CINEMA AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL VIDEO FILMMAKING IN WEST AFRICA

by

S. BENAGHR

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2012
Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... 5
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... 6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .................................................................................................... 7
DEDICATION: .................................................................................................................. 8
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS ................................................................ 9
ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................... 14
1.1 Key Questions of the Research ............................................................................ 14
1.2 Methodologies ....................................................................................................... 21
1.3 Context: Ghana and Burkina Faso ...................................................................... 28
1.4 Context: Development of Film Cultures ............................................................. 37
1.5 Post-colonial West African Film Practices ......................................................... 45
1.6 Video filmmaking in the ‘postcolonial’ context. .................................................. 55
1.7 Cinema, technology and digitisation .................................................................... 66

Chapter Two: FILM PRODUCTION AND FILM MAKERS: PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL VIDEO FILMMAKING IN WEST AFRICA ...................................................... 80
2.1 Defining Digital Filmmaking ............................................................................... 87
2.2 Economics ............................................................................................................. 93
2.3 Creative possibilities in economic adversity ....................................................... 98
2.4. Film practices ..................................................................................................... 103
2.5 Infrastructure ....................................................................................................... 108
2.6 Development agenda: politics and media liberalisation ...................................... 127
2.7 Film local, think global: matter of theme and style ............................................ 148

Chapter Three: INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES; REGIONAL CONTEXT ................................................................. 171
3.1 Towards an integrated Regional Approach: digital video technology and future filmmaking in West Africa ...................................................................................... 171

Chapter Four: MARKETING, DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION . 206
4.1 Alternative models of marketing and distribution ............................................... 206
4.2 Standardising film distribution and exhibition .................................................... 213
4.3 Marketing video films ......................................................................................... 233
4.4 Creating new models: The D-170 Plus and Gated Community Models ... 237
4.5 Video films and the diaspora .............................................................................. 247
4.6 Changes in technologies and digital video marketing and exhibition ..... 261
4.7 Tackling the problem of over production of video films in Ghana .......... 267

Chapter Five: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ......................................................... 273
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Production Volume: 2004 – 2010 (Boubakar Diallo) ......................... 163
Table 2: Production Volume: 2004 – 2010 (Shirley Frimpong-Manso) .......... 163
Table 3: MICA 2009 in Figures .................................................................. 174
Table 4: FESPACO Festival Attendance Statistics: 2001 – 2009 ................. 187
Table 5: The Main UK VOD Film Players: 2007 ....................................... 11609
Table 6: TV Ownership and Viewership: Ghana ....................................... 23129
Table 7: Internet Usage and Population Growth: Nigeria ......................... 23266
Table 8: Internet and Facebook Usage and Population Growth: Ghana ....... 26366
Table 9: Ghanaian Video Films and Production Houses: 1987 – 1993 ....... 26370
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of West Africa ................................................................. 28
Figure 2: Ghana’s Population Growth Projection ............................... 29
Figure 3: Four Major Technological Developments in Film .................. 70
Figure 4: Non-linear Editing Bench of Movie Africa/Danfo B A Productions, Ghana. Picture by Author (2010) .............................................. 115
Figure 5: Non-linear Editing Bench of Movie Africa/Danfo B A Productions, Ghana. Picture by Author (2010) .............................................. 115
Figure 6: Non-linear Editing Bench of Movie Africa/Danfo B A Productions, Ghana. Picture by Author (2010) .............................................. 116
Figure 7: Picture of Street Sales of film on VCD. Picture by Author (2010) ................................. 132
Figure 8: Executive Theatre, Kanda - Accra, Ghana ......................... 231
Figure 9: Rex Cinema in the Central Business District of Accra, Ghana .... 232
Figure 10: Danfo B.A’s Marketing and Distribution Outlet at Opera Square, Accra (2010) ................................. 220
Figure 11: Road side VCD/DVD Solo Marketer/Vendor in Ghana. Picture by Author (2010) ...................... 231
Figure 12: Market Store CD/VCD/DVD Distributor/Marketer/Vendor. Picture by Author (2010) ...................... 264
Figure 13: CD/VCD/DVD Distributor (Silverbird Cinema & Lifestyle Store in Ghana). Picture by Author (2010) ...................... 232
Figure 14: Trasacco Valley Gated Estate: Picture by Sweggs, June 6, 2007 .... 245
Figure 15: Trasacco Valley Gated Estates in Accra: Picture by Sweggs, June 6, 2007 ................................. 246
Figure 16: Silverbird Cinema in Accra, Life Style Shop. Picture by Author (August, 2010) ...................... 262
Figure 17: Silverbird Cinema in Acera, way leading to Screens 2&3. Picture by Author (August, 2010) ...................... 115
Figure 18: Audience queuing to buy cinema tickets at Siverbird Cinema. Picture by Author (August, 2010) ...................... 263
Figure 19: Silverbird Cinema - Accra, Ticket Sales Desk. Picture by Author (August, 2010) ...................... 231
Figure 20: Emerging video film value chain model in Ghana ................... 232
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank first of all God for giving me the strength, knowledge and good health to come this far. To my Director of Studies, Prof. Garry Whannel, I say thank you for the guidance and suggestions during the entire period of this project. You have been an inspiration.

To the Director of my Research Institute (RIMAD) Prof. Alexis Weedon, words cannot express my gratitude for all the support in research and conference grants as well as fee waivers.

To all my interviewees, I say thank you for your views. They have been so useful to the final output of this research project. Of special mention are Dr Stanislas Méda, Mr Clement Tapsoba, Mr Africanus Aveh, William Akuffo of World Wide Motion Pictures, Ghana. You breathed so much life into this work.

My special thanks go to my family both nuclear and extended for your diverse support in gathering information for this work. To my wife Ellen and my two children Fidelia and Benedict, God bless you for the inspiration you gave me and the belief you had in me. Many are those who in one way or the other helped during this project, I say thank you to all.
DEDICATION:

This work is dedicated to the lasting memory of my late uncle Rev. Dr Yvon Yangyuoru, a distinguished clergyman and scholar who supported my education until his sudden death in January 2008. May his soul rest in eternal peace.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABC     American Broadcasting Corporation
AFNOR   Association Française de Normalisation
BECE    Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment
CBS     Columbia Broadcasting Service
CFU     Colonial Film Unit
CGI     Computer Generated Images
CIDC    Consortium Interafricain de Distribution de Cinématographique du Burkina
CINAFRIC Société Africaine de Cinématographique du Burkina
CIPROFILMS Consortium Interafricain de Production de Films
CNC (formerly DCN) National Cinematography Centre
COMACICO Compagnie Africaine Cinématographique Industrielle et Commerciale
CPP     Convention People’s Party
cYO     Committee for Youth Organisation d’Ouagadougou
DBS     Direct Broadcast Satellite
DCI     Digital Cinema Initiative
DCP     Digital Cinema Projection
DHDSB   Direct-to-home digital satellite broadcast
DTO     Download to own
DV     Digital Video
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States
ENG     Electronic News Gathering
ERP     Economic Recovery Programme
FEPACI Fédération Panafricaine de Cinéastes
FESPACO Festival Pan-Africain de Cinematographie
FIPAG Film and Video Producers Association of Ghana
FRC     Film Regulating Committee
GAMPS Ghana All Media and Products Survey
GBC     Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
GCFU    Gold Coast Film Unit
GDP     Gross Domestic Product
GFIC    Ghana Film Industry Cooperation
GREDA Ghana Real Estates Developers Association
GSS     Ghana Statistical Service
HDTV    High Definition Television
ICC     International Conference Centre
IMF     International Monetary Fund
INAFEC Institut Africain d’Education Cinématographique
ISD     Information Service Department
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISSER</td>
<td>Institute of Social, Statistical and Economic Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICA</td>
<td>Marché Internationale de Cinematographie Africain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTI</td>
<td>National Film and Television Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>National Commission on Culture (Ghana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLC</td>
<td>National Liberation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>National Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVMAG</td>
<td>National Video Marketers Association of Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCAM</td>
<td>Organisation Commune Africaine et Mauricienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMDs</td>
<td>Portable mobile devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDA</td>
<td>Rassemblement Democratique Africain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIMAD</td>
<td>Research Institute of Media, Arts and Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECMA</td>
<td>Société d’Exploitation Cinématographique Africaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SONACIB)</td>
<td>Société Nationale d’Exploitation et de Distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SONAVOCI</td>
<td>Société Nationale Voltaïque du Cinéma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSNIT</td>
<td>Social Security and National Insurance Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>full form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UEMOA</td>
<td>Union Economique Monitaire Ouest Africaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGCC</td>
<td>United Gold Coast Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Education and Scientific Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Fund for Population Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USPS</td>
<td>Unique selling propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCD</td>
<td>Video Compact Discs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCR</td>
<td>Video Cassette Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VoD</td>
<td>Video-on-Demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPF</td>
<td>Virtual Print Fees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CINEMA AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL VIDEO FILMMAKING IN WEST AFRICA

S. BENAGR

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa using Ghana and Burkina Faso as case studies within the context of new technologies.

The key research questions that guided the study were how do the economic, social and political contexts of video filmmaking affect the development of a digital video film industry in Ghana and Burkina Faso? and how have the perceptions of digital technologies (held by filmmakers and other stakeholders) impacted upon the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa?

Using field interviews with stakeholders in the video film industry in Ghana and Burkina Faso, as well as with the West African diaspora community in the UK, document research, textual references, and personal observation, the research discusses the challenges of new digital and video technologies, and their implications for the development of the video film industry.

The research establishes that video and digital technologies are offering many people the opportunity to make films. There is however, a plethora of new digital technologies that enable the work of video film producers, which require closer examination.

The research suggests that the impact of the digital revolution has been limited, and a number of factors account for this. The study offers recommendations that might contribute to discussions on finding solutions to the development of a professional, regulatory and practical video filmmaking environment. This would lead to the formulation of policies that impact positively on filmmaking in the region, and consequently increase the capacity of local productions to compete on the international film scene.
Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Key Questions of the Research

General Overview: This thesis examines the development of digital cinema in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Developments in affordable digital video technologies have enabled developing film economies to adopt creative and non-conventional modes of film productions, and Ghana and Burkina Faso are no exception. Ghana (late 80s) and Burkina Faso (mid 2000s) launched their video film industries, led largely by private entrepreneurs. These private initiatives would later become templates for others to embrace the freedom that video technology afforded filmmaking. The new format increased the scope of audio-visual content available to audiences both in volume of films produced and subject matter treated.

Celluloid filmmaking in the region over the years was reliant on foreign funding and technical support. As such, celluloid filmmaking, the dominant format, was often poorly resourced, especially in the areas of production, distribution, and exhibition. Early West African video filmmakers, mostly autodidacts, adopted a different strategy. They resorted to using popular stories that did not require big foreign financial investment and technical sophistication. The main objective of this study is to undertake an independent and comprehensive assessment of how digital filmmaking is being organised in Ghana and Burkina Faso and to assess its impact on the cinema industry in the West African region.
The topic of this research *Cinema and New Technologies: the Development of Digital Video Filmmaking in West Africa* is particularly important. This is because for the first time in the history of filmmaking in the West African region, there has been an unprecedented level of involvement by independent producers. However there has, to date, been a lack of strategic direction or guidance, which might in turn produce a more effective development of the industry. The apparent paradigm shift in film-making from celluloid to the video format as a result of developments in video technology makes the topic of significant interest. The findings of this research project, I hope, will be useful to those who want to know how global technologies can be domesticated and assigned specific uses within specific economic, social, cultural, and political contexts. The likes of George Lucas have argued that new technology of video enhances the cost effectiveness and democratic potential inherent in digital video filmmaking, but the actual development of such filmmaking is always determined by local combinations of social, political and economic circumstances.

The research report is organised into five chapters. Chapter One gives a general overview of the research topic. The aims and objectives of the research are set out here as well as the key research questions. In order to contextualise the research, the chapter provides a brief country history as well as the colonial and post-colonial historical context of filmmaking in both Ghana and Burkina Faso. The chapter looks further at the emergence of video technology and its connections with postcolonial experiences and Western popular culture.
The final section of Chapter One focuses on questions of the relationship between technology and society in general, how that relationship can be understood, and how cinema provides an example of that relationship. The section on technology concludes by looking at the interdependence of societies and their technologies, and how video technologies and digital filmmaking in West Africa exemplifies this complex relationship.

Chapter Two, Three and Four are based on data gathered during field trips and interviews. Chapter Two examines the experiences and views of digital cinema practices of the interviewees. The analysis in Chapter Two is divided into five subsections, each dealing with five fundamental topics that affect video film practice in West Africa. Chapter Three looks at institutions and policies within a regional context, and how these formations impact on the development of digital video filmmaking.

Chapter Four highlights issues surrounding the distribution, exhibition and marketing of video films. The discussion looks at some possible models, such as the D-170 and Gated Community concept that can enhance film consumption and consequently strengthen film culture.

Chapter Five concludes the report by revisiting contextual issues that are pertinent to the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa. These issues include the need to domesticate technology to suit local needs; the prospects of
digital video technology and ICTs; the need for a unified domestic regional market; and the exigencies of a policy vacuum vis-à-vis video filmmaking.

**Research questions, aims and objectives:** I have followed the video phenomenon in West Africa (i.e. Ghana and Burkina Faso) for nearly a decade. During this period, I realised that while there have been general discussions among scholars, industry practitioners, and in the media on the subject, there has not been sustained research on the subject. It was therefore necessary that key questions be asked and answers sought. When I studied for my Master of Arts degree in 2004, the popular view was that digital video in Ghana, and generally in the West African region was a potential panacea for the problems of filmmaking in West Africa over the decades. The reality however, was more complex and it was clear that the problems could not simply be solved by the introduction of video technology.

Consequently I believed it was important to undertake further research into cinema, new technologies, and the practices of digital video filmmaking in West Africa. Therefore, when I was designing my research, in relation to the context described above, it was important for me to identify my central research question that will guide my quest to find some understanding for the complex relationships within the emerging digital video film industry. After reviewing the available literature and carefully assessing the production situations, I posed the key questions:
* How do the economic, social and political contexts of video filmmaking affect the development of a digital video film industry in Ghana and Burkina Faso?

* How have the perceptions of digital technologies (held by filmmakers and other stakeholders) impacted upon the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa?

Having posed the key research questions, I needed to clearly establish the aims and objectives for the research.

1. Accumulate field data in Ghana and Burkina Faso through in-depth interviews with selected filmmakers, instructors, media academics, students and workers, as well as consulting such sources as documents, texts, and artefacts.

2. Investigate digital video filmmaking in West Africa and examine the various perceptions of digital video filmmaking among filmmakers, academics, policy advisers, students, and workers.

3. Assess how the understanding of new technologies of video affects the development of the video film industry.

4. Assess to what extent new technologies offer solutions or threats to the financing, production, distribution and exhibition of West African video films.

5. Formulate findings and recommendations that can augment the relatively sparse contemporary literature in the field, contribute to academic knowledge, and provide a basis for future research.
In the next section, I will outline the rationale for the study, and the methods of inquiry, as well as the justification for the selection of a specific mode of inquiry. The details of how and what data was captured will also be discussed.

**Rationale for the research:** The introduction of technology into certain communities sometimes have unintended consequences (Lister et al., 2003). For instance, Rosaleen Smyth argues that the introduction of the technology of radio and film without careful planning in India and the Far East by Britain had a damaging impact on Britain. It led to agitations for self-rule (Smyth, 1983: 129). The medium of film was introduced to the African continent with a development motive; to educate people in the colonies about ‘life’. Film-making in both Ghana and Burkina Faso is marked, in distinct ways by its colonial origins.

Ghana and Burkina Faso have both made distinct contributions to the development and growth of cinema in the region. My decision to use Ghana and Burkina Faso as case studies for this research is influenced both by their respective contributions to the growth of filmmaking in the region, and also by their leadership roles within the framework of Pan-Africanism. Burkina Faso’s position as a leader in celluloid filmmaking in the region is unrivalled. As the premier sub-Saharan state to become independent in March 1957, Ghana has been at the forefront of many initiatives such as political leadership and filmmaking. It is therefore not surprising that Ghana is one of the pioneering states in the West African region to have adopted the video format for popular commercial film production.
Ghana and Burkina Faso have different colonial and post colonial experiences in the area of film production. These experiences tend to affect their respective approaches to filmmaking. In Sections 1.3 to 1.5, this situation will be explored in detail. This research has tried to understand how the experiences of both countries can be harnessed into a model, which might boost the creative and commercial potentials of filmmakers in the region.

Clement Tabsoba’s view (Interview, Ouagadougou, May 27, 2007) is that Burkina Faso has the requisite expertise in film production. He however, concedes that when it comes to working with the video format, he believes Ghana is a leader, a view shared by William Akuffo (Interview, Accra, May 16, 2007). The two nations have different perspectives regarding the business of film production, which as noted earlier, have been influenced by their colonial and post-colonial experiences. These differences are useful for framing the understanding and the way forward for the video film industry in West Africa.

On the international scene, there have been mergers, acquisitions, partnerships and takeovers of media and entertainment outfits in the last two decades. The takeovers by major media organisations such as News Corp, WPP, and Time Warner, have been undertaken in the spirit of consolidating strong areas, the commercial motives notwithstanding. By the same token, they seek to improve or eliminate weak areas so as to ensure effective and profitable operations. As African cinemas develop, similar processes of consolidation may develop at the regional level. The relative strengths and weaknesses identified by Tapsoba and
Akuffo might form the basis for negotiating strategic partnerships in the region for a sustainable integrated regional film industry.

1.2 Methodologies

During the entire period of this research, I have attempted to understand how new cinema technologies impact on the development of digital video films in West Africa. After evaluating the difficulties in obtaining credible data on filmmaking in the region, I found it appropriate to use a qualitative methodology of inquiry which is ‘multi-method in focus’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2). This method allows for divergent and in-depth data gathering techniques leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the ‘perspectives of those involved’ (Glesne, 2006: 4). Consequently, my data gathering efforts focused on a multiple sources of information gathering approach and focused on the following major areas; field interviews and observations, internet and telephone discussions, and document research.

Although the diverse cultures of film production in the region do offer abundant opportunities for text analyses, this would necessarily be a major project in its own right, and not one directly linked to the main research questions of this thesis. However, it became evident that issues arising from the interview material might be usefully illuminated with reference to specific texts, and consequently some limited textual analysis has been included.
The research adopted an emergent, exploratory, and inductive approach. The justification for such an approach is that the direction of the research was not predetermined or delimited. The study used Ghana and Burkina Faso as case studies in order to understand the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa. Although filmmaking in West Africa dates back to the pre-independence era, to give the research that sense of a bounded system (Creswell, 1998: 61), the research focused on the period from the 1980s to present. The 1980s marked the beginning of change in the dynamics of filmmaking in West Africa. This was due partly to international economic policies on Africa, such as the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) policies and their wider implications on the cultural industries.

More importantly, the period also coincided with the introduction of consumer video technology in feature filmmaking. Focusing on the situations in the two countries mentioned above therefore can be said to be consistent with the case study tradition of qualitative inquiry. Therefore in trying to construct meaning and understanding from the cases in Ghana and Burkina Faso, it was important that I make allowance for paradigmatic assumptions of an emerging design, a context dependent inquiry and inductive analysis (Creswell, 1998: 361).

Typically, the interview sessions lasted between thirty minutes to one and half hours. Out of the eleven interviews conducted in Ghana and Burkina Faso, I transcribed seven of them before embarking on data treatment. After transcription, the data was categorised under major sub-groups consistent with the aims and
objectives and research question of the study. This then set the stage for analysis of the field work in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

The primary research data, discussed and analysed extensively in Chapters Two, Three and Four of this thesis is based on fieldtrips to Ghana and Burkina Faso between 2007 and 2010. Consistent with the research design, data capture in the field took the form of detailed interviewing sessions of varying lengths. I used open-ended questions during the interviews. The rationale for the open-ended questions approach was to enable more details to emerge from the participants during the interviews, thereby clarifying the subject of this research.

My interviewees were pre-selected participants who are well connected to the industry. They were made up of film directors and producers, film scholars and teachers, students of film, and workers in the industry. Out of my initial interviews in Ghana and Burkina Faso, a further list of contacts was generated using the ‘snow-balling’ technique of identifying potential interviewees. In an ethnographic approach to data collection, I also watched (video) films in the Silverbird Cinema, the Executive Theatre-Kanda in Accra (Ghana), and the Cine Neerwaya in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). I undertook observational investigation in down-town Accra and Ouagadougou in order to get a first hand experience of how the highly unregulated video film business is conducted. Additionally, I visited the production, marketing, distribution, and training outfits of some notable producers and pioneers of video filmmaking.
My interviewees all lived in the two capital cities mentioned above. Their responses thus, reflexively would have an urban inflection. Though this presupposes an urban bias, it is worth noting that thus far, the activity of video filmmaking is largely an urban phenomenon. However, the target markets for the videos expand beyond the limits of the city and nation. In line with this cross border and transnational consumption patterns of videos, and to investigate video consumption in the diasporic market, I undertook further fieldwork in London and Luton in England.

The interviews in Ghana and Burkina Faso were recorded with a digital voice recorder and an analogue micro cassette recorder. The simultaneous use of the two gadgets was first of all as a precautionary measure. In case of any failure on one, there will be the other as back up. Secondly, it was an opportunity for me to see whether or not analogue technology still has any relevance in the pervasive digital economy.

In an ethnographic data gathering manner, I undertook multi-sited visits to places that brought me into close contact with some of the less discussed variables in the video filmmaking equation such as street hawkers, mobile sales trucks and kiosks. The significance of these informal channels will be discussed in Chapter Four. My visits were often for a dual mission, first to create the opportunity for engaging patrons of video films and shopkeepers in discussions. Secondly it was an opportunity to study the shopping patterns of customers while I search the shelves for West African video films to buy.
The streets, drinking spots, public eating places, (also known as Chop Bars in Ghana), have become unconventional sites and spaces of consumption for video films, and thus worth my attention. These sites and spaces facilitated my attempt to appreciate and understand the methods, albeit crude, that have helped to circumvent the Western model of film uptake in West Africa. The buzz generated in these informal sites becomes crucial in charting the social, cultural, and economic significance of the videos and how they are positioned in identity creation, especially among the diaspora market. I will examine this subject of informal spaces for video films in detail in Chapter Four.

**Why a case study?** The main focus of this research has been to undertake an empirical study that investigated the phenomenon of digital video film development in West Africa. The significance of this investigation is that it is based on the real life context of the production of video films as popular cultural goods (Yin, 1994: 10). The context of video filmmaking is barely distinguishable from the phenomenon itself. The boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are thus not clearly evident. Since the research concentrates on the specific situations of video film practice in Ghana and Burkina Faso, the method of inquiry could well be regarded as a case study. The appropriateness of the case study approach to my research is that it afforded a clearer understanding and appreciation of video filmmaking in West Africa by studying the contextual framework. This invariably called for a deeper and critical analysis of the conditions of production and consumption. I will discuss the distinctive
production conditions in Chapter Two. This means that beside the requirements of data points, there were equally important variables such as policy and regulatory frameworks, audience and markets creation that needed consideration. Consequently discussions and analysis of field data took advantage of already developed theoretical and conceptual propositions (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

Case study research is undertaken for particular reasons. Depending on the purpose of the research, the work may follow one of the three types of case study approaches that Robert E. Stake (1998) identifies. These are the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study, and the collective case study. Stake suggests that to understand a specific case because the case itself is of interest, an intrinsic approach is desirable. Nonetheless, an intrinsic case study usually is not illustrative of a specific problem. Where the interest of the research is for purposes of offering more insight into an issue or refines a theory, an instrumental case study is recommended. The case being researched therefore mediates our knowledge of something else.

In the situation where one specific case does not offer enough insight for our understanding of a particular phenomenon, it becomes necessary to attempt a collective case study of cases and situations that can open up the inherent issues for better comprehension. It is along these lines of theoretical reflections that this research has opted to study the digital video development in West Africa using the cases in Ghana and Burkina Faso in order to gain profound insight of their context of existence and practice (Stake, 1998: 88-89).
Although greater emphasis is put on the collective case study method, there are elements of both the intrinsic and the instrumental case study approaches. The purpose of my research into cinema and new technologies, and the development of digital video production in West Africa is an attempt to understand why filmmaking since the 1980s till the present moment is taking the present discernible trajectory. More importantly, this research was designed in a way that will enable its findings to throw more light on the complex and confusing relationship between the factors necessary for video filmmaking, as well as how new technologies are making it possible for African video filmmakers to connect with the domestic and global audiences.

What this method of inquiry has enabled me to do is to identify and study, understand, and analyse certain features that I have concluded to be typical of the West African video film practice (See Chapter Two). Thus the findings of the research I hope will enable the comprehension of similar cases that have begun to emerge across the African continent (Stake, 1998: 88).

In choosing Ghana and Burkina Faso as the focus for my research, the overriding concern was the opportunity that their respective colonial and post-colonial experiences in filmmaking will offer to learning something different, as opposed to using Ghana and Nigeria who have similar colonial and post-colonial legacies (Stake, 1998: 101). Burkina Faso, a former French colony is different in terms of her colonial and post-independence relationship with France and the ramification
of that on the country’s filmmaking and cultural traditions (Hoefert de Turégano, 2004). The passion and conviction with which my interviewees spoke during my field research lent more credibility to the case study approach.

1.3 Context: Ghana and Burkina Faso

The Republic of Ghana is located in the western corner of Africa, and shares borders in the north, east and west with Burkina Faso, Togo and Ivory Coast respectively. All these three countries are Francophone whereas Ghana is Anglophone (See Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Map of West Africa](image)

The 2000 Ghana Population and Housing census put the country’s population at 18 million and it was estimated to rise to a little above 25m in 2015 (GSS, 2002:1)^2. The economically active population (15-64 years), according to the same census report, constitute more than half of the total population (55.35%).
The 2010 mid-year population estimates for the national capital by the Ghana Statistical Service put the figure around the 4,000,000 mark. Ghana’s population has grown steadily since 1970, as shown on the population growth graph of Ghana in Figure 2. The population growth rate, as indicated in the 2000 Census report, is 2.7% per annum from 1984-2000 (http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/KeySocial.html Accessed 24/07/2010). It was however estimated that by 2005 this figure would reduce to 1.25%. The United Nations Fund for Population Activity (UNFPA) sees the population estimate differently. The UNFPA puts the fertility rate at 5.15%, and the projected population size of Ghana by 2015 is put at 36m (UNFPA, 2000). In both cases, higher population figures are estimated, and these figures are of economic significance to the film industry which thrives on numbers.

Figure 2: Ghana's Population Growth Projection

The ethnologic map of Ghana lists 65 different ethnic groupings, each with their own language/dialect. This situation translates into the plethora of cultural
diversity that exists in the country, which as we will later find out, has implications for the video film industry. However the official national language for conducting business is English. Ghana’s literacy rate according to the 2000 Census is put at 53.3%. The same census report, however, further revealed that 45.9% of the 15+ year olds have not been to school (GSS, 2002:1-9). The relevance of the above statistics is that the video film production strategies adopted by most producers are indirectly influenced by above demographics.

Ghana is divided into ten administrative regions, each region headed by a regional minister appointed by the President and approved by parliament. Before 1957 (the year Ghana attained independence) the country was known as the Gold Coast. When the Portuguese first arrived in Ghana in the 15th century, they found so much gold along the banks of two rivers, Ankobrah and Volta, that they named the place ‘Mina’ which means mine. However, when the English came to Ghana, they adopted the Gold Coast as the name for the country because of its vast gold deposits.

It is important to note that the concept of appropriation and domestication to serve local needs, as shall be discussed in this research, has been with Ghana for a long time. It is therefore worth considering, that as this research focuses on investigating how the technology of digital filmmaking is being understood, appropriated, adopted and localised in West Africa for enhanced cinematic activities, the name Ghana itself was in fact adopted from an ancient West African empire called Wagadugu.
In 1240 AD, the Kingdom of Wagadugu was controlled by Sundiata but was later absorbed into the broader Mali Empire. Ghana was the title of the kings who ruled the Kingdom. However, Arab scholars who left records of the Kingdom used the name loosely to refer to the King, the capital and the state. Despite the series of external aggressions, the Kingdom endured and flourished because of its gold. The above is analogous to the total domination of Hollywood movies on the Ghanaian and Burkinabe screens. At the dawn of independence, the Ghanaian leadership under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah thought present day Ghana shared similar experiences with ancient Ghana and thus adopted the name.

Burkina Faso on the other hand is a landlocked country that lies 500 km away from the Atlantic. Its total surface area is 274,200 sq km and has a population of about 15,000,000. It shares borders with Niger in the east, Ghana, Togo and Benin in the south-east, Ivory Coast in the south and Mali in the north. Its national capital Ouagadougou, play hosts to Africa’s major biennial film festival, FESPACO and has some 1,500,000 inhabitants. The capital has the highest population density in the country, with its 400 inhabitants per square kilometre compared to the national figure of 33 inhabitants per square kilometre. The above situation puts the country among some of the countries in the region that have high population densities.

Like Ghana, Burkina Faso is culturally diverse in nature, with about 60 different ethnic groups. The Mossi ethnic group is believed to be the biggest of them all. The Mossi Emperor (Moro Naba) wields a lot of power and is an influential moral figure. All official businesses in the country are conducted in French. As
constitutional democracies, Ghana and Burkina Faso observe the freedom of expression and association of their citizens. This has had a tremendous impact on the media’s role in development in the last eighteen years in both countries. Prior to the democratic dispensation, the Burkinabe state had a monopoly on media production and distribution which tended to be bias and propagandistic in content.

**Ghana and Burkina Faso as Colonies:** Studies show that a pre-colonial West Africa had an integrated and regional identity. Robert Smith (1976) has argued that although there were wars fought between the people, the victors often did not acquire the spoils of, and dominate the vanquished. The victors established loose connections, thus strengthening the idea of shared cultures and identities. However, the arrival of the European colonizers destabilized the common regional identity and cultures through their divide and rule policy. As British and French colonies I will discuss how Ghana and Burkina Faso assumed different characters as a result being under different imperial powers.

The Gold Coast, as Ghana was then known, was an economic *Eldorado* for a lot of European countries. The area was known to Europeans to be the bastion of gold and other minerals that Arab traders dealt in. As stated earlier, the Portuguese were the first to arrive, followed by the Dutch, English, Danish and Swedish. These nations competed among themselves for the control of the Gold Coast. The major fierce clash was between the Portuguese and the Dutch, culminating in the loss of the Portuguese economic base, Elmina Castle, to the Dutch in 1642. This defeat led to the Portuguese eventually departing from the Gold Coast for good.
The departure of the Portuguese created room for more competition among the remaining European nations for control over the Gold Coast. Britain and the Netherlands were the major contenders. They set up companies in the like of the Dutch West Indian Company and the British African Company of Merchants that oversaw their African business interests.

The British and French colonizers created sub-regional communes along linguistic lines, the Anglophone and Francophone. Such divisions have led to certain cross border affinities and bases for economies in the post-independence era. The establishment of the linguistics zones predicates the tricky hypothesis that Africa is known and understood predominantly through its colonial histories. The telling legacy of colonization on Ghana and Burkina Faso can not be discounted as I will show shortly.

Britain and France had very different approaches to colonization and this, in turn, affected the development of film practices in diverse ways in both colonies. The French colonial authorities in West Africa affirmed their economic and political control under the pretext of and through the establishment of cultural programs. Armed with the French republican ideals of liberté, fraternité, et égalité, France’s mission was to use the policy of assimilation and direct rule to push the idea that colonial peoples should be made into Frenchmen (Dovey, 2009: 177-189). In order to achieve this, the colonial authorities had to establish cultural institutions indistinguishable to those in mainland France. Consequently, France and its overseas territories were regarded as one people bound by common language and
Due to their belief in the importance of culture, and because of their policy of assimilation, the French colonizers forged a French connection with West Africa through film that has survived into the post-colonial era.

After the infamous 1884 Berlin Conference for the partition of Africa, the Gold Coast became part of the British Empire. The colony was thus subordinated politically, economically, culturally and socially to Her Majesty’s rule (See Ashbury et al., 1998: 15). British governors were appointed to rule the colony in collaboration with local authorities. This was so because there was already a system of rule with the chiefs as leaders of their communities.

The British hence, practiced indirect rule in the Gold Coast. Through this approach, the British attempted to segregate people through various forms of class system. In Anglophone West Africa, the cinema was used for largely functional and economic ends, and not for strengthening cultural ties between Britain and her colonies. Cinema was appropriated by the British Colonial Film Unit in the Gold Coast to integrate peoples of the colony into the British economy, and by missionaries to convince and convert local populations (Ukadike, 1994: 30). Ghana thus had very little in the way of film culture and structures bequeathed to her when it came to independence.

One could argue, therefore, that while France did bequeath something of cinematic value to its ex-colonies, in the British colonies such as Ghana, the
burden fell onto individuals such as Sean Graham to maintain and try to exploit the resources of the old Colonial Film Units (Diawara, 1992).

**Independence:** The quest for independence was characterised by political agitations, boycotts, and detentions, and therefore did not come easily. The pressure for self-rule gained momentum after the Second World War. A lot of Gold Coasters, as Ghanaians were then called, fought alongside the British and other Europeans. The myth surrounding the invincibility of the white man had been broken. They had fought with and defeated them. On their return, the veterans compared the injustices they fought against in the war to what was going on in their homeland. Prior to 1945, renowned figures in Ghana’s history like John Mensah Sarbah, Dr. Kwagyir Aggrey, King Ghartey IV etc. engaged in active political awareness of the local people. The independence of India and Pakistan also gave impetus to the activists to press for changes for their people (Amamoo, 2007: 48).

Bowing to pressure, a new constitution dubbed the ‘Sir Alan Burns Constitution’ of 1946 was put in place, which in itself was described as “outmoded at birth” by a Royal Commission of Inquiry, the Watson Commission (Busumtwi-Sam, 2001: 109). The constitution had 18 elected members included in the government headed by the governor. He had six other officials and six nominated members. The following year the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) party to which Kwame Nkrumah was general secretary was formed to protest against the role assigned the legislative council and the Burns constitution in general. The 18
elected-member council’s advisory role was not binding on the governor. Nkrumah’s arrival in 1947 after 12 years sojourn in the USA and UK marked a defining moment in Ghana’s quest for independence. (see Busumtwi-Sam, 2001: 109; Amamoo, 2007: 55)

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s strategy for grassroots political activism was not popular with his other UGCC comrades who belonged to the upper class. Dr. Nkrumah formed the Committee for Youth Organisation (CYO) which became popular with the grassroots. As his ideas got increasingly out of synch with that of the UGCC, he broke away and transformed his CYO into the Convention People’s Party (CPP) (Amamoo, 2007; Busumtwi-Sam, 2001; see Leslie on www.africaspeaks.com/leslie/1609.html).

According to Leslie, his campaign for independence was characterised by boycotts of European goods, labour strikes and work slow-downs. Still clamouring for changes, he was disappointed in 1949 when the Coussey Committee Report advised the involvement of Africans in government but fell short of asking for self rule. In response to this Dr. Nkrumah made public a ‘nationwide Positive Action’ strike which began on New Year’s Day in 1950. He was arrested and put in detention for 13 months.

In the 1951 first ever general election, the CPP won 34 of the 38 seats. When he came out of detention he was asked to form a government which had Ghanaians as the majority, and Nkrumah later became the Leader of Government Business. As the pressure mounted the date for Ghana’s independence was set as 6th March
1957. This was announced by the Secretary of State for the Colonies Sir James Griffiths in 1956, and consequently by Nkrumah to the Gold Coast House of Assembly (Amamoo, 2007: 70; Busumtwi-Sam, 2001: 29).

1.4 Context: Development of Film Cultures

Anglophone Colonial film cultures: Cinema in Africa first of all is a colonial legacy. This medium was introduced to the continent based on similar principles that characterized the 1884 Berlin meeting for the ‘Scramble of Africa’; the colonizers, mostly Europeans, felt that they had a moral duty to ‘civilize’ Africans (Diawara, 1992:1). Since the early 1940s Ghana was engaged in extensive cinematic activities. However, due to poor documentation on these activities, and post-1966 general apathy towards the film sector, not much has been done in the area of film research. The last decade and half has witnessed critics and researchers like Manthia Diawara (1992), Frank Ukadike (1994, 2002, 2003), Birgit Meyer (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003), Chris Anyanwu (2002), and others doing some studies on film production and its place in socio-economic development in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and South Africa.

However, the medium was introduced cautiously. In the particular case of the British, introduction of the new technology of radio and film without careful planning had damaging impact on them in India and the Far East (Smyth, 1983: 129). Therefore any consideration of introducing these media to their tropical African Empires successfully meant that they had to be done in a way as to inspire
respect from the Africans. This was deemed important by the British due to the fact that Hollywood pictures showed the grubby aspects of the man from the West (Smyth, 1983: 129). The implications were that it could set the tone for political agitations as well as draw the white man’s cachet to its lowest ebb.

According to Rosaleen Smyth (1979) the movement towards a global village began with the growing importance of cinema and radio communications between the first and second world wars. They transformed the communications scene in industrial nations, and their influence was gradually expanding into the ‘Third World’. From the mid 1920s Smyth indicates that the Colonial Office began to assess the impact of cinema and radio on the colonies and for the colonial power. Cinema’s impact was apparent and enormous as a propaganda tool. She quotes Sir Stephen Tallents as saying in 1932 that ‘the greatest agent of international communication’ was cinema (Smyth 1979). It had a tremendous moral and emotional influence on people. Film took a centre stage in the 1927 Colonial Office Conference organized by L.S. Amery, the Colonial Secretary.

In 1929 Amery set up the Colonial Office Film Committee and tasked them with three things: consider and report on the distribution of British films, cinema in education and censorship. The resolution passed by the Conference of Colonial Governors in 1930 following a consideration by a Committee is significant and perhaps explains why cinema was introduced to the colonies cautiously. Quoting from the Report of The Colonial Film Committee, Smyth (1979: 437) says:
The Conference is convinced that the cinematograph has very great possibilities for educational purposes in the widest sense not only for children but also for adults, especially with illiterate peoples. The conference also considers it is desirable to foster in every way the market for British films. It regards the question of censorship as of the first importance, as the display of unsuitable films is a very real danger, and, in the case of primitive communities in Africa at any rate, there is still time to mitigate this danger.

Films that were screened were mostly pedagogical and with less focus on popular commercial feature films. From the above resolution, we can deduce that the colonial authorities thought that exposing Africans to cinema would be damaging. We can infer here the critical and powerful role of cinema in communication. This assertion is validated by Victor E. K. Anti (1995: 42), a former Acting Managing Director of GFIC, when he writes that:

the Colonial Government, desirous to have an effective way of reaching its constituents in the colony, set up the Gold Coast Film Unit whose objective may be summed up as follows: to project a positive image of the Government through production and exhibition of films on Government activities; to provide informal education on such issues as health, communal living, basic education, civic responsibilities and social development; to provide entertainment.
The eventual arrival of film production in Anglophone West Africa can be linked to the efforts of L. A. Notcutt, who worked for the British colonial administration and was also the originator of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE). The films made under the BECE mainly taught Africans to adopt European ways of life. As a cost cutting measure he used African assistants for some of the production work (some times semi-skilled tasks). Notcutt’s experiment was a success, so in 1937 he advised that local film units be created in the colonies to undertake basic production work while the postproduction aspects are handled by the central office in London. In 1939 the Colonial Film Unit was set up with branches in British controlled territories in Africa. The West African branch catered for Ghana and Nigeria. Initially these film units were tasked to distribute (war) propaganda films (Smyth, 1983).

