Precarious work has been a defining preoccupation of research on the creative and cultural industries. This literature suggests that workers are working *now* in "bad" jobs because they are *hopeful* that the future will be better, but that it is a "cruel optimism" because that desired future of "good" work is impossible to reach.[63] Creatives "come with a training in what could be called sacrificial labor. This means they are predisposed to accept nonmonetary rewards—the gratification of producing art—as partial compensation for their work, thereby discounting the cash price of their labor. Indeed it is fair to say that the largest subsidy to the arts has always come from arts workers themselves, underselling themselves in anticipation of future career rewards."[64] In this view, workers are trapped in a precarious limbo from which they cannot escape and for which

they blame themselves.[65] There is little scope in this line of critical thinking for valuing creative professions or for understanding why it is that so many creatives profess to find meaning in their work.

Precarious labor is not simply a condition of cultural and creative industries, but has gained a much wider application in the neoliberal era, and the term "precarity" has come to refer broadly to insecure and low-wage work.[66] Curtin and Sanson go so far as to 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."[67] However, we must ask the vital question put forward by Ferguson and Li: "for whom is present-day instability in work and income an alarming shift . . . ? For whom is precariousness not just routine, but unremarkable?"[68]

The vision of "standard employment" with associated benefits critiqued above is highly idealized, and this ideal has never been the norm in most places. For workers in the global South, the *opposite* of "standard employment" has rather been the norm, and, indeed, for racialized people and women "standard employment" has not been the norm in the global North either.[69] We thus cannot approach precarious work in the creative industries in Nairobi with this normative framework. The concepts of informality and precarity are concepts of *absence* and describe what is *not* taking place, rather than what *is*.[70] Workers in a state of protracted liminality and marginality—where "proper jobs" of salaried labor and benefits are out of reach—can and do find work that "fits their terms" and through which they build meaningful lives in the present.[71] The lens of hustling allows us to see what *is* taking place.

Rather than being seduced into working against their own interests by "do what you love" narratives,[72] Nairobi-based female filmmakers make careful and creative hustling choices to define their own futures. Filmmakers may want the autonomy and creativity that comes with creative professions, but they also know the stakes of pursuing them. Jennifer Gatero, for example, was willing to create a rift with her parents to pursue filmmaking because the alternative did not fit into how she would define a good life:

> I quit university to go to film school. I knew university was not for me. . . . I was supposed to be doing a bachelor's of commerce, and the more I was in

> school the more . . . I saw such a bare life ahead of me. Because I was like, "What do people in BComm do exactly? And what jobs do you get? I'm going to be like an accountant?" It was so depressing. So I knew that I wanted to be a creative because I've been a writer since I was [small].[73]

Her mother initially refused to support her in going to film school, so Gatero quit university without telling her, later creating the "biggest fight," and a rift that healed only once Gatero had established herself in the industry.

> I left school, I got a job, I started my own company. So she started to see, okay fine, you know, I'm doing something with my life. Her friends are telling her, "Oh you know I see your daughter's shows on TV" and then now she's saying, "Oh okay, okay, so this is something."[74]

Gatero's story fits into a narrative of creatives aspiring to work in industries where they get to "do what they love" instead of working in boring, humdrum jobs, but only to a point. She did not pursue her profession naively, since it involved real risk to pursue what she wanted to do.

Different roles in the film industry have different degrees of precarity associated with them. According to 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."[75] Filmmakers need to be willing to embrace precarity to pursue their creative ambitions.

Through hustling they exercise their agency. They work and strategize to create opportunities for themselves so that they can make the kinds of films they want. As we saw in chapter 1, Hawa Essuman has experimented in a wide range of screen media formats. All of this fits into her pursuit of her creative vision:

> You figure out what you do until you make the next film you want to make. Because all eyes are to the film. So you do what you need to do, in order to have the film, and not just the film, but the film as you want it. It goes back to what I was saying before. You just do what you need to do to do what you want.

This mode of working—doing what you need to do to do what you want to do—is shared by all Nairobi-based female filmmakers. Paying critical attention to the work they have to do, as opposed to their finished, stylistically

internationalized films, is vital to understanding how any of it comes to be made in the first place. Essuman, like other filmmakers, chooses to hustle, and in so doing exercises her agency and right to define success in her own terms.[76] The same was true for Njoki Muhoho. When I met her, she was working on the post-production of a talk show she was calling *Maisha* that would celebrate life in Kenya. She was willing to be exacting in the process so that she could create precisely the show she wanted:

> I'm in post-production. It has taken me so long to finish post because I am very, very, fussy on the quality of my productions. . . . I'm on my third editor now. We gave the whole series to one editor, then another, then another. I went to my sound editor and wasn't happy . . . so I told him, hold on, I'm going back to the drawing board and recutting it. And I'm happy.[77]

Ordinary workers might not care about what they produce, but creatives care "vitally about the originality displayed, the technical prowess demonstrated, the resolution and harmony achieved in the creative act."[78] This was clearly true in Muhoho's case. Through working another job she could produce exactly the kind of content she wanted. She felt she did not have to produce content quickly or in a large volume: "I keep saying I don't have too. I have another job, I do this because I love it. And I don't have to prove to anybody anything."[79]

Precarious situations can directly facilitate creativity.[80] 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," 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."[81] We can see filmmaker Lucille Kahara's work in a similar way. Kahara had temporarily left the film industry because she had grown increasingly frustrated with her working conditions as a producer. She says:

> I was pretty frustrated with the industry because people kept calling me for jobs and then they never went through, or they ended up changing their mind about something and not letting me know, and I would change my schedule and prepare to do that work, and then suddenly things are not happening. I can't work like this anymore.[82]

She left the industry, and the country, to go to culinary school in Canada.

> So at the moment I want to blend the two. I want to do food shows. Then also now with the digital migration I want to see if I can actually get a channel on TV. Just do whatever I want to do. Because I'm tired of having to wait for jobs from other people. I want to create my own thing. And do something different.[83]

When faced with precarious freelance working conditions she hustled to create the kind of work she wanted—where she could do "whatever I want to do."

While celebrating the agency of hustlers entrepreneurially working through precarity is vital, we do not want to run the risk of glorifying precarity, as frequently happens in popular publications compelling people to start a side hustle.[84] We must not gloss over the fact that risk has been increasingly foisted on the individual worker, or that precarious circumstances compel some creatives into becoming entrepreneurs.[85] Hustlers work with agency in precarious circumstances, but that does not mean those precarious circumstances should be allowed to exist (by governments, employers, etc.). Indeed, creating precarious working condition works directly to the benefit of particular groups.[86] Entrepreneurship may allow some groups to control their own destinies, but it can also be a way powerful organizations and governments "download responsibility to ordinary people" and in so doing abdicate their own responsibility to care for those people.[87] Entrepreneurial discourses of innovation, flexibility, and daring risk taking must be firmly grounded in a recognition of the precarity through which Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and many other workers, must hustle.

DOCUBOX: BUILDING BUSINESS SKILLS AND A FILM VIEWING CULTURE IN NAIROBI

Creative and cultural industries are not a government priority in Kenya,[88] so Nairobi-based female filmmakers hustle in an environment where there are few institutional mechanisms designed to support them. 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 nonfinancial support to local filmmakers. Docubox directly addresses many issues that make filmmaking a precarious activity in Nairobi, as we shall see.

Rather than being only and always individualistic, creatives in precarious circumstances care about each other and how they can work together to improve their industries, and this kind of communal solidarity is foundational for both individual careers and the functioning of the wider creative economy in these local spaces.[89] Docubox's approach to the film milieu in Nairobi is underpinned by an ethics of care where mentorship of individual filmmakers as well as support for the wider filmmaking (and viewing) community in Nairobi is central. The organization is community-oriented, and this communal support for female filmmakers is important. For Guadeloupean filmmaker Sarah Maldoror—the first woman to have directed a fiction feature film in Africa (*Sambizanga*, 1972)—the shared experience of being women does not result in the solidarity necessary to be seen as a collective of filmmakers. She does not feel African female filmmakers are a sisterhood, saying, instead, "'But we are not sisters, really, we are each in our own isolation making films.'"[90] Community-building initiatives are necessary to make a strong and supportive "sisterhood" of female filmmakers, and we can see Docubox as one such initiative.

Judy Kibinge is the executive director and became involved with Docubox because she "understands what it is to be stuck." The Docubox model works by granting filmmakers various amounts of money to develop documentary film projects. In Docubox's first year, twelve film projects were selected, and each grantee was given $2,500 to make a trailer of their project. After that, six films were shortlisted to be given up to $25,000.[91] However, the value of Docubox extends far beyond the financial support filmmakers receive through the fund. Docubox collaborates with its filmmakers, including holding events such as master classes and informal get-togethers to workshop ideas and get feedback, and taking them to the Sheffield Documentary Film Festival in the United Kingdom 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, program manager at the Ford Foundation in Nairobi and a Kenyan academic. Through the Ford Foundation, Nairo had raised $380,000 and gave Kibinge "such an open brief" to develop the fund so that it responded to "our situation" rather than modeling it after another film fund. Kibinge's research on creating the fund involved meeting with people from the IDFA Bertha Fund and from Hot Docs (two important film funds that support

African documentary filmmaking), but she said that "then at some point you realize, 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 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." She describes initially being "entangled" with Docubox because she had researched it and set it up, but then realizing

> what just an amazing honor 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 ten 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.[92]

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.[93] 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."[94] She feels 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. "Docubox has been so wonderful" for Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, 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?"[95]

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 things for a little bit? Or just look at my idea and tell me truly, truly is it making sense?"[96]

The structure of Docubox is 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 facing a shortage of qualified talent. Despite the recent proliferation of film schools and departments in Nairobi,[97] in describing the quality of film education at university level in Kenya, 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 theater people. People from the National Theatre, from the Phoenix Theatre, are the ones that are heads of departments.[98]

Dommie Yambo-Odotte stated that "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."[99] 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."[100] 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."[101] 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." Much like other established producers running companies, her knowledge of the current film-training environment in Nairobi comes from hiring recent graduates. 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.[102]

Njoki Muhoho similarly described having to teach the students that come to her production company for work "from scratch" because "they

know nothing."[103] 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, and describes having to train them for the first six months of their work because they lack specialized skills and instead can do a little bit of everything.[104] Of course, not all training programs are the same, and 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." 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."[105]

Similarly, recent graduates also point out the inadequacies of their film-school training and how this makes them unprepared for the local job market. Wangechi Ngugi studied mass communication at a local college called Nairobi Institute of Business Studies. 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 "fifty students, or seventy, and there's one camera, and then there's a small studio [laughs] to go and experiment." While working, after a time:

> it got to a point I stopped sending out my CV because I realized 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.[106]

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 strategize to develop their skills in alternative ways.

Docubox actively seeks to mentor its filmmakers by bringing in international talent to give master classes and workshops. Ng'endo Mukii, a Docubox grantee, stated that "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. 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). 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 organize 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.[107]

But Docubox does address these skills, so through Docubox "you're just opening your mind to something beyond you making stuff." 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.[108]

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."[109] She incidentally met a producer at Sheffield and at the time of our interview was actively developing a project with him, and even though she met him by chance, and not as part of an arranged meeting, she was prepared to capitalize on the chance opportunity specifically because of the preparation she received through Docubox.[110]

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, as we have seen, 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."[111] Navigating this competitive market requires a specific skill set, and these are business skills, not necessarily creative ones. These examples show 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.

Making high-quality, creative documentaries is a key objective of Docubox, and one at which it has been very successful. The films *New Moon* (dir. Ndisi-Herrmann, 2018), *I Am Samuel* (dir. Murimi, 2020), and *The Letter* (dir. Christopher King and Maia Lekow, 2019) are all powerful, character-driven documentaries displaying the highest level of creative craftsmanship. *The Letter* and *I Am Samuel* have social messages, but through intimately following their protagonists for long periods of time they avoid a conventional expository didacticism. With *New Moon*, Ndisi-Herrmann initially intended to make a more conventional documentary about the construction of a port in the coastal town of Lamu, Kenya, but over the course of years of production she shifted gears and the final film is a personal exploration of her conversion to Sufi Islam while also presenting a poetic view of life in Lamu.

However, Docubox goes beyond supporting its grantees in making creative documentaries, and a final important initiative of theirs is running monthly public screenings of creative documentaries so that a much wider public can also learn about the possibilities of the documentary film medium. I was lucky to attend one such "Docubox Presents" screening at Pawa254. The audience gathered to watch *Virunga*. Every seat of the theater was filled, and people stood or sat on the floor to fill every available space in the room. Alongside screening the film, Docubox hosted a Q&A with one of the film's protagonists, Mélanie Gouby. Through the event of the film screening and Q&A the audience was given the opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation of the art of documentary filmmaking. Importantly, Docubox also accounted for difficulties in accessing the screening as they arranged three bus trips to take people from Pawa254 back into town after the screening (starting at 9:00 p.m. and then every half hour after that). Initially, Docubox hosted screenings at Shalom House, 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 to Pawa254 because it was difficult for the audience to reach Shalom House because of Nairobi's traffic (Shalom House is on the busy Ngong Road). Eventually

moving to Pawa254 also recognized 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 get to know each other better and support each other's work?"[112]

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." Importantly, however, she insisted that this situation is no one's fault because good documentaries are not available for local viewing.[113] Screening creative documentaries thus directly addresses a production problem in the industry.

CONCLUSION

Hustling is part of the common vernacular for talking about precarious work today. It has migrated from a term used predominantly to describe informal and sometimes illegal work at the margins of society to being broadly used—as is demonstrated by the vast quantity of self-help literature on how to hustle geared firmly toward the Euro-American middle class. Yet despite this common usage, the concept of hustling as a modern mode of work has not been sufficiently theorized. By building on seminal studies of hustling at the margins, such as those of geographer Tatiana Thieme, and keeping the significance of class sharply in focus, I have contributed new understanding not only of what it means to hustle in Africa, but what is means to hustle in the precarious world of modern work.

Keeping both local and transnational perspectives in focus is vital to understanding the creative hustle of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. In comparison to hustling waste workers in Mathare or NGO hustlers in Kibera, the middle-class, transnationally connected Nairobi-based female filmmakers appear remarkably privileged.[114] For those in informal settlements, "the 'hustle' infers a constant pragmatic search for alternative structures of opportunity outside formal education, employment, and service provision,"[115] 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. Film and media scholars Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson 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."[116] Nairobi-based female filmmakers are part of this global filmmaking system, and, as such, it is essential to situate their creative labor within this global framework, just as we must also examine them in relation to hustlers experiencing greater precarity.

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. 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 "there are no supporting, let alone competing structures, no standing machinery of production."[117] Nairobi-based female filmmakers' experiences are certainly intelligible within this frame, as they must be extremely committed to their projects and adopt multiple positions in their production and distribution.

Nairobi-based female filmmakers—like workers in creative and cultural industries across the world—experience job precarity and work to address these circumstances through their individual hustling practices. They often have very diverse careers spanning different formats, mediums, and genres of screen media production, and this results from their entrepreneurial approach to work. Filmmakers must strategize to reduce the instability caused by 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 unauthorized film distribution or training filmmakers to be business people as well as better creatives through organizations like Docubox.

CONCLUSION

Nairobi is home to an extraordinary phenomenon. In this city the most critically acclaimed filmmakers—both directors and producers—are women. 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, the biggest of which is finding a profitable and sustainable way of distributing their films. As Hawa Essuman put it:

> You make films to be seen. So you need to find a way to make sure that they are seen. But it's not just about being seen, it's also remuneration. Because that's the thing that will complete the circle. So finding a solution to that is the big one.[1]

All the filmmakers we have met in this book share a similar desire to change the film distribution landscape in Nairobi and abroad so that it is more open to the kinds of content they want to create. They have contended with state and market censorship, and done so with remarkable innovation—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.

They have approached the challenges facing them with an astonishing degree of flexibility and resourcefulness through their practice of creatively and entrepreneurially hustling. 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. They have employed radical new models of working. For instance, Appie Matere's production company, Zamaradi, produced fifty-six hour-long films for the South African pay-TV company M-Net

in a five-month period from a single location. Not all of their projects are successful—for instance, Wanjiru Kinyanjui's experiments in Riverwood did not lead to a novel 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.

Individual female filmmakers have been at the center of this book, but it is not an auteur study. Many Nairobi-based female filmmakers could be seen simply as auteur directors because, for example, their work has been validated at key prestigious locations on the international film festival circuit. Their stylistically internationalized films—such as *Something Necessary*, *Pumzi*, *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*, and *Saikati*— could easily fit into an auteurist frame. However, as we have seen, Nairobi-based female filmmakers are not *merely* auteurs. Focusing on stylistically internationalized films alone ignores an enormous amount of their creative output and blinds us to how these female filmmakers sustain their individual careers and build a thriving industry. The privileging of auteur cinema in film studies scholarship has led to the false impression that these filmmakers are a minor group in the world of filmmaking, rather than the architects of an extraordinary industry where creative women are flourishing.

Politically, a lot is at stake in studying female filmmakers, and *how* we study them matters. Conventional approaches to cinema studies have obscured the work of Nairobi-based female filmmakers. This raises the important question: How many other female filmmakers have we overlooked? Are there other industries where they flourish where our scholarly methods render them invisible? Throughout this book, I have argued for a non-hierarchical approach to their films and careers. 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 as both filmmakers *and* entrepreneurs. I hope to have laid out a framework for studying female filmmakers that recognizes the true scope of their work and contribution to global cinema.