If the Notcutt BECE experience is anything to go by as Smyth has noted, then the view that Africans were not sophisticated enough to grasp the concept of cinema is quashed. G. C. Latham, the education director of BECE, had a six-month tour where he screened films they produced at BECE to 8,000 local people to test their reaction. His findings were revealing and probably merited a rethink by the civilisers. Quoting Latham’s findings, Smyth reiterates that “‘the moving picture is understood by quite unsophisticated Natives to a degree which astonishes people who have experienced their comparative inability to recognize still pictures’” (1983: 131).
In Ghana the foundation of what was going to become the Ghana Film Industry Corporation started with three Ghanaians, among other African nationals trained by Britain to be the pacesetters of the trade in Anglophone Africa (Aveh: 2001). To consolidate the achievements of the training programme, the Gold Coast Film Unit (GCFU) was set to produce social films for pedagogic purposes. Most of these films were propagandistic in nature (glorifying the colonial administration). Birgit Meyer (1999: 96) writes that the GCFU’s objective was to maintain ‘governmental and imperial interests’ and create ‘loyal colonial subjects.’

Before 1950, the Colonial Film Unit in London funded the production of these didactic and propaganda films. The funding from London started going out to the colonies after Britain was criticised (especially by US and Germany) for not doing much to develop her colonies. In response to the criticism and in furtherance of the drive to project England, the Colonial Marketing Board got £4,175 for the ‘Strand Film Company to produce a 20 minute propaganda film, Men of Africa (d. Alexander Shaw, 1939)’ (Smyth, 1983: 132).

Like Diawara, Middleton-Mends (1995) believes film becomes an adjunct of civilization in trying to educate and uplift the people to realise the development of the colony. The Unit also later undertook the production of narrative features, some of which are The Boy Kumasenu (1952), Theresah (1956). In Kumasenu, we encounter a young village boy. This innocent village boy moves to the city of Accra in search of better life. The problems he encounters in the city become the subject matter of the film. Theresah on the other hand is about the challenges a
young lady faces in her struggle to train as a nurse. She had been motivated by a medical rescue team in her village to want to become a nurse herself. By the mid 1950s pressure was mounting on the colonial administration from the colonies for independence.

By the time of independence the Gold Coast Film Unit was seven years old as an independent production outfit and no longer depended on the British Colonial Film Unit in London. This was long before the latter stopped making films in Africa. To give the unit a firm foundation, Sean Graham helped to organize the Gold Coast Film Unit. Graham and the Unit went into co-productions with private British interests and notably John Grierson. It should be emphasized that Graham was one of Grierson’s students (Diawara, 1992: 5).

**Francophone colonial film culture:** Francophone Africa’s experience with cinema dates back to 1905, which is some ten years after the invention of the cinématographe by the Lumière Brothers. In a circus in Dakar, Senegal, the Lumière Brothers showed two films *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de Ciotat* and *L’arroseur Arrosé*. From that time on there was expansion in the exhibition of 35mm films in the urban centres (Diawara, 1992: 104).

In Francophone Africa, most of which was ruled by France, there was no clear policy by the French regarding the production of films for their colonies. In 1934 however, the French government passed a decree (*Le Decret Laval*) to tackle matters dealing with filmmaking. The ‘*Le Decret Laval*’ sought to control the content of films made in Africa and the creative involvement by Africans in
making the movies (Diawara, 1992:22; Hoefert de Turégano, 2004: 77). However, one of the leading figures of African cinema, Paulin S. Vieyra, thinks that what pre-empted the French minister for the colonies, Pierre Laval to pass the decree was the introduction of sound to film in 1928. The fear was that Africans’ involvement with the medium could be used to promote subversive and anti-colonialist objectives since they could communicate with their people via sound films. Invariably what this meant was that any film project that was thought to be contrary to what the colonial government wanted could not be made.

Jean Rouch suggest in ‘Films ethnographiques sur l’Afrique’ (Rouch, 1967:21) that the decree was used as a cover to prevent Africans from filming their own countries. Even though the decree was for all filmmakers (French men included), it was never applied to French filmmakers. This is a clear case of how technology can be used to advance one’s cause, especially when it is within your powers to determine how to use it. This situation seriously delayed proper film production activities in Francophone Africa. In Anglophone Africa, although such laws were not passed, the films that were brought in to the colonies from the Overseas Film Centre in London were re-edited to suit the interest of the colonial administration.

In French controlled territories, the first case where the Laval decree was enforced was in 1950. The film that was affected was Robert Vautier’s ‘Afrique 50’. Secretly shot in La Cote d’Ivoire, the subject of the film was France’s repression of a freedom movement, the ‘Rassemblement Democratique Africain’ (R.D.A.) (Diawara, 1992:22). The film was heavily censored and the “distasteful” parts
taken out. Africans are of the view that in most cases African traditions and cultures suffer a great deal of misinterpretation in the West, and this situation extends to Africa’s objects of art too sent to Europe. And for lovers of art and culture, this can be a worrying issue since meaning is altered and eventually lost.

It is in the light of the above that Chris Marker and Alain Resnais in 1955 made ‘Les statues meurent aussi’. The film is about how Africa’s statues are taken out of context and put in European museums where they adorn the walls of the museums and lose their meaning. Out of their settings where they are full of life, they become ‘objets d’art’ in Europe. Thus in 1955 Marker and Resnais became the second people to face the full force of the Laval decree. Their film was seized by the government and kept for a decade before releasing it (Diawara, 1992:23).

The foregoing strengthens the theory that the West is always interested in seeing what they want to see about West Africa but not what West Africa has to offer. In advancing this line of argument, Martin Mhando (2009: 20) intimates that Africans:

… met the film through the eyes of the colonizer, and therefore the technology of cinema was used not only to project images that showed the superiority of the master but also to further intimidate the viewers through the ‘magic’ of technology.
Based on this premise, Africans since colonial times, through to independence and post-independence years have always wanted the opportunity to tell the story of Africa from an African perspective. However, this has always proved problematic because the means of production have often come from the West and compounded by the fact that “the Western gaze and the vision it would like to have of African film has always been opposed to the African gaze itself” (Barlet, 1996). In 1955 Vieyra attempted to make a film about Africa. His proposal was rejected by the administration. Instead Vieyra and his associates at ‘Le Groupe Africain du Cinema’, a group of Africans studying cinema in France at the time, were offered the chance to make a film about Africans living in Paris. In the same year they made ‘Afrique sur scene’. For more than half a century after cinema was invented, not a single film could be said to be truly African, that is with cast and crew and an African storyline. If the Laval decree was significant it was its ability to delay serious film production in Francophone Africa.

1.5 Post-colonial West African Film Practices

Ghana being the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to attain independence, it was not surprising that after independence in 1957, the Nkrumah government nationalised film production and distribution. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was conscious of the power of cinema in shaping popular opinion, as observed in the cases of the British and French above, a crucial element in political governance (Aveh, 2001; Anti, 1995). He therefore invested heavily in the cinema sector to the extent that he had a dedicated camera crew that travelled with him within and without the country.
Ghana had the best production and post-production facilities for 16mm and 35mm (i.e. editing studios and processing laboratories). In a period of nine years between independence in 1957, and his overthrow in 1966, Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party set up one of the classiest film production infrastructures on the continent. Diawara in his account states that foreign directors used the facilities at GFIC to make newsreels, documentaries and propaganda films. This means that the facilities measured up to international standards (1992:6).

After the overthrow of the Nkrumah regime in 1966, the foundation that was laid was hardly built upon. A popular opinion at the time of Nkrumah’s overthrow was that he had become a cult figure in Ghana. The Bussia regime thus confiscated all films that were produced under the ousted regime. The new policies adopted by the new government with the appointment of Sam Aryetey are regarded by some critics as counter productive. Aryetey is one of the few early Ghanaians trained at the Accra Film Training School. Instead of sharpening the skills of Ghanaian technicians and directors by using them during productions, he opted for a co-production policy where he used largely foreign directors and technicians with the intent of securing foreign distribution. This lack of interest by the national government in the film sector created the situation where, as Aveh reiterates, ‘celluloid film production and exhibition ground to a near halt in the early 1980s.’ Cinema was virtually on the edge of complete collapse (Aveh, 2001).
Despite this, Ghana, through independent productions, recorded some international successes. Kwaw Ansah received the Jury’s Special Peacock Award at the 8th International Film Festival in New Delhi, India in 1981 with his 1980 film *Love Brewed in the African Pot*. The same title saw Ansah winning the Oumarou Ganda Prize at the 7th edition of Africa’s celebrated film festival, FESPACO (Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou), Burkina Faso. It was going to take Ansah some eight years before he could make another film. So in 1988, he made the award winning *Heritage Africa*. He won the Grand Prize, the Stallion Yennenga at FESPACO in 1989.

Another significant independent filmmaker of the crisis years of 1980s is King Ampaw (Ukadike, 2002: 203-216). Ampaw, who did a film studies course in Germany, managed to secure a co-production deal with NDR Television of Germany. In 1984 he produced *Kukurantumi Road to Accra* and the following year he made *Juju*. Aveh draws the attention of his readers to the fact that ‘lack of funding, coupled with the hassle of doing post-production abroad, did not allow many productions into the system. Cinema houses turned into warehouses and churches as box office returns dropped… A near film vacuum was created in the country in the late 70s up to mid-80s’ (Aveh, 2001:2).

Like most countries in Africa, after attaining independence from their colonial partner France in 1960, Burkina Faso set up a film department. Modestly equipped, the department was engaged in the production of newsreels and educational films that were shown to the people through mobile cinema vans. According to Jean-Claude Méda, the media in Burkina Faso in general from 1960
to 1970 was state controlled. There was a degree of private participation from 1970 especially in the print media sector where there was also a political party sponsored press. This was cut short in 1983 following a state of emergency declared after the military take over by the National Revolutionary Council (Méda, 1996: 31)\(^6\). Burkina Faso occupies an unrivalled position in Africa when it comes to filmmaking. This is primarily due to the pioneering role the nation of Burkina took towards forming a collective of filmmakers in Africa.

The journey to establish a solid base for cinematographic activities in Burkina started around 1960. The French colonial administration at the time started discussions with Burkina Faso (known at the time as Upper Volta) with regard to what would eventually become the nucleus of the film industry in the country. France’s suggestion was that a unit be set up within the Information Service department that would produce news and current affairs material that had social and educational significance (Méda, 2007b, p.2).\(^7\)

Consequently the productions from this unit would provide indigenous material for the national television, which did not start transmission until the day independence was proclaimed; August 5, 1963. By this the movement towards setting up film production structures had been set in motion. To ensure a seamless operation of the unit, the Frenchman Serge Ricci was put in charge of the project which later would metamorphose into the *Centre Cinématographique*. The first ever documentary to be made in Burkina Faso, *À minuit l’indépendence*, came out of the efforts of the *Centre Cinématographique* (Méda, 2007b).
The development proper in film production in Burkina Faso dates back to 1970 when the sector was indigenised, resulting in the creation of SONAVOCI (Société Nationale Voltaïque du Cinéma), later becoming SONACIB. Before then two French companies SECMA (Société d’Exploitation Cinématographique Africaine) and COMACICO (Compagnie Africaine Cinématographique Industrielle et Commerciale) had the monopoly of the market for importing, distributing and exhibition of films. A fund for promotion and expansion of film activities was also set up and financed by proceeds from tax on the gross of box office takings. The fund played an important role in the development of national film production in Burkina Faso.

So in 1972 the first product of the fund was Mamadou Djim Kola’s *Sangs des parias*. Following the landmark achievement of Djim Kola was the acquisition of production and post production equipment in 1976 as well as the creation of a department for cinematographic production through the promotion and expansion fund set up (UEMOA, 2002: 35-36).

Having laid a solid foundation, the 1980s was to witness vibrant production activities. With professionally trained in-house personnel and equipment, the cinematographic production department produced works of their staff directors and also in a consistent manner gave assistance to independent producers by way of equipment and personnel. Directors from the sub-region and from as far as Central Africa made use of the talent that Burkina Faso had. Ten feature films
were made between 1980 and 1989, and eighteen feature films between 1990 and 2000.

A decline in production levels began from the beginning of the 21st century when the funds were drying up and producers were asked to take loans from the banks to finance their work. Only three films were made between 1998 and 2002 (UEMOA, 2002: 37). It is not difficult to find reasons for this decline, first funds from the Burkinabe government were not forthcoming and French and European Union subventions were also stopped in the 1990s. In addition to this a lot of directors of repute went out of active directorial work thus creating a void.

As in Ghana, more documentaries were made by the new unit, mostly pedagogic in nature. These were meant to teach the people about hygiene, good farming practices, etc. To get these productions to the people both in the towns and villages, mobile cinema vans, often owned by the Information Services Department, played a vital role in exhibition and also extending the cinéphile culture to the population, especially those in remote areas.

In 1969 in the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, the seed of what later would be known as FESPACO was implanted. Citing Hamidou Ouédraogo’s records, Meda (2007b: 3) indicates that a fifteen-day film event labelled *Premier Festival de Cinéma Africain de Ouagadougou* was held. This film event, as well as its organisers, later would be accorded a place of significant importance. The significance of the event was that a historic reality, that for the first time the
African image, made by Africans and shown to an African audience, had been highlighted. The following year, at a constitutive forum organised by the *Fédération Panafricaine de Cinéastes* (FEPACI) in Carthage, the events of the previous year in Ouagadougou was hailed as a landmark development.

To further cement their support for the film event, the Union Panafricaine du Cinéma decided that, considering the strategic geographical positioning of Burkina Faso, the Ouagadougou festival should be retained. However, the forum urged the organisers to focus on making the subsequent festivals more purposeful. As it were the prestigious biennial film event on the continent of Africa had been born.

Still in 1970, the Burkina Faso government took a bold step through an ordinance *No. 70/001/PRES* on January 5, 1970 and nationalised the film industry. Leading up to the nationalisation there was an altercation with the leadership of the companies SECMA and COMACICO who were in charge of prospecting the cinematographic resources of the country. SECMA and COMACICO had increased cinema ticket prices which were deemed unpopular by the people.

After the indigenisation, the functions of the two French subsidiaries were passed on to SONAVOCI which by 1984 had metamorphosed into SONACIB. This change came as a direct consequence of the change in regime in 1984 which ushered in the military regime of the late Capt. Thomas Sankara. It was at the same instance that the name of the country was changed from Upper Volta to
Burkina Faso. By July 1970, through ordinance No.70/0281/PRES/MFC, the government established a film fund (Fonds de Promotion et d’Extension de l’Activité Cinématographique en Haute Volta) to help support budding directors. A follow up bill (no.70/684/MFC/DT-CP) that contained the rules governing how the film fund would operate was passed on 23rd November of the same year (Méda, 2007b, p.4).

Having instituted the necessary policy and regulatory frameworks, Burkina Faso was thus well placed to assert her role and place on the continent and beyond in the area of filmmaking. Government’s effort to further strengthen the film industry saw the passing of the decree (no.72/003/PMC/INFO/ENC) into force. This decree institutionalised the Ouagadougou festival and gave it a new name - Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou, with the acronym FESPACO as well as a competition, the highest award being the Etalon de Yennenga.

An inter-ministerial control commission backed by a decree (no.72/275/PM/IS-EN-C/J-AS/INFO) was set up on December 30, 1972 tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the films that were being made in the country. At the fourth edition of FESPACO in 1973, Djim Kola’s film represented the state and won the Jury’s encouragement prize (Méda, 2007b, p.5).

To strengthen Burkina’s and FESPACO’s transnational credentials, the Heads of States of the Organisation Commune Africaine et Mauricienne or African and Malagasy Common Organisation (OCAM) countries meeting in Port Louis,
Mauritius in 1974, gave their nod officially recognising the existence of FESPACO. They further agreed to use the capital of Burkina, Ouagadougou as the headquarters for the Consortium Interafricain de Distribution de Cinématographique (CIDC) and Consortium Interafricain de Production de Films (CIPROFILMS). The objectives of these two bodies were to liberate African cinema screens from foreign material, make available the needed infrastructure for filmmakers, and create a distribution system that would be beneficial to the member countries. CIDC and CIPROFILMS became defunct in 1993 following some disagreements between ministers and film professionals.

The two organisations, CIDC and CIPROFILMS, played very significant roles in the history of film development and FESPACO because they engineered the institution of awards for technical excellence, and also enhanced the profile of the festival. These awards motivated the directors and the technical crew to improve their skills which had an overall positive impact on the film industry. In a move to sharpen skills further and grow a pool of experts for the film and communication sector, the Institut Africain d’Education Cinématographique (INAFEC) was established. In its short period of existence, INAFEC trained about two hundred professionals who are exercising diverse roles within the communication and film sectors (Méda, 2007b, p.6).

**Black African cinema:** For decades, what film commentators and critics have always referred to as ‘African cinema’ is, in effect films from francophone West Africa. This is because this linguistic region has had steady production levels that have always enjoyed distribution in art-house cinema circuits in Europe and North
America. Crucial to this development is France’s neo-colonial cultural policies towards its former colonies. Included in the cultural policies were avenues for training filmmakers and technicians and the provision of funds for film projects. Western film critics have also acclaimed the narrative approach and tempo of these francophone films.

All the above conditions have given value to these films assuming the broad description of ‘African cinema’. In the words of John C. McCall ‘celluloid cinema based primarily in Francophone Africa and produced by European trained cinematographers, has gained global respect as an intellectually sophisticated, politically astute art cinema’ (McCall, 2001). One of the major problems with ‘African Cinema’ is that of distribution. Despite the acclaimed quality of these films, they hardly get any meaningful distribution deals at home and abroad. On the continent, FESPACO is the main platform for exhibiting some of these productions while the greater majority go around the festival circuits in Europe, America and sometimes Asia. The question thus worth asking is why will such good products not find markets in their home countries?

Filmmaking in Anglophone Africa has always been overshadowed by that of francophone Africa (at least in the photochemical format). In countries like Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, independent producers have weathered the storms to maintain some degree of erratic film production. The dire economic conditions of the late 1970s and early 1980s in the region meant that conventional film-making was outside the means of enthusiastic filmmakers like Ansah,
Ampaw etc. (Ukadike, 2002; Ukadike, 2003). Alternative routes were vigorously sought. Consequently in a rare display of creative and financial manoeuvres, the dawn of the video filmmaking arrived. The France-backed art-house oriented productions usually were made with very little or no consideration for the local marketplace. On the contrary, the video film industry that started in Ghana in the 1980s was and still is made for and paid by the local mass market.

1.6 Video filmmaking in the ‘postcolonial’ context.

Cinema has completed its first century of existence and within this period, a lot of major developments and innovations have taken place in the industry. By the first decade of its introduction, cinema had already assumed a diverse outlook as a medium and what it entails, and was introduced to nations across the globe. From the silent film era to the talkies, the introduction of colour to computer generated images (CGI) and special effects; these stages in the history of cinema have come by with their unique influences and impact on how this art form is appreciated. When the Lumière Brothers seized the commercial opportunities of cinema with their screenings on December 28, 1895, it was clear that nations like America and Britain, who were already developing embryonic film technologies, were going to follow in the footsteps of the French pioneers. By the end of 1896 the Lumière Brothers had toured the world showcasing their invention, the Cinématographe.

Granting that cinema is ideologically and culturally oriented, it was only a matter of time and other nations would seize the new sensation to advance and assert their own ideals. From the preceding paragraph, it is apparent the invention of cinema as an industrial and commercial practice owes its root to France. However,
Hollywood has dominated it and given it an entirely different interpretation as an industry. In that context, cinema as dominated by Hollywood meant that it ceased to be the preserve of the inventor, and could be adapted to suit and serve social, cultural, ideological, and economic interests. To adopt only a Western worldview to understanding cinema in my opinion can be limiting and can lead to a narrow understanding and appreciation of the medium.

If we take a snapshot of the world in 1949 there would be a broadly shared view on what constituted cinema and who the leading players were. Viewed in that context, the American cinema (Hollywood) would be the pole sitter, followed by European art cinema, and in particular Italian neorealism. One common factor for all these three cinema practices is that on the whole they were all wedded to the idea of realism. In one form or the other these cinemas saw the cinematographic machinery as a piece of equipment for recording real event and time. This view of cinema is no longer tenable in these times of new digital (video) technologies and globalisation.

The global success of CGI-driven films like The Matrix (Wachowski Brothers, 1999) and The Lord of the Rings (Jackson, 2001-2003) lead us to think that the cinematographic apparatus should be more than just a device for recording real events in real time. As the notion of the camera’s ability to convey meaning and reality other than the ‘formulaic’ Hollywood style heightens, there grows the need for the emergence of ‘Other’ cinemas from nations other than Europe and America. One major factor for this situation is attributable to the fact that as most
colonised states began to attain independence, they recognised the need for self-assertion through film and in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s words (1996) ‘it was felt that cinema was an important expression of national and other forms of identity.’

Given their production and marketing strategies, Hollywood cinema tends to have a global dominance. Similarly, European productions too have made their way into some countries other than the US market, especially former colonies like Ghana and Burkina Faso. The paradox with this situation is that as more and more of Euro-America films invade foreign markets such as West Africa, they give an impetus to the local industry to ‘react’ to the apparent absence of their own images. This situation has been facilitated especially in West Africa by the emergence of affordable digital video film technologies. Hollywood filmmaking style has often taken a commercial approach. As a well-organised and structured industry, the profit motive reign supreme and the entertainment value high. This leads to the production of films that appeal to the masses and compromising sectional or group interests. European films are generally regarded as being less ideological but imbued with beautiful and lovely narrative styles.

From the 1950s as world politics begin to head in a direction where the definition of nation-state and identity become important concepts, the aesthetic strategies of dominant cinema traditions (i.e. Hollywood and Europe) also begin to receive critical scrutiny especially by practitioners from developing nations. As more and more of the ‘foreign’ is consumed, the less ‘indigenous’ one feels. This is the kind of criticism American & European domination in cinema has attracted in regions
such as West Africa. And in the situation where the means of production and distribution is confined to the West, the tendency to ‘under-represent either in Hollywood or in the mainstream of European cinema itself’ of non-European and US point of view is high (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 442).

In international politics and film history, the latter parts of the 1950s through to the 1960s were very significant moments. Most nations were on the verge of attaining independence from their colonisers and dictatorial regimes. From Africa to Latin America and Asia, there was what Robert Sklar notes as a ‘sense of liberation in the air…a desire to escape from not only traditional imperial domination but also the post-war polarisation of the world between… the United States and the Soviet Union’ (Sklar, 2002: 350). These emerging states did not want to be aligned to either the Soviets or the Americans and thus saw themselves as a ‘Third World’. This term later will find its way into film history as both a theory and concept for films that did not conform to either the Hollywood or European art cinema formulae.

In Latin America where the Third Cinema theory started, there was an interesting development of film production that was revolutionary in nature. Cinema in Cuba sought to challenge entrenched conventions of film production along the lines of French New Wave and Italian neo-realism and develop new aesthetic approaches. Julio Garcia Espinosa, one of Cuba’s directors, in his 1969 essay ‘For an Imperfect Cinema’ argued that this situation was less likely to bring about technical perfection. This notwithstanding, Cinema was absorbed into the
revolution that brought Fidel Castro into power after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista and thus played a role in the social transformation of the society. In 1968 Cuban cinema was going to make its impact on the international scene with Tomas Gutierrez Alea’s *Memories of Underdevelopment* and Humberto Solas’ *Lucia*.

In the Latin American region there were other significant cinematic development like the Brazilian Cinema Novo and *Cine Liberacion* in Argentina. The ideals of these cinemas, which tended to foster cultural renewal, could not possibly have been portrayed the way people wanted them if they were operated from the lenses of Hollywood or Europe. Glauber Rocha came out as an icon for Cinema Novo, whose work was characterised by the persistent theme of ‘the possibility of unexpected transformation, of a world turned upside down’ (Sklar, 2002: 355). In Rocha’s 1969 *Antonio Das Mortes*, this theme is vividly expressed when Antonio, a hired killer, returns to the backlands to seek forgiveness. He identifies the conservative landowners and influential people in the community as the real enemy, who resist ‘positive’ change. He has realised that he has become obsolete and tells the moderate intellectual who fights along with him to fight with his ideas, for they are worth more than Antonio’s life.

For cultural reasons, it will be illogical to limit film production to an Euro-America paradigm that has in the words of Med Hondo ‘imposed itself on a set of dominated peoples’ (Hondo, 1996: 39). From Asia through the Gulf region to Africa, there have been conscious efforts to developing national cinemas that
extol the values and aspirations of the people. In Iran for instance Laura Mulvey argues that the emergence of new cinema was as a result of ‘comparative isolation, enforced by international politics and the post-revolutionary government’s censorship of non-Islamic art and entertainment’ (Mulvey, 1998: 24).

The government supported local film production that upheld the rules of Islamic cultural codes. Content and image limitations of the new Iranian cinema attracted the attention of foreign theorists and critics, which ironically gave it an international recognition. This recognition was climaxed in 1997 when Abbas Kiarostami won the Palme d’or at Cannes with his *A Taste of Cherry*. In China, ten years into the communist victory in the 1949 war, the government set out to develop film production that was strictly state controlled. The state encouraged productions that would attract interest outside China and also make its mark on film art. Notable among the works of this period is Shui Hua’s 1959 *Linjia puzi*.

In Africa, especially West Africa and the Magreb region, film production has seen appreciable development, which cannot be ignored on the basis of Euro-American domination. Most of the countries in these regions (e.g. Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, and Ghana) attained independence around the 1960s. Inheriting the colonial filmmaking facilities they naturally continued modestly to make films. Until the recent emergence of the video production in Anglophone Africa, filmmaking in Africa was carried out along two broad movements; social realism and colonial confrontation.
The social realist films deal with contemporary experiences and oppose tradition to modernity. According to Diawara (1992), directors ‘use traditional positions to criticize and link certain forms of modernity to neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism’. The Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene’s *Le Mandat* (1968) and *Xala* (1974) are examples of this type. There was an emerging African film culture. The second movement of colonial confrontation films were interpreted as belonging to the 1960s rhetoric of violence like in Latin America. These films treat historical confrontation between Africans and their European colonisers. What the directors tried to do was, in Diawara’s words ‘to bring out of shadows the role played by the African people in shaping their own history’ (1992:152), with Hondo’s *Sarrounia* (1987) and Kwaw Ansah’s *Heritage Africa* (1988) as examples.

Film is used as the voice of ethnic minorities. To get their views articulated means those ethnic minorities must be involved in every aspect of filmmaking. Mostly because of their origins, there is the need to tell their stories in a way that will instil dignity and accord them respect, thereby by setting right some stereotypes associated with these groups. In America for instance, the involvement of people like Sidney Poitier, Denzel Washington, Whoopy Goldberg, and Spike Lee has brought new perspectives to the representation of blacks in US cinema.

From the above it is obvious that apart from Hollywood and Europe, there exist other alternative film movements that have their own audiences. To limit film
production to certain blocs will mean imposing dominant imperialistic ideologies that potentially could prevent the portrayal of other nations’ and groups’ values and ways of life to the rest of the world. Fortunately, the development in new digital technologies, such as video filmmaking in West Africa, is levelling and offering an open approach to film production where every body have the opportunity to explore their creative potentials. Understanding of peoples will be incomplete if there were restrictions on who should produce and who should consume film. It is only when the playing field is boundless that critics and audiences can engage in discourses aimed at throwing light on what the ‘Other’ means.

Some commentators have argued that the emergence of this vital and prolific popular cinema (video filmmaking) in Ghana could be regarded as an important African response to the encroachment of Western popular culture in this age of global information flows. Meyer (1999: 98) corroborates the above viewpoint when she says that ‘the emergence of Ghanaian popular cinema occurred at the grassroots, behind the backs of Hollywood and the global media industry.’ She argues further by saying the big boost for the popular cinema came with the people’s interest to ‘see their own culture mediated through a television or cinema screen – a trend which exists in many other parts of the world where people struggle to add local images to the flood of Western images, or even replace the latter with the former’ (ibid). Watch any video film and you will understand the above point. The viewer is taken on a tour of Accra or Ouagadougou or which ever city or town that the video is shot in.
Instead of being copycats of western conventional film style, these video mavericks adopt styles akin to earlier tradition of indigenous popular performances such as the popular drama and Concert Party shows in Ghana. It offers a peep into a particular contemporary Ghanaian (or West African) society. The video film phenomenon offers intriguing insights into how people see themselves, their fears, aspirations. They also seek self actualisation in their desire for material well-being and status, and certainly not missing out on the worth associated with pleasure and entertainment in a rather turbulent post-modern society.

With a modest budget of about US$ 10,000 a decent feature video can be produced. Shooting hardly goes beyond two weeks because very minimal set design and construction is required. The break-even point is 10,000 units sold and a successful title can sell over 100,000 copies of VCD discs or VHS tapes in the early years of video films. The majority of Ghanaians see these productions in video theatres, originally little more than a spare room in someone's house but with the advent of digital video projection, large projection screens are being installed in the video houses (Pines, 2000:153).

Given the conditions of their production, what results is a hastily produced, inexpensive popular entertainment rather than art films. Although they have succeeded in creating a mass audience, critics of the sector believe there still is enough room for improvement in areas of production values, artistic and aesthetic concerns (Ukadike, 2003:132). The video films are greatly influenced by soap
operas and use as backdrop lifestyles of the middle and upper class members of society often, as Ukadike puts it, ‘tinged with ostentatious allure’, deploring their corruption and at the same time glorifying the material success (ibid). Infidelity and supernatural intervention, sometimes both, figure prominently in the video films.

There is a perennial problem of lack of funding locally and internationally for budding filmmakers. This has often been cited by critics and researchers as one of the main hindrances to the development of a commercially viable cinema in West Africa. In the case of Burkina Faso, Emmanuel Konditamde states that film makers for a long time depended on external funding from the European Union, the French Ministry of Co-operation, the Intergovernmental Agency of Francophonie (Konditamde, 2005:5). However, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a monumental change in securing funds for film projects. With Eastern European states joining the EU, support shifted direction in favour of the new comers to Europe and their nascent cinema industries. The Burkinabe government he says over the years has been doing her widow’s might to help sustain the industry.

The Culture Ministry in conjunction with the National Cinematography Centre (CNC, the former DCN) offer assistance to those working in the film sector. The situation results in budding film makers getting frustrated in their attempt to get a share of the limited funds available due to keen competition. At governmental and institutional levels, efforts are being made to come out with a model to deal with the chronic funding problem. It is in the light of this that in 2005, the Director of
CNC Ismael Ouédraogo, hinted that there is a national ticketing policy for the box-office in the pipeline which aims to generate some funds that will go into a film fund to promote projects. What are the benefits associated with the national ticketing policy that the film industry regulator in Burkina Faso (CNC) intended to implement? Is it something that will be worth emulating by countries in the region? In Chapter Three under the sub-heading *funding of film projects*, I will outline the implications of this proposed policy.

On the other hand, in Ghana the issue of film funding either at state or institutional levels, have always been problematic. In 1995 a National Film and Video Policy document was drafted and meant to be discussed in parliament and amended for passage into a bill (Aveh, 1996). Not much has gone on since then. The video boom in Ghana that kicked off in the mid 1980s has predominantly been driven by the private sector. In light of the foregoing, Konditamde acknowledges, any time that there is a rendezvous between practitioners of the 7th art, discussions on strategies of cost effective production and funding take a centre stage. It is at this point that digital video film making becomes important at the regional level. Consequently, since 1999, every edition of FESPACO has had either a special seminar or colloquium on the development of digital video film in (West) Africa as a credible alternative to celluloid and all its attendant costs.

In this chapter, I have indicated that this research is looking at the development of digital video filmmaking in West Africa where filmmaking hitherto was constrained by the lack of and inadequate capital investment. Given their colonial
and post-colonial connections with Britain and France, Ghana and Burkina Faso have different characters which tend to feature in their respective film cultures. As cinema is culturally and ideologically inflected, the emergence of affordable video technology would be appropriated by filmmakers in West Africa to tell their own stories. But is the relationship between technology and society that straightforward as video technology is made to appear? In the next chapter, the complex relationship between technology, society, and filmmaking will form the subject of discussion.

1.7 Cinema, technology and digitisation

In this section, I will look at how one might understand the relationship between technology and society. I will outline, following Williams (1990: 12), three broad positions through which the relationship between technology and society can be explained, and how cinema provides an example of that relationship. I will argue that the relation between technology and society is neither simple nor rigid. Societies and their technologies have a complex and interdependent relation and this is exemplified by the relation between video technologies and digital filmmaking in West Africa.

1.7.1 Technology and Society

*Technological determinism:* The first position emphasises technology as having a shaping influence on society and is often referred to as “technological determinism”. In this model, new technologies are invented or developed and then proceed to make various impacts on society. Social change is explained
partly through technological evolution. Technological determinism seeks to explicate social and historical phenomena in terms of one principal or determining factor, technology itself (Chandler 1995:1).

**Social needs:** A second position places emphasis on the ways technological development is a response to social needs. It develops from the fundamental needs of social beings for food, shelter and clothing. To satisfy these needs tools and processes are developed. According to Harnie and Peterson, humans create and use technology to satisfy their basic wants and desires. The resulting knowledges, skills and processes, along with the tools and machines used to accomplish a particular task “are known collectively as a technology”. The more the needs of society change, the more technology evolve (Haynie & Peterson 1995: 5). So they explain communication technology in terms of our needs

It is important for society to be able to keep records and establish a continuing record of knowledge. People must be able to retrieve the knowledge that is important in order to live successfully in their culture. Communication technology has evolved to meet the particular needs of society to share information and to develop a common understanding (1995:7).

**Technology and society: a dynamic relationship:** Both of these positions are too rigid and a third position emphasises the need to analyse the complex interactions between technologies and societies. It is important from the beginning to
emphasize that technologies generally do not develop in isolation from the social structures and contexts that produced them. Rather, these technologies and the social, economic, and political structures are influencing and shaping each other. In the industrially developed societies of the West, socio-political, economic and socio-cultural considerations usually determine the nature and shape of technology and consequently its application in solving the particular problem it is designed to solve. This means, social structures usually provide the material basis for scientific research. The objective of such research is to establish suitable scientific explanation to the particular issue. This then eventually leads to technological innovation. Given the above context technology becomes need-oriented and it is shaped and influenced by socio-cultural demands of the society (du Gray et al, 1997). Technologies often have uses and effects which were unforeseen by their conceivers and developers (Lister et al, 2003: 81).

In the developing societies however, because of the traditional nature of the society and the attendant technological dependence on the West (Lerner, 1957), the availability of appropriate technology is usually a major determinant of how the technology is utilized. This means that technology is opportunistically put to use based on its availability and relative accessibility.

Given the rapid speed of development of media and communication technologies, it is not easy to predict what the media and communication environment will be like even in five years let alone in a decade. Academics have reiterated the problems inherent in forecasting when discussing the emergence and demise of new technologies (Klopfenstein, 2001: 5). In Chapter Two, I will discuss in detail
how the changing nature of technology impacts on video filmmaking. When new technologies emerge, their subsequent social form and social uses are not always clear, not even to the technological pioneers. From early cinema machines to the mobile phone, technologies are apt to develop in unexpected ways once they are transformed into social practices. It is therefore important that any attempt to gauge the nature and mode of media and communication technologies should be foregrounded by the need for ‘analysis and understanding of the environment into which new media technologies are introduced’ (Klopfenstein, 2001: 5).

1.7.2 Cinema and Technology: Determinants of technological change in filmmaking

There is, of course, a close relationship between Cinema as a technology and as a social form, indeed the two are only separable at the level of analysis. Technological changes in cinema occur at three specific stages: recording, processing and exhibiting. Development in one of the three areas impacts on the others.

There have been four particularly significant stages of technological innovation in cinema; projected moving images; sound; colour; and widescreen and 3D. Innovation has been driven by the desire to heighten realism and spectacle and so produce the ‘myth of total duplication of reality’ (Wollen, 2000: 161).
Until electronic visual recording began to emerge, the optical elements of film recording (lens, lighting, film stock and processing) were subject to more innovation than the mechanical element of film transport. Wollen states that the film camera was just ‘a simple piece of mechanical equipment’ (2000: 161) compared to the Autochrome colour photography process, both of which were invented by Lumière.

The innovations in film camera notwithstanding, the end product looks the same (Wollen, 2000). Echoing this viewpoint is the French film theorist Christian Metz. Metz noted that “most films shot today, good or bad, original or not, ‘commercial’ or not, have as a common characteristic that they tell a story; in this measure they all belong to one and the same genre, which is, rather, a sort of ‘super-genre’” (Metz, 1980: 402).

**Precedents in cheap technology:** Improved film stock in the early days of cinema guaranteed accessibility to film-making. Films were made under lower light levels. Abundant opportunities were created for 8mm and 16mm filmmaking on a wide scale. From the above, it could be argued that there is some resonance between 8mm and 16mm formats and digital video, especially given the range of

---

**Figure 3: Four Major Technological Developments in Film**

- 1897: Lumière Brothers' presentation; *La Ciotat*
- 1927: Sound with Alan Crosland’s *Jazz Singer*
- 1935: Colour (Technicolor) with Mamoulian’s *Becky Sharp*
- 1952: 3D Technology with Bendick’s *This is Cinerama*
affordable digital video cameras on the market, and the potentials inherent in digital filmmaking.

**Sound and economic consequences of innovation:** The development of sound technology in cinema came with economic consequences. Sound cut out the orchestras and between-the-screening entertainers thereby reducing labour costs; making some savings on production costs (Wollen 2000: 162). The investment component to sound was significant which meant that new collaborators were required in order to make the technology meaningful. On the other hand, orchestra players and between-the-screening entertainers were made redundant.

As Wollen argues, the successful implementation of a technological innovation in one aspect of film-making always has impacts in other areas. Lighting systems changed, which in turn affected make-up, post-production units were overhauled, script-writing was transformed (Wollen 2000: 162). The introduction of new technologies leads to the development of new forms of standardisation of practices within the sector of work where the innovation has occurred.

The level of involvement by production companies in the introduction of new technologies is significant to what pertains in West Africa. Wollen states that ‘production companies … have been subject to recurrent crises, bankruptcies and take-overs throughout their history. They have simply not been able to afford research and development projects, except for a limited involvement in special
effects, ironing out secondary technical problems and adapting technology developed elsewhere’ (Wollen, 2000: 164).

Video first emerged to simplify the process of news gathering for Television networks in developed economies which hitherto depended on professional and semi professional film cameras (16mm and 8mm). But video technology also enabled amateur home video making, and documentary productions, in addition to its standard ENG functions. In order to extend the functions of video technology beyond the world of news gathering, manufacturers needed to respond to that unforeseen need. Smaller, cheaper and user-friendly equipment were made to suit the needs of non-professional users. The technology adapted to its emergent uses and users.

1.7.3 Questions of Digital Cinema and Digitalisation

Digitalisation has made the modern computer a key mediator in filmmaking (Manovich, 2001). Computers and software programmes are now crucial in every stage of digital filmmaking. Computers have the capabilities to reduce information into digital bits thus simplifying manipulation. New digital technologies process “information more efficiently than any manual process” (Ohanian & Philips, 1999: 4). The digital revolution has also intensified the multi-platform character of film consumption (see Wollen 2000: 160).

Film-making is an uncertain process, and production times can be unpredictable, but digital filmmaking technologies enable greater control of the schedule. It
therefore makes perfect sense when Lucas (cited in Ohanian & Philips, 1999: 4) says:

my primary interest in developing digital technology was to speed up the filmmaking process so that I could get my ideas accomplished in a more efficient way...Digital technology saves vast amounts of time and energy. It allows the filmmaker to be more creative - be it special effects or post production – and makes the job of filmmaking easier.

Perhaps the most intriguing element of Lucas’s vision for digital technologies in filmmaking is his comment that “it will eventually create a more democratic filmmaking environment. Anyone will be able to create movies. Pretty soon you’ll be doing it on your PC” (see Ohanian & Philips, 1999: 5). This rather utopian hope, though also depends on two other factors: the ability of people to be creative with the technology; and the ability to find an audience.

It is almost a cliché now to hear ‘the digital revolution is here.’ Keith Griffith (2003:12) says digitalisation provide myriad of ways of manipulating the cinematic image and offering special effects to be incorporated into ‘otherwise conventional narratives.’ It is also able to generate new images for a totally new set of stories, for a ‘non or partly narrative film.’ Griffith’s assertion is that digital film making enables the film maker to come out with a totally new experience.
Hence, the ingenuity and creativity of the film maker also needs to be acknowledged.