A critical implication of this book is that to understand contemporary processes of film production and distribution we have to examine the local and transnational spaces in which filmmakers live and work. The key to achieving this insight was the long-term study of Nairobi-based female filmmakers in their working context of Nairobi so that their decision-making,

strategizing, and traveling could be situated within the particularities of their own media economy. Nairobi-based female filmmakers recounted again and again how their experiences abroad and at home both shaped their creative processes. Ng'endo Mukii explained how leaving and returning to Kenya gave her a new perspective, which then led to the powerful critique of racialized beauty standards in her short film *Yellow Fever*:

> The time I felt really shocked was when I returned from the US because I'd been gone for six years without coming back. My head was just exploding. There was so much color. When was the soil so red? I didn't remember that. I didn't remember there being so much dust. Why was it so noisy? Why were there so many languages? Why can't everyone just use the same language? . . . I think it made me start to question a lot of things. Things I grew up with but I didn't ask any questions about. . . . I realized that being European or Western in Kenya has a sort of added value that maybe I'd forgotten about when I left.[2]

Transnational experience is imbricated in the local. We can see the same process at work with collaborative filmmaking projects such as One Fine Day Films. Collaboration is central to the development of the film industry in Nairobi, 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," and collapses the automatic opposition between "local" and "foreign" in favor of the "transnational."[3]

Nairobi-based female filmmakers have to seize transnational opportunities in addition to being radically flexible in their ways of working in Nairobi. This is a complicated terrain where the politics of identity—around gender and race, for example—are fraught. As with musicians charged with selling out by working with commercial interests, African filmmakers are too often assumed to have sold out their authentic voices in working with foreign partners, in either production or distribution phases. Yet, as we have seen throughout this book, this politics is too simple. The fact that a film is successful in a film festival abroad does not mean that it will not be meaningful or popular locally; as we have seen, the politics of distribution shapes meaning formation. There are local audiences for the films by Nairobi-based female filmmakers, and Nairobi-based female filmmakers are hustling to bring their films to local screens and, crucially, to develop local

audiences into markets, just as taking their films abroad is also part of that strategy.

Cross-border filmmaking relationships are not inherently suspicious, Tarzanist, or Neo-Oriental. 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. Filmmakers need to rely on a *combination* of funding sources to make their movies, and thus have to be savvy to balance multiple agendas as they pursue their creative processes. As we have seen, Nairobi-based female filmmakers have been remarkably successful on this front. Simplistic assumptions about foreign interference in African creativity thus lack explanatory power.

An intersectional approach accounting for gender but, more importantly, one that recognizes 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. African female 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.[4] In Nairobi, this means also accounting for class position. The filmmakers in this study are united by shared gender, but racial, class, and gendered identities are not separate from one another and instead exist "as part of a permeable interwoven relationality."[5] As such, throughout this book I have taken an intersectional approach and particularly emphasized the way class status impacts the life and work chances of Nairobi-based female filmmakers.

When Hawa Essuman says that "it's almost like the middle class of Africa feels like a dirty secret. Because you hear so little about them,"[6] she both points to a gap in knowledge about the lived experience of being middle-class in Africa and highlights the importance of filling this gap to understand filmmakers like herself. Nairobi-based female filmmakers' hustling strategies are underpinned by their particular class position. Their middle-class position is essential to allowing them to profit from Nairobi's environment of media convergence, a vital enabling condition of their hustle. Making creative and feature films is a painstaking process in Nairobi and one where

filmmakers frequently spend years saving and raising capital. Having client work is indispensable, and working for NGOs and the development industry more broadly is the "bread and butter" of many Nairobi-based female filmmakers. However, 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 correspondingly continue to work as filmmakers even as they struggle to finance their creative projects. The filmmakers we have met in this book are in a privileged position against the majority of the Kenyan population. The very fact that I have termed them Nairobi-*based* filmmakers is reflective of this dynamic, for it indicates a temporality: based here now, with the potential to one day move elsewhere. Keeping class in focus is important to understanding work in the creative industries in Nairobi and far beyond.

Anne Mungai reported needing to visit financial institutions with her husband in order to get taken seriously when she was making films in the 1990s, and likewise her contemporary Wajuhi Kamau reported being held to a different standard than men, where "people would be faster to spot a fault in a production done by a woman. If a similar fault is in a production done by a man, they may choose to overlook it."[7] These examples reflect a heavily patriarchal milieu, and the first generation of Nairobi-based female filmmakers pioneered and laid a foundation for the future success of other female filmmakers. Women in Kenya still face many difficulties in a patriarchal society, but they do not face these difficulties equally and do not confront them with the same resources.

Understanding the position of women in Nairobi (and elsewhere) thus requires an intersectional understanding of privilege and position. Nairobi-based female filmmakers' work practices challenge many common assumptions in creative labor studies about women and work. Whereas in most places "creative people, creative work and creativity itself are all positively valued,"[8] being a filmmaker is widely considered to be not a "real" job in Nairobi. Filmmakers in Nairobi face the difficult circumstance that there is little social respect for their profession, and they have to fight against this stigma even when they have established careers. In other ways, too, they do not face the same challenges as female filmmakers working in places like the United Kingdom. Whereas patterns of informal work, such as the

dominance of freelancing, contribute to the marginalization of women in the film and television industries in the United Kingdom and Europe because these patterns are incompatible with motherhood,[9] the situation is quite 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 they are relatively affluent within a context of radical inequality. In this context, vital assistance for working mothers, such as hired house help, is financially within reach. 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 in the same way as they often are in places like the United Kingdom. Of course, motherhood is not the only challenge women face in the creative industries in the global North, but it is an important one, and it is worth examining how local specificities shape this challenge, particularly as we aim to de-Westernize creative industry studies.

We need to explicitly foreground women's experiences as entrepreneurs, and how they hustle to succeed in their industries. Entrepreneurial activity in cultural and creative industries is highly gendered, so studying cases of women's entrepreneurship, and particularly successful entrepreneurship, is important.[10] Defining entrepreneurial success financially—in terms of profits and growth—obscures and devalues women's entrepreneurial activities.[11] More inclusive metrics are needed. The case of Nairobi-based female filmmakers shows that creating a career where one can make the kinds of films they want to make is one way of defining success, but equally important is the *action* of hustling through precarious circumstances, because it is through this action that they build the kinds of lives they want in the present. I thus contribute new understanding not only of entrepreneurship in film industries but also of female entrepreneurship in Africa and elsewhere.

Creative industries theory has largely emerged from metropolitan centers in Euro-America. At its worst, and often by errors of omission, this scholarship becomes Eurocentric—seeing Europe and the rest of the global North "as ontological 'reality' to the rest of the world's shadow."[12] This latent Eurocentrism in the scholarship has led to normative understandings of creative work based on a very narrow and unrepresentative sociopolitical context. In this scholarship, creative workers are often theorized as trapped in a hopeless limbo of aspiration, chasing after cruel promises where a future of good work will never materialize. *Creative Hustling* has offered

a fundamentally different assessment of contemporary creative work. As we have seen throughout this book, Nairobi-based female filmmakers, like so many hustlers, are not hostages to the future. They build good lives and careers within precarity, and it is through focusing on the practice of hustling that this can become visible.

Theorizing based on the lived experiences of creative African women must necessarily transform how we understand conditions of modern creative work writ large. Nairobi-based female filmmakers have built a vibrant film industry through their willingness to hustle. We have much to learn from their example.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Dovey, "New Looks," 21.

2. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling," 1; British Film Industry, "Statistical Yearbook 2018," 200.

3. Kermeliotis, "Wanuri Kahiu."

4. Alacovska and Gill, "De-Westernizing Creative Labour Studies."

5. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

6. Overbergh, "Technological Innovation," 208.

7. Spronk, "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi," 102.

8. Campbell, "Economic Globalization from Below," 129–130. Nairobi's colonial origins still shape the spatiality of the city. 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, "Nairobi," 122). Furthermore, 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, 129). 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, "Jua Cali, Genge Rap Music and the Anxieties of Living in the Glocalized City of Nairobi," 24).

9. Waldmüller, Gez, and Boanada-Fuchs, "(Re)Searching Nairobi's Middle Class," 4.

10. Overbergh, "Technological Innovation," 209; On August 4, 2010, Kenyans 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, "Kenya Votes for a New Constitution."

11. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

12. Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism," 250.

13. Falicov, "Migrating from South to North," 4.

14. Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 99.

15. McNamara, "Digital Media, Development and Political Creativity," 272.

16. Bryce, "Outside the Machine?," 161. Within the screen media production and distribution landscape in Nairobi, message-based filmmaking has a strong presence (particularly in the documentary film tradition). 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, "Kenya & Nollywood," 117).

17. MacArthur, "Film Review—Rafiki."

18. Dabiri, "'Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan,'" 106.

19. Mehta, "'Hustling' in Film School as Socialization for Early Career Work in Media Industries"; van Doorn and Velthuis, "A Good Hustle"; Idriss, "The Ethnicised Hustle."

20. Farrell, "Hustling NGOs," 128; Thieme, "The 'Hustle' amongst Youth Entrepreneurs in Mathare's Informal Waste Economy"; Thieme, "Turning Hustlers into Entrepreneurs"; Thieme, "The Hustle Economy"; Chułek, "Hustling the *Mtaa* Way."

21. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

22. Diang'a, "Cinematographic Techniques in Three Kenyan Films"; Johnstone, "Queer Worldmaking in Wanuri Kahiu's Film *Rafiki*"; Ojiambo, "Representing Violation in Film"; Mukora, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity"; Giruzzi, "A Feminist Approach to Contemporary Female Kenyan Cinema."

23. Schmidt, "Sub-Saharan African Women Filmmakers," 292; emphasis mine.

24. Curtin and Sanson, "Listening to Labor," 4.

25. Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love*.

26. Conor, Gill, and Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour"; Reimer, "'It's Just a Very Male Industry'"; Idriss, "The Ethnicised Hustle"; McRobbie, *Be Creative*.

27. Warren, "Placing Faith in Creative Labour"; Ikonen, "Becoming and Being a Creative and Entrepreneurial Mum in Finland."