Developing William’s argument further, Hayward and Wollen show that moving image and sound technologies development don’t occur on a straight route, and neither are they ‘fuelled by a singular motivation’ (1993:1). At the core of these developments, often driven by economic, political, cultural and social factors have always been the quest for more realistic (re)presentation of the world in which cinema occurs. Manovich in his essay ‘What is Digital Cinema?’ argues that ‘during cinema’s history, a whole repertoire of techniques … was developed to modify the basic record obtained by a film apparatus’ (see www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html).

Moving image technologies appear to erase all visible barriers between the real and the represented and by so doing create the ‘hyper-real’, according to Hayward and Wollen (1993:2). However, the ability of new digital technologies to create photo-realistic footage independent of the camera raises issues of cinema’s identity and history. Both Manovich and Hayward and Wollen contend that cinema as an indexical art faces identity crises. Therefore the concept of the new presupposes the substitution of earlier models perhaps deemed ‘comparatively inefficient.’

The technologies of visual representation now include the internet, computer games, CD-ROMs, computer multimedia and virtual reality (Manovich, 2001:
19). But Manovich believes things like filming in DV format and editing on a PC, using animations in films, creating photos, illustrations and lay-outs on PCs then printing on paper could be regarded as non new media technology. Such categorisation poses the danger of limiting the meaning of new media technology, reducing the computer, which is so central in the discussions around cinema and new media technology, to a mere exhibition and distribution gadget.

Much as it is important to catalogue what new technologies are made of, it is important to probe the ‘social and cultural context of their use and their broader impacts’ (Flew, 2005: 2). The fact however remains that the computer is also a production and storage piece of equipment. Cultural modes could be altered or left untouched through the intervening functions of the computer. For Flew however, new media technology is the integration of ‘computing and information technology, communications networks and digitised media and information content’ ultimately converging (2005:2).

Perhaps the justification for the label of media technology as new according to Manovich is the scale of the impact and effect of the ‘computer mediated forms of production, distribution and communication’ (2001: 19) compared to earlier forms of technological breakthroughs like the printing press and photography. Only specific individual levels of communication did they affect (printing press: media distribution and photography: still image). Can it therefore be said that this phenomenon of new media technology has a more holistic effect on society, granting that it is people who make up a society? Perhaps the fact that functions of
the computer such as illustrations, layouts, and printing are hardly recognised as being part of the whole gamut of new media technologies give a clue about how society affects and informs this cultural prodigy.

Any thoughts about new media technologies in Flew’s (2005: 2) estimation needs to consider three factors: a) artefacts or devices that enable and extend our ability to communicate, b) communication activities and practices we engage in to develop and use these media devices, and c) social arrangements and organisations that form around these devices and practices. New media technologies act both as a ‘combination of the development of unique forms of digital media, and the remaking of more traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to the new media technologies’ (2005: 3). In this light digital cinema needs to be analysed both as a set of devices, a set of practices and as a configuration of social arrangements.

1.7.4 Digital cinema in West Africa

Putting the prospects of (new) digital technologies into the African context, Gaston Kabore thinks a new wave of filmmaking has emerged and should be encouraged. In an interview with UNESCO CULTURE in 2003, Kabore indicates that the success story of his compatriot Boubakar Diallo (a journalist turned filmmaker) using digital technologies is of considerable significance. He argues that ‘it’s a way by which we can create a film economy that reflects our own reality… we need a flexible film industry to adapt to the conditions we live in’ (Kabore, 2003: 2).10 In such situations technology and culture become
inseparable. To buttress this point Mhando (2000:3) is of the view that ‘it is imperative to relate dynamics of culture to the periods of its production’ in order to warrant a fuller appreciation of the cultural product.

Before publicity about digital video technology and all the associated benefits, Ghanaian filmmakers embraced the format purely as a stop-gap measure to the ailing celluloid industry. The hope was that the situation would improve, and then filmmakers would return to celluloid production. The privatisation of GFIC in 1996 meant that the end to the celluloid era had come. The popularity and acceptance of video technology following the diversification of GFIC indicated that cinematic experience was about to change dramatically.

When communication technologies particularly in the audio-visual industries are introduced into societies, they tend to influence the indigenous culture. A whole gamut of new cultural codes becomes available for reception. Referring to a 1977 findings by Guback, Araba Sey indicates that introducing new technologies of communication can result in the “submergence, pulverisation or even extermination of distinct but vulnerable cultures” (Sey, 1999: 1).11

Writing on the cultural implications of television broadcasting in Ghana, Sey highlights four objectives that the National Liberation Council (NLC) set for the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). Among these objectives was ‘to prepare in the field of culture, education, information and entertainment programmes reflecting national progress and aspirations’ (Sey, 1999: 2). This objective among
the others which still inform GBC’s programming today were contrary to Kwame Nkrumah’s objective for establishing television broadcasting in the country in 1965, which primarily was for educational reasons.

This particular objective is significant to this research in the sense that it would appear that the video film makers in Ghana would have adapted the purpose for TV programming by GBC to that of the video film making business. This is shown through the themes treated in the video films. Ansah’s *Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade* (1994) for instance catalogues the cultures and achievements of the African and its wider impact and relationship to the achievements of Africans in Diaspora. Particularly interesting is the sequence with school children playing a recital game in a class, are juxtaposed with shots of an American rap artist. We see the connection between traditional African socio-cultural practices and western popular culture. Similarly, the traditional 35mm filmmaking practice can draw on the positives of the digital video technology.

The experience of digital video filmmaking in West Africa suggests that the technology is domesticated to suit and serve the interest of the local people first. It is in the above context that Ume-Nwagbo’s assertion (as cited in Sey, 1999: 5) that “embracing the new … technology is the extent to which it can be used in interpreting the lives of the people and their cultures….” gains relevance. And as the histories of technological development show, human inventiveness is immense. As a result of that, men of every age have shown an outstanding ability to appropriate technology of their time and assign novel applications to it in order
that answers are provided for practical problems (De Fleur, 1970; Briggs & Burke, 2005).

From the foregoing, it may be argued that the availability of affordable digital video technology; the pervasiveness of portable camcorders, and postproduction equipment and facilities in Ghana and Burkina Faso have created the opportunity for their applications in the production, distribution and consumption of digital video films.

Proponents of digitalisation have emphasised the cost effectiveness associated with the technology. The initial capital investments required by producers, distributors and exhibitors to convert to full digital formats are, however, enormous. In territories such as in West Africa where the film industry is not properly structured, and filmmaking occurs sporadically, the challenges for the filmmakers to maximise these benefits of digitalisation appear to be a daunting task. If ever there were times that collaboration in the film industry was important, it is probably now. Private and public sector collaboration, as well as between producers will play key roles in driving home the benefits of digital filmmaking. In the next Chapter, we will discover if the proliferation in new digital technologies pose any challenges to the development of digital video filmmaking.
Chapter Two: FILM PRODUCTION AND FILM MAKERS: PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL VIDEO FILMMAKING IN WEST AFRICA

_**Conceptual understandings:**_ Chapter One provided the historical and technological foundations to the research. This chapter will focus on the primary data gathered during field trips to Ghana and Burkina Faso, based on interviewees’ perceptions of digital cinema practices, and their relation to conventional practices in the film industry. The analyses are grouped under seven themes: defining digital filmmaking; the economics of filmmaking; creative possibilities in economic adversity; film practices; infrastructure; development agenda: politics and media liberalisation; film local, think global: matter of theme and style.

The meaning of digital cinema among filmmakers in West Africa, especially among those from the video filmmaking generation, is framed by their views on the history of African filmmaking and their experiences with the industry. In a rather simplistic manner digital cinema/filmmaking is equated to films made in the video format. This involves the use of low-end video cameras shooting and editing non-linearly through the mediation of the computer.

The above understanding of digital cinema is based on the fact that filmmakers lack real knowledge of the extent of technological changes taking place in the film industry. This ambiguity surrounding video filmmaking and digital cinema in West Africa is highlighted by the fact that “if we look at the evolution or development of digital cinema itself, it is at a stage or level that perhaps it is not
yet been mastered or finalised adequately” (Tapsoba, interview 29/05/2007). Digital cinema is thus linked more often to films made on formats that were readily available and accessible to filmmakers in the 1990s; this is the period when the technology of video (mostly analogue) gained popularity among emerging directors.

There is however, a hiatus between the rate of change in digital filmmaking technology in the West (this translates into high costs and standards) and the rate of appropriation and adoption in West Africa. This tends to explain the apparent differences in the meaning and understanding of what digital cinema is. The introduction and adoption of new technologies in Western economies out-paces that in West Africa. At the time when digital video gear is getting popular in West Africa, High Definition and 3D technologies are becoming the norm in the West. This difference in technology uptake partly explains why the understanding of digital filmmaking by West African video filmmakers must be taken within the context of their production environment.

There has been a transition from the traditional format (celluloid) of filmmaking to digital video starting from around 1987 in Ghana and 2004 in Burkina Faso (when the first commercial feature video films were launched). The video feature phenomenon is a significant cultural occurrence that has varied implications for film practitioners, but means nothing to film viewers. This assertion is validated by the view expressed by Ansah, when describing what digital cinema means. Ansah identifies a common characteristic between the two formats; they are both
audiovisual. It is this common characteristic that makes viewers gloss over what potentially could be fundamental conceptual, methodological and theoretical differences inherent in the two formats of film practice.

For the typical film viewers, Ansah’s opinion is, that their understanding of digital cinema as it relates to video filmmaking is informed by their ability to “see a good film, a story well told” (Ansah, interview 02/06/2007) whether they go to the theatre or watch a DVD or VCD at home. It therefore does not make any significant:

difference to the ordinary man except that the filmmaker now finds it very reasonable in terms of cost and I want to believe that considering the African economies, but for the advent of video I am sure filmmaking would have come to a halt, especially when you are talking about Anglophone African countries, because you know the French support their former colonies to make films, and so the understanding I believe should go the filmmaker not the public (Ansah, interview 02/06/2007).

The assertion that the film audiences are indifferent to the format used by filmmakers, but interested in seeing a good picture, hearing good quality sound and an interesting story implicitly raises the questions of filmmakers’ understanding of such core principles of film production. Equally the economic significance of the audience to filmmakers is alluded to. It is when filmmakers
understand the said principles, and are guided in their work by these principles, only then can audiences be guaranteed a good picture, quality sound and a well-told story. Therefore to understand and apply the above principles to video filmmaking will enable filmmakers to manage the moral aspirations/production values of the videos. It is the production values, the narrative and textual objectives that give the videos their economic value. For video film audiences, the economic value of a video is expressed in the ‘goodness’ of it, which consequently drives them on to pay to access the particular video.

However, filmmakers who are embracing the digital video model in the industry, a phenomenon Ansah believes “without which I am sure we could not have continued” making films, are doing so at a great cost. This cost is directly related to the affordability and the immediacy of digital video technology compared to celluloid. People like Ansah have argued that some filmmakers rarely go through such processes as business approaches required during the pre-production, production and post-production stages of a film project. These processes include researching the story adequately, developing the characters, and getting a good script. Ansah calls for the adoption of a business approach to filmmaking by producers where professional talents and crew are used in all the three stages of the film project to guarantee an acceptable end product. Ansah further identifies one major factor that he thinks compromises the need for a professional attitude and approach to the business of film production. It is the minimal financial investment often required ($10,000 to $25,000) to get a video film project off the ground.
A fairly good film can sell about 40,000 VCD copies at $3 or GHS5 per copy. Given the average cost of project indicated above, such pricing will be enough to guarantee full recovery of the investment and some profit margin made (Francis Gbormittah, personal communication, Accra: January 22, 2009). With slightly higher investment levels in film projects, producers will be enabled to take on professional cast and crew without multi-tasking, a common practice within the industry.

A closer look at Boubakar Diallo’s *Sofia* (2004) reveals that the director employed the services of professional crew members and used both professional and raw actors. The end product was good, and driven by an interesting love story, saw the film doing very well at the box-office. This will motivate producers to follow a structured business model from the start to finish of film projects. Making further claims in support of the aforesaid, Ansah’s theory is that “if you spend about $200,000 or even $50,000 you will realise that you cannot just take a camera, go and shoot anything, and put it on the screen” (Ansah, interview, 02/05/2007).

The budget size can impact positively on the aesthetics of final product, but if the filmmaker has not mastered the art of filmmaking, a $200,000 film project will be no better than a $10,000 budget film. Given that most video filmmakers are novices, starting with smaller budget projects and building the needed experience and eventually trying a big budget production looks more realistic.
The conventional view of trained filmmakers on digital video filmmaking is that the sector is dominated by filmmakers regarded as “charlatans… who have not been trained” (Ansah, interview 02/06/2007). The ‘trained and talented professionals’ whose work conforms to the ‘acceptable’ universal aesthetic conventions and values of filmmaking have not fully embraced video yet. To achieve a desirable level of aesthetic conformity that professionals like Ansah call for does not require the novice filmmakers to go back to film school to learn the rubrics of the trade. Alternatively, they “must serve or undertake some apprenticeship to know the processes of achieving a good story on video or celluloid” (Ansah, interview 02/06/2007).

There is another side to Ansah’s argument which upon closer examination is equally significant. The digital video filmmakers’ willingness to deviate from the norms of cinema, in other words to be non-conformists, is what has caused the phenomenal rise of the sector. Most of the older generation of filmmakers were trained in Western countries. Constrained by lack of funding, their desire to make films to match Western standards partly contributed to the stagnation and near collapse of the sector in many African countries. The economic, cultural and social conditions under which they got their training are directly incongruous with the realities in their home African countries. Before the advent of digital video technology, some governments controlled the film sector. The production strategies often were very predictable; use the medium of film to educate and foster national cohesion.
Digital video films try to capture the day to day realities of the ordinary African. These films, then, have a direct relationship with the audience, most of whom are ambivalent about the aesthetic conformity that Ansah talks about. His description of how the digital video films are made; “because it is cheap, they grab any camera, any story, they don’t even do a screenplay, and they go and take a few people to improvise a story which is not tested”, on the one hand is a perfect portrayal of the formula for producing some video films. On the other hand the creativity of these “charlatans” and their ability to circumvent standard practice and come out with films that the masses accept is equally highlighted.

There are earlier video films that have been made by trained GFIC filmmakers and independents such as Tom Ribeiro (A Debut for Dede, 1992) and Kwaw Ansah (Harvest at Seventeen, 1988) respectively. The near absence of an active cinephile culture in Ghana does not help with public discussions and commentary on such video classics as Harvest at Seventeen by Ansah. Critical analyses of films and the industry in general helps to build a certain consciousness about filmmaking. For the debutant filmmakers, that provides invaluable resource which invariably will influence their projects in a positive manner.

The general consensus among my interviewees is that some of the critics lack training. As such as they do not understand how the cinematic machinery functions. The consequence of their inadequate knowledge of the sector and how it should function is that often their loyalties are bought. What this means is that their critiques and reviews of films and the industry do not portray the real
situation. On the contrary, the impacts of professional critiquing of the industry, and its activities, are summed up by Ansah. In his view, there are a few exceptions where “once in a while you get good critics coming out to really analyse a film out of which we all learn”. He is however, quick to add that “there aren’t many of them” (Ansah, Interview, 02/06/2007).

2.1 Defining Digital Filmmaking

Generally, the understanding of digital filmmaking in West Africa takes into account the technological aspects of making films which is held together by two related concepts; the artistic and technical considerations. The artistic considerations involves such activities as directing, art directing, scriptwriting, costume, make-up etc. The technological or technical considerations deal principally with photography, sound and editing, which nonetheless have artistic significance. It is in these areas, photography and editing, that change in digital technology and their effect on filmmaking are felt most in West Africa. Despite the pervasive nature of digital video technology among filmmakers, some of my interviewees indicated that analogue formats such as BetacamSP and Hi8 are still used by some producers. The reason for this is purely financial.

With regards to editing, post-production work is usually done with computer software programmes on PCs or Apple Mac to edit non-linearly (see Figures 4 to 6). These hardware and software applications are standard irrespective of where they are being used. It is only in practice that differences are discernible. The choices, usage and effects of these technologies on the film industry as a whole
are comparable to Klinger’s concept of ‘hardware aesthetics’. I will stretch this concept further to include software. Thus with the **hardware and software aesthetics** concept, value is attributable to imperatives drawn from technological reflections and choices (Klinger, 2006:75). Hence, in some instances, the type of technological gear a filmmaker or consumer acquires to produce or access content is directly related to value and quality of content inherent in the technology.

Technological innovations leading to digitalization in filmmaking in West Africa is felt more in the video production sector. The current group of active filmmakers, especially in Anglophone West Africa, for nearly two decades, have principally done projects beginning with the analogue video format and have progressed to low end digital video production technology. The evolution of the video camera from its beginning to what it is now gives the grounds for video filmmakers in West Africa to associate digital video filmmaking to digital cinema.

Digital filmmaking is seen more as a procedure through which films can be made. Given that is the case, it is to be expected that the meanings and approaches that practitioners have adopted for digital filmmaking will be as diverse as the people engaged in the practice. Talking to filmmakers and film scholars in Ghana and Burkina Faso, it was not difficult to establish an inventory of the available production gear. There is some quality video equipment available for production and postproduction. These facilities are privately owned, mostly by advertising companies, and are not top of the range. This is because since the start of commercial video in Ghana till the present, the industry has been dominated by
private entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are limited in their resources, and therefore are unable to acquire top class equipment.

Viewed within the context of global discourse on digital cinema, practice in the West African digital video production sector may not pass as digital cinema, at least not according to the DCI and AFNOR standards.\textsuperscript{12} But then should the standards set by groups like the DCI and AFNOR be of any significance to operators in Ghana and Burkina Faso? Filmmakers, trainers, and administrators I spoke to are ambivalent about this. In as much as filmmakers want international recognition, they also want to stress the specificities in their works.

The above notwithstanding, there exist a link between digital cinema technology and digital video technology. Both offer the potential for low cost production, and have democratized the image creation business. This relationship results in such misnomers that we find in Ghana and Burkina Faso for digital cinema and video production (Aveh, interview, 23/05/2007). Clement Tabsoba is of the view that:

There is this confusion being made between video films and digital cinema. If we look at the evolution or development of digital cinema itself, it is at a stage or level that perhaps it is not yet been mastered or finalised adequately. Therefore we could often talk about video films bearing in mind there is this confusion being made about video filmmaking and digital cinema due to the fact that people don’t have a real knowledge of all the
technological changes. Therefore in West Africa I think it is more of films done on formats that from the 1990s were used, that is when video filmmaking was in high gear, that today digital video cameras are used for similar formats which aren’t digital cinema but continue to think of digital cinema as similar to that video experience. (Tapsoba, Interview, 29/05/2007).

The production and business model that emerges will directly influence how digital video filmmaking develops in West Africa. It is important that cinema is organized in a way that it impacts on the social, political, cultural and economic realities of the people and the country. The model of video filmmaking that Ghana has offered starting from the 1980s, using everyday rumours in society to plot their stories (e.g. Diabolo, Zinabu, Accra Killing) should not be treated from only the economic convenience perspective of digital video filmmaking. The reception of local content through the purchase of video films on VCDs by the public needs some study.

In Francophone West Africa, the problem of the definition of digital filmmaking is even more intriguing. It is compounded by the fact that image creators are typically designated by the format they use for their productions. Celluloid is the most preferred format to work with, thereby creating a hierarchy in the industry, based on medium used. Such differentiations are considered so important that if you work brilliantly on video, you would still not be referred to as a filmmaker but a video filmmaker. As noted by Stanislas Méda “this is very important in the
Francophone countries where there are proper words because the profession is defined through the support of filmmaking” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a). Filmmakers are those who work with celluloid, and are called cinéastes while those who work with video are vidéastes. If though, filmmaking is reconceptualised within the broader West African context, where the desire to see locally created content is prime, there may not be the need for format wars and hierarchisation as is currently the case especially in the francophone zone.

What is important is making films irrespective of the format. The equipment or technology on its own is of no essence without the creative input from the director. Lee Marshall in his article ‘Rise of The Machines’ (Marshall, 2007: 3) expressed similar views when he discussed the role of technology in Robert Zemeckis’ film Beowulf, where characters have been digitally enhanced, that it is not all about what you have, but how you use what you have. That is why Kwaw Ansah’s Harvest At 17 and Crossroads of People Crossroads of Trade made with ‘primitive’ technology’, still look evergreen whereas a film like Sky Captain And The World of Tomorrow with all its CGI trappings already looks aged (ibid).

West African producers may not have top notch production facilities, but make the best out of what they have. Onookome Okome sees in this video phenomenon an emerging sub-continental video culture that responds to the realities of Africa's postcolonial legacy: the city. He contends that video films present to:
Scholars of history, cultural studies, ethnography, and visual studies a way of understanding how contemporary Africans see themselves, and how they see the outside world that has held an unmitigated fascination for them. But more than anything else, the video-film phenomenon points to the fact that Africa may be economically distressed—but the continent is never tired of trying to make sense of it all.

One problem with digital video film development is in the area of definition and understanding of filmmaking especially in West Africa, and the complex that it creates. Despite remarkable improvements in recording equipment and postproduction facilities for digital video filmmaking and their positive impact on films like *Beyonce, My Mother’s Heart* (Onyeabor, 2005), *Darkness of Sorrow*, the format is seen and treated as second best to the 35mm by some seasoned filmmakers.

Defining and understanding digital filmmaking thus has to do with the psychology of practitioners. We could say that digital technology is a concept linked to the mental attitude of people and professionals. It is a state of mind of the professional filmmaker. If digital video filmmaking is accepted by seasoned practitioners as a format in its own right but not as an alternative to celluloid, then a business model could be worked out to maximize the potentials that the technology offers. Indications that audiences like these productions are found in
the sheer number of people retailing video films on the streets and in the shops and stalls in Ghana and Burkina Faso (see Fig. 7, 10 to 13).

If digital video filmmaking is not considered as a replacement format for filmmaking, since celluloid is still considered among filmmakers of old to be of a higher standard, what such considerations pose as a problem is the question of survival. It is a matter of anachronism in the sense that the developments that have taken place in a century of filmmaking, such as 8mm, 16mm, 35mm and 70mm formats, sound, colour, 3D, (as outlined in Chapter One), pointed to the fact that the technology of film was moving in the direction where it will impact aesthetic and stylistic concepts. Easier and less cumbersome approaches such as light and portable cameras and CGI effects enhance the cinematic experience.

2.2 Economics

In the past two decades, filmmaking in West Africa has undergone changes in the production and consumption of films. The volumes of production and access to films by audiences have expanded. Hence, digital video and other emerging technologies have become enabling factors for filmmakers. Ghana is estimated to make around seventy films a year, and the most prolific video filmmaker in Burkina Faso, Diallo makes on the average two films per quarter (see Tables 1 and 2). In the region, Nigeria is, according to UNESCO, the biggest producer, making around eight hundred video films per annum (UIS, 2007). There is a significant reduction in the gestation period for a film project and usually at a fraction of the cost of producing a film on celluloid. Celluloid filmmaking,
although it instils discipline and regard for production conventions and values, has
none the less denied many filmmakers and potential ones the opportunity to
exercise their skills regularly due to the costs associated with making a film in that
format. Acclaimed filmmakers such as Med Hondo and Ansah usually waited for
between:

Five to ten years to get funding not only to buy the film stock but
also to send the negatives to Europe to develop then edit since in
Africa generally there are no post-production facilities for
celluloid. Whereas with the so called digital facilities that are in
use today, it effectively enables filmmakers to avoid all the above
difficulties and even makes it possible to view the rushes and edit
locally without great difficulties (Tapsoba, Interview
29/05/2007).

The collapse of celluloid filmmaking and the emergence of video filmmaking are
described by the film critic, educator, and administrator, Tapsoba as a revolution.
Viewed in the context of a revolution means there would be some aspects of the
former filmmaking practice that the new generation directors are ‘revolting’
against. Amongst the things being redefined in the new video film practice is total
ownership of the film project and deciding how to represent the African story.

Without foreign finance, local producers have found a means to fund film
projects. Video film producers, through the use of affordable video equipment and
local resources, are renegotiating the solutions to these challenges in a more creative way than their celluloid predecessors. However, a common denominator to both film practices is the need to approach the trade with a professional attitude requiring that:

The art of lighting, camera work and the whole production process have to be mastered and applied to the digital format of filmmaking. Digital does not mean easy and cheap ways of production. The constraints, the technical challenges that celluloid pose, people think that by using digital methods of production, you can run away from those challenges, this is far from being the case (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007).

Digital video technology offers varied aesthetic possibilities to filmmakers to capture the African realities. These realities range from the colour of the Black African to cinematographic enactment of certain belief systems (e.g. witchcraft) through computer generated images (CGIs). The technical challenges involved in getting the right skin tone on a film stock perhaps influenced the choice of subject for film projects, usually favouring issues that relate to nature, external bodies. This choice aided the efforts of filmmakers to achieve some semblance of natural brownness that suits the black African skin. An example is Cheick Oumar (Abdelramane) Sissoko’s allegorical film La Genèse (1999). Genesis, the English equivalent of La Genèse is a 20th century rendition of the famous Biblical story of Esau whose birthright is stolen by his brother Jacob in exchange for a plate of
beans. Sissoko gives the story an African inflection by setting it in Mali and using a cast of African actors.

The appropriateness and relevant allusions of the agrarian Old Testament lifestyle to African history and culture is made manifest by shooting outdoor and taking advantage of the natural topography - expensive and challenging to create in a studio. With white balancing, digital cameras’ functioning is programmed to suit different lighting and colour conditions before a shoot. Equally post production capabilities where the original image can be transformed in diverse ways to suit the filmmaker’s purpose help to tackle the problem of colour tones that as noted above have always been a major issue with regard to subject selection when making a celluloid film.

New video technologies have democratised the entire filmmaking process. The access to different types of affordable image capturing devices and the abundance of stories, especially in West Africa, have broadened the filmmaking landscape. But this broadened often means people go into production “without any regard for scriptwriting, casting of roles, mise-en-scène and a host of other considerations” (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007). Such hurried productions, usually by charlatan filmmakers, draw a lot of criticisms regarding their artistic and technical values. However, it must be noted that applying conventional production techniques in video filmmaking is not a sine qua non for perfect finished product.
Digital video technology’s ability to adapt easily to other formats sometimes creates unforeseen problems. These could be avoided if only the filmmaker maintains a focus, and sets clear objectives. When filmmakers remain committed to the set objectives, that helps determine the choice of format and release platforms for their projects. When the above is the case, problems such as grainy pictures and sound distortions when a DV film is kinescoped on to a 35mm will not arise. The above reinforces Klinger’s hardware (and software) aesthetics mentioned earlier in this Chapter.

Congolese director Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda’s film *Juju Factory* (2007) was shot in the DV format, but the director employed all the techniques for shooting on celluloid. The film was then transferred on to 35mm to enable it play in cinemas. In Tapsoba’s view, the blown up version was not as good as the films shot originally on 35mm that were submitted for the official competition at FESPACO 2007. However, it cost the filmmaker a third of what it would have cost to produce on 35mm film. Digital video technology thus enables the filmmaker to tailor his product to specific demands of distributors, exhibitors, and festival programmers.

Bakupa-Kanyinda’s *Juju Factory* (2007) and Newton Aduaka’s *Ezra* (2006), originated from digital video, were shown at international film festivals such as the Dubai International Film Festival in December (4th Edition, 2007) on 35mm format. In as much as digital video technology offer the aforesaid possibilities, it is important the core ethos of filmmaking is not lost in the digital technology
discourse. Where the fundamentals of filmmaking are ignored by video filmmakers, digital technology:

… on the flip side could pose a danger as it can give the wrong signal to the world that African cinema has no quality, reducing African films to films not properly made with regard to the ethos of cinema (Tapsoba, Interview 29/05/2007).

There are costs associated with transfer, which from studio to studio, and can increase the total production budget beyond the means of an independent producer. The average cost of transfer of a seventy-five minute long feature from digital video to 35mm and 16mm film can be as low as $20,000 and $13,000 respectively (DV Film Digital Transfers, 2010).\(^{15}\) However, to guarantee good quality final product, DV Film Digital Transfers maintains that the source material has to be of excellent quality.

Current new digital technologies and emerging ones offer expanded opportunities for producers to maximise the economic values of video films both nationally and internationally.

### 2.3 Creative possibilities in economic adversity

There are key elements necessary for connecting production and the ways in which people appropriate and use cultural texts and practices such as West African video films. These elements are determined by the following factors:
• Who are the principal target consumers/audience for video films
• Is the tag ‘video film’ influenced by assumptions of consumers’ or audience’ past association with cinema?
• What types of marketing activities and techniques are employed via digital technologies to reach the target consumers and audience?
• Gathering information on audiences’ activities in relation to video films.

Digital technologies in video production offer solutions to the once persistent problem of distribution and exhibition of films in the West African region. From the production stage through to distribution and exhibition, new technologies provide filmmakers a variety of affordable choices of tools (i.e. cameras and post production facilities, DVD & VCD, internet) to produce and market their products. The difficult economic, social and political conditions of the 1980s and 1990s in Ghana and across the West African region gave an impetus to the popularity of video as a mediation technology used for sharing and contesting the understanding of the (West) African media sphere.

The IMF and World Bank projects of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) were implemented during the 1980s and 1990s. As part of the package, countries receiving SAP and ERP support from the two bodies had to devalue their currencies and embark on privatisation of state enterprises. As the value of the local currencies became worthless against the US dollar, celluloid filmmaking ceased to be financially viable. Film stock and
equipment had to be imported and post-production done abroad with non-existent foreign exchange\textsuperscript{16}. These conditions resulted in the privatisation of state institutions like the GFIC in Ghana, little disposable incomes, and changing habits of entertainment consumption (confining people to their living rooms).

This meant the traditional model of cinematic exhibition was becoming obsolete. In the case of Ghana where the majority of the cinemas were owned by GFIC, after the corporation was divested, the chains of cinemas were sold to churches or to businesses to use as warehouses. Finding new platforms for exhibiting video film products became a prerogative for cultural mavericks like William Akuffo.

Ghana’s commercial feature video film pioneer, Akuffo, found answers in video centres, VHS tapes, VCDs and TV broadcasts. These platforms for outputting video film products reinforce and validate the philosophy behind video filmmaking. From the beginning video filmmaking was positioned as a popular and mass cultural activity. The possibilities are liberating for video filmmakers, as well as giving wider access and visibility to both films and producers. Tapsoba explains that “\textit{It enables the penetration of films right into the community. With the digital you can go direct to the community this is targeting and segmenting the audience}” (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007).

In the 1990s cinemas were rapidly disappearing in most countries in the sub-region, so it became necessary to satisfy the entertainment needs of the people using the most affordable means available both to the filmmaker and to the
audience. In West Africa, the technologies of VHS, VCD, and DVD are significant for building film culture through distribution and consumption. Because these technologies have been miniaturised, it becomes less cumbersome moving an entire exhibition gear around unconventional exhibition venues. As a result, the concepts of distribution and exhibition have been redefined. For Mike Figgis, conventional models of distribution and exhibition call for more investment, something the independents struggle with. Going around this problem means reconceptualising our notion of cinema. As such, cinema becomes:

Any space where chairs can be placed all facing in the same direction; where a white wall or a screen exists; and where a medium-priced digital projector is connected to a tape or a DVD or even a computer with a couple of speakers. That is cinema. (Figgis, 2007:148).

Thus Figgis’ concept of alternative distribution for independent filmmakers falls in line with the above logic. The filmmaker takes the entertainment to the people instead of the audience going in search of entertainment. In assessing the role played by new digital technologies in video film distribution and exhibition, Tapsoba states that:

With digital technology, for example with mobile cinema with big screens, you can get the public to be educated on topics of national importance that can be done using the digital video
technology and exhibited through DVD. I think that what is important here is not really the importance of the quality of the viewing image which come with the projection of 35mm film (that is important), but there is a real challenge to be dealt with through the exhibition of images; bring people to see more of the African image… (Tapsoba, Interview, 29/05/2007).

The history of film distribution and exhibition in most African countries until the video film phenomenon in the last twenty years (see Diawara, 1992; Ukadike, 1994) shows African screens were colonised by foreign distributors and exhibitors. This meant that African films, most of which targeted African audiences, were rarely shown. African classics such as Sembene Ousmane’s *Borom Saret* (1966), Djibril Diop Mambety’s *Touki Bouki* (1973), widely seen abroad via the festival and art house circuits, were rarely seen by African audiences.

With the availability of scanning and multi format duplicating technologies, these classics and a lot more, are now available in formats that are accessible to audiences. This is important from a developmental point of view. As (West) Africans take their destiny into their own hands, these new technologies are helping to reconnect the masses with events of the past. Gaining insights of the past helps to shape and enhance their present and future existence, self confidence, pride and worth. The foregoing resonates with the Ghanaian social
theory of *Sankofa*. It is important that audiences are enabled through new technologies to watch both the African classics and the popular video films.

### 2.4. Film practices

Cinema in Ghana and Burkina Faso is in transition from celluloid to digital video. For both new and old filmmakers it is a novelty that has attracted positive and negative responses as a result of past experiences and association with celluloid mode of film practice. Digital filmmaking is thus being framed within the context of the knowledge and experiences people have of celluloid film practice. New technologies act as litmus, for testing existing models and theories. Under such circumstances, knowledge and experiences associated with existing media types offer the grounds for patronage and acceptance. Analysis of new technologies should take into cognisance the ‘communication behaviours and social contexts’ within which they occur (Rice and Williams, 1984: 55).

New media technologies gain relevance through comparison with old or traditional technologies. The presumed positive impact video technology is having on the industry, as I gathered from some of my interviewees, is often assessed almost unconsciously against the performance of celluloid film practice in Ghana and Burkina Faso. This means that new approaches are evolving to deal with prevailing conditions of production, distribution, exhibition passed on from the celluloid era. Media technologies, be they new or old are ‘extensions of human senses and effectors’ (Rice & Williams 1984: 56). New technologies by their nature are interactive, and this interactivity makes it possible for the
uses of new technologies to be adapted to different situations by different people, in the context of this research, the appropriation of video technology in West Africa.

**The format wars:** There have been significant developments in the technology of digital image production from the 1980s to present, leading to better picture resolution and sound quality. Nevertheless, when digital video films are shown on large cinema screens, quality is compromised - video films tend to get grainy when blown onto larger screens as the pixels get stretched. Many trained filmmakers I have spoken to prefer celluloid. Ansah however acknowledges that “it is the cost that we all cannot play with now” but remaining optimistic that “I wish one day the atmosphere will come where we will go back to celluloid” (Ansah, interview, 02/06/2007).

Filmmaking in West Africa has grown along with the Anglophone and Francophone film cultures. The latter for over three decades gained ascendancy and reputation as a base of astute art cinema. Francophone cinema benefited from French and local governments’ support in areas like training, finance, equipment, and distribution. Such assistance is absent in the Anglophone sector.

The affinity trained traditional filmmakers have for celluloid, its mission, and the desire for its survival are all understandable. The mission was mandated by the Second Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) Congress in the Algerian capital in 1975, and the 1982 Niamey manifesto. Given the FEPACI premise, celluloid film practice was meant to operate within the remit of ‘art cinema’ where instructional ideals take precedence over spectacle and commercial motives, the
very things that digital video film practice tend to exemplify. Filmmakers were to
make social realists films that will interrogate neo-colonialism as portrayed by the
narrative structures and images of Africa in western films. The broader objective
was to eventually achieve political and cultural development using the medium of
film (Diawara, 1992:42). However, in Ansah’s words, conceding to the celluloid
predicament, “we have to just accept what is there now. Their style was therefore
conspicuously didactic with an oppositional stance (Ansah, interview,
02/05/2007). Their films often lacked spectacle and entertainment. However,
with some nostalgic feeling for celluloid and the prospects for digital video,
Ansah concedes that:

I do realise that digital is so being developed that very soon may
be celluloid might become a thing of the past, because as you
know in Hollywood now they shoot digital along side celluloid
and so I think it is good for us (Ansah, Interview, 02/06/2007).

The comparative cost benefits of digital video vis-à-vis celluloid should not be the
only pull factor for people adopting the format, but they should take cognisance of
the ability of the medium “to repair the damage done to our race... It is a very
powerful tool ...because it also played a major role in the destruction of our
image...I think we should not take it lightly” (Ansah, interview, 01/06/2007). The
foregoing assertions by Ansah re-echo the 1975 Second FEPACI mandate and the
1982 Niamey Manifesto on African film practice, discussed above. These
assertions run contrary to the true spirit of digital video film practice as indicated
by my interviewees. The view of video filmmakers is that video films aim to provide entertainment, then education for the masses (Safo, personal communication, 26/09/2010).

Video filmmakers like William Akuffo of Worldwide Motion Pictures (in Ghana) says has never been their intention that video films should be regarded as counter-cinematic practice, as Ansah’s view above would appear to suggest. Akuffo states that video films’ main objective is to tell African stories in the most entertaining way possible to the African audience, hoping that the audience will learn some lessons after being entertained. It is at the level of film’s importance and role in terms of mass education and the implication of that on national development that the celluloid school and the video generation share common interests.

The film industry, according to Ansah, will be better positioned to contribute its part to the national development agenda if support from government in the form of a national film policy was put in place. For over 20 years, discussions about a film policy in Ghana have gone on, with successive governments promising to see to its implementation, but none of them till date have fulfilled that promise. However, with little support coming from the state, is it time for a paradigmatic shift in filmmaking?

Towards a new paradigm: Conferences, seminars, and published articles on digital cinema, tend to speculate on the future of this new mode of filmmaking. This shows that digital cinema despite being around for some time now is yet to
achieve the preferred standards. This section looks at the processes of film production and the reflections on these processes by filmmakers.

Digital cinema is in West Africa, is viewed as the film practice where video equipment, mediated by the computer, is used to produce motion pictures. This theory is based on the evolution and transitions that video technology has witnessed in the sub-region especially in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. That is why William Akuffo says:

When you are talking about digital cinema, are we really referring to the era of the digital cameras or video as a whole, because video did not start with the digital, video started with the analogue, with VHS analogue. Then we came to the U-matic; u-matic low band and we went to u-matic high band, then we went to Betacam. Then from Betacam we got down to the digital cameras (Akuffo, Interview, 16/05/2007).

The desire to go a step higher both in quality of production and adopting a professional approach meant that some film producers from the mid 1990s shifted to using Sony DSR professional cameras for production purposes although a larger majority still use the analogue cameras. Films are made generally to play to an audience (mostly a paying audience). It is however intriguing to note that in trying to find out what digital filmmaking is about, the audience’s views are deemed not so crucial. According to Ansah:
To the ordinary man I don’t think it makes any difference, after all celluloid was audio-visual and digital is also audio-visual or video. So to the ordinary man it doesn’t mean much to him…you enter a theatre you want to see a good film, a story well told (Ansah, Interview, 01/06/2007).

The assumption is that the ability to tell a good story cinematically presupposes that you understand how the cinematic apparatus functions. It is important to note the relationship Ansah draws between celluloid and digital video. It can be said that audiences experience with celluloid would affect and influence their appreciation of digital video films.

Framing the dialogue on digital video practice, the format is assigned functional roles. At least in Anglophone West Africa, digital video filmmaking has served as the anchor for the film industry. In Ansah’s view “considering the African economies, but for the advent of video I am sure filmmaking would have come to a halt, especially when you are talking about Anglophone African countries” (Ansah, 2007).

2.5 Infrastructure

Declining attendances between the 1980s and early 2000s have led to the closure of theatres across Ghana and Burkina Faso. Besides the falling numbers, one other reason for this situation is that there have been chronic shortages of films to feed the theatres, resulting in films such as George P. Cosmatos’ Rambo (1985) being
rerun countless times. Perhaps the most obvious solution is increasing the volume of production to service the theatres. However, the ability to produce films regularly has a direct relationship with the availability of production facilities. Also the determinants of the choice of any production format are very much influenced by the costs and audience implications, the bottom line.