28. Jedlowski, "Studying Media 'from' the South," 189.

CHAPTER 1

1. Watching *Dangerous Affair* could be powerfully inspirational. Filmmaker Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann recounted how she felt on watching *Dangerous Affair*: "I remember that we were so excited that this film came out, we watched it at home, and suddenly you mean as a Kenyan I can make a film? That is I think what it did.

And suddenly you realize that actually it was possible" (Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015).

2. Sanogo, "Certain Tendencies in Contemporary Auteurist Film Practice in Africa"; Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema."

3. 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 KES (approximately $250,000) if they are under thirty-five (or part of companies where 70 percent of the employees are younger than thirty-five). The loan has an interest rate of 8 percent, 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 time frame of four to six months. The loan is widely considered impractical because of its unrealistic time frame 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."

4. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

5. Tomaselli, "Film Cities and Competitive Advantage."

6. For a detailed account of how Nairobi-based female filmmakers felt about the Kenyan government and its film industry promotion initiatives, see Steedman, "Promoting the Film Industry in Kenya."

7. Njuguna, Comunian, and Rickmers, "Financing Cultural and Creative Industries in Kenya."

8. Kahiu et al., "A Bold Transmission," 135.

9. Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema," 99.

10. Ellerson, "The Evolution of Women in Cinema," 122. Wanjiru Kinyanjui trained in screenwriting and directing at the German Academy for Film and Television Berlin (DFFB).

11. Kinyanjui, "A Historical Voyage through Kenyan Film," 69. After Kenya was declared independent from Britain in 1963, the new government nationalized 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, "The Organisation and Management of a Broadcasting Service"). Since 2011, KIMC has been a Semi-Autonomous Government Agency (Kenya Institute of Mass Communication, "History").

12. Anne Mungai, interview by Robin Steedman, March 5, 2015.

13. Bisschoff, "The Emergence of Women's Film-Making in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa," 163.

14. Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism," 380.

15. Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema," 95–97. While KIMC once had a lab equipped to process 16-mm film, the equipment is no longer functional and it is not currently possible to process celluloid film in Kenya (Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015).

16. Mungai, "Responsibility and Freedom of Expression," 65.

17. Bisschoff, "The Emergence of Women's Film-Making in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa," 168.

18. Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back*, 147.

19. Beti Ellerson's work has been vital to charting this history. See especially Ellerson, *Sisters of the Screen*; and Ellerson, "African Women in Cinema."

20. Dovey, "New Looks," 22.

21. Andrade-Watkins, "A Mirage in the Desert?," 204.

22. Cf. Barrot, "'Video Is the AIDS of the Film Industry'"; Okome, "Nollywood and Its Critics"; McCain, "FESPACO in a Time of Nollywood," 257; Sereda, "Curses, Nightmares, and Realities"; and Haynes, "What Is to Be Done?" However, it is important to note that 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, suggesting that this preoccupation with art cinema style is a scholarly one (McCall, "Madness, Money, and Movies," 88).

23. Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 79.

24. Armes, *Dictionary of African Filmmakers*, 217. This problem is not confined to one book. As Bisschoff notes, "African women produce more work in video and television than on celluloid," 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" (Bisschoff, "The Emergence of Women's Film-Making in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa," 159).

25. Adesokan, "African Film," 248.

26. Haynes, "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films," 133.

27. De Lame, "Grey Nairobi," 153.

28. Wahome and Graham, "Spatially Shaped Imaginaries of the Digital Economy"; Friederici, Wahome, and Graham, *Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa*.

29. Toni Kamau, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

30. As is noted in *Pumzi*'s credit sequence, *Pumzi* "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."

31. As with other filmmakers like Judy Kibinge, Wanuri Kahiu 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.

32. Tomaselli and Shepperson, "Transformation and South African Cinema in the 1990s," 121.

33. Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*, 74.

34. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

35. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015. Subsequently, Karago and Kibinge collaborated on another urban romantic comedy called *Project Daddy*, which was similar in theme, aesthetics, and production style to *Dangerous Affair*.

36. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

37. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 17.

38. Toni Kamau, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

39. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 24.

40. Kibinge explained that the crew consisted of many "first timers . . . so things were wrong, I mean the sound was wrong especially, like the sound really screwed up. Pictures were sometimes not so great." Yet she described the production process very positively, saying they could "laugh through" it because there was "nobody looking over your shoulder at their money" and that it was "the most fun film ever to make" (Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015).

41. Spronk, "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi," 107–108; Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures*.

42. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

43. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

44. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

45. 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).

46. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

47. 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. For a comprehensive

overview of the violence, see Branch and Cheeseman, "Election Fever: Kenya's Crisis," the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2008 special issue on the postelection violence. In February 1984, the Kenyan Army forcibly gathered up to 5,000 Somali men from the Degodia clan and took them to 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. The official position is that fifty-seven died, but survivor testimonies account for almost 1,000 dead with perhaps 2,000 additional people missing. The exact death toll remains unknown (Anderson, "Remembering Wagalla," 658–659).

48. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

49. Furthermore, "the distinction between celluloid and video has been rapidly eroding if not disappearing everywhere, including in Hollywood" (Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism," 246). This makes the division of "African screen media into oppositional categories" all the more nonsensical and obsolete (Dovey, "African Film and Video," 2).

50. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015. When we met, she was working on two documentaries. 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.

51. Adejunmobi, "African Film's Televisual Turn," 121–124.

52. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 110.

53. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

54. 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 including intense competition (Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 3; also see Haynes, "Video Boom," 4). "Nollywood-style" is perhaps the more appropriate term.

55. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 6–7.

56. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 5–8.

57. Julien, "The Critical Present," 18.

58. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 7.

59. Kermeliotis, "Wanuri Kahiu."

60. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 5.

61. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, May 4, 2015.

62. Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity," 240.

63. Musila, "Part-Time Africans, Europolitans and 'Africa Lite'"; Dabiri, "'Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan.'"

64. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014. *Makutano Junction* has been on air since 2007 and is the most famous developmental show in Nairobi. While *Makutano Junction* is made in Kenya, it is produced by a global charity called Mediae that works to use entertainment for education. The show "now has 10 million viewers across East Africa," thus suggesting its successful merging of education and entertainment. Notably, the goal of Mediae, unlike local broadcasters, is not to turn a profit (Block, "Entertainment Education and Social Change," 610). *Makutano Junction* has also been an important site for film training as film professionals would be brought in from outside the country to train local filmmakers. For instance, screenwriter Natasha Likimani got her start in writing working for Makutano Junction (Natasha Likimani, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015).

65. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, May 4, 2015.

66. Wenner, "Postcolonial Film Collaborations and Festival Politics," 189.

67. The film is in rather direct contrast to dominant images of Kibera as gray and dirty and its inhabitants as desolate—a difference that likely contributed to the film's local popularity. Kibera residents also praised it for its creativity (Dovey, "Through the Eye of a Film Festival," 131–132).

68. Hawa Essuman is codirecting 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, codirected with Anjali Nayar, is called *Silas* (2017) and it premiered at the A-list Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). *Silas* received financing from the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) Bertha Fund.

69. Focus Features Africa First was active from 2008 to 2012. 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 she said that "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." 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. Aboubakar 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, "Certain Tendencies in Contemporary Auteurist Film Practice in Africa," 141–143).

70. Sanogo, "Certain Tendencies in Contemporary Auteurist Film Practice in Africa," 142.

71. Sanogo, "Certain Tendencies in Contemporary Auteurist Film Practice in Africa," 142.

72. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, May 4, 2015.

73. Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*, 22. 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 that "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." 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." 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." Having more experience disqualified her from modes of film funding specifically designed to empower a particular kind of filmmaker (young, underprivileged, and female) (Dangaremba, Mistry, and Schuhmann, "Tsitsi Dangarembga," 207–208).

74. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

75. Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

76. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

77. Interview with Ng'endo Mukii, November 2, 2014. For more on the subject of hair and beauty, see Dosekun, "Editorial: The Politics of Fashion and Beauty in Africa."

78. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 96.

79. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 100.

80. Interview with Lucille Kahara.

81. As Garritano explains: "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)" (Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 180–181).

82. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 101. For example, anthropologist Ruth Prince studied volunteers in the health sector in Kisumu (Western Kenya) 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," 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 financial circumstances (Prince, "'Tarmacking' in the Millennium City," 593).

83. Lucille Kahara, interview by Robin Steedman, March 4, 2015. Similarly, screenwriter Mildred Achoch explained that "even from the colonial times the respected jobs were the white-collar jobs. So, up until now, especially our parent's generation, if you are not going to the office at 8:00 dressed in a suit, you are not really working. So it's a carryover from those days" (Mildred Achoh, interview by Robin Steedman, December 28, 2014).

84. Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love*, 4 and 6; emphasis in original.

85. Zippy Kimundu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 29, 2015; Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, March 13, 2015; Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

86. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

87. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, May 4, 2015.

CHAPTER 2

1. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

2. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

3. Diawara, *African Film*; Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear"; McCluskey, *The Devil You Dance With*; Peranson, "First You Get the Power, then You Get the Money"; Ross, "The Film Festival as Producer."

4. Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear," 314–317.