Technological development in the area of image capture equipment has made it possible for producers in Ghana and Burkina Faso to have access to alternative modes of production to such an extent that even mobile phones can be used to make short films. New technologies tend to create clusters of creative artists and outfits such as Village Communications, Sparrow Productions Ltd, Film du Dromadaire, etc. and their corresponding audience. A simple story shot on consumer Sony Hi8 camera and edited with the cheapest editing software and outputted on to Video Compact Disc (VCD) gets an audience. Therefore depending on the motive of a filmmaker and the profile of the core target audience, to set up a production outfit with top notch equipment and facilities means taking a business gamble since filmmakers have alternatives that offer possibilities that are immediate, cheaper and will enhance sales.

The use of professional equipment for filmmaking, albeit privately owned, means that quality is significantly improved. The better the quality of a film project, as observed in the works of Akuffo, Diallo, and Frimpong-Manso, the bigger the investment in all departments of the project. A fundamental truth about digital video film practice in West Africa is that it is driven by commercialism, as
opposed to celluloid filmmaking, which set out to emphasise national cultural specificity. It is this specificity that propelled West African celluloid films into the international sphere thus guaranteeing their producers some modest economic success (Higson, 1989 cited in Hoefert de Turégano, 2004: 83).

In economies, such as Ghana and Burkina Faso, where there are competing demands on disposable incomes, producers opt for the economically prudent option; maximising the efficient use of resources. For producers to make the crossover to using professionally set up production facilities such as the likes of **OM Studios, Sparrow Productions Ltd., Insel Communications** in Ghana and **Imagine, Sahelis, Film du Drommadaire** in Burkina Faso, there needs to be competition among producers to win audience for their productions. Audience have to mature in their expectations of films from producers in order that there is this competition. Audience have to demand more of the producers than they are presently being given.

The present trend is that low-end production facilities swamp the market and the vast majority of the audience buy works coming out of these set ups. A few quality conscious viewers in the middle to high income brackets., are not numerous enough to offer compelling reason for producers to engage in ‘expensive’ productions. However with time as the cinephile community grows and matures both in numbers and taste, quality production will become the norm. In Tietaah’s (2007) opinion he foresees:
a consequence in which market forces will necessarily require or dictate that we begin to professionalise in the films that we do and that those who do not rise up to the reality, market forces will necessarily cut them out and so it will crystallise as a result.

State intervention, through investment, as part of a programme of cultural preservation, setting up production centres, establishing a cultural heritage fund that will attract patronage from the private sector, could increase production quality at a reasonable rate.

**Film culture and the critical audience:** The economic inertia of the 1980s and early 1990s had consequences on the film industry across West Africa, reducing the size of the cinema-going culture. The level of patronage of video films suggests that a film culture exists, or at least is emerging. This is because people watch films a lot, on TV, and on DVDs and VCDs that are traded on the open market or from designated marketers, and some times from ‘in-traffic mobile vendors’. However, while a mass audience is created, there is an absence of the critical audience. Critical audience in the context of this research means audiences who through cinematic viewings, reading, and discussion develop an insight and knowledge of film culture and cinematic techniques.

The prevalence of Cine Clubs, the Association of Cinema Critics, and cinema-going culture, in Burkina Faso does help to sustain a critical film culture. Through the regular discussions of films, such groups are able to decipher what might constitute a good film in terms of the content and style, technical qualities
and production values inherent in the film. However, there is also the contentious issue of the lack, among some video filmmakers, of basic film production training, whether formal or informal. They go into the profession as passionate enthusiasts trying to put their stories on the screen.

Although technical inadequacies are pervasive phenomena among untrained filmmakers, their continuous existence in the industry is attributable to their skilful handling of interesting popular themes on the screen that strike a chord with the audience. Although quite often most of the characters are stereotyped, they suit the popular ideas and popular interests. But are these popular stories well told? Dealing with quality issues requires the institutionalisation of some standard operating procedures (SOP) within the industry. Industry connoisseurs like Aveh (2007; 2008; 2009, 2010) think some of the films adopt an episodic plot structure where series of sometimes unrelated events are chained together in post-production to make the movies.

The institution of a film fund, where filmmakers could go and borrow, requires open, critical and fair scrutiny of the stories, of the scripts, and of the proposed crew. If an untrained or trained filmmaker meets the qualifying criteria for the award of funding, it will mean that practitioners are beginning to work along guiding principles. The consequence of such an outcome could be the institution of business discipline and professional approach to the industry.

**Cultivating the critical audience:** There are two important factors to consider in connection with cultivating a critical audience base. First, putting in place the
mechanisms that will help create and develop the critical audience. Secondly, creating a broader access to the video film product beyond the Ghanaian and West African shores. The development of the critical audience is contingent on the ability of the producers to do more improved productions, that have a transcultural and transnational appeal, but based on African stories. Emmanuel Appiah’s 2007 *Run Baby Run* is an example. The films shot on locations in Britain and Ghana deals with the issues of racism, drug trafficking, gang culture, and Ghanaian cultural norms. Through Junior and Hertha, his British girlfriend, viewers get involved in the tensions between Western and African worldviews on interracial marriage. The logic here is that as more quality productions become accessible to the viewers “when they see anything substandard, anything mediocre they would be able to tell the difference between what is good and what is not good” (Aveh, interview 23/05/2007). At present, audiences do not get the opportunity to compare local productions on the basis of quality and production values.

Video film fans I have spoken to in Ghana and in the UK are conscious of the fact that some of the local West African productions are of poor quality. This is because they have access to DVDs of European, North American (Hollywood), Hong Kong, etc. productions and therefore can discern the differences in quality. But again the polarising argument that is often given to justify the sorry state of some of the video production is that one is foreign and the other is local. This situation could be regarded as soft endorsement for the local video film economy. The assumption appears to be that it is fine for local productions to be substandard, and if the films being produced are considered as such, that is alright.
and acceptable. To say that because they are local productions and for that matter should be watched despite being fraught with basic flaws sounds a bit patronising.

Aveh however, believes that “it is because there are not many of these productions made locally that they have access to or they have seen that are comparable to the foreign standard” (Aveh, interview 23/05/2007). The last few years, though have seen the emergence of such directors as Emmanuel Appiah, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, Leila Djansi, and Boubakar Diallo, all of whom have won international awards with their films. From the critical audience perspective, “when we continue to have improved productions overtaking the substandard ones then the people will start knowing that local productions can be of comparable standards to those coming from Europe and North America” (Aveh, interview 23/05/2007). For the productions to get a wider market internationally would require subject matter of international appeal.

Some production houses are using digital cameras in shooting, as well as using non-linear editing suites in postproduction. (See Figures 4-6 below: Danfo B. A. Production Studios in Accra New Town, Ghana)
Figure 4: Non-linear Editing Bench of Movie Africa/Danfo B A Productions, Ghana. Picture by Author (2010).

Figure 5: Non-linear Editing Bench of Movie Africa/Danfo B A Productions, Ghana. Picture by Author (2010).
Skills levels need to match the available pool of resources. But cameramen or cinematographers, directors, editors who are not technologically adept, may compromise the economic potentials of video films outside of the West Africa region. The use of latest technology or non-linear editing suites with packages such as Adobe Premiere C5, Final Cut Pro, does not guarantee an automatic quality product. Bad shots and cuts can still be found even when principal photography utilised digital video technology. Crew and personnel must understand the mechanics of how both the hardware and software packages should function in tandem in the bid to construct a coherent and interesting story.
The impact of training: Filmmakers and scholars identified two major entry strategies; formal training and on the job training. In Ghana formal training is provided first and foremost by NAFTI. Filmmakers like Akuffo and Safo have got their own private training outfits as well. Those who get formally trained at NAFTI get trained with the facilities that are available at NAFTI. Being a state institution, they are not well endowed. Their resource base is limited, and do not have state of the art video production technology. Although the institute has a decent pool of equipment to offer good training, it would be an exaggeration to say in the Ghana NAFTI has the best of the digital cameras or editing suites or whatever it takes to produce a quality movie.

Therefore trainee experience at NAFTI, does not match the level of professionalism in other training institutions in Europe or America where students are exposed to the latest technology. Training on the job depends on which studio or production outfit trainees are attached to. The quality of skills acquired is very much determined by the degree of sophistication of the production outfit and their vision. The filmmaker and scholar Aveh affirms that lucky on the job trainees could be “attached to a newly established, modern production house that has latest equipment or facilities” which boost their chances of being exposed to current production gear and better skills acquisition.

In some cases cameramen are unable to handle HD format because there are few HD cameras around, which means little or no training. And even with the few HD cameras, production houses that have them most of the time do not shoot in HD
mode, because some editors have difficulties editing material shot in HD. So some production outfits with HD cameras choose to shoot in standard DV. Alternatively, they shoot in HD and then have to convert to more familiar formats such as standard DV before going into post-production. Or they may even do everything in HD but when they finish there have no HD exhibition or transmission outlets to use. So in the end they have to convert the finished product to standard DV in order for it to be accessible to the audience. Because of the lack of resources, it takes some time before newer technologies get introduced onto the West African market (Yassala, personal communication, 28/05/07).

Apart from a few new production outfits with lavish finance, one will not find the latest state of the art equipment. Producers with more limited resources may have to choose between three cameras costing £3,000 each, or one camera at $10,000. One problem with acquiring the latest production equipment is that you might not get personnel with the right skill set to handle it, and therefore may require additional training and consequently cost. In addition, a $10,000 camera may come with some features or abilities that may not be relevant to the production environment in West Africa. HD technology is not yet very popular among the majority of video filmmakers. Therefore investing in high end HD technology might not be a prudent thing to do. Unless the filmmaker(s) have an existing market outside of the region where producing in HD is a precondition, sticking to the standard formats and what the mass audience can easily access makes more business and economic sense.
The role of research institutions (ACREDOC): ACREDOC (African Cinema Research and Documentation Centre) is a research unit within NAFTI in Ghana, which studies how best to adapt indigenous storytelling procedures for the screen utilising new technologies. Speaking to filmmakers and film scholars, it is clear that apart from just using the equipment or the technology, filmmakers need to know what the technology can give them. A lecturer and a research officer at ACREDOC told me how he encouraged one of his students to do a project on the training of directors, asking whether training in NAFTI is adequate for them to pursue careers and perform creditably in the industry. The ACREDOC officer intimated that on occasion, for example, a director’s knowledge of lighting was inadequate. ACREDOC’s findings therefore are intended to compliment the trainee directors’ artistic and technical expertise and knowledge with the technological aspects of film production.

So with a research institution such as ACREDOC, in addition to finding appropriate ways of adapting indigenous storytelling procedures for the screen, the dissemination of its research findings on digital technologies is crucial to the development of the industry. In this way ACREDOC becomes a rallying point for both industry practitioners and the entire staff of NAFTI. It also becomes a major step towards synchronising theory and practice, and opening the window for stakeholders to know the goings on in the industry both locally and internationally.
One way ACREDOC has done this knowledge acquisition and dissemination is getting NAFTI to sign on as a member of CILECT. CILECT members receive the association’s monthly magazine on equipment. Members are therefore kept updated on new equipment that comes on to the market and other vital industry development. This goes to ACREDOC directly. Copies are made and distributed to the various departments to see the new technologies that are being used in the industry although NAFTI cannot afford all the latest technology. The important thing however, is that after reading, staff will know that it is possible to do certain projects with certain type of material and know-how. This helps in the teaching and development of talents.

**Critiquing:** Critiquing is an important tool for shaping and guiding video filmmaking. Film critics, however, often do not have the requisite background knowledge. Most of them are reviewers attached to media organisations, and so their freedom is limited. Both filmmakers and scholars I have spoken to believe reviews are not undertaken with an objective and critical consideration. Film reviews are done on demand from the producers or on demand from the media houses that they work for, especially in the print media.

In Ghana, if a producer makes a film, then invites a reviewer from a media house to the premiere of the movie, he expects a favourable review. Otherwise, next time the reviewer may not get an invite to the producer’s next premiere. Eventually the reviewer will be blacklisted by film producers. An editor may reassign or even fire such critics, so you find these critics being soft on the producers. In the light of the above, filmmaker Akuffo believes that the industry
needs “constructive criticism that will help push the industry forward not critics whose loyalty can be bought. So that when they say something people will respect what they said” (Akuffo, interview 16/05/2007).

Some Ghanaian film producers, especially the untrained ones, see criticism as “fiendish”, as personal attacks on their work. A film teacher and freelance critic I spoke to confirmed to me that he had been confronted be film producers after critical comments. As an academic and freelance critic, he could afford to be blunt, and exercise proper academic critical responsibilities. However he acknowledged a problem with some producers.

Film critics and reviewers need training. According to film critic Burkinabe, this is one of the core objectives of the Pan-African federation of film critics (FAC). FAC liaises with recognised film associations in countries with filmmaking traditions to run the training (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007). Secondly media houses should buy their own copies of productions rather than rely on complimentary copies. The filmmaker, critic and scholar Aveh explains that in Ghana you do not expect to get a free complimentary copy of a production on disc in order to do a review or criticism, and then hit hard on the director or producer who offered you the copy, even when there are genuine concerns (Aveh, personal communication, August, 2010). On the other hand there are producers who do not care about the critiques of their work. This explains why films from a particular producer or across different production houses over a period of time do not show signs of any improvement. You will notice the same problems of poor
lighting, loose storylines, uneven sound levels and other shortcomings running through all the movies.

Digital video film practices have been criticised by fellow industry practitioners and those in academia for the lack of professionalism and disregard for production values. Stories are not tested and scripts are not developed properly, shot compositions are bad, poor sound, bad lighting, etc. Much as these are genuine concerns facing the industry, there are divided views on the subject both among practitioners and academics. The loosely regulated film sector in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Nigeria, makes the sector vulnerable to misuse and misapplication of the cinematic conventions. For critics, academics and people with certain professional competence of the film industry to justify their critiques, they must be seen to be making contributions by way of engaging with private and state institutions to impact on policy and interventions. This can be in the form of seminars, conferences, and workshops at the end of which communiqués can be issued and sent to the appropriate quarters outlining where and how the industry ought to go.

The purpose of criticism is to offer profundity of understanding and deep reflection that benefits both audiences and filmmakers. As African cinema is primarily a ‘social reality cinema’, critics through their rigour and professionalism can inspire confidence in the work of the filmmakers. They can do this by tackling issues ‘about how the filmmakers can be close to their public and take inspiration from their culture’ in a constructive manner (Barlet, 1996). There is an important economic argument for critiquing. Although there are other factors that affect a
film’s success, studies have shown albeit inconclusively, that there is a link between how a film performs at the box-office and the type of critical review it gets (Kerrigan, 2010: 113-114). Kerrigan argues that acting as gatekeepers, critics pass judgement on films presented to audiences, and consequently shape film consumers’ habits.

One media academic I spoke to thinks that:

> To the extent that we (academics/critics) have not provided the necessary support by way of impacting legislation and driving policy direction it would be immoral to begin to suggest that they (filmmakers) should do what you have not enabled them to do (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Tietaah comments that filmmakers are working within the context of their own limitations, financially and technologically, but manage to find markets for their productions, and to critique the digital video films for quality would be unjustified. If academics and those with professional capacity in the filmmaking sector can impact policy, if they drive the direction of state, national, and regional priority, the issues that they would raise could also become the subject for film projects. If professional training and refresher courses are provided for practitioners as a consequence of policy interventions, that would affect the performance and output of practitioners in the industry as well. And the views and issues that professionals and academics raise for policy consideration would
invariably become the kernel for state or regional direction and deployment of resources. Only with these changes, could critics make an influence or input in the film sector that would be practicable and even far-reaching.

**National identity, patriotism, and policy vacuum:** While all representations might contribute to a “national identity”, there is little convincing evidence (based on examination of the Cultural Policy, The Media Policy, and The Communications Policy) in the sense that this is who the Ghanaian is, this is how Ghana should be seen, and how Ghanaians should make themselves be seen (see Appendix 2).

The productions are independently produced with commercial intent. Producers hence put emphasis on stories that have commercial potential than topics that promote national identity and pride. In this regard, some local producers merely reproduce stereotypes of the African as an exotic species that is often associated with European and American representation of Africa in movies. This is due to the lack of a mature critical film culture and the necessary policy, regulatory, and legal framework to guide and direct filmmakers towards achieving best practices of their trade. I am not in any way calling for censorship laws. My argument is that it is important to establish good practice that enables filmmakers to express their creative freedom as well as manage potential harm that their work can do to society. This means good precedents and discretion by filmmakers become the watch words.
Knowing that the film medium is a unique and effective means of communication and expression, the role of filmmakers in Pfaff’s (1992: 31) view is that of a:

Cultural and sociological commitment: to reveal, reconstruct and redefine their history; to generate pride in indigenous cultures previously neglected or distorted by colonial rulers; and to address problems concerning their compatriots in the hope that adequate solutions would be found.

In Ghana the Cinematographic Act of 1960, a fifty-plus year old Act, has become obsolete but is still in operation. There have been attempts to revise it starting with the 1995/96 draft film policy, which has never seen the day of light. There were a series of seminars organised to discuss and look at a draft film policy that could not be carried forward. Around 1999 those discussions metamorphosed into a communication policy. During this period, the Ministry of Communication of Ghana was formed, incorporating movies, telecom, internet and other emerging technologies. The draft film policy thus got absorbed into a bigger communication policy. According to Aveh (personal communication, January 2009), despite the workshops that were organised to discuss and look at the draft document in detail and make recommendations, it never got passed until there was a change in government in 2000.

The new National Patriotic Party government did not want to pursue the policy and so did not revive it. It was not until around 2003/2004 that the New Patriotic
Party administration also came out with a proposed film classification and development bill. Experts like Aveh and Gbormittah who have looked at the draft document think that it was the 1995/96 document that was revised. In Aveh’s own words “that also we were told was supposed to go to Cabinet and from Cabinet be placed before Parliament. But because there is no priority in that area unlike other areas we have seen, other bills being passed into law within a short time because it has some priority to the government; ROPAB, Domestic Violence Bill, Disability Bill now are passed into law” (Aveh, Interview 23/05/2007).

The common view expressed by film industry experts and academics that I have talked to is that the film sector is not a priority for governments, hence the lack of passion in coming out with a substantive national film policy. So currently there is no national film policy which regulates film production, film exhibition, and film distribution in Ghana except for a few paragraphs of guidelines found in parts of the policy documents mentioned earlier. Speaking to filmmakers and academics in Ghana, like Akuffo and Aveh, they expressed concern about the influx of Nigerian productions in Ghana, especially since there is evidence that the films, with violent sequences have effects on the Ghanaian. And the cultural and social situations that are portrayed in the Nigerian movies are different from what pertains in the Ghanaian setting. Some commentators in academia believe that they are influencing the Ghanaian youth. For instance, the recent SAKAWA scandal in Ghana (get rich quick mentality by indulging in occult practices associated with Nigeria) is believed to have originated from Nigeria via the film medium. It is however, important to note that the media have always, in all
societies been blamed for social problems, but that does not mean that forms of censorship are necessarily a viable answer.

From 2007 there has been resurgence in the video film industry in Ghana. In this regard, the industry’s desire to develop will receive a fillip if a policy framework is put in place to guide and direct the work of filmmakers. The Censorship Board that was set up after independence, ceased to be operational with the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution, which frowns on censorship (Republic of Ghana, 1992: 112). The Ghana Cinematograph Exhibition Board of Control’s (GCEBC) current mandate does not empower it to prevent films deemed to be unsuitable for viewing from getting distributed and exhibited in the country. There is no law that the GCEBC will exercise to ensure that producers market, distribute and exhibit films that have passed through their screening checks. Consequently, foreign content, including Nigerian video films, are shown or sold without going through the necessary scrutiny or classification, and therefore may have undesirable effects on viewers.

2.6 Development agenda: politics and media liberalisation

Sociologist Daniel Lerner (1958), who has examined development patterns of traditional societies, suggests that exposing traditional societies, (in this case the former European African colonies), to the lifestyles of their colonial masters (through film) would bring about some understanding of these lifestyles by the colonies. Consequently, in copying these lifestyles “…they would over time catch up with and resemble western countries. That was the way to develop African
countries, so a certain development motive (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). Hence, a closer examination of the context of introduction of the medium of film would suggest that it was to serve as a tool for indoctrination.

Perhaps the greatest motivation behind the development agenda, at least from the pro-western and capitalists’ perspective, for the technology of film for pedagogy was the medium’s ability to perpetuate the colonial hegemony. However the Marxists and dependency theorists have a different take on the topic of the use of film technology in the colonies. They are of the view that “it was in fact intended to keep us subservient” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). The introduction and use of film technology in West Africa must be viewed against these contexts. Filmmaking began as a government institution and was used vigorously as the propaganda machinery of government, as discussed in Chapter One with regard to the operations of the CFU and GFIC.

After the attainment of independence, African governments appropriated film for educational purposes. In the case of Ghana, after independence in 1957, the first president Dr Kwame Nkrumah with his socialist leanings thought that if film has been conceived and applied by the colonialists to address the causes of lack of progress “… the very … tool of film could be used to reverse the colonial or neo-colonial mind set of the African” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). Nkrumah thus appropriates film and uses the medium not only to teach but to unshackle colonised and neo-colonised Ghanaian as well as try to find a certain national
cohesion. This is how African states such as Ghana and Burkina Faso recalibrated the technology of film and its effects on their people.

Due to the capital intensive nature of film production, the industry started as state monopolistic institutions in independent Ghana and Burkina Faso without the governments automatically legislating that they operate as such. This is because only the state at the time could afford to set up the infrastructure needed for filmmaking. In 1962 the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) was set up and then the Information Service Department (ISD) as a division charged with the responsibility of using mobile cinema vans to inform people about matters of national interests. In Burkina Faso the government in 1969 nationalised the film industry, thus assuming total ownership of the sector.

The development and introduction of video technology in West Africa, predictably, has brought competition into the filmmaking sector. Before the arrival of video, celluloid filmmaking was in vogue. Films were made with expensive and bulky equipment. The technology then was not miniaturised as Tietaah puts it. Costs were high and private participation in the sector was non-existent. It is important to note that there is often a correlation between the media establishment and “the political ideology within which it operates” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Prior to the return to multiparty democracy in Ghana and Burkina Faso in the 1990s, both countries were governed either by a military dictator or a one party
system. The consequence was that the media environment was also unitary; state controlled. The constitutions of both countries made provisions for liberalising the mass media including film, a provision that is sine qua non for participatory democracy, “because then there must be general public participation and input in the choices or the decisions that affect the electorate and all” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). The political evolution in both countries is analogous to the technological evolution in the media sector generally which has acted as a catalyst for the entire process of change in filmmaking.

The political will to include private participation in the mass communication sector coupled with the rapid technological development have created the condition for inexpensive filmmaking. The consequence of private sector involvement in filmmaking is that there is a laissez faire culture in film production because “private people do not require license or do not require any special mandate or permission from state in order to do films” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007) which hitherto was not the case. This is also partly due to the fact there is no more huge capital investment required to set up a production facility because of miniaturisation and price reduction of key production equipment. Therefore if you can afford the cost of acquiring basic film production facilities e.g. video cameras, computers, desktop editing suite/software etc. and without any formal or informal training in filmmaking, you can go into film production and be regarded as a filmmaker. All that you require is to capture “any theme on video and adding a script to it hit the screen with something that can be compared to film” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). This rudimentary filmmaking
culture thrives on the basis that the market or customer base is receptive to the productions. Everyday themes and gossip, which resonate with the audience, are used (e.g. an unfaithful or cheating husband, the ills of modernisation in relation to traditional Africa culture, etc.).

Political goodwill and technological development have enabled people to go into video filmmaking for financial gain. Due to the immediacy of the technology of video, filmmakers quickly produce films on issues that generate an impact on society, and so recover costs, generate profit as well as create employment for others. It is this enabling environment Tietaah refers to when he says “the technology has made it easy or possible for people with little or no training, with little or no resources to produce and sell films on video or VCD” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). As a result of the inefficient distribution system for video films, producers have developed innovative ways of getting their films to the audience. So “what you see on our streets these days is that people would rent a commercial vehicle with big loud speakers and basically they are selling”
(Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007) as illustrated in the picture below.

![Figure 7: Picture of Street Sales of film on VCD. Picture by Author (2010)](image)

[In Figure 4, the white truck in the picture has public address system with big speakers advertising a video. The young men with back to camera are part of the foot sales team moving along with the truck]

**Professional practice:** Any unregulated and fledgling business or industry is bound to experience a fair share of mediocrity in its service or product delivery. Such is the case of the video film industry in West Africa. One factor that is responsible for this condition is the cheap and easy method of acquiring production facilities and the direct relationship that has with the films produced. This is an integral characteristic of many growing and developing institutions. It is in the nature of Africans to live lives that are manifested by performance. Performance thus is in the character of ordinary living and discourse of Africans. Therefore when video filmmaking is understood as a process of putting together a
performance, something that is at the core of their existence, some video filmmakers maintain that unlike the legal or medical professions, they are not duty bound to undertake any professional training to be certified by a body before they are able to work as filmmakers. The preceding argument is valid even in the most advanced places in the world. While there is established film training institutions and programmes in the UK and US for example, there is little to stop advancement in the film making industry for those without qualifications in the subject. In the light of the above, it can be argued that film making is not a profession.

Traditionally venue-based performances in Africa such as the Concert Party tradition in Ghana, the Travelling Theatre in Nigeria would interrogate and critique what goes on in the community. On the basis of the above, the technology of video is appropriated to mediate such cultural forms, broaden the access channels for these performances by people as well as deal with problems of geographical boundaries that usually would be an inhibiting factor to the ‘on-the-road’ kind of production style that these traditional modes of communication adopt.

In West Africa in general and Ghana in particular, the uncontrolled numbers of people going into filmmaking results in a glut of film productions. Production levels in Ghana in the mid 1990s to early 2000 averaged fifty-five video films annually according to Akuffo (personal communications, 2004, 2007) with Nigeria presently rolling out about one thousand films per annum. Given such
high production output, Nigerian productions dominate the Ghanaian and other West African markets. Despite its negative economic implication on the local industry, there is a positive lesson to this Nollywood dominance. The silver lining, as expressed in Tietaah’s words, is that:

Over time people will require more than numbers and so, mere competition will necessarily impel the people to become more professional than we are doing now. If so many are available and people begin to have options and choices, they will begin to look beyond what is ordinary (Interview, 21/05/2007).

Therefore as video technology is helping to broaden the production landscape, the same technology will help to streamline the industry. As filmmakers perfect their trade, producers whose video films fall short of the minimum standards risk closing down.

As audiences get more knowledgeable and are offered a broad range of films to choose from, the market forces will demand that film products meet acceptable professional standards. If a film therefore is unable to meet the required standard such as good picture quality, good sound, appropriate lighting, it will naturally be rejected by the market. This scenario is based on the assumption that audience act rationally, thereby moving to consume quality products and reject mediocre ones. Consequently this self-correcting production model (in the absence of a credible policy framework) will enable the system to crystallise. It is worth noting that
hegemonic management does not always result in ingenuity and efficient productivity of institutions such as those in the film industry, e.g. the GFIC story.

Technological flexibility or hegemonic control: In an industry where creativity is the name of the game, regulatory measures by government tend to undermine potential gains that can be achieved in a self-correcting set up such as the video film industry. Central government control of the media environment generates apprehension among experts. Gate-keeping by the government on how people enter the sector, should be exercised within the broader legislative context of the rules governing setting up of any business, which already exist (as in the Registrar General Department’s requirements for setting up a business). Technological developments and processes, which are being adopted in the video film industry, such as platforms for distribution and exhibition are constantly evolving. Such situation makes it almost impracticable for governments to regulate and keep pace with the changes in technology.

Academics in the media and communication sector such as Méda, Tapsoba and Tietaah, tend to oppose regulation and think that in so far as filmmakers operate within the broader legislative context for setting up and running businesses and do not engage in anything illegal, like piracy, the burgeoning industry “should be left to the season of time …. the market forces will sort them out” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). However, gratuitous production practices such as the exposure of certain parts of the body that will seem to undermine the cultural and moral inviolability of the society should be proscribed. Hegemonic control should be in
the form of interventions that create the enabling environment for video filmmaking to thrive. A progressive intervention in this regard will mean that

There is going to be some facilitation of distribution process, … there is going to be some institutional or state facility that would make production cost effective so that people can refer to that place rather than the so many multiplicities of individuals being paid for theirs (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Any move short of the aforesaid will not be compelling enough to justify regulation in the video film sector.

**Locating the role of film:** Film practice in West Africa pre and post independence has struggled to find legitimacy. This struggle for legitimacy has resulted in situations where a triple function role is ascribed to film practice. Film is used variously to advance cultural, communicative or informative functions. Both in Ghana and Burkina Faso, film from the early days (from the 1950s) has been attached to the operations of the ministries of Culture, Communication or Information. Without a clear-cut definition from a national perspective regarding what film’s principal function should be, it becomes problematic trying to determine a clear direction for the sector.

The ambiguity in the roles of film practice leaves it to the mercy of practitioners to ascribe whatever functions they deem fit for their particular projects. Such situations leave commentators and experts like Méda to ask is:
Filmmaking an informational undertaking or a cultural undertaking? … is it used for the expression of values, cultural values, social values, artistic views or is it used to communicate an image, to communicate information, to create relations just like is filmmaking a medium or it is a tool of expression of artistic views (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

Video filmmaking as exemplified by the films of Akuffo, Frimpong-Manso, Diallo, Kelani, ideologically subverts that of earlier filmmakers such as Ansah, Sembene, and Hondo. The video film school of thought readily accept that video technology is a liberating medium for them to tell their stories without any strings. The video generation thus engage filmmaking as a medium first and foremost. In Méda’s words,

It is just something we can use to express our image or to create a real image of us, to give a certain value to ourselves, to sell ourselves. So it is a kind of enterprise to sell a product; it is a product and it is also a tool of communication to sell the product itself (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

The celluloid filmmaking era in (West) Africa flourished at the same period as the literary arts. The rigour and aesthetic discipline which the African writers of the late 1960s and 1970s gave to their work influenced the emerging film production
traditions. The formal training that most celluloid film producers got also influences their strong views about filmmaking as an art form with conventions that must be respected. It is difficult for the celluloid generation to come to terms with the new paradigm of digital video technology.

Jean-Piere Geuens estimates that digital technology has the “power to shatter the long-standing arrangements that regulate how movies come into being” (2002: 16). Thus for the likes of Ansah who for a long time have “held firm to the notion that the rich texture and the shading palette of the film image could never be overtaken” (Geuens, 2002), crossing over to the digital paradigm is problematic. They accuse digital video technology of less intense involvement during a shoot, which often leads to sloppy work. They believe that film “heightens everyone’s attention and sharpens the work” (Geuens, 2002: 19). Therefore the artistic and aesthetic rigour associated with celluloid raises the value of its product. The fact that artists have direct and tactile relationship with their works (i.e. processing of film negatives: touch, feel, splice) makes it all the more difficult for them to accept and work with digital technologies which tend to thrive on virtual and abstract concepts. Until the artistic possibilities inherent in digital technologies are adequately deconstructed, Méda’s opinion is that it will take traditional filmmakers in the region “a long time before they can accept it (digital filmmaking) as a new system to express themselves as artists” (2007a). The fact Ansah returned to using digital video to re-launch his directorial career in 2010 with the first part of his twenty-four part film titled The Good Old Days, is a soft endorsement for the format.
The digital revolution is already with us and “we should therefore not shy away from discussion - wild speculation, even – about its impact on the art of cinema” (Geuens, 2002: 16). If filmmaking is framed as an activity for cultural expression, the digital video paradigm offer opportunities for filmmakers, irrespective of their technological grounding, to thrive and explore their creative potentials in a limitless manner. Similarly, video films’ core audiences access the videos which consequently are helping to shape the knowledge of the new African worldview. This point will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four. Therefore any desire by creative artists to shape the views they hold of Africa requires that they get on board the digital video technology bandwagon. And it is in the same spirit of using technology to positively influence national development that Ghana’s National Commission on Culture intimates that:

In the era of globalisation and contemporary technological challenges, the people of Ghana must recognise that their culture is the basis of, and the most important factor in the nation’s human and material development. Thus our history, cultural values and institutions must continue to exercise a deep influence on the nation’s destiny and play a key role in governance and national life (NCC, 2004: 7).

Digital video technology affords users the opportunity to interject a personal filter on the ensemble of work. Resisting the digital revolution invariably means foregoing the opportunity to become part of the body of creators of works with
diversified values, be they cultural, communicative, informational, or artistic. Méda’s (2007a) considered view is that:

This diversification is very important and it should be one of the mobile for… (developing the industry, my own), either (whether) we take film as an artistic way or we take it as a medium of communication, the most important thing that we should think of is to see whether filmmaking can help us enhance the cultural diversity of Africa in our countries.

This desire to experience other African cultures in one’s country has long informed the works of filmmakers such as Paulin S. Veiyra, Med Hondo, Sembene Ousmane, Cheik Oumar Sissoko, and Kwaw Ansah who worked predominantly with celluloid. Since the early 1960s, filmmakers in the region began to reflect on their profession and work in relation to the African people. According to Méda, they set objectives for themselves, particularly the desire to use film to “sensitise people for development, education, freedom of the countries”. These are the main objectives that filmmakers and their profession were tasked with. Beside the above objectives, filmmakers also had and still have responsibilities to their communities. Chief among these responsibilities is “to know what are African cultures, Africa traditions, to enact them, to value them ... and to stigmatise those values that do not help Africa to develop” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a). To be able to execute the set objectives and responsibilities, filmmakers needed to be guided by history, know where they
have come from in their quest to make films, the challenges they have encountered. Said to be liberating and democratic, new digital technologies have their own challenges that must be understood within the specific context of West African film practice.

**Video filmmaking in the context of global cultures:** Despite the rudimentary nature of video filmmaking in West Africa, it is important both academically and politically. Its relevance on the global cultural tapestry is viewed against the advocacy role played by institutions such as UNESCO and the McBride Commission that focus on equitable flow of information amongst nations. The ideals that these institutions champion are valid for the film business in the current technological era. Because the digital divide tends to tilt in favour of the more prosperous nations, it becomes almost impossible for poorer nations to compete on equal levels with the huge multi-million information, communication, and media industries in the West. The overwhelming reliance on and influence of foreign content on the traditional filmmaking (celluloid) industries in West Africa have been a major cause of the stagnation and collapse of the establishment of a veritable film industry. Digital video technology therefore comes in as a tool for cultural mavericks to recalibrate the business of filmmaking with the key operating principles being immediacy of both product and technology, reproducibility, affordability, and audience-specific content creation.

While Hollywood and its established conventions and production values, set a particular standard, other cinemas have always had to develop their own production modes suited to local contexts. In these sense video filmmakers in
West Africa, do not consciously aspire to become like others (in Europe or America), for in the words of Tietaah “you cannot be good enough in the thing you are copying as the one who is the originator and owner of the thing” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007). Film is a culturally specific product, therefore video filmmaking in West Africa should be allowed to develop and crystallise within its specific cultural setting. European films, Indian films, Mexican telenovelas, American soap operas all have their own character, and Hollywood has its character and therefore there should be a place for (West) African video film practice to develop its own film character and taking into account its own uniqueness and heritage. The question that we should focus our attention on is whether or not the realities that produce the video films in West Africa can find resonance with people who are deeply entrenched in western cultural values.

One of the legacies of colonialism of the African continent is official languages that the colonisers left behind after independence. These European languages have become the lingua francas in almost all African countries. These languages in most instances are the ones used in films, therefore creating linguistic barriers. Fortunately, when it comes to African cultures, there are very little differences between them, a trump card that the video filmmaking industry wields. Experts such as Gbormittah, Aveh, and Tabsoba think that video filmmakers should be targeting the African market (including Africans in the Diaspora) and be less ambitious about a certain prospect of getting a stake in or a certain quota of the global film industry.
The Nollywood success story is a model that is worth duplicating within the region and consequently the continent. Initially, targeting the unified domestic Nigerian market, Nollywood films soon began to go beyond Nigeria and have become a continent wide experience. Focusing on the African market as one unified market, West African video filmmakers stand a greater chance of making an input and an impact by virtue of the ability to navigate the cultural nuances that exist evidenced by Nollywood. Tietaah’s view is that:

… if that is the concern, I don’t think we need to do much about learning from Hollywood, because what pertains to Ghana, what pertains to Burkina Faso culturally and all has very little variations beyond perhaps language as a medium with what pertains to Nigeria or Uganda or wherever else (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Film scripts/themes whether it is the Cameroonian Ako Abunow’s Potent Secret (2007) or the Ghanaian Frimpong-Manso’s Scorned (2008), you will find similarities in themes being handled in the films. It is in this regard that filmmaker and head of Research at Centre Nationale Cinématographie (CNC) of Burkina Faso, Yassala Sessouma, (Interview, 28/05/2007) see a great deal of optimism, because if you are targeting markets beyond the geographical boundaries of West Africa, then there is a certain requirement and necessity to improve qualitatively. Greater professionalism is central.
In the next section I will look at the specific case of the film *My Mother’s Heart* (Onyeabor, 2005) produced by Venus Films, Ghana. In this film the director uses indigenous cultural practices and gives them a contemporary rendition in a manner that resonates with the social, cultural and political experiences in the region. Thus the subject matter, cast and crew, political overtures, the moral and textual values of the film are harnessed by digital video technology. This could well be viewed as a test case for going forward in video filmmaking in the region as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

**Analysis of the film My Mother’s Heart:** The story of *My Mother’s Heart* is about Nana Yaa, a young pretty woman who loses both of her parents when her village is ravaged by war. She flees the war and arrives in the Kingdom of Apemso and lodges with a newfound family. Word gets to King Agyemang that there is a stranger in the kingdom. Nana Yaa’s adopted father (Owusu) is summoned to the palace with the stranger girl. After she explains her plight, the King puts her in the care of his brother Boakye. Nana Yaa presents to the King a heart-shaped golden locket handed down to her by her mother in appreciation for the King’s kindness.

Boakye tries without success to win Nana Yaa’s love and eventually rapes her in the bushes. By this act, Boakye has abused the trust of his brother and the gods of the land. In Apemso, it is an offence against the gods to be pregnant out of wedlock. The discovery that Nana Yaa’s pregnancy resulted from Boakye raping her is despicable. Boakye is expelled from Apemso as consequence of the abominable act. King Agyemang later marries Nana Yaa, but their union is not
blessed with an heir to the throne. King Agyemang is critically ill and painfully learns of the happy moment he has longed for; that Nana Yaa is pregnant for him.

While in exile, Boakye marshals support and returns to claim the throne from the ailing King Agyemang. The new king, derides and intimidates Nana Yaa so she can give in to his advances. Though pregnant and buoyed by the challenge to survive, Nana Yaa once again flees.

Boakye’s reign is fraught with problems. The gods (through an oracle) reveal that the land has been desecrated, and normality will be restored when the heiress apparent is found. Boakye murders the chief priest and appoints a new one who will tell him what he loves to hear but not what the gods say. The battle lines are drawn when Boakye learns there is an heiress to the Apemso throne.

A search party of four valiant women is sent to find the heiress Yaa Asentewaa. They find her wearing the heart-shaped locket that her dying mother left for her upkeep. The people of Apemso team up with Yaa Asantewaa to overthrow the oppressive (Boakye) regime.

*My Mother’s Heart 1&2* is a personal experience narrative film or what Esi Sutherland-Addy calls “the mythic legend” (2000: 272) made by a Ghanaian cast and a combination of Ghanaian and Nigerian crew. The film treats issues such as excessive ambition, the place of women in society, as well as the inherent values of traditions and customs in the African setting. Onyeabor in the opening
sequence introduces Nana Yaa as a woman in danger. In a tracking shot, we see her running for dear life. It is only when she is invited to the palace to explain her mission in Apemso that we get to know the reasons for her fleeing. The plight of the protagonist highlights the negative effects of war on the vulnerable in society, especially women.

A contemporary and historical reading of *My Mother’s Heart 1&2* positions the film as an allegory of the political situation in many African nations. Like Boakye in the narrative coming back to force his ailing brother out of power, legitimate governments are forced out of office and members of the ousted regime come under constant threat, like the chief priest(s), Nana Yaa, and the council of elders in the film. These despots who usurp power are nothing but egocentric maniacs. Eventually they do find favor neither with the people nor with the gods, as evidenced by Boakye and his calamitous reign.