5. Quoted in McCluskey, *The Devil You Dance With*, 166.

6. De Valck, "Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization."

7. Myers and Murray, "Introduction," 3.

8. Julien, "The Critical Present," 26.

9. Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema," 11–12.

10. Cf. Bhaumik, "Consuming 'Bollywood' in the Global Age" on Bollywood; and Adejunmobi, "Nigerian Video Film as Minor Transnational Practice" on Nollywood.

11. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 23.

12. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 56.

13. Bhaumik, "Consuming 'Bollywood' in the Global Age," 190.

14. Nagib, "Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema."

15. Bhaumik, "Consuming 'Bollywood' in the Global Age," 190.

16. Bollywood and Japanese cinema offer a useful contrast here. Bollywood is excluded from world cinema and 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, "Consuming 'Bollywood' in the Global Age," 189).

17. Stringer, "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy," 134–135.

18. Stringer, "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy," 135.

19. Lu, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital," 126. Hutchinson, in "Orientalism or Occidentalism?," has made a similar point about Japanese cinema.

20. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 52.

21. Cf. Tcheuyap, *Postnationalist African Cinemas*; and Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back*.

22. Murphy, "Africans Filming Africa," 243.

23. Tcheuyap, *Postnationalist African Cinemas*, 12–14.

24. Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor, *Culture Is Bad for You*; Oakley et al., "Cultural Capital"; O'Brien et al., "Are the Creative Industries Meritocratic?"

25. McRobbie, *Be Creative*.

26. Haynes, "Neoliberalism, Nollywood and Lagos."

27. Waldmüller, Gez, and Boanada-Fuchs, "(Re)Searching Nairobi's Middle Class," 4.

28. The African Development Bank (AfDB) classifies as middle-class those who consume $4–$20 per day, a classification that has been met with scathing criticism. Political scientist Henning Melber, for example, writes that "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" (Melber, *The Rise of Africa's Middle Class*, 2). A more nuanced criticism suggests that the AfDB's, and other economic definitions of class, are "purely descriptive" of an income stratum and that "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, "Kenya—An Unconscious Middle Class?," 111), which could be one reason why the AfDB's definition has received such scorn from disciplines grounded in sociological questions. In her study of debt in South Africa, anthropologist Deborah James states that "economists and anthropologists have existed in an uneasy relationship: less a truce, more a state of studied mutual disregard based on ignorance" (James, *Money from Nothing*, 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 emphasized the importance of studying how people think of and represent themselves, and their own class status.

29. Neubert, "Kenya—An Unconscious Middle Class?"; Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures*.

30. Kroeker, "The Kenyan Middle Class and Responses to Social Security."

31. Sherman, *Uneasy Street*.

32. Spronk, "The Making of the Middle Classes," 13.

33. Spronk, "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi," 99.

34. Spronk, "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi," 107–108.

35. Toni Kamau, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

36. These are the indicators of middle-class position used in the first study of Nairobi's middle classes: Latvala, "Obligations, Loyalties, Conflicts: Highly Educated Women and Family Life in Nairobi, Kenya."

37. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1–2.

38. Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015.

39. In her evocation of the informal settlement Kibera, Karuana expresses class difference in a typical Nairobian way, as commonly "people refer to social classes by quoting a part of the city" (Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 102).

40. Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015.

41. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

42. Lavie, "Israeli Drama."

43. Spronk, "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi."

44. She took five years to graduate from DFFB because she had to find additional financing as her school could finance only a short film and she wanted to make a feature (Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015).

45. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

46. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

47. Tcheuyap, *Postnationalist African Cinemas*, 12.

48. Bisschoff, "Representing Africa in the UK," 155; Calvin, "The Environmental Dominant in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*"; Krings and Okome, "Nollywood and Its Diaspora," 15; Tomaselli, "'Local Is Lekker,'" 117.

49. For more information on Riverwood, see Overbergh, "Technological Innovation" and "Kenya's Riverwood."

50. Kinyanjui, "Kenyan Videos."

51. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

52. Kahiu had completed several films, including *The Spark That Unites* (2007) (about the making of *Catch a Fire* [Phillip Noyce, 2006]), *Ras Star* (2007), *From a Whisper* (2008), and *For Our Land* (2009), when she made *Pumzi*.

53. *Pumzi* has been noted most predominantly because of its unusual genre: science fiction. It is cited by Kenneth W. Harrow as an example of the new "kinds of films that are now emerging" that demand "new kinds of critical approaches" (Harrow, "Manthia Diawara's Waves and the Problem of the 'Authentic,'" 14). Other scholars have suggested *Pumzi* "provides a never-before-seen image of high-tech Africans in the future" (Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 135) and displays a "new use" of film genre (Higgins, "The Winds of African Cinema," 85).

54. Harrow, *Postcolonial African Cinema*, xi.

55. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 60; emphasis in original.

56. XamXam, "Africa & Science Fiction."

57. XamXam, "Africa & Science Fiction."

58. Ciecko, "African 'First Films,'" 244.

59. Kahiu, "Ancestors of the Future," 167 and 173.

60. TEDx, "No More Labels"; Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, October 27, 2014.

61. Kahiu, "Ancestors of the Future," 172.

62. De Valck, "Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization," 44.

63. Huggan, "The Postcolonial Exotic," 29.

64. Cf. Barlet, *African Cinemas*; Diawara, *African Cinema* and *African Film*; Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*; and Saul, "Art, Politics, and Commerce in Francophone African Cinema."

65. Diawara, *African Film*, 76.

66. Diawara, *African Film*, 81. 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, *African Cinema*, 32).

67. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 26. One Fine Day Films grew out of Steinmann and Tykwer's existing Nairobi-based arts NGO One Fine Day e.V. Slavkovic, "Filmmaking in East Africa," 205.

68. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

69. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

70. See especially Haynes's and Dovey's work: Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood"; Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*. An example of gatekeeper power in distribution is the way FESPACO used technology to determine which films could or could not enter competition. The Festival Pan-Africain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO), perhaps the most

significant festival devoted to African cinema, segregated its programs, separating out a section for TV/video films and allowing only 35-mm celluloid films into competition. At FESPACO 2011, several of the "most exciting works of the year," in Dovey's view (including Nairobi-based female filmmaker Hawa Essuman's *Soul Boy* [2010]) were separated from the main competition and could compete only in the TV/video films program because of their format. 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 35 mm celluloid film" (Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 104–105). The political dimension of the technological division is all the more apparent here as these video films were clearly not of a different and lesser quality in aesthetic terms to their celluloid counterparts.

71. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

72. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 6, 2013. She was sad and disheartened when the subject of the film was revealed to her: "I was like, oh God, again postelection violence! I just, aww, I was just so sad when they unveiled that the script that I'd work on was 'oh postelection, oh God.'" She had made three films that dealt with the violence previously—her forty-minute documentary *Peace Wanted Alive* (2009), her twelve-minute short *Coming of Age* (2008), and her sixty-minute documentary *Headlines in History* (2010)—and, consequently, "was just done with it" (Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015).

73. Tasker, "Vision and Visibility," 216.

74. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

75. Hodapp, "Review of *Nairobi Half Life* Directed by Tosh Gitonga," 232.

76. Wenner, "Postcolonial Film Collaborations and Festival Politics," 189.

77. Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015.

78. Emily Wanja, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

79. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

80. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

81. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

82. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014; Njoki Muhoho, interview by Robin Steedman, February 17, 2015; Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

83. While it is doubtful beneficiaries of the project would publicly express a strong negative criticism, it is still remarkable that the only filmmakers I interviewed with negative views of One Fine Day were from the older generation, such as Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui, and their criticism was in representational terms.

Particularly in regard to *Nairobi Half Life*, and in the same vein as critics of Nollywood, they worried the films were representing Kenya "badly" to the outside world. Cf. Okome, "Nollywood and Its Critics."

84. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

85. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 66.

86. Hesmondhalgh and Saha, "Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural Production," 190–191.

87. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

88. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, October 27, 2014. 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, "Funding/Awards: Changamoto Arts Fund: Nairobi, Kenya").

89. Xu, "Farewell My Concubine and Its Nativist Critics," 163; Khiabany and Annabelle, "Beyond Metropolitanism and Nativism"; Morey and Yaqin, *Framing Muslims*.

90. 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, "Introduction," 7–9). "The politics of geographical difference" as they pertain to the films of Nairobi-based female filmmakers are important to assessing filmic acts of border crossing. 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," ignores the vast spread of popular culture across borders (Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear," 303).

91. Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, "'From, by, for'"; Dovey, "Through the Eye of a Film Festival," 131–132; Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 105.

CHAPTER 3

1. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2013.

2. Cf. Diawara, *African Film*. The centrality of Hollywood worldwide has long been met with scholarly resistance—indeed, the subdiscipline of world cinema studies developed precisely to decenter Hollywood and shine a scholarly light on other cinemas that could otherwise have remained obscured in the shadows (Andrews, "An Atlas of World Cinema"; Nagib, "Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema"). Yet, in response to this scholarship, film scholar Iain Robert

Smith notes that "the key question here is whether bracketing Hollywood's global dominance challenges its status or simply recentres it as the unacknowledged standard." Thus, in his book on transnational adaptations of Hollywood hits such as *Star Wars* and *The Godfather*, 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. Instead, "we need to address this interrelationship in order to better interrogate the complex cultural dynamics underpinning the transnational circulation of cinema" (Smith, *The Hollywood Meme*, 3–4). 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" set out in places like the edited volume *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema* (Bisschoff and Murphy, "Introduction," 6).

3. Global standard aesthetics are most dominantly set by Hollywood, but also by major A-list film festivals. But it is also important to recognize that there is a value judgment inherent in defining quality in these terms. For example, Nollywood films have long been criticized by scholars as aesthetically lacking in comparison to other traditions of African cinema, 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, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 93).

4. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 101.

5. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 102.

6. Julien, "The Extroverted African Novel," 681–682.

7. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, October 27, 2014.

8. Dovey, "African Film and Video," 3.

9. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, October 27, 2014.

10. Barlet, "'Homosexuality Is Not Un-African; What Is Un-African Is Homophobia,'" 187.

11. Barlet, "Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki*."

12. Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*, 185.

13. Olivieri and Wong, "The Slum Film Festival in Nairobi."

14. Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema," 94.

15. 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 1.

16. Tcheuyap, "Comedy of Power, Power of Comedy." This way of thinking results "less from the content and style of the films themselves than from the discourse that surrounded them" (Saul, "Art, Politics, and Commerce in Francophone African Cinema," 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" (Julien, "The Critical Present," 19).

17. Diang'a, *African Re-Creation of Western Impressions*, 74.

18. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

19. *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. Diang'a, *African Re-Creation of Western Impressions*; Mukora, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity." It is one of only three films listed in Armes's *Dictionary of African Filmmakers*. Anne Mungai's films have been treated in much the same way, where the stylistically internationalized *Saikati* is widely celebrated. Armes, *Dictionary of African Filmmakers*; Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema"; Diang'a, "Cinematographic Techniques in Three Kenyan Films"; Mukora, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity." However, *Tough Choices*, with its lower-quality aesthetics and socially conservative Christian message, is ignored.

20. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

21. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

22. Kinyanjui, "Kenyan Videos: A Director's Experience."

23. Barlet, *African Cinemas*.

24. Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema," 180; emphasis in original.

25. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 14.

26. Ojiambo, "Representing Violation in Film"; Giruzzi, "A Feminist Approach to Contemporary Female Kenyan Cinema"; Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*; Ojiambo, "Confronting National Pain and Suffering"; Steedman, "Screening Violence and Reconciliation" and "Review of *Something Necessary*."

27. Stringer, "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy," 134. For a similar argument, see Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 180.

28. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

29. Jinna Mutune, interview by Robin Steedman, December 13, 2014.

30. Jinna Mutune, interview by Robin Steedman, December 13, 2014.

31. Jinna Mutune, interview by Robin Steedman, December 13, 2014.

32. Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*, 5.

33. Williams-Hawkins, "Speak Up! Who's Speaking?," 27–28.

34. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, October 27, 2014.

35. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

36. 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" (Tasker, "Vision and Visibility," 221).

37. White, *Women's Cinema, World Cinema*, 13–14.

38. Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*, 11.

39. *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*.

40. Kaplan, "Women, Film, Resistance," 25; emphasis in original.

41. Diawara, *African Film*, 161.

42. Murphy and Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema*, 5.

CHAPTER 4

1. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

2. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

3. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

4. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

5. A survey prepared for the Kenya Film Commission found that audiences in Kenya predominantly watch films in the following ways: 85.1 percent at home, 18 percent in movie theaters, 4.7 percent in video halls, and 2.8 percent on mobile phones (SPRRL, "Economic Contribution of Film and Television Industry in Kenya," 7).

6. According to a 2016 report for the Communications Authority of Kenya, 85 percent of households with televisions—approximately 32 percent of Kenyan

households—watch free-to-air primarily (Intelecon, "ICT Access Gaps Study Final Report," x). The most recent report on audience trends in Kenya found that the market breakdown of favorite TV stations among audiences is as follows: 60 percent Citizen TV, 15 percent KBC, 9 percent KTN, and 8 percent NTV (SPRRL, "Economic Contribution of Film and Television Industry in Kenya," 7).

7. The Standard Media Group owns KTN, Citizen TV is owned by Royal Media Services, and the Nation Media Group owns NTV. In the realm of pay-TV, Zuku is part of the Wananchi Group and M-Net is owned by Naspers, which is "arguably the wealthiest media corporation based in Africa" (Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 95).

8. Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures*, 237.

9. Toni Kamau, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

10. Isabel Munyua, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

11. Wanuri Kahiu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

12. 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 (Mildred Achoh, interview by Robin Steedman, December 28, 2014; Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015; Jinna Mutune, interview by Robin Steedman, December 13, 2014; Natasha Likimani, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015).

13. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 112.

14. Quoted in Mulupi, "Television Entrepreneur, Dorothy Ghettuba, Explains How She Got to Where She Is Today."

15. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

16. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

17. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

18. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

19. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 110. Ghettuba is not alone in thinking about a digital future. For instance, Nairobi-based female filmmaker Lucille Kahara was also exploring the possibility of starting a channel when we met in 2015.

20. Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 100.

21. Liz Lenjo, interview by Robin Steedman, May 5, 2015; Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015; Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015.

22. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

23. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 106.

24. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015; Natasha Likimani, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

25. Zuku, "About Zuku."

26. Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 100–101.

27. Dorothy Ghettuba and Ndanu Kilonzo, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015; Natasha Likimani, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015; Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

28. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 110.

29. Natasha Likimani, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

30. Haynes, "Neoliberalism, Nollywood and Lagos," 84.

31. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 109.

32. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

33. Murugi, "Broadcasters to Air 60% of Local Content by 2018."

34. Mungai, "TV Stations Yet to Meet 40% Rule on Local Content—CA."

35. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

36. Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 33; emphasis mine.

37. Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 181.

38. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

39. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

40. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

41. Kenya Film Classification Board, "Classification Guidelines," 3. There are five tiers of classification: General Exhibition, Parental Guidance, 16 (unsuitable for audiences younger than 16), 18 (unsuitable for nonadult audiences), and Restricted/Banned.

42. The KFCB guidelines on restricting films based on sex, obscenity, and nudity read: "Restricted in this thematic area is a film, poster or program that portrays, encourages, justifies or glorifies perverted or socially unacceptable sex practices such as incest, pedophilia, homosexuality or any form of pornography; content showing women as tools of sex; content endorsing sexual violence" (Kenya Film Classification Board, "Classification Guidelines," 8).

43. In Nairobi, filming in public locations requires licenses from the "local regional council, Nairobi City Council, and Kenyan [government]" (McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 108).

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

45. Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

46. Fuglesang, *Veils and Videos*, 157. Popular culture historian Laura Fair's study of love elsewhere on the Swahili coast had similar findings. Fair, "Making Love in the Indian Ocean."

47. Amutabi, "Neither Bold nor Beautiful," 185.

48. Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

49. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015; emphasis mine.

50. For instance, "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, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital," 132). Similarly, the fact that much African literature is extroverted 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" (Adejunmobi, "Provocations," 63).

51. 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, "Kenya's Film Regulator Is Calling Netflix a Threat"). See Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, for further discussion of Netflix's conflicts with national regulators.

52. Barnes, "Kenya's Film Censor."

53. Cf. Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age*; Crisp and Gonring, *Besides the Screen*; Iordanova and Cunningham, *Digital Disruption*; and Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

54. Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age*, 56–57. We can see this, for example, in the case of Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire where producers adopted digital technologies at the same time, but diverged in the media products they made with video film developing in Nigeria and television in Côte d'Ivoire. The provision of reliable electricity is starkly different in each of these cases (notoriously bad in Lagos, reliable in Abidjan), and as watching a TV series requires the electricity to turn on a television at a regularly scheduled time, conditions of infrastructure have a role to play in explaining the diverging choices of producers to focus production on video films or television (Jedlowski, "African Videoscapes," 303–304).

55. Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 79.

56. Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 100.

57. Kaigwa, "From Cyber Café to Smartphone," 189.

58. Omulo, "Over 60pc of Kenyans Have Smartphones"; Communications Authority of Kenya, "First Quarter Sector Statistics Report for 2015/2016," 8.

59. The impact of internet phone technology for the future of television in Africa is made clear by Dovey: In 2016 "there were 58.3 million television sets in sub-Saharan Africa" but "an estimated 181 million unique mobile internet subscribers" (Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 98).

60. Iordanova, "Instant, Abundant, and Ubiquitous," 49.

61. Tomaselli and Shepperson, "Transformation and South African Cinema in the 1990s," 121. The film was shot using RED—a professional-grade digital camera technology—and had a budget of $100,000 (Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015).

62. Judy Kibinge, interviews by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014, and May 13, 2015.

63. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

64. Boshoff, "Q&A."

65. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 13 and 82.

66. Vourlias, "Africa Offers Big Potential for Streaming Video" and "Trace TV Buys Pan-African VOD Platform."

67. Fisher, "African Cinema on Demand?," 243.

68. Fisher cautions, "It is still not known what will happen to the remastered material held by AFL, whether it will become available for streaming via another platform, be distributed through other means, or whether the rights will be sold on" (Fisher, "African Cinema on Demand?," 247–248).

69. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, 99. The activities of iROKO TV are particularly interesting in this regard. When faced with the problem of limited access to high-speed Internet in Africa, iROKO canceled its streaming service and instead created an Android app so African consumers could watch content on their mobile phones (Dovey, "Entertaining Africans," 98–99). IROKO must also work to differentiate themselves and their paid service from the mass of free Nollywood content available over YouTube, and one way they do this is by buying the exclusive rights to feature films that have premiered in cinemas (Adejunmobi, "Streaming Quality, Streaming Cinema," 228).

70. Kickstarter, "Ger"; Kickstarter, "Walls of Leila."

71. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

72. Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love*; Gandini, "Digital Work"; Scolere, "Brand Yourself, Design Your Future."

73. Other filmmakers thought about crowdfunding explicitly in terms of exposure. Judy Kibinge, for instance, saw crowdfunding as a potential way to identify the future audience of a film before it is even made (Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014).

74. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 12–13.

75. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 67.

CHAPTER 5

1. Lucille Kahara, interview by Robin Steedman, March 4, 2015.

2. Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, "'From, by, for.'"

3. My bus fare to Pawa254 was approximately 40 KES ($0.35), but a taxi the same distance could cost 600 KES ($5.20). The difference between bus and taxi cost was similarly sharp between my home and town. Of course, as Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri point out, even this bus fare would make access to these locations difficult if not impossible for many low-income Nairobians. Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, "'From, by, for.'"

4. Lobato, "Subcinema," 116. Nigerian cinemas and home viewing provide a powerful example of the meaning of physical space for film viewing. Within Hausa Northern Nigeria, "the immoral connotations of sexual intermixing were so intense that cinema theaters never became socially acceptable for women" (Larkin, "The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria," 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, "Evolving Popular Media," 116; Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers," 424).

5. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, "Introduction," 5–6.

6. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

7. I observed audiences in these spaces in Nairobi, but 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. I did make observations about the audiences at the venues I was studying. At each event I 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 afterward, so I also logged all audience questions and comments in my field notebook. I further noted audience reactions during film screenings (such as laughter). I also noted, as far as possible, the composition of the audience. (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). 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 female filmmakers were screened more frequently at the Goethe Institut than in commercial theaters—and

the strategies Nairobi-based female filmmakers were adopting to find both audiences and markets for their films.

8. During my eight months in Nairobi, no film by a Nairobi-based female filmmaker had a theatrical premiere or screening in cinemas. However, this is not to say that they never screen in these venues. *Something Necessary*, for instance, was theatrically released and screened for several months (Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2013). Cinema tickets at theaters in locations such as Prestige Plaza and the Junction Mall cost approximately 400 KES ($3.50), but tickets at the IMAX in town can cost 800 KES.

9. Bisschoff and Overbergh, "Digital as the New Popular in African Cinema?," 114. According to the seminal arguments of anthropologist Karin Barber on popular art in Africa (Barber, "Popular Arts in Africa"), 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, "Digital as the New Popular in African Cinema?," 113). "The people" is not a fixed category with clear boundaries, but rather a nebulous grouping consisting of those who are not elites (Barber, "Introduction," 3–4). Accounting for the complexities of local experience is essential to understanding popular culture, and this includes transnational connectedness as experienced "on the ground" (Barber, "Foreword").

10. Prabhu, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora*, 233.

11. This line of thinking—of the need to correct audience behavior—goes back to colonial-era film projects. For instance, for Major Leslie Allen Notcutt of the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), "one of the aspects of 'European' culture descending 'too rapidly' upon the African was commercial cinema itself. The BEKE, therefore, was partly designed to 'capture' African viewers and correct the 'falsehoods' perpetuated by the Hollywood dream machine" (Reynolds, "The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment," 61).

12. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

13. Smith, "Beam Me up, Ömer," 12. Again and again media reception scholars have found Smith's point to be true. Audiences of Nollywood video films also watch imported content, and "[f]or 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, "Nollywood," 5). Similarly, media anthropologist Laura Fair conducted an extensive study of Zanzibari audiences in the 1950s–1980s and concluded that "African audiences were selective consumers of global cultural flows, as well as active agents in the construction of meaning from the texts with which they chose to engage" (Fair, "Songs, Stories, Action!," 109). Even Netflix must localize its offerings to be competitive because, generally, "audiences still want television in their own language, with familiar faces and culturally relevant stories" (Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 182).

14. Nye, "Soft Power."

15. Granqvist, *The Bulldozer and the Word*, 34–35.

16. Rea, "'Our Tradition Is a Very Modern Tradition,'" 63–64.

17. Granqvist, *The Bulldozer and the Word*, 35.

18. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015.

19. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015. Content House focuses on sports media and journalism and has made a film, called *Gun to Tape* (David Forbes, 2012), about Kenyan Olympics runners David Rudisha and Edna Kiplagat.

20. 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" (Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015). At times, programs held at these venues would have a charge. For example, at the Udada Film Festival, screenings in the Goethe Institut auditorium were advertised as costing 200 KES ($1.75) for regular admission and 50 KES ($0.43) for students. But advertising a charge was unusual, and, in the case of Udada at least, the admission fee was never actually collected.

21. Rollet, "Celebrating 40 Years of Films," 141.

22. Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 69–70.

23. Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 70.

24. During my time in Nairobi (October 2014–June 2015) there were numerous small film festivals, such as the Udada Film Festival (October 24–29, 2014), the Film Africa Documentary Film Festival (November 10–15, 2014), the Out Film Festival (January 23–25, 2015), and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival (November 10–14, 2014), held at the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française. 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) and the Slum Film Festival (held annually in August/September since 2011). In January 2017, the Nairobi Film Festival held its first edition. Unusually, it was hosted by commercial movie theaters. This represents an interesting new development in the local film festival landscape, but is beyond the scope of this analysis. The now defunct Kenya International Film Festival ran from 2006 to 2012.

25. 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. The Michael Joseph Centre is an exhibition and event space within the Kenyan telecommunication giant Safaricom's business complex.

26. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

27. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015. 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.

28. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

29. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015. 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. Udada also partnered with the Zimbabwean International Images Film Festival for Women (IIFF), where Zimbabwean writer, filmmaker, activist, and IFF director Tsitsi Dangarembga did a "mini IIFF" at Udada where IIFF brought their own films and provided the funding for their events.

30. 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 need to be thoroughly subsidized to survive" (Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 150).

31. Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015.

32. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 9.

33. For a detailed overview of the origins of the festival and its political goals of creating a "slum filmography," see Olivieri and Wong, "The Slum Film Festival in Nairobi."

34. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 160.

35. 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. Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, "'From, by, for.'"

36. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 214.

37. Kwani? is a Kenyan literary organization 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.

38. Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa, "Offices & Foundations."

39. Pawa254, "About Us."

40. 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.

41. Dovey, "Toward Alternative Histories and Herstories of African Filmmaking," 478.

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

43. I was very lucky in that, during the prescreening socializing, I made friends with a local lawyer who generously translated the Swahili comments for me.

44. Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 14.

45. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

46. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

CHAPTER 6

1. Zippy Kimundu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 29, 2015.

2. Zippy Kimundu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 29, 2015.

3. Röschenthaler and Schulz, "Forging Fortunes," 1.

4. Reimer, "'It's Just a Very Male Industry,'" 1042.

5. Brydges and Hracs, "What Motivates Millennials?"; Ekinsmyth, "Challenging the Boundaries of Entrepreneurship". Africa's Greatest Entrepreneurs 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. The limitations of this approach to entrepreneurship are particularly clear when we note that across its sixteen chapters, each devoted to profiling an individual entrepreneur, it includes not a single woman (Makura, *Africa's Greatest Entrepreneurs*, xi).

6. Ahl and Marlow, "Exploring the Dynamics of Gender, Feminism and Entrepreneurship," 557.

7. Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 69.

8. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 351; emphasis in original.

9. Amankwaa, Esson, and Gough, "Geographies of Youth"; Carter, "Hustle and Brand"; Muthoni Mwaura, "The Side-Hustle"; Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman, "The Work of Hope."

10. Farrell, "Hustling NGOs."

11. Thieme, "The 'Hustle' amongst Youth Entrepreneurs," 394.

12. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 16.

13. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

14. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

15. Grazian, *On the Make*, 13.

16. Isabel Munyua, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

17. Isabel Munyua, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

18. Conor, Gill, and Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour," 9.

19. Conor, Gill, and Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour"; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, "'A Very Complicated Version of Freedom.'"

20. Miller, "Labor in Lagos," 153.

21. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

22. Idriss, "The Ethnicised Hustle," 13–14; Chułek, "Hustling the *Mtaa* Way."

23. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

24. Lucille Kahara, interview by Robin Steedman, March 4, 2015.

25. Morean, "Creativity at Work."

26. Wei, "Dealing with Reality."

27. Adejunmobi, "Nigerian Video Film as Minor Transnational Practice," 13.

28. 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 postelection violence—and he quit his job to devote himself to it (Kermeliotis, "Kenya's Politicians Battle like 'Transformers' in 3D Animation"). "People loved it, so they watched it a lot and he went to a lot of 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" (Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014).

29. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

30. Caves, *Creative Industries*, 2.

31. Mistry and Schuhmann, "Introduction," xix–xx. 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" (Munga et al., "Aftermath," 45–46).