Analyzing the film within the context of the political history of the West African region (e.g. Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria), the war in Adukrom and Apemso parodies the senseless military takeovers between 1966 and 1997 in both countries, driving officials of the ousted regimes into exile. In the narrative, King Agyemang is characterized as an agent for constructive dialogue. In *My Mother’s Heart 1*, we see him in many sequences with his council of elders. He discusses and seeks their views before he takes any decision. He ensures his decisions are in the interest of his subjects. His role within the context of modern democratic practices is representative of elected officials while the vicious and power

*My Mother’s Heart 1&2* challenges the established worldview of the African woman in films. Women are often cast as obedient, unassuming, less exposed to danger and unable to contribute to society’s good. On the contrary, the director casts women as major players of progress in the kingdom. Nana Yaa confronts the unknown future head-on, challenges Boakye who is part of the establishment. She tells Ama and Akosua, her step sisters, that it is the challenge to survive that brought her to Apemso. With her talent as a jeweler, King Agyemang recognizes her usefulness to the kingdom. Using Nana Yaa’s skill we can draw an analogy between her role in the development of Apemso and the video phenomenon. She learnt the trade from her mother. Similarly, video filmmakers should learn from established filmmakers, who should equally be willing to pass on their experience and skills to younger filmmakers. This way both sides can make positive impact on the development of video filmmaking.

In a number of sequences, it is clear the development of the plot hinges on the actions of women. For instance, when Nana Yaa meets the two sisters, their decision to offer her refuge sustains the story. The tension of the impending conflict is heightened when Ama informs Boakye the former queen was pregnant.
Again the task of restoring normalcy to Apemso is initiated by four women sent to look for the heiress to the throne. Finally, the heiress Yaa Asantewaa has a duty to defend the oppressed.

There is a belief system among Africans that the just find favour with the gods. Thus at the birth of Yaa Asentewaa, in a typical *deus ex machina* style, Nana Yaa is attended by ‘gods’ who appear and cause a woman to come and safe the baby. The succession of the locket from Nana Yaa’s mother to Yaa Asantewaa is important in emphasizing the need for continuity in the good practices of culture and tradition just like Ghana for the second consecutive time, successfully inaugurated the second term of an elected government in 2005. Thus the commercial success by way of sale of VCDs and DVDs locally and abroad can be linked to the above democratic feat.

### 2.7 Film local, think global: matter of theme and style

Over the years, the best of African cinema is not about getting genres for cinema. It may be said that African cinema does not have genres, what it has within is intelligence and responsibility. This intelligence lies in knowing the art of cinema and presenting it on the screen, and responsibility in the way that a filmmaker would be able to address issues of society.

The filmmaker is seen as somebody who is responsible for the society. I do not think these ideas are outmoded in the current technological dispensation. Digital video film practice is framed in a similar context. This is believed to be what
would distinguish African cinema from the other cinemas. And I believe that West African video filmmaking have to still maintain that and not to copy without thought, what is happening in other cinemas.

(West) African cinema is recognised by the above factors. For instance in Kwaw Ansah’s *Heritage Africa* (1988), we encounter responsibility and intelligence in his handling of the theme of cultural alienation and its repercussions as well as the effective use of cinematography, lighting, sound, characterisation, and most importantly a good narrative. In all other film practices, it is the ability to utilise the aforesaid elements that make films appeal to global audiences. Therefore, getting a footprint in the international film stage is not about trying to package what is already known and belongs to the West back to them. It is about packaging what is specific to and belongs to the West African video film practice to the rest of the world in standards that are accepted the world over. This way the video films are able to participate in the global film economy with a tinge of local identity and the specificity of West African cinema.

But if these distinctions are lost, when there are problems with funding already, it can get tough trying to participate in the global film economy without a unique proposition or specificity. As noted earlier, video films that have their story lines modelled along existing Hollywood movies, but use an African casts will not appeal to the international audience, majority of who are used to the Hollywood genres.
Setting is the most memorable feature when one watches the recent video films coming out of Ghana, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. A lot of effort is concentrated on their setting and leaving all other aspects. Their setting, costume, make-up and the environment; the *mise-en-scène* is what carry the narrative. In a way this is good in the sense that packaging cinema from West Africa is intricately linked to the cultural aspects of the West African lifestyle. But that is not all because it is only a small aspect of cinema. That is why it is important that the other elements such as scriptwriting, professional lighting and sound, the intelligence and artistic bit of filmmaking, need to be properly exploited and used in order to be able to get a true and complete outlook of West African cinema.

A historiography of video films point to the fact that since the beginning, the focus of video filmmakers have been on social matters that affect institutions such as the family, community, and state. From Akuffo’s *Zinabu* (1987) to Frimpong-Manso’s *CheckMate* (2010), these films and many others that have been produced within that period have examined themes of love, betrayal, marriage, generational conflicts in relation to choosing partners, corruption, as well as drug trafficking.

It is common to find the interfering mother-in-law either in her son’s or daughter’s home to decide what is best for her child in the marriage department. For instance in Frimpong-Manso’s 2009 *A Sting in a Tale*, Auntie Tamara, (seeking the best interest of her daughter), does everything in her power to stop Frema’s relationship with Kuuku. Auntie Tamara’s actions lead to Frema’s death after the latter was forced to abort a pregnancy. Procreation is an important element of marriage in the broader African socio-cultural context. So where there
are no children in the marriage, the mother-in-laws act swiftly to rectify the situation. The proposed replacement often is the mother’s preferred choice.

Another popular subject thematically is young sexy ladies and their power to wreck marriages for material gains. They use their charming experiences to lure older and naïve married men in responsible positions in society to abandon their matrimonial homes and responsibilities just to be at the beck and call of these ‘mini-skirt leeches’ as Aveh calls them (Interview 23/05/2007). The consequence is that often very good relationships, before the coming into the frame of these mini-skirt leeches, are destabilized and sometimes families ripped apart as in Frimpong-Manso’s 2010 production, *CheckMate*.

Directors introduce elements of traditional belief systems such as juju or supernatural powers to emphasise the reliance on local beliefs to achieve modern aspirations of ‘good and happy’ marriage. This style of narrative construction prepares the ground for introduction of a conflict between traditional beliefs and a modern Christian belief. Eventually it is the modern Christian belief represented by a Pastor or Priest who triumphs over the juju or supernatural deity. For instance in E. Dugbartey-Nanor’s film, *Jewels* (1999), the protagonist Opanyin is entrusted with the safe keeping of his wife’s family ancestral jewels. His desire to live a modern life drives him to sell the entrusted family treasure in the city without his wife’s knowledge. Opanyin takes a young mistress Tracy in order to raise his status as a rich city dweller.
With his traditional upbringing, Opanyin is naïve about the cunning modern city life and Tracy takes advantage of that. She seeks the assistance of a juju shrine. She casts a spell on Opanyin which makes him renounce his village wife and later is made blind. Tracy locks him in a room and denies him any access to people while she lavishes in her newly acquired wealth with her young boyfriend. It will take the Pastor to break the spell and reconcile Opanyin with his village wife. These styles of video film production have been taken up by critics who have commented on the negative portrayal of traditional African religious practices and values (Sutherland-Addy, 2000).

The traditional priests are presented as charlatans, evil, and grotesque-looking beings some of who accept any request from people to kill or destroy another for payment. A woman wants to eliminate the rival, she goes to consult the juju shrine; a man wants to succeed in his criminal activities, he goes for protection from them. The traditional priest is a personification of good and evil. He is associated with murder as he often demands human parts for ritual sacrifices. Their shrines are weird-looking insanitary places filled with odds and ends. They are charlatans that swindle people who consult them.

The question worth pondering about is the authenticity of this type of characterisation of the traditional practices. What about traditional priests as healers and custodians of the knowledge of the potency of plant and tree species as medicines? What about the role as counsellors and as intermediaries between the people and the Supreme Being and as one who foretells danger and how to
avert it? They lead their communities in communication with the ancestors and the gods during traditional festivals, as we saw in Section 2.6 with *My Mother’s Heart*.

With the springing up of several new churches, religious themes are very popular in video features. They are targeted at the growing Pentecostal church-going population in the region. The styles of these productions has been such that characters knowingly or otherwise get under the powers of evil forces and get delivered by Christian pastors under very hard to believe circumstances.

Some of these "deliverance videos" seek to enforce the preaching of contemporary charismatic Christian leaders, who see prayers as the answer to all problems and situations that man finds himself. The power of God can easily be invoked by a pastor or any other spiritually-charged person to deliver any afflicted person from the *powers of darkness*.

It is also noteworthy that some cultural practices have been confused with religion and come under attack in these video features. One such practice is traditional marriage, popularly referred to in Christian circles as “engagement”, and is regarded as not a full marriage until the couple have had a wedding in a church. *Wedlock* (1999) has the story of a couple who after their traditional marriage ceremony, where the lady was given to the man by her family, decides to go for a church wedding. The wedding was cancelled due to some unforeseen issue just when the ceremony got underway and the pastor could not pronounce them
husband and wife. This production highlights the question whether a couple should be recognised as duly married without a church wedding.

**Context of (digital video) filmmaking:** One of the key principles of text analysis is not to read the text from its production context. However, in order to understand the West African video film phenomenon in the context of a regional cinema, it is useful to analyse film text and production. When the two analyses are put together, it then becomes possible to produce an account of the regional cinema in context.

The presence, however, of geographical and cultural distancing when reading a film text can pose serious problems for understanding. African films quite often are read for their anthropological relevance: how well they portray traditional and contemporary African customs and beliefs. It is Sheila Petty’s view that “while it is important to examine the symbolic and institutional aspects of African cultures as they are presented in the films, it is equally important to study the films as art forms” (Petty, 1992: 26).

The concepts of spatiality and temporality are important in the overall understanding and appreciation of video films. The length of the shots and how the actions within the shots are placed in the natural settings mostly devoid of studio set ups gives an insight into the economy of video film practice. Aesthetically the use of ‘real time’ or ‘lengthy shot duration’ helps to establish the single shot “to role of great formal significance”. This technique is not novel, it is a feature that was maximised by neorealist filmmakers. It can also be found in the
works of film greats like Jean Renoir, Orson Welles, and Andy Warhol. African filmmakers outside of the video film generation have also adopted this aesthetic technique at one point or another in their projects. For instance in Souleymane Cisse’s *Yeelen* (1987), we see this feature in use. In the Komo ritual sequences, Cisse utilises long takes and longer shot lengths (Petty, 1992). From the above, it may be argued that video film practice has a historical and symbiotic relationship with earlier film practices.

From an ideological point of view, Africans have interminably served as objects of Western film studies. With the aid of affordable video technology, (West) Africans are now reframing the discourse on African cinema on their own terms. Video filmmakers are doing this by re-filming history with their own images. It is important to point out that “received theories and modes of observing and interpretation do not always fit African films” (ibid). Reading and analysing the (West) African film text requires contextualisation. The existing cultural dynamics and how that relates to production are important elements for this contextualisation. This means having some background understanding of the historical antecedents and practices of representation in African filmmaking, as well as the technological and conceptual challenges (Petty, 1992; Mhando, n.d).

The need to highlight these differences is because when African film production started; it did not start in 1895 with the Lumière cinematographe. African filmmaking began some fifty odd years after the invention of commercial cinema. This period coincided with the time most African countries were seeking independence and becoming independent from their European colonisers.
The themes and styles of some video films as well some traditional 35mm films are a manifestation of indigenous art forms such as folk theatre, oral tradition, concert party, travelling theatre, and myths. Kwaw Ansah’s *Harvest at Seventeen* (1988), Souleymane Cisse’s *Yeelen* (1987), Gaston Kabore’s *Wend Kuuni* (1982) offer examples of how home-grown art forms (i.e. oral tradition and storytelling as social art forms) are absorbed into the cinematic language.

Prior to 1960, the period a lot of African nations started modest film production, colonialism and Christianity were the vehicles for introducing Africans to the cinematic culture. England and Belgium using colonial film units and missionary activities, trained Africans in the technical aspects of filmmaking (Pfaff, 1992). Out of these initiatives, health, propagandist, and educational films that often praised the colonial administration as well as propagating the Christian faith were made. However, there was no corresponding development in the area of “native movie-making”. For a long time, until the arrival of the video phenomenon, the above approach would lay the grounds for the representation and interpretation of Africa from a Western cinematic perspective.

Before African filmmakers took hold of the cinematic apparatus with didactic intent, the representation of Africa through the western cinematic lens was one-dimensional, Tarzanistic, and often disparaging typecasting (Pfaff, 1992). With new-found freedoms of digital video technologies, filmmakers desire to assert themselves and the African point of view. Through the work of filmmakers,
audiences find self-actualisation and the expression. The new generation of video filmmakers have made it their duty to domesticate the western technology of film to African realities. By so doing video filmmakers are re-presenting Africa to the world with an African perspective.

**Technology, formats and aesthetics:** There is no direct connection between artistic or aesthetic quality, format and technology. There is a theory among older generation filmmakers in the region that celluloid practice delivers high art and quality work. Video filmmaking on the hand has been associated with cheap aesthetics. This binary and simplistic view can be misleading. It is more complex, and thus requires some unpacking and critical reconsideration.

There have been works done on celluloid and video that have been regarded as great works for instance Gaston Kaboré’s *Wend Kuuni* (1982) and Ansah’s *Harvest at 17* (1988). These films produced on different formats, celluloid and video respectively, have been successful on the Burkinabe and Ghanaian markets, and have appealed to both the critically minded audience as well as the popular mass audience.

Nearly a decade and half ago, (1995 to be precise), Lars von Trier and his associates took the world of filmmaking by storm. They announced at the Odeon Cinema in Paris, the birth of Dogme 95 movement. The Dogme 95 movement in their manifesto criticised the French New Wave as an elitist form of filmmaking.
They argued that theories on the French New Wave shared the same core principles with the bourgeois perception of art (Willis, 2005: 24-25).

The overall import of the movement was to counter the illusionist representation of film as prescribed by corporate Hollywood. Rule number nine in ‘The Vow of Chastity’ and their subsequent work offered some interesting contradictions. The said rule stated that films made in the Dogme 95 tradition must be in Academy 35mm format. Interestingly however, the first officially labelled Dogme 95 project by Thomas Vinterberg (*Festen or The Celebration*, 1998) was shot on miniDV. For theatrical release *Festen* was kinescoped onto celluloid. At the Cannes festival the same year, *Festen* shared the Jury Prize and nominated for the Palm d’Or. Dogme 95 thus laid the gauntlet for the disconnections between technologies, formats, and aesthetics.

Therefore, as the first product of the new dawn, *Festen’s* performance on the market was critical for the entrenchment or otherwise of Dogme 95, and subsequently the digital video format. Vinterberg’s trump card was not based solely on *software and hardware aesthetics*, but also having a good story and experience, a formula that Ansah prescribes at the beginning of *Chapter Three* for quality production. Thus according to Willis, the success of *Festen* which later influenced the works of directors such as Steven Soderbergh, Jordan Melamed, and Harmony Korine, was due to the “dramatic intensity of the story and the urgent and vibrant cinematography” (Willis, 2005: 26).
The view expressed above by Willis corroborates Méda’s assertion that “… it is not because you have your film in celluloid that it has more artistic or aesthetic quality. It depends on your creativity; it depends on your competence, on your performances as a professional” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a). It is essentially all about what one is able to make of available resources as a creator of works of art and culture such as film. It is about novelty in its most banal form and the initiatives that the filmmaker brings to his work and less about the format being the main determinant.

Pace setters such as D. W. Griffiths, Robert Flaherty, Sergei M. Eisenstein, George Méliès, in the film industry at some stage in their careers encountered some constraints. For instance Flaherty and the filming of Nanook, Eisenstein and the montage/editing challenges, and Méliès’ accidental discovery of the stop trick technique (film frame/tourne cache). For these great filmmakers, their motivation to succeed in their work had nothing to do with ambitious budgets or formats. It was more about how creative they could get in the face of their respective difficulties. Méda’s view that “sometimes creation, innovation depends on the constraints you have, and those constraints bring you through innovation” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a) reiterates the above.

Thankfully the blueprint for filmmaking has been laid for over a century. All the significant developments that have occurred since 1895 have essentially been reworking the blueprint under diverse challenges which often resulted in new aesthetic appeals. Video filmmaking in West Africa is situated within this context.
With modest infrastructure, producers depend on interesting storylines that they interpret creatively.

Ukadike subscribes to the foregoing when he says that filmmakers need not necessarily reinvent the cinematic convention in order to distinguish themselves from dominant cinematic practices and values. The preceding view was broadly shared by my interviewees. Thus in trying to renegotiate aesthetic strategies using their historical antecedents and cultural value systems, video filmmakers take advantage of the already existing conventions from the dominant practices and technologies and domesticate them (Ukadike, 1994: 101). A critical reading of West African video films, be it *The Figurine* or *Harvest at 17*, will immediately point to one of the following factors; cultural, educational, traditional, neo-colonial/colonial, imperialist, Pan-Africanist ideologies, as being responsible for defining and shaping the video film aesthetic. The combined effect of the above tendencies in video filmmaking enables filmmakers to map out the social tendencies of (West) Africans. The political significance of video filmmaking in West Africa hence emerges as a result of the above influences.

There is a complex relationship between technology, film financing and aesthetics in the video film practice in West Africa. Filmmakers that I spoke to during this research hold a common desire to make the best films they possibly can. The realities of the production environment, however, points in a different direction. For the simple fact that directors and producers most of the time self finance their
projects changes the dynamics that inform producing films along known aesthetic conventions. In this section we will see how the above factors play in Ghana and their effect on the films made.

In the course of my fieldwork especially in Ghana, it became apparent to me that conscious discourse on film aesthetics is regarded by video producers more as an academic concept and exercise than a component of film practice. I found out that although concepts like mise-en-scène, framing of shots, camera angles, crossing the line (180-degrees rule) are there, they are discussed mostly within the academic setting (Aveh, interview, 23/05/2007). Therefore when it comes to practice, some video producers do not have an understanding of such conceptual and theoretical constructs, and how they impact on their films.

As film director and producer Socrates Safo told me, at an African Film Conference in Illinois-USA, that he is amazed that what they do as entertainment for their audience is subjected to rigorous scrutiny and analyses (Safo, personal communication, 09/11/2007). What we can infer from the above is that the motivating factor is to make movies, put stories on the screen. Therefore concepts that have a bearing on the aesthetics and production values of films are of little interest to some video filmmakers.

**Cinema of simplicity:** When we take the experience of Ghana or Burkina Faso or Nigeria, certainly from the perspective of production costs, the production strategy being adopted makes it possible for film-makers to recover costs. The present strategy of low budget production offers vast opportunities to video
filmmakers to exploit their ambitions from production through to distribution and exhibition of video films.

The reality is that, after video films are released in the theatres, VCD and DVD copies are released via the float distribution strategy enabling the public to buy copies for private home viewing. In Chapter 4, there is more discussion on this method of video consumption. The high costs associated with celluloid filmmaking in West Africa up till the coming of video denied filmmakers the opportunity to make films, quite often having to wait for years to get funding not only to buy the film stock but also to send the negatives to Europe to develop and then edit.

However, with the digital technology facilities in use today for video production, it effectively enables filmmakers to escape from all the above difficulties relative to celluloid production approach. A producer can make two or three video films in a year. For instance Boubakar Diallo made two feature video films per year between 2004 and 2006 as well as in 2008. Examples include Sam Le Caid (Diallo, 2008), Couer de Lion (Diallo, 2008). As Tables 2 and 3 indicate, in a period of seven years, Diallo has produced eleven feature videos whereas his Ghanaian opposite Shirley Frimpong-Manso between 2007 and 2010 has produced six feature videos which include The Perfect Picture (2009), A Sting in a Tale (2009).
Table 1: Production Volume: 2004 – 2010 (Boubakar Diallo)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Films</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Trague à Ouaga</em>, Sofia</td>
<td>DVCam</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Code Phénix, Dossier Brûlant</em></td>
<td>HDV</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>L’Or des Younga, La Belle, La Brute et Le Berger</em></td>
<td>HDV</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Mogo-Puissant</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Sam Le Caïd, Coeur de Lion</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Clara</em></td>
<td>HDV</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Julie &amp; Romeo</em></td>
<td>HDCam</td>
<td>Diallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Author (2011)

Furthermore digital video technologies make it possible for producers to film rehearsals, view rushes and go into postproduction locally without any great difficulties. This is a dramatic change. It is enabling filmmakers to do projects for

Table 2: Production Volume: 2004 – 2010 (Shirley Frimpong-Manso)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Films</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Life and Living</em></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Frimpong-Manso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>It</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Scorned</em></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Frimpong-Manso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>The Perfect Picture &amp; A Sting in a Tale</em></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Frimpong-Manso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Check Mate &amp; 6 Hours to Christmas</em></td>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Frimpong-Manso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Author (2010)
sometimes less than half the cost of 35mm filming. It is however important that filmmakers who are keen on using the digital format for filmmaking do so from a professional perspective, because there is a difference between a well planned digital video film and an ordinary digital video. The difference between the well planned digital and an ordinary digital video film lies in the fact that a well made digital film that adheres to all the cinematic codes can be kinescoped on to 35mm which would be of comparable quality. This then presupposes that the production technique used for celluloid should be the same technique that digital video filmmakers work with.

Digital technology per se does not mean easy ways of production. It is wrong to think that using digital techniques of production implies that you can avoid the technical challenges and constraints associated with celluloid filmmaking. Constraints such as knowing how to frame shots, proper lighting, sound, colour adjustments are pertinent to the digital format as well, and mise-en-scène is in no way made easier by digital technology. Much as digital technology has democratized filmmaking, we do not have to assimilate it as a cinema of simplicity or lower standard. If we understand it that way, the danger that digital technology could pose instead of being a benefit is that wrong signals can be sent out to the world that contemporary West African films are not of quality, thus reducing the films to films not properly made with due regard to the ethos of cinema. Mere competition will necessarily impel practitioners to adopt a more professional approach to filmmaking than they are doing now. If so many are
available and people begin to have options and choices, they will begin to look beyond what is ordinary.

The other alternative is for a certain monopolistic control or hegemonic handling of the institution, which doesn’t necessarily lead to ingenuity and productivity. Some possible consequences of the video production sector are that market forces will dictate that video film producers begin to inject professionalism into the films they do. Those who will not rise up to the challenge market forces will unavoidably cut them out and so it will crystallize. Such are the challenges of a growing industry, while it is undesirable it is also unavoidable.

**Dubbing and cinematic language:** Before the introduction of digital video filmmaking technology in West Africa, lack of access to the few films that were made was often attributed to the linguistic divide in the region. New technologies of filmmaking have made it much easier than before to have films dubbed into other languages to broaden the access and viability of film projects. The benefits of dubbing films into other languages cannot be overlooked. However, some industry connoisseurs think that the problem for some films’ inability to succeed in some countries has little to do with the spoken language used by actors in the films. To a greater extent it has to do with film language. It is therefore important that filmmakers and audiences make conscious effort towards developing and understanding the language of film.

From the preceding paragraph, it is safe to assume that our ability to understand a film text is dependent on our knowledge of the language of film. The film text,
however, does not constitute a language on its own. A film produces its meanings, according to David Browne, ‘through systems which work as languages in relation to the film text’ (1997: 12). It is these systems working together as languages that offer film its layered meanings. Hence, it can be argued that the spoken languages that audiences use to appreciate and to receive the message of a film are very different from film language.

Perhaps the inadequacies in mastering the language of film by both audiences and filmmakers often results in complaints by the latter “saying that it is because people do no master the language you use in your film” that is why a film may not be appreciated, but Méda is “convinced that there is a film language that can go beyond the variability or diversity of languages used in our countries” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a). To put emphasis on dubbing films to enable audiences’ appreciation of them means that the spoken language assumes a place of significance in our attempt to decode a film text. Given such conditions, it then becomes easier for people to like or dislike a film. The experience of a film in this context is framed through a system of value judgement which borders on superficiality (Browne, 1997: 12).

It is imperative to accept that film has its constituent parts such as narrative, editing, framing, and lighting which are placed within the mise-en-scène that merge to form its language and people must learn the functioning of these parts. In this case when an image is composed by a filmmaker and is seen by the audience, they do not have to stop at the superficial meaning the image signifies.
Knowing how the constituents work within their own context of generating meaning provides an entry point to implicit meanings of the film text which may have very little connection with dubbing.

Using a picture hanging on the wall in his office, Méda illustrates how an image has layered meanings. He says that:

Don’t let people believe that when they see this image (at this moment pointing to a wall hanging in his office of a woman leaning forward to extend a hand to a little child) it is just a man or woman giving hand to a child. Through this image there are a lot of things or meanings. At least the line going from the hand to the left leg of the child has significance. The colour of the shirt and the trousers of the child have significance. The background of the picture has significance. This is what the language of film is. If we are able to learn English or French or German in order to understand what people say in their language, we are also able to learn what the film language is. And let us try this one and know whether it is necessary to dub our films to different languages, because we may dub these films in those languages and they will still make no difference (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

And as digital records are manipulable, mutable, they create a catalogue of challenges for the once widely held view of the recorded image being an authentic
and realistic representation of life (Manovich, 2000). Therefore the image one sees is not a reality. Film’s indexical relation with visible reality takes a new direction. An image purporting to be a representation of me, in reality may be somebody else. This is because the digital record can be manipulated in lots of different ways using different techniques for a particular intention. To know there are implicit intentions underlining the construction of an image will impel people to try to understand what meanings lie beyond the picture. And Méda thinks:

This is the starting of learning the image, the film language, and if they know that film is a means of communication, a language, they will try to know what the basics of this language are. What are the ABC of the language, what is the grammar, the syntax of this language and any other thing needed to understand or interpret the language (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

Relating his personal experience about the potential dangers involved in putting prime emphasis on the superficial reading of an image, Méda recalls that in 1987, he went to his native village to shoot a film. One of the women he shot for the film sometime ago came back to him and said:

When we shot the film I just gave her some small money and people say what I gave her was not enough, and secondly since we shot the film she was ill because it seems that I took something from her, so she doesn’t feel very well since that time. This means
that there is something like an exoteric meaning to them in film. It is just like in our culture the ‘kpiin daa’.19 When someone dies you make the kpiin daa for him. So these kpiin daas are replaced by the photograph. And when even there is deceased, during the ceremony they put the photograph by and when they finish they take photograph inside to expose it just like the kpiin daa just because they are Christians. So it means that your spirit is still in the photograph … So if we believe in this way then we have a long way to go to understand that there is nothing in the photograph, what I meant in taking you in the photo, I mean many other things (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

In this chapter, we have seen how the various stakeholders in the film industry frame their understanding of digital video filmmaking. History and experience of the industry play a large part in the views expressed. We have also seen that video technology is expanding the frontiers of filmmaking due to affordable costs. However, the affordability and immediacy of the technology poses challenges of some filmmakers not adhering to acceptable industry practices. But this non-conformist approach, using stories that treat everyday life, arguably is what has helped to sustain the once moribund film sector especially in Ghana.

I have argued that digitalisation in filmmaking is prominent in the video production sector, where digital filmmaking is seen more as a procedure. Coupled with changes and transitions in technology, these result in the diverse approaches and meanings that video films generate. More importantly, transitions in film
practices have brought about problems of format wars, whereby celluloid is regarded as the superior format to work in. There is, however, an ongoing dialogue about the inevitability of a paradigm shift to digital video. We have seen again that video technology has enabled filmmakers to navigate the perennial problem of funding film projects. Thus, the ability to own the entire process results in filmmakers injecting their unique styles into their work. Out of this emerges a particular video aesthetic that is not acceptable to some critics. Much as training, research, critiquing are necessary, experts believe that formulation and implementation of a national film policy will improve work in the industry. From the preceding sections, it is obvious that there are diverse interpretations of digital (video) technologies and their products by the stakeholders in the industry. Therefore a holistic orientation towards understanding the mechanics of image production, distribution and consumption is important.
Chapter Three: INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES; REGIONAL CONTEXT

Over the years, there have been efforts and initiatives at personal, institutional, and state levels, aimed at harmonising the film production capacities in the region. In this Chapter, I will look at some key organisation, institutions, events and policy initiatives aimed at coordinating and integrating the filmmaking efforts and abilities within a wider regional context.

3.1 Towards an integrated Regional Approach: digital video technology and future filmmaking in West Africa

Traditional filmmaking in West Africa as championed by such icons as Sembene Ousmane, Med Hondo, Paulin S. Vieiyra, Kwaw Ansah, King Ampaw share a common feature. They all have had formal training in the art of filmmaking (in Western countries). Training institutions such as NAFTI in Ghana, the erstwhile CINAFRIC in Burkina Faso, a private initiative set up by Martial Ouedraogo in 1981, as well as IMAGINE had and still have noble intentions of offering African centred training.

To achieve the above goal, these outfits adapt the universal conventions of cinematography to the African realities (Diawara, 1992:75). As a publicly funded institution, Ghana’s NAFTI is plagued with logistical problems. The high cost of 35mm film stock and production gear in the 1980s meant it was not sustainable to use that format to teach students. The institute resort to using analogue video to teach film production. As video become the default format for feature filmmaking in Ghana, NAFTI switched to teaching video filmmaking.
The point of convergence of the two paradigms of film practice is that they both strive to master the use of the cinematic apparatus. The mastery gives them the *savoir-faire* of the different workings of film-making gear and systems. Tasks such as positioning of the camera, how to frame and take shots, and opening of the camera’s aperture, are tasks common to both paradigms.

However, with regards to digital technologies in filmmaking, one piece of hardware, the computer, assumes a central role and importance. The computer has become the mediating device for most digital activities in digital filmmaking, from the pre-production stage through to post production. The centrality of the computer to digital video filmmaking makes it imperative that “irrespective of one’s area of specialisation in the ensemble of filmmaking, mastering computer technology is important as it will enhance understanding of how to use the computer to achieve certain effects in cinematography, sound, lighting, acting and all” (Tapsoba, interview 29/05/2007).

Editors, directors, scriptwriters, producers, and people pursuing studies to become such professionals, it is imperative that they have a well-grounded knowledge of how the computer works. This knowledge enables them to see and appreciate how computer technology impacts on their respective roles. In *My Mother’s Heart* (Onyeabor, 2005), computer generated imagery (CGI) is employed to reinforce the general belief in supernatural powers. With computer special effects, Nana Yaa is able to invoke the protective spells in her golden-locket to enable her traverse the dangerous waters in order to reach Apemso. Symbolically, digital
technology makes it possible to overcome some difficulties that traditional filmmaking in West Africa has suffered over the years. Given the aforesaid situation, a production culture/strategy that emerges is a robust and a proactive one, which invariably affects the nature of the final product.

The experiences of filmmakers in the region over the past couple of decades can be described as a roller-coaster journey. It became more difficult in the 1980s for filmmakers to get film related equipment than in the 1960s (Ukadike, 1994). With such background any technology that would enhance the work of filmmakers at a reasonable cost was going to be welcome development, especially for the continental and regional body Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO). It is along such thoughts that FESPACO for the past decade has stressed that digital technology should be embraced by the film industry in Africa for purposes of production, distribution and exhibition.

At the peak of the video phenomenon in the West African region, especially in Ghana and Nigeria, FESPACO created an audio-visual and film market, MICA in 1983. MICA runs concurrently to the main festival. MICA was specifically created to showcase TV productions most of which are usually on video format (Tapsoba, interview 29/05/2007). Since its creation, MICA has grown in importance as the one-stop shop to sourcing African audio-visual content during the biennial of Ouagadougou. By 2009, MICA’s back catalogue stood at one thousand and its videoteque was 594 films. Beside the main festival, MICA in 2009 attracted approximately 8000 visitors to the market grounds. For the 192
registered films, the market provided a good exposure for both the films and the producers (See Table 3 below).

**Table 3: MICA 2009 IN FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MICA Catalogue</td>
<td>1000 Copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Stands</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Films for MICA</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenings Booths</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenings</td>
<td>88 Scheduled Screenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Projections</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors to MICA</td>
<td>8000 (Approximated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidéotèque</td>
<td>594 Films</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* [www.fespaco.bf/fespaco.html](http://www.fespaco.bf/fespaco.html), 2010

As a further boost to the emerging video film industry, a video category was created for films done on that format to compete and win awards. Recognising video productions this way enhanced the credibility of the format among established filmmakers. They have always had reservations about the suitability of the format for feature productions. Beside seminars, colloquia, and master classes that FESPACO has organised over the years, the 2001 edition had *cinema and new technologies in Africa* as the festival theme. During these FESPACO-organised discussions, the central topics have largely been on digital technologies and filmmaking in Africa. These initiatives by FESPACO are seen by industry insiders as a way of engaging the filmmaking fraternity, both old and new, to dialogue and chart a course for future filmmaking using formats that are adaptable to the digital and technological 21st century.
As a regional outfit that endeavours to coordinate the activities of filmmakers and the industry at large, FESPACO faces some questions that Western filmmakers have also posed and may be coming to terms with. The most important of them all is posed by Tapsoba (who works for the FESPACO Secretariat and) is a member of the 2007 selection committee:

should films done in the DV format be screened to the public/audience during the festival as part of the competition or should it just be only films done on celluloid that can be considered and programmed for competition for the grand prize? (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007).

To resolve the above question means there is the need to strengthen and build on the initiatives mentioned earlier. It also calls for the consideration of the views of the audience as well. After all the audience occupy a pivotal place in the career of filmmakers. After all, their patronage or otherwise of films translates into the commercial success or failure of the filmmakers. As low budget high quality video films like Coeur de Lion ( Diallo, 2008) and 6 Hours to Christmas (Frimpong-Manso, 2010) gradually gain mainstream acknowledgement, there is some sense of optimism for video in West Africa. Tapsoba shares in this optimism when he says that “I think that we will eventually opt for this situation, which is to consider digital films for competition. But at the same time there will be the need to be more rigorous in the selection criteria and procedure” (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007).
The history of video filmmaking in West Africa points to the fact that majority of the early adopters of video technology lacked formal training in film-making. Invariably the production values in three out of five of the films have been seriously compromised. This situation tends to lend itself rather crudely to the theory that digital filmmaking is a cinema of simplicity. However, considering the fact that a video feature takes about six weeks or less to shoot, edit and release, it becomes easy to buy into such theoretical constructs.

Every two years the selection committee of FESPACO is confronted with problems about the technical suitability of video films for competition. Most of the videos are plagued with bad sound, poor lighting, and bad storyline. Much as FESPACO embraces the possibilities of digital technologies as noted earlier, there are also genuine concerns. Among such concerns is the fact that taking a liberal approach towards the acceptance of digital video films has the risk of “reducing films that come to FESPACO to films that are done without any sense of professionalism” (Tapsoba, interview 29/05/2007). In the 2007 edition of FESPACO, over 500 digital video films were submitted for selection for competition in the video category. Out of that lot about 66% were adjudged not to be of acceptable quality according to Tapsoba’s estimation.

However, it is not all doom and gloom; there were some video films of exceptional quality in all departments which passed for the competition for 2007 (see next page). Looking at the positive side of the numbers given above, it
becomes apparent that digital video technology is enabling the African capacity in film production. The technology for making video films is in constant state of revision to enhance performance. In the same way, one can only hope that over time, the majority will gain more experience and improve their productions. This can be achieved through learning, dialogue and collaboration with more experienced producers. Thus the 66% failed directors as per the FESPACO 2007 Selection Committee criteria can benefit from the privileged 34% filmmakers whose works met the requirements. Celluloid filmmaking is gradually phasing out in the region and around the globe. Perhaps it is about time that the obsession for films done in the 35mm format is minimised (see James, 2012).

The preceding views therefore suggest that filmmakers themselves will play an important role in giving digital video film practice the needed recognition, and help create a model that is acceptable to the digital video technology tourists (celluloid generation) and the digital video technology citizens (new generation filmmakers). Achieving a level playing field for both the digital tourists and citizens means that comparisons will not be tolerated between video films done by a digital tourist using the format due to lack of funding for 35mm project and the citizen whose entire filmmaking life is immersed in the digital.

**Regional and national institutions:** The development of digital filmmaking in the region requires national governments’ involvement and collaboration with regional and sub-regional institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA ) and
Union Economique Monitaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA); this group is made up of only Francophone countries in West Africa. In the region and especially between the UEMOA member states, there is already an ongoing discussion regarding the use of digital technologies in the production, distribution and exhibition of films. In a country specific study on the film industry in Burkina Faso, UEMOA indicates that the future of a vibrant African film industry lies in the adoption of new digital technologies (UEMOA, 2002). The study is emphatic in its findings that in order to fully exploit the prospects of digital cinema in the region, it is imperative that common policies for the region are panned out.

The availability of satellite technology in the region and on the continent as a whole is creating new opportunities for film production. Key among them is the emergence of pay television market with dedicated channels for showing African films. The continent and regional leader in terrestrial digital satellite TV broadcast is the South African outfit M-Net (MultiChoice) with its subsidiaries. M-Net was launched in 1986 as the first African pay TV network. At the time of its launch, M-Net was the second pay TV outside of the United States. By 1993 MultiChoice was formed out of M-Net to drive the expansion of satellite pay TV across the continent (see Appendix 2).

Having established themselves as market leaders and with increasing subscriber base, MultiChoice embarked on a project of rolling out digital satellite broadcasting technology in 1995. In the same year MultiChoice Ghana was set up and this period also saw the peak of video filmmaking in the region. Having
launched their DStv bouquet in 1995, MultiChoice Africa phased out their analogue satellite broadcast technology and started direct-to-home digital satellite broadcast (DHDSB) the following year (Hundah, 2009).

The network’s initial offerings and programming was dominated by foreign content. That notwithstanding, subscription continued to rise. The implication is that there is a common craving on the part of (West) African viewers for images that are transmitted. For filmmakers to benefit from the technology of satellite transmission by way of distribution and exhibition, there is a need for a co-ordinated regional policy on film production, acquisition and exhibition by satellite broadcasters.

Therefore to give an impetus to digital filmmaking, a business model that will cater for the interests of content creators, audience, broadcasters and policy makers is required. Such a model in the view of Tapsoba can “promote the production of films, the creation of games in the digital format, buying of cameras etc.” (Tapsoba, interview, 29/05/2007). The creation of the Africa Magic and Africa Magic Plus channels by M-Net for showing mainly African films dominated by digital video films is testament to Tapsoba’s assertion. He contends that pay TV via satellite broadcasting is a potential market that cannot be ignored. In the formulation of policies it is important that the volume of content created in all its variety and the size of the potential market in the region become strong bargaining points, and they should be critically assessed.
A country like Nigeria for instance, is very significant in the region both in the annual output of video films and the potential market size she commands. With a one hundred and forty million population, Nigeria’s ability to impact a coordinated regional policy for the film sector is incontestable. If we consider the level of investment that goes into the production of a video film, the Nigerian domestic market alone is self-sustaining. Producing in excess of a thousand films per annum (The Economist, 2006 cited in Abah, 2009),21 and selling between 20,000 and 400,000 depending on the popularity of the video film (Gbormittah, Interview, 15/05/2009; Abah, 2009), Nollywood asserts some degree of autonomy and therefore an important voice in any regional strategy on video film production.

It is not sufficient to be able to deliver numbers that impact on revenue generation and financial models. It is equally necessary that the films that are made, irrespective of the country of origin, have a mass appeal across the region and beyond. Conscious of the fact there are linguistic barriers across the region, it is in the interest of the industry, administrators and policy makers that the region should tap the benefits of available technologies to break those boundaries in order to achieve an expanded market. Quite apart from the linguistic difficulties, the majority of the video films treat themes that are germane to most other (West) African countries. The film scholar, critic and educator Tapsoba, believes that:

There are good films made in Ghana and Nigeria that are not known in (other) francophone West Africa, so the question of
language is often a barrier. There is the need for a policy that will allow films done in Ghana, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso to be dubbed into other languages that can then be distributed and exhibited (Tabsoba, Interview, 26/05/2007).

The solution to the linguistic difficulties lies in the Jean Rouch Sound Dubbing Studio (JRSDS). The JRSDS in Ghana at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) has the technology and expertise to handle such tasks. The Studio exhibited its debut work at FESPACO 2005 with an English language version of the Burkinabé AMAA award winning film *Sofía* (2004) directed by Boubakar Diallo. Different countries in the region have their unique propositions with regard to the development of the film industry. It is when these unique propositions are harmonised and translated into workable policies that the full potentials of digital technologies in filmmaking would be realised. When participating nations make substantial investments in the sector and the onus is to get their return on investment, only then will the leaky tax regimes currently in place be reviewed (see Appendix 2).

With an accountable tax system in place, where audience, content creators, distributors and exhibitors all pay the right taxes, it is expected that investors will recover costs and make profits and therefore be motivated to plough back their profits into more projects. It is only then that the structures and institutions that will engender the development of the sector begin to emerge as well as taking advantage of existing ones as we shall discover shortly in the next section.
**Burkina Faso and FESPACO; platform for launching emerging filmmakers:**

The objective of many emerging video filmmakers is to satisfy the viewing needs of their audiences. Participating in festivals and winning awards is a secondary matter to them. However, it is an undeniable fact that the biennial film festival in Ouagadougou is an important launch pad for emerging video filmmakers. In the recent past, the trend has shown that when films show at FESPACO and get good reviews, they turn to move on to other festivals that recognise African films, for instance *Juju Factory* (2007) and *Coeur du Lion* (2008) by Balafu Bakupa-Kanyinda and Boubakar Diallo respectively. Consequently, they secure distribution deals outside Africa. Diallo’s *Sofia* (2004) after showing at the 2005 edition of FESPACO, has gone to win awards at other festivals such as AMAA in Nigeria and secured a digital distribution deal with a French based internet distribution site www.w4tch.tv.

As the continents leading film festival, FESPACO uses its privileged position to offer a neutral platform for filmmakers to express their craft. The few countries on the continent which are lucky to have thriving film industries sometimes introduce and implement strict regulations that are counter-productive to the sector. In Senegal for instance, there have been occasions where films have been censored, consequently preventing public distribution and exhibition. An example in recent times is the film *Karmen Gei* (Joseph Gaï Ramaka, 2001) which was banned in 2001 after pressure from a religious group. Under such conditions filmmakers find the environment hostile and unattractive to work in. Burkina Faso via FESPACO.
offers an avenue for films coming from such countries to play to the diverse audience that the festival attracts.

Regarded as a leader in filmmaking, Burkina Faso therefore is very receptive to all the realities, challenges and the possibilities that confront filmmaking in Africa. It then takes up the challenges through its programmes such as seminars, training of trainers, master classes, etc. during and after the festival season to improve Africa’s understanding of filmmaking. The zero tolerance of film censorship by the regulatory institutions and the FESPACO secretariat can be regarded as boding well for the nurture of creative talents that are emerging across the continent as a result of digital video technology.

Taking as example, Desiré Ekaré’s 1985 film, *Visages des Femmes*, would be regarded by some African governments as a variety of pornography and therefore have difficulty passing censorship test in most African nations. It was however, accepted at the festival in 1987. The film had brought a new approach to filmmaking in Africa. Branching from the established formulae of treating themes related to African heritage and culture, Ekaré ventured into new grounds and the feedback according to one of the festival programmers at the time paid off the gamble. Talking to me about the film, Médé says that:

> There were naked women in the film. When he came he asked me, (at that time I was the President of Programming of FESPACO), whether it will be accepted. I said there is no
censorship, so if you think that your film can go through, I am sure it will. It is the audience who will judge. But you have your freedom, liberty of expression, so you have to express yourself. People will judge, they also have the liberty of opinion and they will also judge what you are doing. So that film did a very big record of audience. And when people were going out of the film any time, I was always at the end of the programme to hear what people will say. They will say oh no this film, oh no this film, but they rush to go and see it. So this is the possibility given by Burkina Faso to people, first to see what filmmakers are doing, the progress of filmmaking and also the possibility for the filmmakers to express themselves. (Méda, Interview, 26/05/2007a).

The point Méda emphasises above is worth analysing in the context of this research. FESPACO and Burkina Faso recognise that filmmaking is a creative process. As such the very best comes out of practitioners if they work in enabling conditions that are without recriminations. On another level, the above view shows the importance and the symbiotic relationship filmmakers and audience have. They need each other to make the cinematic experience complete. It will therefore not be out of place to suggest that Méda’s assertion above can be extrapolated to give audience that watchdog role which is backed by their acceptance or rejection of a film product depending on the specific circumstance.
It is easy to talk of liberties or giving liberties to filmmakers. They may have the freedom to express themselves, but if they do not have the means to actualise those liberties, it means that economically they are censored. It is therefore not enough for FESPACO and Burkina Faso to offer liberties that otherwise would have been denied some filmmakers in their home countries. It is one thing providing the platform where people can express those liberties of creative expression and another to actually empower them to be able to turn their creative ideas into finished film products. Economically and facilities wise, where for many years it has been almost always impossible to secure funding or acquire facilities to do a project, in the spirit of South-South cooperation, as shall be discussed later in this Chapter, Burkina Faso has always offered and continue to do so in the area of providing facilities: crew facilities, equipment facilities to national, local independent filmmakers as well as to African filmmakers who want to co-produce with Burkina Faso.

Given her leading role, it is therefore critical that Burkina not only rebuffs censorship, but also extends its pool of resources to all those who require them in order that they maximise the freedom of creative expression that exist. Besides the political and economic implications, the social implications of cinema can not be ignored. Programming sometimes controversial films during the festival help to bring filmmaker and audience together for an experience. The result of the interaction normally will have far reaching implications for the filmmaker’s future projects. The adoption of an open minded approach toward the opportunities and possibilities of new technologies makes it easier for FESPACO to engage with the
emerging filmmakers in constructive discourse aimed at redefining how films are, and can be made. As indicated earlier, in 2001 FESPACO organised the first forum on new technologies. It focussed on cinema and new technologies and the perspectives of African filmmakers on the emerging technologies on their work. Again during the 2007 edition FESPACO held a workshop that discussed the concept of African cinema in digital times (see Appendix 2).

The liberties that Burkina Faso and FESPACO guarantee filmmakers have the potential to generate diversity of projects. That diversity is made all the more relevant by the fact that FESPACO buys into the notion of producing films in the most economical way possible without compromising on quality and values using new digital technologies. The notion of creating diversity is further highlighted by the way the festival is programmed. Films are programmed under three major categories. The first category is African films made by African filmmakers that treat issues pertinent to Africa. The second category is films by the diaspora filmmakers of African origin for the diasporic audience and the third category is the world filmmakers. Films in the third section are films about Africa or on Africa, and they are either shot in Africa or they deal with African issues. This not only creates an expanded arena for experiencing diversity, it also extends into geopolitical spheres. The relative strengths of each category are put in the spotlight, and new approaches to filmmaking learnt. As a consumer of filmmaking technology, African filmmaking interacts with the rest of the world as a result of the programming strategy of FESPACO.
The global awareness the festival gets as a result of the countries and media professionals attending is big publicity for the emerging filmmakers in the region and beyond. Between 2001 and 2009 (see Table 4 below), the number of countries that have attended FESPACO has averaged seventy-nine while the number of media professionals in attendance has averaged 2998.

Table 4: FESPACO Festival Attendance Statistics: 2001 – 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival Year</th>
<th>Film &amp; Media Professionals in Attendance</th>
<th>Number of Countries Attending</th>
<th>Films Submitted for Selection for Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FESPACO 2001</td>
<td>3099</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESPACO 2003</td>
<td>3200</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESPACO 2005</td>
<td>3724</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESPACO 2007</td>
<td>4020</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESPACO 2009</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14992</strong></td>
<td><strong>397</strong></td>
<td><strong>834</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Capacity building; a South-South co-operation: To create an environment that will engender the development of a sustainable audience base for video films requires capacity building on a south-south co-operation model. Video filmmaking, according to pioneers such as Akuffo, has never been positioned as countering Western hegemonic tendencies. Therefore discussions about south-south collaboration should not be read as oppositional but as ways of finding solutions to problems that have long affected film practice in the region.
To deal with the possible short fall in production levels that can impact the efficient functioning of exhibition systems requires that majority of the traditional filmmakers accept that the digital is here and make the best out of it. The fear of foreign domination in the digital exhibition systems only gains traction when traditional filmmakers are unwilling to embrace digital technology. As national governments’ support for filmmaking declined in the 1980s especially in Ghana, filmmakers in the celluloid and video traditions have become more individualistic in their enterprises. It is therefore crucial that the benefits of partnering are highlighted for filmmakers. Such partnerships can be negotiated across different fronts among filmmakers such as film projects, equipment and personnel, talents and expertise.

In the light of the above, it is important that filmmakers view partnership as a value that should be cherished. The technical and human capacity across the region can only be harnessed and made productive when the value of co-operation is made apparent. For instance, Méda thinks that “people trained in filmmaking in Burkina Faso usually work in a year may be for three or four months, and the rest of the year they may not have anything to do” (Méda, Interview, 26/05/2007a). Therefore to optimise the existence of this pool of talents and experts, south-south collaboration becomes a sine qua non. They can transfer logistical, technical and human expertise to other parts of the region to augment production levels qualitatively during the period of the year that their services are not required in Burkina Faso.
Western hegemony is often associated with control or power over means of production. Based on that premise, there are geopolitical connotations with locating the means of production in a specific country. To tackle such issues, a rotating pool of resources in the region is a credible model. The power associated with ownership of means of production will be a revolving one, thus minimising the potential for discord among member states. This south-south co-operation model is made more relevant by the workings of modern technology.

The rate of technological change is so fast that most filmmaking gear in the West African context does not have a life span of more than five years. In that regard planning and scheduling of the pool of resources can conveniently be tied to the expected life span of equipment, for instance five years knowing that “within five years we will have new possibilities or even easier possibilities that we can use” (Méda, interview, 25/05/ 2007a). Making a further case for this kind of model, Méda stresses the fact that it will make no economic sense for individual states to purchase expensive production equipment that will be underutilised arguing that “a rotating pool can help to solve such problems of production” such as quality and volume and it is “... a question of South-South co-operation between filmmakers” (ibid).

It is not sufficient to have a rotating pool of resources in the region to boost the development of digital filmmaking. It is also necessary that filmmakers know the raison-d’être for their film projects. Making films to feature at FESPACO to prove a filmmaker’s artistic skills, as the case seems to be with most francophone
directors, is a simplistic view according to Méda. New digital video technologies and their applications and usage by people are impacting on organised political philosophies and common sense with regards to how films are made. Conventional wisdom has it that to be part of the establishment, a filmmaker should have a celluloid film to his credit and it should preferably be shown at Africa’s prestigious film event, FESPACO. The stark reality however is that making film in that format has always been over and above the means of producers, and being made worse by technological development in the sector (see James, 2012). Thus the respective standpoints of organised political philosophies and common sense vis-à-vis high and low art are blurring and giving way to the emergence of a popular culture that is made manifest via video filmmaking.

This situation is made more significant when we give a contemporary scrutiny to the role of FESPACO and FEPACI. The two continental bodies over the years have had to make concessions regarding (West) African film practice in the era of technological development. According to FESPACO new technologies in filmmaking must be embraced and used within the African context to advance film practice. The current digital technologies offer unrivalled opportunities to make the African image readily available and accessible to its diverse audience than ever before.

The experiences in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa indicate that the Anglophone states have a more pragmatic approach to digital video technology than their francophone counterparts. Collaborating filmmakers ought
to be guided by the ultimate aim for their project. The common denominator in all these cases is the audience. The best way to reach the audience thus should form the basis for opting for one format or the other. Video films are products of popular culture, and are invariably a mass market product. It is therefore important that film-makers understand how their product should function in a mass market environment. These conditions are key factors that should be flagged in any South-South negotiations and attempts to pool resources in the region for enhanced audience and production development.

**Geopolitics and film development in West Africa:** There are strong cultural ties among the people in West Africa. This is noticeable by the fact that you sometimes find same families who literally belong to different sides of borders. They are further separated linguistically as a result of the partitioning of Africa by the European colonisers. Therefore in the broad scheme of things, it is expected that there should be a lot of goodwill when it comes to initiating programmes geared towards drawing people closer, and in the context of this research, the need to devise standards that can be workable across the region in the area of film production.

Co-production is one route that makes it possible for nations and individuals to share common goals and values in their production work. Burkina Faso over the years has taken this option in trying to share their experience and expertise with other countries and individuals in the region and Africa as a whole. There have been co-production arrangements done with countries like Ivory Coast, Togo, Ghana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. And where there is no co-production linkage
between nations, individual filmmakers can still benefit from the possibilities of co-production provided they ask for it. What this means is that it is possible to have state and private sector partnership in the area of film development in the region. This kind of arrangement is currently absent in the growing video film industries in Ghana and Nigeria where the private sector is the principal anchor. In the area of film industry regulation and administration, Burkina Faso’s cinematographic code has been studied by other countries who have modelled their own cinematographic code along the lines of Burkina’s, for instance Mali.

Over the years Burkina Faso has often engaged in high level discussions and training seminars across the continent to share what is often regarded as their success in organising their film industry. Key directors and managers from the Burkinabe film board usually are the facilitators at such forums. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, the then Director of the Burkinabe Film Board, Stanislas Méda visited countries such as Mali, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Morocco to give an experience of filmmaking in Burkina Faso. Recognising each country is a sovereign state, discussions are conducted in the spirit of mutual respect with the ultimate goal of achieving some acceptable standards across the lines of film production. A strategy Méda says was very well appreciated by countries visited and by the filmmaking community in general across the continent (see page 306).

In pursuance of finding acceptable and workable standards, Burkina Faso through the *Union Economique et Monetaire Ouest Africaine* (UEMOA), a group of francophone countries within ECOWAS with a common currency (CFA Franc),
have commissioned a country specific research in film, broadcasting, film production, distribution. The findings from a 2002 work have helped to refocus the film industry especially with the exponential growth of new technologies. Again in 2001 under the auspices of *Agence Gouvernementale de la Francophonie*, Méda was sent as an expert to Togo to help revitalize their weak film board. Such undertakings do not only strengthen the leadership role of Burkina, but also bring to light the conscious effort being made to ensure that what is seen as a success in the Burkina Faso film industry is extended to those ready to improve their own industries. Thus Burkina’s effort at setting some standards and to enhance other African countries’ cinematographic institutions can be viewed in the light of the above.

The preceding views would seem to suggest that Burkina Faso’s co-operative spirit is largely concentrated in other francophone states. Although it is a plausible deduction, the fact of the matter is Burkina Faso responds to calls and invitations by countries that in one way or the other require their expertise in any area of film production or countries that have some initiatives in which they require their assistance. Perhaps due to linguistic affinity, they get more invitations from other francophone nations to attend programmes. Much as they like to share their experiences with others, Burkina equally respects the sovereignty of other states. As such they cannot on their own initiative go and say we have a programme that we think is good for you, “whenever we are asked to, we do it” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).
There is enough evidence to show that Burkina Faso’s efforts at co-operating with countries especially in the region extend to the Anglophone sector. The official working relationship between Ghana and Burkina Faso goes back to the mid 1990s when a team of Ghanaian filmmakers visited Ouagadougou on a learning mission. In 1998 a team from the film sector in Burkina Faso also visited Ghana to study Ghana’s booming video industry. Beyond such bilateral arrangements, there have been top level technical working visits between these two nations. Recognising that both countries can play key roles in the development and integration of the region in the area of media and communication, the French government initiated a working exchange visits between the Director of NAFTI and the Director of DCN (now CNC). According to the former Director of DCN, I was…asked by France in 2002 to work in Ghana to see what kind of link we could make of the francophone countries and Anglophone countries with Ghana and Burkina Faso being the leaders. At that time Loh Martin (Director of NAFTI) came here to work and I also went there to work. We even discussed about dubbing of films saying that if we have the films, francophone ones can be dubbed into English and the Anglophone ones dubbed into French. Programmes of training and other questions were discussed (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).

Even though it takes time for some of the ideas stated above to see the light of day, it is always a starting point to making positive progress. Ghana’s modern
dubbing studio, the JRSDS, is one of the outcomes of the French sponsored working visits between the two nations. As stated earlier in the thesis, the studio’s first project was dubbing Diallo’s *Sofía* (2004) into English. The dubbed version stunned even the actors of the film at the 2005 FESPACO. Ghana has a long tradition of filmmaking which goes back to the GCFU era. It therefore makes it easier for the country to engage in film related discussions.

Apart from Ghana with its filmmaking history, if we take West African Anglophone countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia or Gambia, film structures or institutions in those countries are almost non-existent. Not much is known about them and they rarely come to FESPACO, where the opportunities exist to show their films to get some visibility. Neither do they give any invitations to attend programmes to let people know what work they are doing as far as filmmaking is concerned. Under such circumstances, it becomes obvious “why when we talk of film-making you think that it is always francophone countries” (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a). However Burkina Faso has collaborated with Ghana, which is a brilliant dynamic country in video filmmaking (see Appendix 2).

Nigeria, another major Anglophone West African nation with a vibrant film industry, is cast in a different light regarding the mediating role of Burkina Faso towards standardising film production in the region. With its large population, Nigeria’s film industry-related problems are not the same as the others. In the first place they have the market to sustain their industry, which is a very important aspect of the film business. Of all the other countries, Ghana is the next most
populated with a little over twenty-four million people (GSS, 2011)\textsuperscript{22} and the rest ranging between five to fourteen million. Nollywood, as the industry in Nigeria is known, is run as a mass market or commercial proposition.

South Africa also has a specific problem. It regards itself as the most developed economy in Africa. Until recent times it has often shown minimal level of interest in matters related to film production. The country with its filmmaking facilities tend to gravitate towards Hollywood production style. Just like Nigeria counting on its huge numbers to sustain its industry, South Africa counts on her technological advancement on the continent. As one of the leading economies, South Africa may feel compromised according small Burkina Faso any leading role towards developing a standardised African film economy.

Following from the above, there is therefore question of leadership; with regard to Nigeria they have a big market in West Africa where as South Africa considers itself as the richest and most developed economy in Africa. Here then are two major Anglophone states that are riddled with a complex, the complex of leadership, but who can play key roles in pushing African filmmaking to the next level.

The situation in North Africa is not too different. A source closely linked to FESPACO and a senior officer in the Ministry of Culture in Burkina Faso thinks that Egyptian cinema is not very keen on what goes on in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the source, the Egyptian film industry looks to the Middle Eastern
market than it does to the African market in general. Conscious of the impact of Indian films on Africa, Egyptian cinema sometimes adopts the same production style as Bollywood in order to capture markets in Africa where people are still fascinated by Bollywood films.

As a result of that, Egyptian cinema representation at FESPACO is thought to be purely for marketing not for the festival as a celebration of African culture via the medium of cinema. The source (Stanislas Méda) further notes that even the problems of the Egyptian film industry and film activities of its Film Board, does not fit the kind of art film strategies that small nations like Burkina Faso have long been recognised for. Like Nollywood and Hollywood, the Egyptian film industry operates to a greater extent as a business proposition.

**Funding of film projects:** During the entire duration of this research, there was flagrant absence of any organised system of film funding in Ghana. The national ticketing policy proposed in Burkina Faso, where a percentage of gate proceeds would help fund projects has also not worked. This situation no doubt has some implications on the aesthetics of the films being made as discussed in Section 2.6. Filmmakers work with shoe-string budgets and as such try to make the best of what they have.

With SONACIB overseeing a somewhat structured distribution and exhibition system in Burkina Faso, it was hoped that regular programming of films at the cinemas (most of which were closing down anyway) would generate enough
income to support the funding of projects. To achieve this goal and sustain a weekly programming would require a minimum of fifty-two films per annum with a corresponding cost of importing them at about CFA 150,000,000. New technologies however offer audiences diverse forms of distraction and accessing content.

Thus the policy assumed that audiences would use cinemas as their main source of entertainment. It overlooked the fact that piracy emanating from new technologies enables audiences to access certain films on other formats before they get to the formal Burkina Faso market. There is therefore no motivation to go and see such films at the cinema. The failure of this policy meant that to grow and sustain the industry attention was placed on producing and showing films regularly in an affordable manner. It is in the light of the above that the feature video pioneer in Burkina Faso, Diallo, has made remarkable impact in the industry (Diallo, personal communications, April, 2009).

The industry in both countries is therefore based almost entirely on private funding. The way the films are produced to a larger extent is determined by the market forces. Speaking to filmmakers, teachers, and policy makers, it becomes clear to me that filmmakers make deliberate choices in their treatment and handling of themes as a result of the level of financing they have for their projects. The key determinant becomes what will sell in the market as opposed to what has got to be told to the audience along the lines of standard industry norms. The above funding system invariably creates a particular aesthetic for video films
whereby emphasis is put on the story rather than using cinematic language to advance the plot. Using the right lighting, sound/music, camera angles to achieve the right mood and effect calls for extra investment, and that will put extra strain on video filmmakers.

If there are no perceived market potentials for stories that have to be told to the audience, then they do not get the filmmakers’ attention. Contemporary life thrives on interconnectivity in all spheres, thus shifting the focus from dealing with topics that predominantly are pan-Africanist in orientation (e.g. tell the audiences some effects of copying blindly foreign cultures which involves several things like religious beliefs) to dealing with popular themes. The polemical treatment of Africa versus the West is seen as an unpopular subject amongst the majority of video film consumers. This situation invariably compromises the profitability of such a project as it is not a sellable or marketable story presently.

On the contrary, stories that explore drama and fancy for a long time dominate the corpus of films made in the region. If you take a story of some infidel or flirtatious lady going round wrecking homes of respectable married men (*A Stab in The Dark*: Quarshie, 1999) or somebody turning into a snake and going round sucking people or some occult practice (*Diabolo*: Akuffo, 1997) or some trickster going round tricking people (*A Sting in a Tale*: Frimpong-Manso, 2009), audience would want to watch that.
The filmmakers are confronted with making a choice between the economic value and the moral value of the film. Safo suggests that since filmmakers are engaged in a business, and would want to recover their return on investment (see Figgis, 2007: 147), it makes more sense for him to consider the economics of producing a film before any other concern (Safo, personal communication, 10/11/2007).

It is possible to do stories that incorporate both the economic and moral values such as *A Sting in a Tale* (Frimpong-Manso, 2009), but putting too much emphasis on strict academic aesthetic considerations, can result in audience not wanting to watch such a film.

However, if it is very popular thematically as in the case of Frimpong-Manso’s *The Perfect Picture* (2009), you find that audience desire to watch and watch it over again. And as filmmakers or producers, Frimpong-Manso of Sparrow Productions and Onyeabor of Venus Production are steadily becoming successful and are goaded on to making more movies because more people are watching their films. This is why between 2007 and the first quarter of 2010, Frimpong-Manso has managed to produce five quality video films. To attempt any discussion or analysis of any emergent aesthetics of video films means that examining the videos along conventional cinematographic techniques and style (Sutherland-Addy, 2000). But this approach is compromised given the precarious funding conditions under which most of these videos are made, often resulting in the committing of quite basic flaws.
In the light of the above analysis, we find that Ghanaian directors such as Safo and Harry Lord are still very active in the video film business making movies because of their conscious choice of themes and their intended goals for the choice, which is to please the curious audience (Aveh, interview, 23/05/2007; Sutherland-Addy, 2000). For instance Safo has made eleven sequels of *Jezebel*. Despite their technical and aesthetic flaws, the *Jezebel* films have been very popular with the audience as I gathered from the director. This is further testament that technical and aesthetic sophistications become secondary as long as the theme is popular and audience are happy and laughing at themselves through the unfolding narrative.

The foregoing notwithstanding, there is no questioning the fact that West African film practice has been influenced by the film cultures of Britain and France. Filmmaking in West Africa since the early years has often been classified along two major linguistic categories; Anglophone and Francophone, with the latter gaining dominance as an astute art cinema. The francophone cinema benefited from French government support, financial and technical as well as strong local support for the industry by francophone West African governments. For instance, the Burkina Faso government has given support (financial and logistics) to the film sector and FESPACO over the years. On the contrary, Anglophone filmmakers have had to manage on their own to secure funds and equipment to make films. Filmmakers like Ansah and Akuffo I spoke to related that at certain stage in their burgeoning careers, they have gone to such lengths as mortgaging their own properties or their in-laws’ properties just to secure bank loans to make
films. This shows the level of passion some of these independent filmmakers have towards their chosen profession.

The difference in approach and attitude towards filmmaking between these two linguistic blocks is closely associated with the perception of the art form by their former colonial masters, Great Britain and France. Whereas the English used cinema for functional purposes, the French saw cinema as a cultural tool. And as culture is a way of life of a people, francophone West Africa nurtured the cinéphile culture from colonial times through independence to date. France faced by late 20th and 21st century realities such as the expansion of the European Union, a body that France is a leading and founding member, its relationship with its former African colonies have been less intense. This situation has also affected the relationship with its West African filmmaking fraternity in the areas mentioned above. The foregoing points present a compelling case for a regional collaboration in the filmmaking sector where the various states will bring to the table their various unique selling propositions (USPs).

Nearly all the Anglophone West African states have francophone states as their immediate neighbours. In as much as states will want to emphasise certain geopolitical advantages they must not be oblivious of the fact that there are also challenges. The most obvious challenge is that of language as noted earlier; language limitations affect the size of the market in a negative way for film products across the region. In the particular case of Ghana, its northern, eastern and western neighbours are francophone. Therefore, relying solely on independent
national production strategies and not collaborating on the broader regional level, given her small population size, has the potential to down size the effect and impact Ghanaian productions can have, and it applies to all other nations in the region.

West African film and media experts and academics such as Tabsoba, Méda, and Tietaah are all of the view that to deal with the language limitations requires integration and Multilanguage learning. It is also important to appreciate and deal with the Nigerian and Nollywood experience. As indicated earlier, the Nollywood factory allegedly produces around 800 to 1000 video films per annum. With over 140 million people, Nigeria can afford to operate a closed market strategy and at the same time dominate smaller markets. For any other nation in the region or the continent, for instance Ghana or Burkina Faso, to want to compete with Nollywood films in the Nigerian market, means that “there will be little opportunity for the Ghanaian production except if quality was an advantage” to make an impact (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Ghana has often been characterised as the shining star of the continent in various fronts, including filmmaking. On that basis the nation has a certain urge and the prospect for exploiting that leading role that it plays in politics, in post independence struggles and in the film and media sector. But some experts think it is not an advantage that has any significance in today’s digital technology economy where access and know-how is available to all. For a nation such as Ghana to assert a leading role in digital video filmmaking:
There must be a certain institutional and state interest to impel or provide the momentum for a certain leading role. Now if we leave it laissez-faire, I don’t see that coming. But if for example, state or government were to say that now we can make film a leading export commodity/product, then there will be the necessary infrastructural and financial policy support that will reflect in perhaps tax support or relief system, that will reflect in training support processes, even some kind of heritage fund for cultural development and production that will support the institution” (Tietaah, interview, 21/05/2007).

Tietaah here highlights the inadequacies of a free market model. He emphasises the need for coherent state policies to structure the industry. While it is true that in Burkina Faso the state has been more interventionist in forming state policies for film production, in neither Ghana nor Burkina Faso have state polices been formulated with a clear strategy for structuring film production. Instead, in the region as a whole a rather chaotic, pragmatic and opportunistic free market model has been the dominant form of film production.

It is only when the above conditions are activated that the notion of capturing a significant share of the West African film market will look probable, because people would support the film product not because of its ‘Ghanaianess’ but precisely because it is a quality product. That will be the unique selling
proposition, but if that is absent there is nothing that differentiate a sloppy film from, for instance, Ghana from another from say Nigeria or Burkina Faso or wherever.

Film audiences have a certain affinity to the way the film industry functions as well as to individual actors; the stars system. The presence of particular artist(s) such as Genevieve Nnaji, Van Vicker, Jackie Appiah, and Ramsey Nouah featuring in a particular film alone is enough for the audience without previewing the film to go and buy it. So that is one of the ways in which collaboration can help improve quality. There will be the best of artists and crew from Ghana, the best of artists and crew from Nigeria or Burkina Faso, and when they team up, the synergy of their specific talents normally should result in a noticeable difference in the production qualities and values.

This therefore should afford a wider audience’s interest in that kind of collaborative project than if they were individually and independently produced. Examples of such collaborative projects are films such as Beyonce, My Mother’s Heart (Ghana and Nigerian collaboration). This type of collaboration holds prospects for growth in the digital video film industry and it will also help deal with those cultural and linguistic nuances. Consequently, filmmakers begin to breach the barriers by collaborating and audience begin to see the films not as country specific (i.e. Nigerian, Ghanaian or Burkinabè), but as regional films.
Chapter Four: MARKETING, DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION

Every filmmaker’s greatest desire is to have his or her film seen by audiences. However, the traditional models of marketing, distribution, and exhibition used by filmmakers to get their films to the audiences have been monolithic in approach. The filmmaker’s ultimate aim is to recoup production cost and make some profit. However, film marketing, distribution, and exhibition pose problems for independent filmmakers, and more importantly for West African film producers. In this chapter, I will be discussing the conditions under which video films are marketed, distributed, and exhibited, against the background of emerging new media technologies. I will also examine the significance of the home and diaspora markets for the sustenance of the video film industry in West Africa.

4.1 Alternative models of marketing and distribution

There has been a proliferation of delivery platforms such as video-on-demand (VoD), download to own (DTO), portable mobile devices (PMDs), and social networking sites (SNSs). These platforms help to target niche markets. Due to the multiplicity in the delivery platforms, audiences have different preferences for accessing content. Consequently, discussions of business models that serve the needs of the mixed market for content emanating from new digital technologies are complex.
Nevertheless, independent filmmakers, distributors and exhibitors are being empowered by the development of new technologies in the industry. However, the big studios and their networks will, for the foreseeable future, still dictate the direction for the digitalisation of cinema. Michael Gubbins warns that ‘the future of the digital will only be influenced by those in the big tent…’ , but suggests that even though they (big studios) appear to have the ‘whip hand’ for now, it is obvious that ‘no one is in their comfort zone’ (2006a: 2). This means that opportunities for using new technologies to advance the course of independent filmmaking open up, especially if mavericks such as Akuffo, Diallo, and Nnebue can turn their adversities into opportunities, as they did with standard consumer video technologies in the early years of the video phenomenon in West Africa.

For more than hundred years of cinema’s existence, ‘those in the big tent’, Hollywood and European majors have determined what is good for the industry. For instance, 35mm was the universal standard format for commercial film production, distribution, and exhibition. In the current technological landscape, the major studios have continuously engaged their energies and resources in finding acceptable, standardised answers to issues such as Virtual Print Fees (VPF), Digital Cinema Projection (DCP), encryption technology as well as access to encrypted files. The standards announced in 2005 by the Digital Cinema Initiative (i.e. inter-operability, security, virtual print fees) and their subsequent modifications, would have seemed a done deal to industry practitioners. However, due to global influences emanating from developments in communication technologies, film audiences are confronted with choices of access and
consumption of content. This situation means that there is competition among film producers for the time and money of audiences. In the light of the foregoing, agreements and debates on technical specifications and business models without considering the audiences’ interests will be a wasted effort. Audience-focused marketing, distribution and exhibition models become imperative for the development of the independent video filmmaking industry.

The Hollywood (vertical integration) model for film marketing, distribution, and exhibition requires substantial capital investment. Under-resourced video filmmakers in West Africa cannot operate along the Hollywood lines to market, distribute and exhibit their films. More importantly, the fact that the major studios not only control the distribution chains in North America and Europe, but also control foreign territories means that “there is absolutely no way in the world that an independent film-maker can compete with the firepower of a studio in terms of putting their actors or their actresses on the front of a magazine, on trailers, in TV spots and print ads in magazines and newspapers” (Figgis, 2007: 148). As an alternative approach to the dominant model, independent filmmakers have been quick to embrace the opportunities that digital technologies offer for production, marketing, distribution and exhibition.

Both in Ghana and Burkina Faso, filmmakers such as Frimpong-Manso and Diallo are reaching some audiences that they cannot reach through the orthodox distribution and exhibition methods alone. According to Gubbins (2006a: 2) ‘it is highly likely that the new media forms such as downloading and video-on-
demand will play an increasingly important role in bringing independent cinema
to a wider audience’. Such an optimistic outlook means that the occupiers of the
big tent as well as independent producers will have to adapt to the changing
consumption trends dictated by new digital (media) technologies. What such
technologies are doing is challenging the media content access and start-up costs
as well as ‘the preserve and culture of professionals’ mentality that persists among
the traditionalists (Long & Wall, 2009: 157).

Research has shown that audience’s demands are having an effect, on the
economics of the video (film) industry. Video-on-demand, downloads, catch-up
TV (e.g. BBC iPlayer), nVoD (near video-on-demand), etc. are becoming popular
among technologically adroit audiences, especially in Western countries, in recent
years. For instance, the UK Film Council’s statistics on filmed entertainment in
the UK noticed that there was a large potential for VOD (see Table 5). Valued at
€185 million, the VOD market was dominated by BSkyB and Virgin Media with a
combined subscriber base of over 11 million representing ninety eight percent of
the VOD market (Steele, 2008).

Table 5: The Main UK VOD Film Players: 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Customer Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSkyB</td>
<td>Satellite pay-per-view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(nVOD) and broadband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sVOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Media</td>
<td>Rental VOD via cable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: David Steele, UK Film Council (2008)
Are there implications for audiences if the call for the big distributors and exhibitors to take on board propositions from the independent producers were ignored? What is clear is that there are genuine concerns of the economic implications of digitalisation of existing cinemas and video theatres in the case of the West African region. Speaking to the filmmaker, researcher, and policy adviser of Burkina Faso’s CNC, Cessouma, and owners of production outfits in Ghana and Burkina Faso (i.e. Worldwide Motion Productions, Movie Africa/Danfo BA, and Film du Dromadaire), I understood that gate proceeds are low to the extent that the cinemas/video theatres cannot sustain any costs of digitalisation based on box-office returns alone (Cessouma, interview, 28/05/09). Help is therefore required from somewhere to convert the cinemas and theatres to digital projection.

In the absence of this extra external funding, independent distributors’ effort and production levels can be affected adversely (Gubbins, 2006b: 4). Summarising a joint statement sent to the European Commission (EC) by Europe’s film agencies in support of the growth of digital cinema, Wendy Mitchell states that ‘effective support measures with a view to encouraging the digitisation and digital distribution of films are critical to the development of digital cinema exhibition and VOD platforms and are needed at both the national and the European level’.

The viability of any delivery or reception platform under the digitisation of cinema will depend on the availability of content tailored for the platform as well as the appeal of such content to audiences. DVD technology, which is modelled
on a similar technological principle to the video disc of the 1980s, has done very well, whereas the video disc player failed. One of the factors that accounted for the video disc failure, was the ‘lack of available content titles making the device relatively useless’. Compared to the VCR, there was a good amount of back catalogue of already recorded content to feed the VCR technology. The VCR’s added advantage of time shifting (record programmes and shows that could be watched at convenient time) made the VCR all the more appealing (Klopfenstein, 2001: 5). Digital video technology in its diverse manifestations means that the era of ‘control and scarcity’ of content is long gone, and audiences now have ‘pluralism and plenty’ (Long and Wall, 2009). Similarly, the fact that digital video can be tailored for the multitude of platforms, formats, and audience mean that access is increasingly becoming easier and broad based.

The internet enables the transportation of communication information and data (text, audio & video) anywhere in the world at an affordable cost compared to physical distribution methods. The internet has engendered what sociologist Manuel Castells calls networked society. Castells’ theory is that “networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture” (Flew 2005: 54 cf. Castells 1996: 469). At the core of the networking logic that Castells talks about is the ubiquitous computer.
The ability to network implies the ability to duplicate and share content/data at manageable cost through the mediation of computer technology. The computer handles and processes content/data in digitised form. Hence whatever content/data that is duplicated and shared via the network remains in the same pristine state as the original. Consequently, the computer’s ability to reproduce content/data accurately make them become vulnerable to piracy. Traditional models and structures for distribution in the form of theatres or cinemas may no longer be a *sine qua non* for the consumption of digital video products by audiences.

Although the internet plays a central role in the access and delivery of digital content, it also poses the threat of piracy, affecting both the music and film industries. Rapidly, though, the internet became an important platform for marketing, distributing and exhibiting the very products that were once protected from it. Although piracy still remains a problem, the internet nonetheless enables producers to reach specific target audience for their films (Kerrigan, 2010: 193).

The rate of change in new technologies is so rapid that it outpaces the revised business plans of any group of (big) players. To find the way forward for effective marketing and distribution mean adopting a blend of good strategies and policies at national and international levels reached through industry-wide lobbying and consensus building. It is in light of the foregoing that a concerted approach involving producers, marketers, distributors, exhibitors, and government is deemed the right strategy going forward (Gubbins, 2006a: 2).
4.2 Standardising film distribution and exhibition

Film distribution is one area of the film business that has not been properly organised since the 1960s when national film industries began in (West) Africa. In Ghana, the GFIC had production, distribution and exhibition departments. However, due to the inefficient manner in which the production department worked, as a result of enormous state influence, the other two departments equally suffered. Consequently, there were not enough local feature productions to guarantee efficient programming in the GFIC chain of cinemas as well as private ones.

The shortage in production across the region generally necessitated the importation of foreign films. In the particular case of Ghana, the state-funded GFIC and private businessmen (mostly Lebanese and Indians) imported films to run the cinemas. Apart from being entertainment laden, foreign films do not connect culturally with viewers (Akuffo, personal communication, Accra, 2004; Akuffo, interview, 16/05/2007; Aveh, interview, 23/05/2007). By importing foreign films, it means the local capacity to produce was being weakened but guaranteed the continuous existence in business of the private entrepreneurs. Critics such as Ansah have argued that the Lebanese and Indian businessmen were insensitive to the aspirations of the local people, which included their desire to see films made by their own people (Ukadike, 2002: 9).
The above film exhibition trajectory is due to the fact that film exhibition started in Ghana as a private initiative by David Ocansey. He worked as a clerk with some expatriates. By 1925 Ocansey built the first chain of cinemas that opened for business in Accra. Ocansey’s cinema houses include the Palladium, Mikado, Capitol, Royal and Parkes. Over the years as filmmaking developed steadily, and the medium became a major tool for ‘government information campaigns…’ (NMC, 2003: 9). Besides using film as a tool for disseminating information, the newly independent administration saw film as a very potent instrument for ‘national integration, for social and economic development and for the preservation and further enrichment of the cultural heritage of Ghana’ (ibid).

Therefore the establishment of the now defunct GFIC by the Nkrumah government in 1962, was a bold move to provide institutional base for the development of the film industry. This intervention was necessary for achieving the noble objectives ascribed to the sector as noted above. However, during the following three decades, GFIC would be plagued with numerous problems which would see the outfit reduced to a production department of an African Ministry of Information set up. Records at TV3/GAMA show for its entire live span as a publicly funded corporation (from 1962-1996) GFIC produced fourteen features, one hundred and ninety documentaries and one hundred and forty newsreels.

In the 1990s when the video film phenomenon was at its peak, video producers gave exhibitors a steady supply of films for programming. But as the volume of videos produced began to increase, Odoi recalls that film producers sometimes
had to queue for several months to secure slots in the few existing theatres to show their films. Odoi has worked at Ghana Films Theatre, Kanda in Accra-Ghana for more than 20 years and has therefore witnessed the changing trends in film exhibition in Ghana (Odoi, personal communication, Accra, April 2007). It is ironic that some of these same theatres now struggle for audiences (Fig. 8 & 9).

Government policy to privatise GFIC in 1996 and the relative ease of accessing video film production equipment resulted in the over-production of films. With longer waiting times for video films to be programmed in the cinemas, private video showing centres emerged in the suburbs to fill the gabs that the inadequacy of cinemas was creating for producers. Producers would go and negotiate private deals and arrangements with owners of the video centres. The terms of such negotiated arrangements sometimes were that the producer would bring the video film and his/her own personnel to staff the gates of the video centres. After the show, and when all ‘accounting’ is done the proceeds will be shared according to their prior revenue-sharing arrangements.