32. Negus and Pickering argue that "the greatest influence of the Romantic conception of artistic creativity has . . . been through its strong sense of expression as conjuring something forth, giving form to what is inchoate, and bringing an inner voice or vision into being. . . . Throughout the modern period, art has been regarded as the consummate expression of individual selfhood" (Negus and Pickering, *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value*, 4).

33. Bisschoff and Van de Peer, *Women in African Cinema*, 22.

34. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

35. Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema," 99.

36. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

37. A particularly famous example of edutainment filmmaking in Kenya is the work of the Kenya-based and 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) (dir. Nick Reding and Kamau Wa Ndung'u, 2010) addressing HIV/AIDS, *Ni Sisi* (dir. Nick Reding, 2013) promoting peace in the wake of the 2007–2008 postelection violence, and *Watatu* (dir. Nick Reding, 2015) addressing extremism on the Kenyan coast. For a discussion of the impact of *Ni Sisi*, see Steedman, "Screening Violence and Reconciliation."

38. Slum-TV is a media NGO located in Mathare (an informal settlement in Nairobi). The organization has a small number of staff members and "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." Slum-TV receives funding from the Belgian non-profit Africalia, which has a mission of achieving development goals through supporting culture and art in Africa. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 178–179.

39. McNamara, "The Culturalisation of Development in Nairobi," 198–199. 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, because all filmmakers, middle-class and working-class, must "hustle" to continue working (and correspondingly to "subsist").

40. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital (1986)."

41. Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 104–105.

42. Barbara Karuana, interview by Robin Steedman, March 3, 2015.

43. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 158.

44. Nigerian female video entrepreneur Emem Isong's response, for instance, was to develop "what could be defined as an informal windowing strategy." 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. Using this strategy, "she managed to protect what she considers her best market (the U.S.) from the interference of Nigerian bootleggers" (Jedlowski, "The Women behind the Camera," 252).

45. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, 73.

46. Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*.

47. Lobato, "Creative Industries and Informal Economies," 347.

48. Emily Wanja, interview by Robin Steedman, June 3, 2015.

49. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015. For a further discussion of Nduti, see Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood."

50. 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" (Overbergh, "Kenya's Riverwood," 105).

51. Appie Matere, interview by Robin Steedman, May 6, 2015.

52. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015.

53. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, 74.

54. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, 74.

55. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015. I interviewed Lebo in the middle-class neighborhood of Kilimani, which is in the more affluent west side of Nairobi.

56. Bryce, "Outside the Machine?," 161.

57. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015.

58. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

59. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, 41.

60. De Beukelaer, "Toward an 'African' Take on the Cultural and Creative Industries?"; Lobato, "Creative Industries and Informal Economies."

61. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

62. Hesmondhalgh and Baker, "'A Very Complicated Version of Freedom'"; Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love*.

63. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; McRobbie, *Be Creative*.

64. Ross, *No-Collar*, 142.

65. Pettit, "The Cruelty of Hope"; Mackenzie and McKinlay, "Hope Labour and the Psychic Life of Cultural Work."

66. Kleinhans, "'Creative Industries,' Neoliberal Fantasies." 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, "Just-in-Time," 22).

67. Curtin and Sanson, "Precarious Creativity," 5–6.

68. Ferguson and Li, "Beyond the 'Proper Job,'" 7.

69. Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman, "The Work of Hope"; Bridges, "Flexible as Freedom?"; Scully, "Precarity North and South."

70. Thieme, Ference, and Van Stapele, "Harnessing the 'Hustle,'" 4. See also Ferguson and Li, "Beyond the 'Proper Job,'" 1.

71. Millar, "The Precarious Present"; Thieme, "The 'Hustle' amongst Youth Entrepreneurs"; Chułek, "Hustling the *Mtaa* Way."

72. McRobbie, *Be Creative*.

73. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

74. Jennifer Gatero, interview by Robin Steedman, May 26, 2015.

75. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

76. Thieme sees hustling as a productive and calculated choice where youth are focused on obtaining "work that fit[s] their terms" (Thieme, "The 'Hustle' amongst Youth Entrepreneurs," 397). 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. Peterson, "Kwaito, 'Dawgs'' and the Antimonies of Hustling.'"

77. Njoki Muhoho, interview by Robin Steedman, February 17, 2015.

78. Caves, *Creative Industries*, 4.

79. Njoki Muhoho, interview by Robin Steedman, February 17, 2015.

80. Morean, "Creativity at Work"; Dovey and Muller, "Dangerous Learning in Edgy Contexts"; Förster, "On Creativity in African Urban Life."

81. Berg and Penley, "Creative Precarity in the Adult Film Industry," 159, 163, and 167. Because, "like other industries in advanced capitalism, the adult film industry more and more relies on a flexible, itinerant, and deskilled workforce," porn performers rarely make a living from performing alone, and instead survive this precarious situation by creatively manipulating other potential profit streams.

82. Lucille Kahara, interview by Robin Steedman, March 4, 2015.

83. Lucille Kahara, interview by Robin Steedman, March 4, 2015.

84. For publications indicative of this trend, see Cohen, "Millennials Rely on 'Side Hustles' to Climb the Corporate Ladder"; Releford, "How This 23-Year-Old

CEO Turned Her Dorm Room Side Hustle into a Business"; and Edmondson, "9 Reasons to Start an Online Side Hustle in 2020."

85. Neff, *Venture Labor*; Ekinsmyth, "Professional Workers in a Risk Society"; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor among Cultural Producers"; Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition."

86. As Ross so forcefully states (about the start-up economy in the United States): "From the perspective of corporate managers—freed from the need to offer health insurance, paid vacations, sick leave, personal days, pension plans, social security contributions, stock options, quarterly bonuses, infrastructure overheads, or performance reviews—any crusade to heroicize freelancing was a welcome boost" (Ross, *No-Collar*, 157).

87. Ferguson and Li, "Beyond the 'Proper Job,'" 8.

88. Hivos, "The Status of the Creative Economy in East Africa"; Horowitz and Botero, "Importing Innovation?"

89. Alacovska and Bissonnette, "Care-Ful Work"; Alacovska, "Informal Creative Labour Practices."

90. Ellerson, *Sisters of the Screen*, xviii.

91. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2013.

92. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

93. Judy Kibinge, interview by Judy Steedman, November 25, 2014; Zippy Kimundu, interview by Robin Steedman, March 29, 2015; Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015; Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, March 13, 2015; Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

94. Jackie Lebo, interview by Robin Steedman, March 10, 2015.

95. Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, interview by Robin Steedman, April 24, 2015.

96. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, November 25, 2014.

97. "There has been a dramatic increase recently in the creation of film schools on the African continent" (Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*, 6); so the proliferation of film school in Kenya is part of a continent-wide phenomenon. Cf. also Adesokan, "African Film," 247.

98. Njoki Muhoho, interview by Robin Steedman, February 17, 2015.

99. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015. 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 (Wanjiru Kinyanjui, interview by Robin Steedman, March 24, 2015).

100. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

101. Farrell, "Hustling NGOs," 126.

102. Dommie Yambo-Odotte, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

103. Njoki Muhoho, interview by Robin Steedman, February 17, 2015.

104. Isabel Munyua, interview by Robin Steedman, May 29, 2015.

105. Toni Kamau, interview by Robin Steedman, March 6, 2015.

106. Wangechi Ngugi, interview by Robin Steedman, April 27, 2015.

107. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, March 13, 2015.

108. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

109. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

110. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, March 13, 2015.

111. Zippy Kimund, interview by Robin Steedman, March 29, 2015.

112. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015.

113. Judy Kibinge, interview by Robin Steedman, May 13, 2015. 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 [Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment]," and notes that "this legacy of documentary film-making still exists today" through the prominence of NGO documentaries about various social and development issues (Bisschoff, "Cinema in East Africa," 73).

114. Thieme, "The 'Hustle' amongst Youth Entrepreneurs"; Thieme, "Turning Hustlers into Entrepreneurs"; Thieme,"The Hustle Economy"; Farrell, "Hustling NGOs."

115. Thieme, "The Hustle Economy."

116. Curtin and Sanson, "Precarious Creativity," 2.

117. Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 74.

CONCLUSION

1. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, November 7, 2014.

2. Ng'endo Mukii, interview by Robin Steedman, November 2, 2014.

3. Cieplak, "Alternative African Cinemas," 76–79.

4. Mistry and Schuhmann, "Introduction," xvii.

5. Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, 2.

6. Hawa Essuman, interview by Robin Steedman, May 4, 2015.

7. Cham and Mungai, "African Women and Cinema"; Ellerson, *Sisters of the Screen*, 137.

8. Conor, Gill, and Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour," 4. For example, geographer Richard Florida famously and optimistically suggested: "Everywhere we look, creativity is increasingly valued. Firms and organizations value it for the results it can produce and individuals value it as a route to self-expression and job-satisfaction" (Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 71).

9. Conor, Gill, and Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour"; Wing-Fai, Gill, and Randle, "Getting in, Getting on, Getting Out?"

10. We also need more comparative work about women in different creative industries to have a more complete vision of the struggles, strategies, and accomplishments of creative women across different industries and spaces. This is a project I have begun contributing to alongside Taylor Brydges in our forthcoming work comparing female filmmakers and fashion designers in Kenya and Canada.

11. Brydges and Hracs, "What Motivates Millennials?"; Ekinsmyth, "Challenging the Boundaries of Entrepreneurship."

12. Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 1–2.

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