Until the mid 2000s, the marketing, distribution, and exhibition of video films had also not been given any serious attention. The lack of interest was partly caused by the low cost of production and the ability to recover these costs and make some profit in a single run. The average production budget for a video is between $10 000 and $50 000.
Figure 8: Executive Theatre, Kanda - Accra, Ghana.
[This film theatre is located within the premises of TV3 Ghana, the company that took over the operations of the GFIC in 1996. It is however ironic that this theatre has struggled to get audience through these doors when one of its objectives was to develop the film industry in Ghana. I spoke to Odoi here in 2007 while waiting for an evening screening to start, and visited again in 2010]
Figure 9: Rex Cinema in the Central Business District of Accra, Ghana. [One of the old cinemas I visited in 2010]
Research has shown that a successful video film (e.g. *Sofia*, 2004; *The Perfect Picture*, 2009) can attract in excess of 30,000 cinema viewers in major cities such as Accra or Ouagadougou. Revenue from box-office with this audience size is enough to cover all costs and make profit. If a ticket cost $2, selling a minimum of 30,000 ticket will result in a minimum box-office revenue earnings of $60,000. Revenue from home video market and screenings in the other regions are not included in this calculation.

Although that there is some semblance of a distribution and an exhibition system, these are none the less ad hoc. Filmmakers or producers become their own distributors because of the fear of the very infrastructure which has enabled the thriving video film industry to gain a good deal of visibility outside their immediate precincts - piracy. The lack of what Ansah calls “a well established distribution” system in Ghana and across the region enables self-styled distributors to take advantage of unsuspecting film-makers and producers who hand in their films to them for distribution (Ansah, Interview, 01/06/2007). The absence of a proper accounting mechanism in the video film sector also leaves the field open to exploitation by the smart distributor. Such a distributor, in Ansah’s view, “when he sells a hundred copies, he copies a hundred” and that extra hundred will not be reported and accounted for, thus leading to filmmakers or producers losing revenue (*ibid*).

One of the ways of dealing with the lack of accountability and effective distribution is using Ansah’s “*under my armpit*” distribution method and hoping
the popularity of the film generates enough awareness for people to want to watch or buy. He personally was involved in the promotion and exhibition of his *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1980). This robbed him of time to work on his next feature, *Heritage Africa* (1988). The other, which appears to be the trend, is production houses setting up their own distribution outlets to handle the sales aspect of films that they produced (see Figure 10). This strategy is possible because the films are funded almost entirely by private sources. Ansah’s considered view is that the consequence of this type of unstructured system of distribution is “I don’t see a very effective distribution system now prevailing” (*op cit*). In view of the above, Ampaw thinks that, ‘promotion, distribution, and exhibition must be the responsibility of another person. It is difficult to function as the filmmaker and the marketing person at the same time’ (Ukadike, 2002: 212-213).
However it is not all doom and gloom. There is a sense of optimism in the willingness of established and accomplished practitioners to share their experience with the new generation filmmakers. Ansah intends to use his TV Africa and Film Africa outfits, said to have the largest studio space in the country, to “get involved in a way, a collaborative effort to try and also uplift the image of the industry locally” (Ansah, Interview, 01/06/2007; Interview by Ayorinde & Barlet, 07/10/2005). The objective of Ansah and his Film Africa outfit is that after the studios have been equipped, they will identify and encourage people who have good stories and programmes to come in. Their synopsis and outlines will be developed into viable scripts for production, in line with his mantra, which is ensuring higher production standards.

Haven taken a cue from the experiences the celluloid generation had gone through in the area of film marketing and distribution, the video film generation is therefore constantly trying out new formats intended to find solutions to the perennial problems of marketing, distribution and exhibition. Initially the artisanal nature of the industry fostered the director/producer figure who was in charge of almost all aspects of the film project. This practice is gradually giving way to more professional and business approaches, as illustrated in Figure 20.
Creating an audience; a case of physical and psychological availability of videos: Having emerged and developed as a home video art form, the video film product in its finished state relied on rudimentary platforms in order to reach the ultimate consumer, the audience. These channels involve a combination of human and technological interventions such as TV, cinema theatres, cassettes, VCD/DVD, and internet in the process before the audience come into contact with the film image. The emergence of video filmmaking in West Africa coincided with the disappearance of film theatres, at least for 35mm exhibition, in countries in the region, including Ghana and Burkina Faso. Some of the surviving ones such as Executive Theatre Kanda in Accra or Ciné Burkina in Ouagadougou have malfunctioning antiquated equipment, spare parts of which are almost non-existent now. With an increasing number of video films being produced, more than 1000 per annum in the region, the problem then is how to replace the equipment in the exhibition centres with modern digital ones that are able to maximise the economic potentials of the nascent video industry.

The widely held view among filmmakers I have spoken to in West Africa is that digital exhibition technology is still at the trial stages. Therefore “buying digital exhibition equipment today means, accepting that you are one of those people helping experiments digital systems” - note that since the DCI announcement in 2005 about the expected standards for digital projection technology, there have been countless discussions and revisions among the world major players in the industry to come to a consensus without much success - (Média, interview, 26/05/2007a). For West African film producers, there is also the added problem of
keeping pace with constant technological development in the image capture sector, which invariably affects film practice and content delivery. Central to the above conditions that affect the production and delivery of the image is the notion of maintenance of the equipment if ever they are acquired. This flies back to the issue of economics and technology in the face of dire socio-political demands that authorities have to contend with.

Acquisition of the top range of the available film gear is seen by some of my interviewees within the filmmaking community as taking a gamble since it may not necessarily translate into acquiring durable equipment. There are uncertainties about how best such equipment can adapt to the climatic and atmospheric conditions in West Africa. Using the personal computer, Méda draws an analogy with digital video equipment. According to him, knowing that the final video product is largely determined by the origination technology:

if we take like the computer sector, we see how things *evolve* (evolve) everyday… if you buy a computer today with a diskette, tomorrow you may not be able to use diskette, the following day you may not be able to use the CD format, even the DVD format. This is in acceleration … the evolution of the system that is not yet standardised. And that standardisation becomes a problem for those people who do not have enough money to engage … in just adventures (Méda, interview, 26/05/2007a).
To engage in technological adventures at this stage requires film-funding: a major sore point for most West African filmmakers, economies, and governments.

On the psychological front, the capacity of the filmmakers to churn out enough content to feed the system is open to question. There is the pervasive fear of acquiring exhibition facilities of international standards, and having short falls in production levels that equal international standards. This position can potentially lead to the situation where foreign films will swamp the exhibition centres once again just to keep them operational as I referred to in the previous section. Having barely come out of a similar situation where Hollywood dominated the African film economy for a very long time, any move that is suggestive in the slightest manner the possibility of western paternalism is deemed counter productive for the emerging video film industry.

Trapped in the this situation, filmmakers adopt ingenuous ways via affordable technologies and strategies such as VHS cassettes, VCDs, DVDs, TV, and video centres to make available the films to the masses whose support for the video films have helped to define the form of West African video film practice. In the following section I will look at the particular case of television and its impact on the video film industry.

*The role and effects of television on the video film industry:* Since its inception in 1965 in Ghana, television has grown steadily. The monopoly of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) was broken in the mid-90s when government
policy enabled private stations to be licensed to operate. There are eleven licensed free-on-air TV stations in operation in Ghana in addition to numerous subscription and satellite broadcasting networks (NCA, 2010). Many homes have TV sets switched on for most part of the day that someone is in the house (see Table 5).

Primarily, television broadcast has concerned itself with news reportage and documentaries, interspersed with light entertainment and sporting activities, mostly transmitted live from the studios or from an outside location where the action is taking place. There are also live discussion programmes from panellists in the studios on current national issues or civic responsibilities.

In the light of the above, viewers therefore associate television with the presentation of factual issues or true events in the society. My grandmother, who had never gone to watch any movie on the big screen in a cinema but saw films on television, thought of Westerners as *killers* because Hollywood films that she had seen shown on television featured mass killings and destruction. She could not tell the difference between the feature movie and the news report. To her all the images on screen represent factual or real events happening in the world. It is very difficult to explain, to relatively illiterate viewers, the difference between a news presentation and a fictional production shown on TV.

During the first decade of the introduction of commercial feature video, video centres offered a public space for the video experience. With the emergence of the *hardware aesthetics* (Klinger, 2006), video screening centres had diminished
significance as sites for social circulation of cinema. There are not many video screening centres in operation presently compared to the early years of video. It was estimated that in 1988, there were more than three hundred video centres in Ghana’s capital Accra alone (Garritano, 2008: 25). Along with the *hardware aesthetics* comes the home viewing culture, thus moving from the public space to the private and domestic settings.

The local video features are mostly viewed privately by people in their homes where a VCR, VCD, DVD player or PC is available and connected to a TV set. The youth especially use their leisure period after school or during vacation to borrow titles from friends and family, or rent from the few rental shops still in operation. Hence, there is a parallel in the mode of video film consumption between local West African audiences and their diasporic counterparts as I shall discuss in Section 4.5. However, as noted earlier, many film viewers still rely on the television medium to see films. This is because the TV stations (e.g. GTV, TV3, Metro TV in Ghana) have regular slots on their schedules for screening local video films, especially at the weekend. Also, the size of the television screen plays an important role in attracting viewers to that platform. The TV screen does not present abnormally large images as one finds on large screens in movie theatres. Because of the closeness to life and the association of TV content with reality, it therefore becomes very easy for viewers to get emotionally attached to whatever is unfolding before their eyes via the TV set.
Commercial exploitation of video films: It is worth emphasising the point that the video film industry is operating strictly as a private sector initiative. From its beginning till the present, video filmmaking has not had any direct and significant state support in Ghana. Government’s position on the video phenomenon as it is now could well be described in Akomfrah’s words as ‘total indifference’ (personal communication, April 2004). It is important to note the profile of the home market that producers target. This market is mostly made up of the urban lower and aspiring middle class, and it is multi ethnic in nature (see Figures 9-11). The use of the official language in Ghana, English, in the films makes their appeal cut across all the ethnic groups.

The provisional results of Ghana’s 2010 census put the country’s population at a little over twenty-four million people (GSS, 2011: 9). There are eighteen different languages beside the dialects. If compared to other nations such as Nigeria, (with a population of over a hundred and forty million), Ghana’s home market is surely not that big. Given such marked differences in numbers, what is important for filmmakers is the loyalty of the home market. Their continuous patronage of the films is crucial for the sustenance of the industry. The different language groups do not constitute large numbers as to justify using local languages for films. Therefore producers who choose to shoot films in local languages may be taking a gamble.

It is therefore not surprising that Kofi Yirenkyi, one of the good directors in Ghana returned to the use of English language in his films after doing two films in
a local language. His reason for using the vernacular was to liberate the actors from self-consciousness when using a foreign language. The problem with this production style is that local language films are unable to reach about 70% of the population who are reachable through English, and this has serious economic implications. Although Yirenkyi’s two local language films *Sika Sumsum* (1991) and *Kanana* (1992) technically were brilliant, they were not popular, as his *Heart of Gold* (1993) that was shot in English later.

In the bid to structure and streamline the industry in the true spirit of commercialism, a couple of companies have been established that oversee the distribution and marketing of videos. The interesting thing, however, is that some of these companies are also involved in the production of films. Notable among them are Miracle Films, Alexiboat Productions, Danfo BA, Princess Film and Despite Productions in Ghana. These companies have networks and agents in the major cities and towns of Ghana, as well as in USA and Europe. It is through these local networks that the films made in Accra and Kumasi get to the audiences who are farther from the production hubs.

One other company that is set to give a major facelift to distributing Ghanaian content is Afrimus Ghana Limited. This is an independent company and is not into film production. It aims at finding outlets both within and outside Ghana for the films by organising and attending film festivals. The management of Afrimus believe that in order to broaden the reach of video films, their focus is not only on
directors based in Ghana, but Ghanaian directors in diaspora who want to find markets for their films can also benefit from their services.

The privatization of GFIC in 1996 created a vacuum in the commercial exploitation of films as exhibition theatres were converted into churches and warehouses. The few remaining ones are recording declining numbers at showings partly because people are reluctant to go out especially at night due to incidence of crime in the cities and urban centres. The decline in numbers at cinemas is countered by increased household ownership of television sets. Such opposing trends emphasise the point made earlier that audiences prefer to have entertainment in the convenience of their homes. The popularity of Ghanaian and African video films among (television) viewers make programming African content a must for television stations in Ghana and across West Africa (see Table 5). In the Ghana All Media and Products Survey (GAMPS) report, TV viewing habit was 76% and ownership of television sets was about 50% (GAMPS, 2001). From the same findings any time a Ghanaian or African movie is shown, an estimated 400 000 viewers are reached just in Accra alone.

Beside the television networks, VCRs and VCD/DVD players are standard appliances owned by Ghanaians and Burkinabes. Like in America in the 1980s VCRs are commonly ‘used for viewing feature films on cassettes rented or purchased at the video stores’ (Sklar, 2002: 426). In the GAMPS survey cited above, the purchase of VCRs in Ghana rose by 17% and the same percentage was
estimated for planned purchase the following year. Such developments explain the phenomenal boom in the video film sector in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

A BBC World Service Trust (WST) research in 2006 also made some interesting findings on TV ownership and viewing. As illustrated in Table 5, between 2004 and 2006, nearly half the population (46.9%) owned a TV set, and there was an access rate of 79.5%. More than half the population between 2000 and 2006 watched TV at least once a week, and more than 33% watched TV every day. The GAMPS findings and that of the BBC WST show consistency in ownership, viewership, and acquisition trends of television and consequently the impact on the film industry. The BBC WST figures particularly expose the problem of lack of consistent and credible media and communication data (in Africa).

Table 6: TV Ownership and Viewership: Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ownership (%)</th>
<th>Access (%)</th>
<th>TV Watched Once a Week (%)</th>
<th>TV Watched Everyday (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National 1997-2003</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 2004-2006</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2003</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2006</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2003</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2006</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BBC WST (2006)²⁷

Current figures from Ghana’s Ministry of Trade and Industry also indicate an increase in television imports into the country. From January 2007 to June 2010, over three million TV sets were imported into the country. The above numbers show that there is a growing demand for the product (NCA, 2010: 23).²⁸ The
above trends and developments are significant for developing the ancillary distribution and exhibition markets of the video industry. This is because the technological and infrastructural base is being laid that facilitates the target markets’ compliance and readiness to consume the films tailored for release on that platform. In the light of the above, films produced by Ghanaians or co-produced between Ghanaians and Nigerians are shown in the cinemas and video theatres for a couple of weeks after which they are marketed as home videos on VCD or DVD formats.

In Figures 10 to 13, we see the different types of business set-ups engaged in the commercial exploitation of video films. These range from the single mobile vendor in the streets to the well set up and licensed official distributor in the shopping mall. Their services help to identify and deliver the biggest possible audience for every video film released. My observations suggest that they offer tailored and audience-centred distribution. This is not only crucial for the commercial success of the specific films in question, but for the overall development of the industry.
Figure 11: Road side VCD/DVD Solo Marketer/Vendor in Ghana. Picture by Author (2010)

[This type of distribution helps to profile the audiences of video films, as not every viewer will use the above sales point to purchase video films.

Figure 12: Market Store CD/VCD/DVD Distributor/Marketer/Vendor. Picture by Author (2010)
[This type of outfit has viewing equipment in place to enable customers to preview films of their choice before purchase. This reduces the chance of buying a defective disc, as returning faulty items are not guaranteed].

Figure 13: CD/VCD/DVD Distributor (Silverbird Cinema & Lifestyle Store in Ghana). Picture by Author (2010)

Beside the above direct-to-consumer distribution approach, producers in Ghana have also come out with other innovative methods of connecting their audiences with their films in order to have the desired commercial and social impact. One of such methods, I refer to as the float distribution. After the films have gone through the theatres, mass copies are produced (between 40 000 and 70 000 copies) destined for the home exhibition market and accredited retail shops. A day is fixed and advertised on television and radio. On the D-day about eight hundred people, mostly young men who have been recruited go on a float on long trucks and lorries, amidst much carnivalesque fanfare, for the whole day selling the video films to the general public at a slightly discounted rate. This distribution
system is mostly undertaken in Accra and Kumasi, the two most populous cities in Ghana.

In order to improve this distribution system, the Film and Video Producers Association of Ghana (FIPAG) is planning to widen the scope to include all the ten regions of Ghana. Regional agents will oversee and coordinate the distribution of films at the regional level. As soon as a film is released, copies will be sent out to these regional representatives. Apart from coordinating sell-through activities of retail shops, their main task is to plan and execute simultaneous float distribution.

4.3 Marketing video films

As the Ghanaian film industry is undergoing changes along its business and creative processes, particular importance and attention is being put on marketing Ghanaian content abroad. To become competitive in the international film marketplace, the Ghanaian industry must explore ground-breaking methods of marketing and promotion of its films. Establishing deeper relationships with distributors, acquisitions executives, sales agents or increased presence at recognised film festivals and markets can do this. In this manner they will be offering the industry and its films exposure to territories beyond the Ghanaian diaspora.

Ghanaian films need to take the appropriate entry route by way of marketing and publicity. The marketing and advertising effort must be coordinated and on a
bigger scale than it is now. In England for example, there are Ghanaian and African video rental and sales shops serving principally the diaspora market (see Section 4.5 for detail). In various stores (Examples include East Street Market in Camberwell, Money Matters Shop at Dalston Market in Hackney, Kumasi Market in Peckham) one can get Ghanaian videos films to rent or buy. However, the problem with this type of marketing and distribution is that the shops that sell the films do not operate solely as video distribution shops as we saw above with the set up in Ghana. In such conditions it is not possible for them to undertake any serious advertising and promotional campaigns that will create the awareness for the videos. A sustained presence in target markets both at home and abroad is important. The importance of this strategy is that it would provide Ghanaian and West African filmmakers with a sense of sustained achievement, visibility as well as international presence.

There are a number of African owned and run channels on the Sky Digital satellite that show Ghanaian and other West African films. However, the present situation where some of the films and TV series are rerun several times is an indication of limited titles. This offers opportunities to filmmakers, producers, and distributors. Filmmakers need to take advantage of the limited African content on these channels to negotiate favourable TV broadcast deals, a view echoed by Mr. Fritz F. Andoh, former Minister/Counsellor in charge of Information at the Ghana High Commission in London. Apart from the financial benefits that the producers will derive from the sale of broadcast rights, they will also be marketing corporate Ghana or West Africa to the Sky audience.
Furthermore, there is a big potential market on the African continent that needs to be harnessed. To be able to exploit this market requires both content creators and carriers to leverage the advantages of new technologies of satellite broadcasting, Internet and telecommunications, as well as smart communication devices. In the area of satellite television, the leading continental private satellite TV broadcaster is Dstv, part of the M-Net group. Dstv have dedicated movie channels, the *African Magic* and *Africa Magic Plus* channels that screen African films.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Three, Ghanaian and other African films are being acquired by M-Net. This means that all the films being acquired eventually will get a pan-African exhibition when shown on the network. On the surface this looks very positive for the film industries in Africa. However, there is a caveat which is associated with economics of accessing satellite broadcasting, which is largely subscription based. For African consumers, satellite dishes and set top boxes (i.e. Personal Video Recorder, Integrated Receiver Decoder) are expensive items. John Badenhorst estimates that beside the monthly subscription fee, it will cost around 1500 US dollars to have the service installed (2000: 159). This can have negative consequences on reaching mass audiences on the continent via satellite TV unless such screenings are routed through national networks that offer free viewing.

The filmmakers need to look beyond the West African diaspora audience in foreign markets and woo other nationals. If variety actually is the spice of life, it
stands to reason that there are non-Ghanaians and non-West Africans who want to sample the African cinematic diet. This can only occur when films from the region are given promotional hype. It is however, worth stressing that a good film in the real sense of the word, should rise above cultural and language obstacles and be able to do well in any (foreign) markets. The fact that Ghanaian and Burkinabe videos are in the main done in the English and French languages respectively give them the opportunity to reach a wider audience both within and outside of the region.

To be able to capture mass audiences at home and especially abroad also depends on creating awareness of style, genre, and popular taste. These conditions are also necessary for the development of a distinctive brand of a West African video film product. Given the current state of affairs where access to institutional funding is non-existent, it is imperative that the video industry consolidates its hold on the local and diaspora audiences. These sets of audiences provide an important economic mass for the sustenance of the video industry. Strategic partnerships through the marketing of Ghanaian and Burkinabe content internationally can provide filmmakers with a platform to meet potential collaborators, audiences, and would-be customers.

It is important for filmmakers to use the services of marketing experts and agents. It is important that the producer has a mechanism for commercialising the completed film product in place even at the scripting stage. This has the advantage of making available a plethora of funding options that can be sourced and
crystallised before principal shooting commences. Marketing and advertising experts can approach advertisers for discussions on the viability of the filmmaker’s project. In the event of associative publicity of any sort coming up, this can normally form part of the general agreement for advertising that will be signed. In this regard a synergy will be created, which has to be recognized and considered while finalising any deal. More importantly, advertisers also have to quantify and qualify the reach that the film product gets. If the deliverables are acceptable, financiers can then commit revenues right from the scripting stage. It is important that producers are directly involved in any negotiations since such deals have to be struck at the highest level possible. By allowing marketing and distribution experts to bear the burden of publicity the filmmaker can save money and time that can be invested into improving the creative aspects on the film project.

4.4 Creating new models: The D-170 Plus and Gated Community Models

The moment a person takes the decision to go into (commercial) filmmaking, it is a foregone conclusion that, that product must go into the public domain, it must be seen by the viewing audience. Due to the fact that some level of investment goes into making a film, its success quite often is determined by the number of people who pay to access the film irrespective of the channel, and the proper payment accounts rendered to the director/producer/distributor. Viewed in this context, distribution becomes one of the most important aspects of filmmaking (Figgis,
2007: 147). However, film industry experts in (West) Africa are unanimous that film distribution, it is one area where they have the biggest problem.

West African filmmakers want to make profits, but are confronted with the chronic problem of the lack of organised distribution and exhibition system, simply because there are no proper distributors. As a consequence, the producer or director of a film frequently doubles up as a distributor. Hence, in Akuffo’s view, it makes the work of the filmmaker very ‘tedious because you have made a film and have to put it in your car and start to market it around’ (Akuffo, Interview, 16/05/2007).

We can analyse the history of video filmmaking in West Africa (especially in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Nigeria) to show that very ordinary business propositions can turn out to be successful models. Having used basic video technology to tackle the dearth of local audiovisual content, simplistic as it may seem, some practitioners think that the solution to the distribution and exhibition problem partly lie in taking advantage of existing local institutions and structures. Just as video technology was appropriated, these institutions and structures can also be appropriated.

Formal exhibition structures across West Africa have been on the decline since the 1990s. On an informal and semi-structured level, video film viewing has endured in different forms. For instance, it was and still is usual to meet a few people, in a make-shift ‘cinema’, sometimes in a bar. Buying a drink allows
customers to watch video films, which are often shown on TV screens connected to a VCD/DVD player or VHS player. Real commercial exhibition in purposefully built cinemas became nearly non-existent following the privatisation of GFIC, until the opening of the Silverbird Cinema in Accra in 2008.

With cinema houses all sold into churches and warehouses, filmmakers, producers and film enthusiasts over the years have tried different models to rejuvenate the film viewing and cinema attendance culture, but have not been very successful. In the mid 2000s, a group of cinema lovers came together and tried organising exhibition of some of the local productions at the International Conference Centre (ICC) in Accra. As the ICC is owned by the State, that meant hiring a wing of the facility that is suited for film exhibition every weekend. The cost of hiring and paying bills for electricity and other overheads did not make it a profitable venture. As they began to operate at a loss due to low admissions, they had to stop. Another group also started at the National Theatre (NT), but they also had to stop because of low attendances. The above attempts and failures indicate that the need to see films exist but the appropriate distribution and exhibition models are yet to be identified and developed.

In an effort to come up with indigenous solutions to the distribution and exhibition problems, two models have been considered. These models generate some buzz with filmmakers and people closely connected to the video film industry in Ghana. The first of these models is what I call “The D-170 Plus” and the other one is the “Gated Community Model”. Ghana has about 170
administrative districts and the National Commission on Culture (NCC) has offices in all these districts. Through a private sector-government partnership scheme, the district cultural centres could be upgraded to theatres with government funding as part of efforts to develop the cultural industry as captured in the Ghana Cultural Policy document (NCC, 2004). If the said project is implemented:

> It will serve a dual purpose: one when the films are produced, we will have a place to show them. So we can make some box-office returns. At the same time the same venues could be used in educating our people (Akuffo, Interview, 16/05/2007).

As noted earlier in Chapter Three, one of the post independent problems associated with the film is its role in society. What the D-170 Plus model proposes to achieve is harmonising the informational and entertainment functions of film, in other words bringing the artistic and the popular roles of films together. For instance in 2007 when the Ghana government embarked on its new currency redenomination exercise, under the D-170 Plus model, all the government agency charged with that exercise had to do were to commission a little documentary on the subject.

The finished product will form part of the programming and scheduling in all 170 district theatres. Such public service films will be shown to that captive audience before the main film start. This resembles the pre-independence era model of the
British Newsreels in Ghanaian mediascape. Often full of topics of varying interests, the newsreels were shown in the cinemas before the main show and also during the interlude. If the government agencies are convinced that by doing these documentaries in the dominant dialects of the districts will result in better engagement with the issues, central government can make policies to that effect. And because it is coupled with entertainment film and the audience are already subsume in that group chemistry in the theatre, they are bound to watch.

The D-170 Plus model has two potential economic benefits. In the case of Ghana, the decentralised system of local government makes it imperative for the district assemblies to undertake income generation ventures to supplement central government’s allocations to the districts. Lotteries are one method councils are using to generate funds. So if the councils provide the theatres that meet acceptable viewing conditions, they become owners of the facilities. A revenue sharing arrangement can then be worked out between the producers and the local, municipal and metropolitan assemblies. This means that they will be entitled to a percentage of the box-office proceeds, thus offering the district councils another way of generating income. This is an interesting concept because it would produce 170 theatres or mini theatres across the country. This would be a very big boost for the film industry.

This is how D-170 Plus is supposed to work. When a new film is released, producers make 170 master copies on the acceptable format. These copies will be sent to all the district councils via the 170 representatives of the producers for
theatrical screening. Details of how long a film should run in the theatres also need to be worked out in order that films can optimise the theatrical release window. Depending on the popularity of a film, re-runs can be factored into whatever arrangements that are drawn so as to maximise the commercial potentials of a film. With this model, at the end of a film’s run in the theatres, there are two outcomes envisaged; the educational and commercial propositions of filmmaking. The audience get to be educated on the issues of national interest as well as enjoy the popular films. Secondly, looking at the economics side, some money is made for both the film producer and for the district councils.

Piracy is endemic in the region, and the absence of contractual agreement between so called distributors and producers means films often get to the pirates. As a result, there is scepticism about the above model. So “most of them are even scared to give their films to people thinking that somebody might go and pirate” (Akuffo, interview, 16/05/2007) them and making more money than the filmmakers. Some filmmakers personally carry their films with them to every screening venue, to ward off the pirates.

It is important to create trust and confidence in the D-170 Plus and Gated Community model if the majority of filmmakers are to subscribe to it and stop operating as individuals. This can best be achieved through private and public sector collaboration. When central government or local government provide the infrastructure to support distribution and exhibition, they are not only giving a major boost to the film industry, but they are also complementing the efforts of
the government department responsible for disseminating public service information (PSI). In Ghana for instance, that means the Information Services Department (ISD) will not have to deploy their mobile cinema vans to areas where these theatres exist, thus saving money and rationalising the department’s use of resources. With the theatres in all the districts, the ISD needs to compile all public service information (PSI) into a reel, and if required with local language commentary. For the captive audience, the PSI will serve as an introduction to the main screening.

Despite the scepticism, Akuffo thinks “that is the best bet, because you know definitely 170 districts” theatres are there to show your film. Using a hypothetical scenario, and taking into account the uneven demographic and income distribution in the country, Akuffo’s view is that if you make, for instance, GHC 1000 (£470) across all the 170 districts, that translates into GHC 170 000 (£79 900), and that is a significant amount viewed within the context of the economics of video filmmaking in West Africa. Although in some places box-office proceeds could exceed the GHC1000 figure, using the above figures as an average, box-office takings alone, minus all overheads, could still give the filmmaker encouragement, even before exploiting the VCD and DVD release windows. The more distribution and exhibition channels develop, the greater the need for more productions which could lead to increased production values (Akuffo, interview, 16/05/2007).

Closely related to the D-170 Plus model is the Gated Community model. Since the privatisation of the GFIC in 1996, the production and consumption of cultural
products have been organised outside of the powers of state cultural institutions such as the National Commission on Culture. Video filmmakers and scholars I have spoken to think that private estate developers could offer solutions to the problems of distribution and exhibition.

Even though video filmmaking began at a time (the 1980s) when the economic conditions were dire, research undertaken by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) indicate that there has been steady growth in the general well being of Ghanaians. In *The State of the Ghanaian Economy in 2006*, ISSER indicates that Real GDP growth in Ghana in 2000 was 3.7%. By 2006 Ghana’s GDP had reached 6.2% compared to the UK’s 2.4%. The period in question has witnessed meteoric rise in the construction sub-sector across the country contributing 8.2 percentage points to its sectoral growth rate of 7.3% of GDP (ISSER, 2007).

With the “proliferation of building projects, both private and public, throughout 2006, ranging from houses to roads and schools” (ISSER, 2007: 21), it is obvious that this sub-sector could be a serious strategic business partner or model to the ever expanding video film industry. The consequence of the growth in the construction sector is that there are growing numbers of gated communities and estates, most of them quite removed from the business districts in the towns and cities.
Speaking to Gbormittah about his views on the Gated Community model (personal communications, 2007; 2008; 2009), I could feel the passion and belief with which he spoke about this model. As though to test and proof the viability of the model, he has initiated a pilot project of the model in his community, Sakumono Village, near the port city of Tema (Ghana). As the number of housing estates and residential areas grow in numbers, what filmmakers have to do is “to the estate developers, as they are developing the estates they build a small theatre at those organised environments” (Gbormittah, interview 15/05/2007).

Figure 14: Trasacco Valley Gated Estate: Picture by Sweggs, June 6, 2007
[This is one of the many gated residential areas that are growing in number across Ghana].

Records from the Ghana Real Estates Developers Association (GREDADA) show that they have about seventy paid up members. If we take just the Greater Accra region as an example, there are not less than fifteen organised communities (e.g. Sakumono Estates, Regimanuel Estates, Paraku Estates, Adenta SSNIT Flats; see
http://www.gredaghana.org/greda/members.asp accessed 1/07/2010). If the estate developers and filmmakers or representatives of filmmakers meet and discuss the business potentials, they can incorporate these small sized or community theatres into their building plans. Where the estates have already been built, they have open spaces that could be converted into these theatres. This could produce not less than twenty average size theatres just in Accra alone. Like the first model, having these theatres in these communities such as the one below (Figure 15) will be a fillip to the industry. In addition to providing exhibition places, these communities will also provide locations for filming projects.

Figure 15: Trasacco Valley Gated Estates in Accra: Picture by Sweggs, June 6, 2007
[The above are some of the many gated residential areas that are growing in numbers across Ghana].
Having lived in a residential area myself as young undergraduate, you get the sense that people who live in these areas tend to have the same socio-economic characteristics (working people, educated, etc.). The demographics in these housing estates can offer associated benefits. For instance, where there is a high number of people of school going age, training institutions such as NAFTI can take advantage to show some of their students’ productions. This way NAFTI would be engaging in a subtle marketing campaign via the students’ production. Young viewers will get to know what the institution does and perhaps develop an interest to study filmmaking. Considering the fact that tertiary education the world over is big business, besides showcasing the work of students, the model has the ability to enhance future recruitment efforts of the institutions that take advantage.

In Sakumono Village, Gbormittah’s version of the Gated Community model takes on even a further dimension. Apart from the exhibition of films to the community, he runs filmmaking surgeries for young viewers aged between thirteen to eighteen years. They learn how to handle the camera and make short films. Taking the cinema and filmmaking to the people engenders a cinephile culture in Ghana which at the moment is non-existent. The exposure to the rudiments of the film industry can only enhance their reading and understanding of the film text as they grow. Satellite and cable broadcasters and telecommunication companies can also offer business models for video film distribution and exhibition.

4.5 Video films and the diaspora
West African videos as Nollywood (in the diaspora): The Nigerian video industry known as Nollywood which also subsumes other video film practices in the region has its origins in the efforts of the Igbo creative entrepreneur Kenneth Nnebue. Nnebue, in 1992, devised a strategy of how to dispose commercially of forty-thousand VHS tapes that he imported from China. Around the same time, VHS format was the dominant technology both for production and consumption of video films in Ghana. Nnebue adopted the model from local video producers in Ghana and also in Nigeria. Having recorded his own video in his native Igbo language on a consumer handheld camera, he then dubbed the finished video with English subtitles onto the excess VHS tapes. The video was titled Living in Bondage, and advertised with dramatic posters right through Onitsha.

As is the case in Ghana, most Nigerians who owned televisions also had VCRs. This made the selling of VHS tapes a money-spinning marketable technological product. Like Akuffo his Ghanaian equivalent in the introduction of commercial video production, Nnebue merged the emerging creative video film industry in Ghana and Nigeria with a serious marketing strategy.

The West African video film industry is based on video film and digital film recordings as opposed to the celluloid film industry of Hollywood and Bollywood. “Nollywood” is used in the context of this research to refer to video films produced in Anglophone West Africa with particular emphasis on Ghana and Nigeria. Nigeria is the largest producer of video films in the region, and as such tend to dominate the smaller nations’ output such as Ghana.
The West African video film industry emerged at a moment when West African nations’ efforts at rebuilding from repercussions of Western neo-colonial, political and economic policies on the region could well be described as chaotic. The launching of the video industry bolstered West African popular culture (Okome, 2007). This has led to the production of a new generation of Ghanaian and Nigerian filmmakers. These new crops of filmmakers have created a practicable market for their videos in the crumbling economies of West Africa. More importantly, the rapidly emergent video film industry out of West Africa began to go beyond its regional borders courtesy of emerging technologies such as satellite, internet, VCD, DVD. Video films’ broadened audience and spectator base began to structure along transnational and diasporic formations (Haynes, 2007).

Nollywood as a collective term for the West African video film industry seem to suggest parallels between the American and Indian film industries. Scholars, however, hypothesize that Nollywood is a media genre with its own eccentricities crafted around the wider socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Anglophone West Africa (Haynes, 2000; Haynes, 2007; Esan, 2008). However, the key players in the video film industry are quick to acknowledge the influences of Hollywood or Bollywood on their work. Similarly, Latin American telenovelas which occupy a considerable share of West African television screens offers West African video film practice a model template (Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 2000). Additionally, the cinematic form has strong roots in the traditional and other popular art forms like storytelling and concert party (Sutherland-Addy, 2000; Dovey, 2009).
There are discernible traits of such art forms as folk opera, soap opera, melodrama and cultural tradition in West African video film practice. From the above, West African video filmmaking can be said to thrive on the notion of hybridity, and consequently the films made become hybridized cultural products. Nonetheless, West African videos retain a distinctive brand that caters for the aspirations of the local audience (Okome, 2007). This local focus is manifested in the handling of themes of occultism and the underworld, an imagined African past, postmodern desires of the African metropolis and romances that sway between traditional relationships and contemporary intimacies of multiple and complex affairs (Haynes, 2007; Okome, 2007).

The deficiencies in controlling the distribution of video films mean that the exponential expansion of the video film industry swiftly went beyond the national borders. As Emeka Mba noted at an African Film Conference at the University of Westminster in 2009, Nollywood video films move in the suitcases of Nigerians and other Africans travelling abroad.30 Haynes develops on the preceding notion in the following when he says:

The export of Nigerian films has been remarkable, even if most of the profits do not end up in the right hands. They are on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast with the soundtrack turned down while an interpreter tells the story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, their biggest consumers are now immigrants from the Caribbean and African Americans, not Africans, and Chinese
people are buying them too. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the streets of Suriname, and in London they are hailed by Jamaicans. (Haynes, 2007:106-107)

Haynes acknowledges the transnational currents and diasporic moments that occur with the flow of the West African video film industry. The fact that West African video films are rapidly being distributed and sold in the African diaspora, makes it imperative to develop research that focuses on understanding its audiences. In Europe and in America, West African video films are being purchased by Caribbean migrants, Black British, African-Americans, White Westerners, Chinese-migrants, as well as African migrant groups. However, West African video filmmakers are of the view that much as this diverse group of audience bodes well for the commercial development of their work, they do not consider them as wielding so much power or knowledge that can determine the content of their films or influencing the operations of the industry.

The economic imperative of the diaspora market cannot be underestimated. The African diaspora audience for West African video films in Europe and United States is estimated to be worth more than a million pound sterling. A joint working group of the Association of Movie Producers (AMP), the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), and the Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group (NCWG) in 2006 estimated that around $US 400m is lost annually to West African video films (Nollywood). Over a quarter of that figure is purported to be
lost in the UK alone as a result of illegal distribution, internet piracy, and unauthorised TV broadcast rights (Ayorinde, 2007).

According to a sales associate at a popular London-based video film marketing and distribution shop, the sales made to Caribbean and Black British audiences are beginning to exceed the selling to African migrants. One reason accounting for this imbalance in the volume of sales to the African migrants and the other nationalities is alternative sources of access and acquisition. It is a common practice for African migrants to bring videos from Ghana, Nigeria or Burkina Faso in their suitcases when they travel to these countries and are returning to their host nations in Europe or USA (as noted by Emeka Mba above). Through such practices, African migrants circumvent the quasi-formal distribution and marketing routes which happen to be the only source of access for the Caribbean and Black-British audiences.

However, because the video film economy both in the West African region and abroad is still largely informal, the commercial success and benefits of videos continue to elude producers and directors. For instance, the respected Nigerian video filmmaker Tunde Kelani sees the situation as having a serious negative implication for the growth of the industry (Kelani, personal communication, August 2009, Lagos). For a total of seven movies of his marketed in London, Kelani is reported to have earned less than £5000. As a result he had to turn down a distribution deal of £500 for 500 copies for his film Abeni 2, by a London-based Nigerian distributor saying that “if Nollywood will collapse, I think it will come...
from the diasporan market, where our films are popular but from which we get nothing” (quoted in Ayorinde, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, the video film economy is organised along informal lines. Therefore, the industry does not have effective monitoring structures in place to gauge how much it sells. More importantly, video films are yet to make a significant crossover from being a culture staple to viable commercial cultural and artistic products which can be marketed and distributed using conventional business models. In line with the above, filmmaker Niyi Towolawi advocates a two-tier release strategy for video films. The first is mainstream theatrical release which will enable producers to make some money, and then go for DVD/VCD release (see Figure 13). Towolawi’s film *Twisted* is a testament to the above proposed formula. The film is the first video film to have secured a nationwide distribution deal in Britain with the Odeon chain of cinemas (Ayorinde, 2007).

**Identity building as a consequence of video consumption:** The research data I am drawing from is based on three months of fieldwork in Accra, Luton, and London, as well as from interviews gathered from a snowball sample from participants I met during my field visits. Respondents lived in Accra Central and Legon, Ghana, as well as Luton and London. The Accra and Legon areas are predominantly black suburbs in Ghana whereas Luton and London have very visible multiracial and multicultural populations.
What could be classified as ethnographic data was gathered through multi-sited visits of shops (four were general stores, one distribution centre, and two were African hairstyling salons) owned and operated by African migrants in Luton, Dalston and London areas. During these visits I struck up conversations with shopkeepers and patrons, and also observed shop activity while I looked for West African video films to purchase.

As regular visitor to Central London, I often walk past these shops and have entered several during the course of this research. However, after I officially started my research programme, on the average, I visited each shop not less than four times in a three-year period between 2006 and 2009 (with the exception of the distribution shop) and stayed approximately twenty-five minutes with each visit. As my research work progressed, my visits to the shops were brief, normally just picking up videos and/or talking to the owners who have come to know me as a regular customer. Most of the time, my conversations would be with shop owners, salespersons, and occasionally brief and measured chat with other customers.

In Peckham and Dalston, most of the shops are in close proximity of each other, and are owned mostly by African migrants of varying nationalities, with the dominant nationalities being Ghanaians or Nigerians. This situation in a way emphasises the colonial and postcolonial legacies and uncertainties between these countries and Britain. My interest was to focus on locations of consumption of video films, and see how these neighbourhoods configured identity. During and
after my field visits, I conducted informal interviews and discussions with women mostly aged between twenty-five and forty. Speaking to video film vendors both in Ghana and the UK, a recurrent response I got was that women between the above stated age bracket top their list of purchasers.

My informal interactions with shopkeepers and patrons of African shops showed that the distribution process is inextricably linked to consumption patterns that are as complex as the distribution methods. The film distribution process flows through formal and informal economic structures. Once a film is produced in Ghana, Burkina Faso or Nigeria, copies are sold to major marketers or distributors locally and in the UK mostly by way of physical shipment through a number of formal and informal sources. The video films are reproduced en mass by distributors who sell them in bulk or individually at their stores. Circulation ranges from bulk video sales to African, Caribbean and Black British run stores in the UK.

However, the distribution centres and ethnic shops do not monopolize the bulk distribution of video films. Small shop owners ‘pirate’ copies and sell them individually or in bulk to the community they serve, as well as ship them abroad to countries who demand video films from West Africa. As a Caribbean woman respondent confided in me, she and her husband make copies from the ones they purchase legally from marketers and distributors in Luton and London. As part of the informal and pirate distribution chain, they ship them to family and friends in St. Lucia. The motive is not commercial but an extension of the West African
experience which resonates with the lives of the Islanders. My respondent continued by saying African video films are popular St. Lucia and are shown on television. She however, could not confirm if the networks had any broadcast rights as is the case in West Africa some times. The foregoing re-echoes the scale of the informal video economy both in West Africa and the diaspora that pirates original copies to re-engage in the formal and informal markets.

Just as in Africa, in the diaspora, consumption of the videos are mostly situated in a closely knitted setting such as the households, kin networks, important African functions, as well as emergent local formations (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998:7). Some of these include locations such as hair salons, barbering shops, and social gatherings of various national and ethnic groups. It is a common occurrence to attend christening or birthday parties to find out that as part of the entertainment African video films will be playing on television at the venue. In April 2009, I attended an Angolan friend’s son birthday party. After going through her collection of video films, she decided to zap through her Sky+ digibox to find one of the numerous channels that show video films. She got to the Nollywood channel on Sky network (Channel 329 at the time of writing this thesis) and the film that was showing was to the taste of her transnational guests.

As we all watched the film, some Caribbean guests talked fondly about the films. The dominant view that emerged out these informal discussions was that when they first started watching West African video films, there were some cultural codes they were unable to decode. But as they watched more and interacted a lot
more with their African immigrant friends, they now understand most parts of the films.

**Consumption patterns of video films in a pirate economy:** From my discussions with respondents and looking at the patterns of viewing, it can be said that video films are mostly watched in private spaces with same ethnic groups. Other respondents acknowledged that same sex consumption was often preferred to a mixed grouped audience. In the (West) African social settings, the homes of family members and friends, who usually are from the same tribe, homeland, or at the very least, region or province constitute private spaces. The private space thus becomes an avenue through which the video films are discussed along the different ethnic coding and behaviours specific to each group.

My African respondents were between eighteen and thirty-eight. They were either college/university students, or worked in a vocational/professional setting. One of the female respondents who considered herself as a second generation migrant confessed to hardly ever buying video films. Although she had access to video films, it was usually through the informal distribution channels that are made up of relatives and African friends. Watching video films in her room was a rare occurrence. However, when she did, it was usually with two or three other female students of African origin. In her view, the university room did not come across as a private space like her home. The university environment however, offered a stage where she and her friends could mimic the language, behaviours, gestures,
and noise expressions in the video films. Through this mimicry, they are reminding themselves of their heritage and seeking a new understanding.

Just as you would find in video films, female discussants indicated that it was normal for their parents to speak in favour of marrying from their own ethnic group. In this regard, the watching of video films not only transmits such cultural ideologies, but also affirms marriage and moral codes that operate as an ‘extension of work or activity’ designated for ‘respectable’ females. This respectability is judged by their willingness to stay home at night instead of going out ‘clubbing’ or not conforming to their ethnic mores (Esan, 2008). Esan posits a demographic profile of video consumers. She notes that in African communities, video films are predominantly consumed by women.

The films offer a congenial conduit for emphasizing the moral codes of “home culture,” (i.e. African culture). As Esan notes, African immigrants use the films “to learn culturally appropriate positions to adopt or negotiate”. This was also my impression of my own respondents. Also films become pedagogical material for the teaching of “the younger generation . . . who have a greater need to be realigned with the home cultures lest they become subsumed in the culture of their host community as they adopt less appropriate aspects of the Western culture” (ibid). Thus, these implicit behaviour models that take place in domestic spaces engender the private viewing of video films to a place of moulding the ‘true’ African woman.
I visited a mother and daughter respondents who identified themselves as Congolese to watch video films with them. They told me they mostly watch video films together and with other immigrants who lived in the predominantly Black neighbourhood of Marsh Farm. I asked them if they watched them with Black neighbours. They both explained that they had not before I was invited. They admitted that I was the first male Black African to inform them I watched video films. When I further inquired about the other immigrants they sometimes watch videos with, it turned out that they were mostly Caribbean and some first and second generation African immigrants. The daughter, a college student, said she talks about and exchanges the video films between her and her Caribbean and African friends.

Her friend, a second-generation migrant from Guinea, admitted that she was perceived as Black-British by the Congolese respondent because she did not have an accent. When I spoke with the Guinean discussant who is friends with the Congo/African-British student, she admitted that she was not an avid viewer of video films as some of her friends. She however indicated that her parents watched videos from Guinea as well as Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria. Emphasising the importance of the domestic space in video consumption, she indicated that when she did watch them, it is mostly at her parents’ or in the private spaces of relatives and friends. I also learnt that her father was not very keen on watching video films as much as her mother. His viewing of videos is usually unintended because her mother would normally have the videos playing, and making it impossible for anyone to watch something else.
The recurring views I got in these discussions was the similarities of the story lines of the videos irrespective of the country of production. Also there was a difficulty sometimes in understanding the language. Among second generation immigrants, there is therefore a sense of interference of an intra-ethnic connection.

An African-British female patron at a store in the Luton Borough explained to me that she got obsessed with the video films by first being exposed to them at the African hair styling salon she frequents in Burry Park in Luton. Service business operators integrate video film viewing as tie-in attractions to customers while serving their core patrons in other areas of business. In the Luton and London boroughs, African hair stylists often play video films as they style the hair of their clients. Having seen several videos at the Luton salon, she wanted to see more. She said she expressed her interest of the films to a Ghanaian co-worker. Her colleague often gave her VCDs/DVDs that she had not seen before. The shared experience through video exchanges provided the grounds for discussing the storylines while at work. She also indicated that her husband began watching the movies with her and they would go shopping for the films together. The above examples illustrate the formation of a structure of consumption for video films that move around different spaces just like people move around. They also show video films being a location of ‘transnational’ cultural rendezvous.

Having lived in Britain for over two decades, the husband of the African-British female patron at the Bury Park hair salon informed me that the videos were fascinating and they made him think about ‘home’ (Africa). As would be expected
after being away that long, he admitted that he sometimes did not understand all that went on in the films. Such moments provided comic relief as they (husband and wife) laughed during these discomfited sequences. To understand certain parts and aspects of films that they find difficult to comprehend at first viewing (e.g. phrases or noise gestures, groans or sucking of the teeth), they do a lot of repeat viewing. For them also, the family space constituted the primary site of consumption.

From the foregoing, the viewing of videos in the private and domestic spaces among the diaspora audience creates the condition where viewers’ aspirations are expressed as a two-way experience. In the first instance, the videos offer a sense of inclusiveness and feelings of alienation in the process of negotiating cultural citizenship. Secondly, the domestic video space also becomes a site of cultural appropriation and instruction. The views of the discussants above become an attempt to engage in an intra-cultural social activity. In so doing, these viewers are recalibrating themselves as members of a homeland and diaspora that they may not totally identify with, but imagined to be directly linked.

4.6 Changes in technologies and digital video marketing and exhibition

Video via the traditional methods of distribution and exhibition (using approved mass marketers such as Danfo B. A., Venus Films, Kumasi Market, and Miracles Films) and the video centres no doubt are effective ways of ensuring that the masses are kept in touch with the works of the video filmmakers and the socio-cultural messages they carry. The coming of the Silverbird entertainment group
with its pan-African vision and mission is setting up multiplexes and lifestyle shops along the West coast of Africa (see Figures 8-11).

Figure 16: Silverbird Cinema in Accra, Life Style Shop. Picture by Author (August, 2010)
Figure 17: Silverbird Cinema in Accra, way leading to Screens 2&3. Picture by Author (August, 2010)

Figure 18: Audience queuing to buy cinema tickets at Silverbird Cinema. Picture by Author (August, 2010)
These chains of cinemas and lifestyle shops are gradually getting people back into the cinemas. Where there are no permanent physical theatres, they use mobile digital projection technology to screen popular local content to audiences that are farther afield from the major towns and cities. The lifestyle shops present yet another revenue stream for producers through cross-platform consumption and sales of film merchandise, an area that has been overlooked thus far. Looking at the people in the pictures above, you notice that they are young and members of the fast growing working middle class who have the means to buy any such add-ons emanating from a cross-platform marketing strategy.

The internet and World Wide Web as well as Web 2.0 technologies are presenting new opportunities for independent video filmmakers and audiences to engage in interpersonal dialogue. Since the late noughties, it has become increasingly
popular for filmmakers particularly in Ghana and Nigeria to put their film trailers on the web as well as on dedicated websites where such films can either be purchased or watched (sometimes free or by paying a minimal subscription fee). On GhanaNation.com, Ghanalifetv.com, Ghanalive.tv and ghanaweb.com, you can watch some of the recent Ghanaian, Nigerian and some francophone video films. What is important to note however, is that not only do these channels offer access but they also help to create virtual communities and audiences as well as offer a vital source of feedback to filmmakers who otherwise will not have such feedback through the conventional mode of distribution and exhibition.

The VCD and DVD retail model of distribution and exhibition already discussed does not lend itself readily to customer feedback. These online access models for video films have the facilities for visitors and viewers to leave comments about their experience and also rate the films. As research on online viewership of videos from West Africa is almost non-existent, I cannot estimate the effectiveness of this model and how it impacts the work of individual filmmakers. Despite the lack of research on new media applications on video film consumption, the director of The Figurine (2009) and multiple AMAA award winner, Kunle Afolayan, believes that filmmakers can show that there is a market and how to reach that market. This can be done through the use of an integrated marketing strategy that includes the use of social networking applications such as facebook, twitter, and youtube, as well as traditional media.
Using the above strategy, Afolayan created enough exposure for his film. This translated into increased ticket sales at the cinemas. By end of November 2009, he had recouped about 50% of the £250 000 production budget.\textsuperscript{32} The steady growth in usage of the internet and facebook by Africans as evidenced in the ITU figures in Tables 6 and 7 show that filmmakers, distributors, marketers, and exhibitors have got to pay close attention to these technologies in order to maximise profits. Nigeria for instance, in 2009 had nearly twenty-four million internet users. This is nearly the entire population of Ghana. In Ghana, between June 2010 and June 2011, the combined average of both internet and facebook users is more than a million of the population, that is around 5% of the total population.

Table 7: Internet Usage and Population Growth: Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Pen.</th>
<th>Usage Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>142,895,600</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>ITU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>159,404,137</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>ITU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>23,982,200</td>
<td>149,229,090</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>ITU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Internet and Facebook Usage and Population Growth: Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GHANA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rate of development of digital technology is very rapid. This means that new and complex digital skills are required to keep up with the flow of technological development: a cumulative skills set is required. If you have basic technological gear and the corresponding skill requirement, the chances are that you could be outpaced by those who have access to current technological gear and the
corresponding required skills. However, whereas the access to very rudimentary
digital technology and skills encourages a broad based uptake, the access to
current high digital technology and skills can be limiting.

So the basic digital video technology and skills used in West Africa results in a lot
of repeat and cross-platform uses and in the process users find and assign new
purposes to the technology. This translates into more productions irrespective of
their production values. The sheer numbers tend to catch the attention of people
who work with the latest and more sophisticated technology gears and skills.
Hence, the video film phenomenon in West Africa and its social, cultural, and
economic potential is epitomised by Nollywood success both in Africa and abroad
albeit the problems of piracy.

4.7 Tackling the problem of over production of video films in
Ghana

The over production of video films in the industry means, that the market quite
often is saturated. With a plethora of distractions such as live concerts, stage
productions, etc. available to audiences, it is increasingly becoming competitive to
capture the interests of video film viewers. In the absence of an effective policy
frame-work that streamlines the release of video films into the market, the one
credible strategy is to put a cap or quota on the number of releases per week.

The Film Regulating Committee (FRC) is a body set up with the approval of the
Ghanaian Minister for Information to oversee the activities of producers,
distributors, marketers, actors, etc. in Ghana. In December 2009, FRC tried this approach of managing the release of videos by announcing a temporary freeze on video releases from 4\textsuperscript{th} January to 15\textsuperscript{th} January 2010. The exercise among other things was to enable them flush out from the system illegal and pirated films both local and foreign (Ghanaweb, 2010). In a startling admission, the FRC admitted that ‘Ghana Movie Market is choked with so many pirated, stolen, and low standard movies, which is affecting the movie business in the country’ (ibid). The intended objective in the long run is to limit video releases to three Ghanaian videos and one Nigerian video per week into the market after they have been vetted by the CEBC (‘censorship board’).

The political context within which the Ghanaian video film industry operates makes it difficult to implement such laudable operations. Media works are not to be censored and anti-piracy campaigns are woefully ineffective. So even before the officers of the FRC could start their work, there were already some uncooperative members from the National Video Marketers Association of Ghana (NVMAG). This highlights the difficulties involved in getting a concerted approach to tackling problems of common interests. There are many types of video economies in Ghana and Burkina Faso defined by place and language of production. Thus the variations in the performance of the different markets undermine attempts to cap since some markets cope better than others especially in the midst of the pirate economy.

The success and effectiveness of any exercise of the aforesaid nature means that producers must show an unwavering commitment to work within any acceptable
regulatory regime and policy frame work. A closer look at other industries such as Hollywood and Bollywood indicates that the successes are directly linked to the market engineering tactics that they adopt. Also faced by fierce competition for audiences, releases are managed, sometimes even tent-poled, in order to minimise the effects on over production. This is so because films struggle to find audiences where too many are released at the same time. The creation of an artificial shortage of video films through managed production and releases mean that audiences have a finite number of choices. With the correct marketing strategy, video film audiences will be attracted to these videos and will use all available legal channels to see them like going to the cinemas or video theatres and buying genuine VCD or DVD copies from approved marketers (see the value chain model in Figure 20).

In as much as new video technology offers the opportunity for all to engage in affordable filmmaking, the other side of the scale is that it becomes counter productive when we all become creators of content. In Ghana for instance, after the first decade following the introduction of video filmmaking, a lot of producers folded up because it was increasingly getting difficult to recoup their investments on film projects (Gbormittah, interview, 15/05/2007). So those early adopters who came into the industry purely for economic gains but not using the technology to resurrect and advance the near moribund film industry were the first to exit. For instance, between 1987 and 1993, production houses fluctuated between one and twenty-eight according information related to films officially submitted to the censorship board (Sutherland-Addy, 2000: 278). See Table below.
Table 9: Ghanaian Video Films and Production Houses: 1987 – 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Production Houses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Films made</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The phenomenal explosion of the video film industry during the first decade of its introduction was not matched by a corresponding rise in research to forecast the trend the industry would take and propose measures to deal with it. As producers were obsessed with releasing films for the enthusiastic home video audience, a trend was emerging as a result of the glut in the market place. The inability to have films programmed in time at the few film theatres saw producers turning to the TV stations. Though there are no records of attendance trends, speaking to industry insiders, the popular view is that as video films became increasingly available on TV, the number of people who hitherto relied on the theatres and video centres to access films dwindled. As TV became the preferred platform for exhibition, audience ratings for African films began growing and assuming important marketing and advertising significance for the fast moving consumable goods (FMCGs) industry.

Exploiting a broader regional, continental, and diasporic markets become sine qua non for any long term strategy and sustenance of the video film industry. This broader approach will also ensure that supply does not outweigh demand. With an
economically active population of about 300 million, the ECOWAS region alone offers a sizeable market that when adequately exploited can guarantee producers decent returns on investment (ROI). With the current average rate of investment of about $50 000 on a video film project, such as Run Baby Run (Apea, 2007), Sofia (Diallo, 2004), or The Perfect Picture (Frimpong-Manso, 2009) could reach just 1% of that population, a gross income of $6000 000 will be made when charging just $2 per cinema ticket or VCD/DVD.

To achieve these goals mean that the film value chain must be adequately exploited, and this has began to happen as explained in the model in Figure 20 below. The model shows a typical distribution and exhibition model in the film value chain that is gradually gaining popularity with the new crop of directors coming into the industry in the last couple of years, as well as some of the established producers. With this model, the media, invited guests, and members of target market for new films get to attend the premieres of new films. The films after the premier make the rounds in public and niche viewing places such as the cinemas, theatres, university auditoria, and hotels. It is after the above phase that the film moves into the mass market where they are distributed as home videos. Television showings form part of both the second and third tiers of the value chain as shown in Figure 20. Filmmakers like Akuffo, Ansah, and Diallo believe this model can help to recover production costs and make some profit which can then be reinvested into a project.
These figures will no doubt look good for the average video filmmaker in Ghana and across the region. However, to deliver these figures mean engaging in and adopting the right marketing, distribution, and exhibition tactics. These tactics without any illusions come with some costs because the right calibre of professionals is required to advice and strategise the production, release and marketing of films.

**Figure 20: Emerging video film value chain model in Ghana:**

![Diagram](image)

*Source: Author, 2010.*
Chapter Five: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general consensus among my respondents during this research was that the incremental expansion in availability and access to digital video technology in West Africa has the potential to promote the creative talents of filmmakers. However, the production environment in West Africa as discussed in this thesis, makes it difficult for video filmmakers to realise the full commercial and creative benefits for embracing digital video technology.

The relationship between technology and society is complex, there is no straight-forward cause and effect link. My research has problematised the very thing I set out to investigate and find answers to: the perceptions that West African video filmmakers have of the new technologies, the uses to which they put technology, and the problems that they encounter.

Therefore in attempting to answer the research question, how do the economic, social and political contexts of video filmmaking affect the development of a digital video film industry in Ghana and Burkina Faso? the research suggested the following conclusions.

Theoretically, digital video technology is offering an alternative mode of storytelling which consequently is able to shape the ideological mindset of [West] Africans. Video technology was seen as an enabling technology for people who wanted to tell their own stories their way, without any foreign influences.
Video and digital technologies have equally expanded the possibilities of exploiting the economic benefits of video films. At the same time, however, digital technologies are presenting new copyright and piracy challenges to filmmakers.

Some celluloid trained filmmakers in Ghana and Burkina Faso regard digital formats of filmmaking as delivering inferior aesthetic looks to celluloid. Professionalism, they say, is being sacrificed at the expense of cheap access to digital technology.

The absence of central government funding and national film policy [in the case of Ghana] has created the situation whereby filmmakers offer independent interpretation of issues with no state co-ordination of policy or strategy.

Socially, video and digital technology is engaging a broader section of film enthusiasts. The growing popularity of video films in the area of sales and the holding of academic conferences means that more people are giving more attention to the practice.

The type of funding available to producers at present is a determinant of the video aesthetics. The industry is premised on a commercial proposition where the profit margin is of paramount interest. Hence the choice of topics and subjects for films is determined by the ability of the story to sell in order to break even. Producers
therefore cannot dwell on topics that challenge entrenched positions and assumptions. Low budgets have aesthetic consequences.

Video film practice is positioned as a popular culture, and thus provides a platform for dialogue and exchange of views. As video filmmakers feed into the social psyche, video filmmaking is helping to frame discourses on social, economic, and political issues in society. Therefore, video film practice has become an integral part of the political and democratic process in West Africa.

The triumph of video film practice is that through the espousal of unconventional modes of distribution and exhibition, it has taken West African cinema out of the art house circuit to the ‘mainstream’.

Challenged by the complexity of learning to keep pace with evolving production practices taking place through digital video technologies, filmmakers, researchers and academics, are becoming increasingly aware that the diversity of digital technologies dictate an analogous diverse and mixed media approach to content creation and dissemination.

Video films are bringing mainland African culture to the diaspora, thus helping to bridge the knowledge gap among the diaspora community.

The digital revolution is not happening as expected because of piracy, lack of conventional exhibition and distribution systems, and the absence of national film
policy. But perhaps the mixture of local approaches and domesticating western technology using the necessary industry approaches could still ignite hopes of the digital revolution.

The issues discussed in this research will generate on-going discussions among key players in the sector. I hope that this research will facilitate the emergence of new perspectives that will develop scholarship and literature in this field. In the light of this, I will offer some final thoughts [on some key questions] that have emerged from this research that impact on the development of the video industry. I will then propose some direct and indirect interventions by government and private entrepreneurs, but first I will outline the summary of issues that I gathered from the research.

5.1 Summary of issues

In the course of this research, the general view I gathered from my interviewees is that digital technology offers hope to video filmmaking in the region. Views expressed by filmmakers who have handled professional productions in analogue mode in the years past, point to the difficulties that they encountered shooting on tape, editing from tape to tape. Celluloid film directors like Ansah, Ampaw, Médé and many others, outlined the problems they endured carrying bulky equipment to shoot, buying film stock and their inability to do instant reviews of the rushes. There were also economic and ethical implications of having to take the film negatives to Europe to develop and then go into post-production.
Digital technologies have offered filmmakers (the) opportunity to escape some of the above mentioned problems, providing very compact equipment that is easy to transport to and from locations. All the operations involved in film production are easier to do because they are all in digital mode. Certain effects or camera movements are easier to achieve with digital cameras than with the old analogue cameras. When it comes to post production, editing in non-linear form become a very interesting project. The above notwithstanding, to get the maximum out of digital video and its associated technologies still requires adequate training and familiarisation with the new digital technologies of video filmmaking.

There are also opportunities that have not been explored yet, to market good video films in territories beyond the West African region. I discovered that if a filmmaker is able to develop a very good story, shoot it very well, edit it very well, s/he can blow it up to 35mm film and exhibit it in big theatres and cinemas locally and internationally.

The main problem that still confronts producers is the absence of well-established distribution networks, both locally and internationally for West African video films. Locally there is a lack of theatres. The existing ones are in such poor state that they attract neither producers nor audiences. My visit to some old exhibition theatres in Accra showed that these venues were no longer attractive to audiences (see Figures 8 and 9). Although there were posters advertising screenings, there were no staff members or management to discuss the state of the facilities, a situation which contrasted sharply with the scenes I saw at Silverbird cinema
where there were long queues of filmgoers buying tickets to see films (see Figures 17-19).

Located in a shopping complex, the Silverbird example proves that when film is integrated into the daily activities of people like shopping, it is easier for the audience to buy into the film going culture. It is in this light that the D-170 Plus and Gated Community models could be crucial to finding solutions for the distribution and exhibition problems. However, given the relatively high volume of production in recent times, and the limited number of standard exhibition places, distribution through selling of VCD and DVD discs or even tapes of video films still thrives (see Figures 10 and 13).

Despite the above positive outlook for film distribution and exhibition, buying movies or going to the cinema is not something that is on the priority list of many members of the film audience. Due to low incomes in Ghana and Burkina Faso, there is pressure on people’s incomes and they prefer to wait till the TV stations get films and screen them for free. The above economic condition also results in audiences buying cheaper pirated copies instead of the original (expensive) copies sold directly to the public by the producers or their nominated agents.

Distribution is thus privately arranged, and it is not very easy getting a distribution deal internationally for an independently produced work from an unknown West African director. Equally important is the fact that West African video filmmakers’ uptake of digital technologies is still low. Hence they fail to seize and
take marketing, distribution, and exhibition opportunities associated with using such technologies as pay per view, VOD, social networking, and internet distribution. This partly explains why West African video films are not very popular among international audiences other than the (West) African Diaspora audiences in Europe and North America.

Film distribution locally therefore is not an attractive business. Producers become their own distributors. The inadequacies in exhibition outlets also contribute to the growing practice of producers setting up their own distribution outlets, which tend to promote piracy.

### 5.2 Key questions for the industry

**Expectations of video filmmakers (in Ghana):** Funding was identified in this study as an important constraint to the development of the industry, and the reality is that the industry (in Ghana) is dominated by novice directors and producers. Such directors need international exposure to build a marketable profile, which is good for their own career development as well as the industry. As noted in Chapter Three, it is not all about the size of film budget or type of equipment that a filmmaker has which determines a film’s quality. It also depends on the creative abilities of the filmmaker.

Starting with smaller film projects that do not require huge investment will help to build needed experience and skill. These abilities will become useful when a bigger project is being done. Short and small films that are done well can enter the
festival and film market circuits, consequently giving exposure to the novice director. Through such interactions, filmmakers’ awareness of other film practices and business models will be enhanced as well as increasing their chances of securing future distribution deals.

Therefore, any support to novice filmmakers, both by government and private sector, perhaps should consider a broad based approach where more filmmaking talents will emerge rather than trying to find a star director. The more films that make it onto the international circuits, the bigger the exposure and marketability of filmmakers and industry get.

**Historical apathy:** From my research, I realised that from colonial times to post-colonial era, the film industries in Ghana and Burkina Faso have usually been under the Ministry of Information. This relationship with the Ministry of Information has often been lethargic, hence making it difficult to establish the role and function of film; whether it is a commercial or cultural venture. Under such circumstances, there is no unified approach to fighting the case of the film industry. Also, issues of competence arise, whether those playing the advocacy role for the industry are knowledgeable of the idiosyncrasies of the industry especially in this era of new technologies.

**Polarised industry:** Following the boom of the video industry in the early years and the current resurgence, more people became attracted by video film without fully understanding how the sector functions. As people came into the industry
from different backgrounds, there are tensions and suspicions among filmmakers. Trained filmmakers resent the success of the untrained, thus giving a notion of a polarized industry where some are tagged as unprofessional. In Burkina Faso, such divisions are emphasised through the use of terms as *vidéaste*, *cinéaste*, *téléaste* to distinguish the value of work. Given the above conditions, the formation of guilds and associations are seen as serving sectarian interests, hence not getting a oneness of voice for the good of the industry.

Given such internal disunity, a central focus for filmmakers of all backgrounds to turn to, will be a welcome move. The CNC in Burkina Faso provides this service whereas the GFIC in Ghana provided the same before it was divested. There has been no replacement for the GFIC since the divestiture, thus creating a vacuum and therefore no point of reference and direction. Market forces therefore determine who the successful filmmakers are and which category of filmmakers can cope with the demands of the industry.

*Underestimating scriptwriting:* From my interviews as well as watching video films, I have come to the conclusion that scriptwriting particularly in Ghana has been under-rated. A good script makes a good film and it is an important marketing weapon that can aid a producer to secure funding. However when a filmmaker is the director, producer, scriptwriter of his/her film, not enough time goes into developing the story and characters by way of research. The film training outfits in Ghana and Burkina Faso should therefore consider offering scriptwriting as a single major course.
In the next section, I will outline suggestions that can be beneficial to the development of the video film industry in Ghana and Burkina Faso. These suggestions involve both direct and indirect interventions.

5.3 Recommendations for intervention

Having identified scriptwriting as an integral part of the filmmaking process in the last section, one of the direct intervention measures is creating a script development fund. This fund will be accessible to writers to help develop their stories into full scripts for production. This way the quality of production will improve and hence increasing the competitiveness of West African video films locally and internationally. This also means directors and producers will have ample time plan the creative execution of the written script which no longer form part of their duty. Having a pool of dedicated writers and stories potentially can attract external funds for productions.

Closely linked to the script development fund is the production fund. This fund will help to finance short and small projects hence minimizing the risks (of loss and default). Producing more films over time will help filmmakers build the reputation needed to compete at the international level. The industry will look within itself, in the spirit of south-south co-operation, for answers to problems, and consequently devising its own model instead of playing catch-up to foreign models like Bollywood and Hollywood. The dynamics of the local and
international market should be studied in order to ensure efficient allocation of funds to producers.

The indirect interventions are in three areas; distribution related matter, anti-piracy campaigns, and industry presence at important film festivals/markets. There is a loose marketing and distribution structure in place in Ghana that needs tightening up for it to be effective. The institutionalisation of film awards, special screenings, and festivals for different types of film practice will help build a cinema-going culture, which will impact distribution and exhibition. To achieve this, the old cinemas need to be revamped and new community-based ones built.

In the course of this research, I have realised that piracy is the unwanted spinoff of new digital technologies. The absence of measures to deal with piracy was as evident as piracy itself. As a way of tackling the problem and promoting the industry, producers, distributors, and exhibitors should be encouraged to insert a government or private sector sponsored anti-piracy clip at the beginning of videos produced to educate viewers about the need to protect the rights of the filmmakers.

The foregoing notwithstanding, the weakness of my research was that the issue of piracy which I encountered personally in West Africa and in the UK was not adequately analysed. The enormity, complexity, and ramifications of piracy in the new digital era are such that I felt it would be best to consider the topic for future research.
In as much as new technologies offer a fair amount visibility to filmmakers via a range of platforms, filmmakers through their national governments or elected representatives should attend international festivals and markets. This way the upcoming directors and their nations will be known in international circles and networks. The presence at festivals and markets will help to promote new talents and create opportunities for negotiating future collaboration and distribution deals.

5.4 A Postscript

It is important that video films with all their shortcomings and misconceptions should not be dismissed outright. Video films should be seen as an important corpus of work even if only for their literary value. Video technology is drawing upon a story-rich culture and providing new means of narration. Video films also provide for other audiences, insights into the nature of Ghana, Burkina Faso or West Africa in general.

Filmmaking is an attempt to re-present the world, and a process of meaning construction. However, it can be said that as re-presentation has no rigid formula in motion picture production, there are bound to be problems associated with re-presentation. As cinematic practice offers a mediated access to the real world, we are bound to be confronted with choices and decisions about how to accurately re-present the world which lies before the camera. A little care and time for research and gaining knowledge on the subject and striving for a balance will make a great difference to what appears on the screen and the effects this leaves on the viewers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


**OTHER SOURCES CONSULTED**


LIST OF SELECTED FILMS

The Boy Kumasenu, Dir. Sean Graham, 1952.


Afrique sur scene, Dir. Paulin S. Vieyra, 1955.

Theresah , Dir. Sean Graham 1956.


Kukurantumi Road to Accra , Dir. King Ampaw, 1984.


Harvest at Seventeen, Dir. Kwaw Ansah, 1989.


Traque à Ouaga, Dir. Boubakar Diallo, 2004


Linjia puzi (Shui Hua, 1959)

Memories of Underdevelopment (Tomas Gutierrez Alea, 1968)

Lucia (Humberto Solas, 1968)

Le Mandat (Ousmane Sembene, 1968)

Antonio Das Mortes, (Glauber Rocha, 1969)

Xala (Ousmane Sembene, 1974)

Sarrounia (Med Hondo, 1987)

A Taste of Cherry (Abbas Kiarostami, 1997)
# APPENDIX 1: Interviewees: Ghana and Burkina Faso

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Occupation/Achievements</th>
<th>Interview/Discussion Date</th>
<th>Key areas of discussion at interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africanus Aveh</strong></td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Lectures in film and video production at School of Performing Arts (Univ. of Ghana). He has been involved with documentary, television and feature production in Ghana since the 1990s. In 1996 he made <em>Literature and Modern Experience in Africa</em> - a video documentary on an 8-week Summer Institute in Ghana sponsored by Department of Black Studies, Ohio State University. He also made <em>Commonwealth Writers Prize 2000 Africa Region</em> - a video documentary in February 2000, to announce award winners. He worked on a ScriptNet (UK/Ghana) short feature in 2000 (<em>Lareba</em>), and acted as Consultant for a Zone Production/Delta Entertainment (USA) production, <em>Killing Zone</em> (2002).</td>
<td>23rd May 2007, January 2008, January 2009, August 2010</td>
<td>What is the understanding of digital cinema in West Africa? All participants were asked this question. Does digital video filmmaking offer hope for developing cinema in West Africa? What role can film critics play in the development of digital cinema? How should the training of future filmmakers be organised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Francis Gbormittah</strong></td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Lecturer at NAFTI and University of Ghana, Filmmaker, Artistic Director. He is also the former Director of the African Cinema Research and Documentation Centre (ACREDOC) based at NAFTI.</td>
<td>15th May 2007, January 2008, January 2009, August 2010</td>
<td>Training of future filmmakers. Role of research institutions. West Africa’s participation in global film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>William Akuffo</strong></td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Filmmaker, Producer/Distributor, Proprietor of a film training school and owner of the production company, Worldwide Motion Production. He started commercial video filmmaking in Ghana. His</td>
<td>16th May 2007</td>
<td>Transition from celluloid distribution to video feature production. Government’s involvement in the development of...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Debut video feature is *Zenabu* (1987).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kwaw Ansah</th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Filmmaker, CEO of Film Africa and TV Africa, Ghana. He won the prestigious FESPACO award in 1989 with his <em>Heritage Africa</em> film. Ansah has also been a UNESCO resource person on African film in Zimbabwe.</th>
<th>02nd June 2007</th>
<th>Difference between celluloid and video. Telling the African story with new technologies. Internal film markets.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Tietaah</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Lecturer at the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. He has also worked as research and publications officer of Media Foundation for West Africa, Advocate for Media freedom.</td>
<td>21st May 2007</td>
<td>Technology and society. Democracy and technology. Critics, academia and film policy. Afrocentricism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odoi</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Worker at Ghana Film Theatre (Executive Theatre, Accra) for over 20 years. He witnessed the privatisation of GFIC and the changing trends in film/video exhibition and audience trend at the cinema.</td>
<td>19th May 2007</td>
<td>The impact of new technology on the film culture in Ghana. The changing trends over the years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislas Meda</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Researcher, Filmmaker, Policy Adviser, Academic. A former director of DCN/CNC, he holds a PhD in film studies. In 1989 he made a short film <em>The Guardian of the Fields</em>. He has been on the Board of FESPACO and FEPACI. He also chaired the film market wing of FESPACO, MICA (International Market for Film and Audio-visual).</td>
<td>26th May 2007</td>
<td>The importance of audience. Film language, dubbing and new technology. Collaboration between the cinema sector, new media, and traditional media outfits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clement Tapsoba</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Film Critic, Scriptwriter, Lecturer, Head of Research and Education at FESPACO. He teaches cinematographic culture at Institut de Sons, Image et</td>
<td>29th May 2007</td>
<td>Costs implications of digital cinema. Training, professionalism and film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edgard Bokongo</strong></td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Film student at Gaston Kabore’s training school, Imagine.</td>
<td>28th May 2007</td>
<td>The essence of digital technology to the new generation of filmmakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Madika Kabore</strong></td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Worker at one of Burkina Faso’s biggest cinema – Neerwaya</td>
<td>27th May 2007</td>
<td>Training and skills acquisition necessary for the digital era.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 2: chronology of Organisations, Institutions, events, policies for Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>The Launch of MICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>M-Net/MultiChoice is launched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>MultiChoice launches the DStv bouquet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Draft Film Policy of Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Fespaco Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Agence Gouvernementale de la Francophonie sponsored trip to Togo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>High Level Working Visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An established footprint, and rapid subscriber growth, allows MultiChoice Africa to roll out digital technology across Africa. Offices in Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya and many others set up as well as new franchises launched in Tanzania, Malawi, Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

### 2004: CULTURAL POLICY OF GHANA: 2004 [Excepts]

CHAPTER VII
### 11.0 THE MASS MEDIA

11.0.1 The mass media shall be encouraged to promote national consciousness, national self-sufficiency and a strong sense of national identity.

11.0.2 The National Commission on Culture shall collaborate with the relevant institutions to ensure the effective use of the press, radio, television, film and other audio visual aid to promote Ghana’s heritage, cultural values and aspirations within the context of our national development and the challenges of globalisation.

### 11.1 CINEMA, FILM AND VIDEO FOR CULTURAL EDUCATION

11.1.1 Recognising the audio-visual media as an important means of education, information dissemination and entertainment, the National Commission on Culture shall collaborate with all media agencies to promote the social, political, economic and cultural integration of the nation and thus achieve national stability and peace.

11.1.2 Recognising that a virile film industry is an indispensable tool for cultural promotion, the state shall:

- a. encourage the establishment of institutions and agencies for film production and development;
- b. encourage banks and other lending institutions to promote investment in the film industry by offering special financial terms to film makers.
- c. promote the indigenisation of film distribution, assist in the marketing of Ghanaian films and establish standards in exhibition facilities compatible with acceptable theatre usage;
- d. enact appropriate regulations to guide both public and private broadcasting stations as well as importers of films to safeguard Ghanaian values and the national interest.

11.1.3 The State shall:

- a. encourage private entrepreneurs to establish laboratories and invest in equipment to ensure self-reliance, productivity and viability of the film industry;
- c. Support the establishment of institutions for archival documentation of films and for the training of film personnel.

---

### 7.0 MEDIA-SPECIFIC POLICY GUIDELINES

The following policy guidelines are specific to the different media and media services. They should be read in conjunction with the policy guidelines which are common or apply to all media.

#### 7.3 Film Industry

Film refers to the recording of moving images and sound on cellulose, video tape, disc or other recording medium for public exhibition.

#### 7.3.2 Overall Policy Statement

1. Considering the potential of film in the development of Ghanaian society, it shall be the responsibility of Government and all institutions, government and private as well as formal and informal, to provide support in all forms as may be required and appropriate the continuing development and permanent strengthening of a viable film industry in Ghana.

2. In this regard, the recent growth in “video-film” production and in the spread video centres throughout the country shall be viewed as basically a healthy development which shall be encouraged and channelled into socially useful and culturally validating initiatives.

3. Recognizing the cultural and economic potential of film, all necessary steps, including self-regulation by the industry shall be taken to:

   a. Encourage the production of local films both on celluloid and videotape and the attainment of the highest possible standards.

   b. Provide incentives for the production of such films.

   c. Ensure that productions are in keeping with Ghanaian traditions and mores and promote desirable aspects of Ghanaian culture.

   d. Encourage the extensive use and development of authentic national cultural forms and symbols in productions.

   e. Encourage productions by and about groups and communities that are relatively under-represented in the national film output.

   f. Exploit the potential of film to establish the common identity and shared interests of all Africans and black people and cultures everywhere.


---


1. Vision and Objectives

Vision:

The Republic of Ghana has been at the forefront of the information and communications revolution in Africa for more than a decade. As one of the first countries to introduce widespread liberalisation in basic telecommunications services, in August 1994, Ghana took an important step forward in embracing the potential of competitive markets to generate growth and innovation in the sector…

The Government now intends to build upon the foundation that has been
created by these advances, to bring Ghana further toward the realisation of a true Information Society, which includes all citizens and provides the greatest opportunity for economic growth, social participation, and personal expression.

The Government acknowledges, consistent with its ICT policy, the need to integrate Ghana with the new emerging economic order wherein information and knowledge are fundamental to achieving competitiveness, investment, development of human capacity and improved governance, leading to wealth creation and national prosperity, through the appropriate use of information and communication technologies in an entrepreneurial, open, participating and facilitating environment...

Telecommunications is also one aspect of a wider technological and market convergence, which encompasses such fields as broadcasting, information technology, and electronic commerce, and the Government recognises the need to harmonise its policies in all of these areas. Accordingly, the Government intends to undertake further policy and legislative reviews before the end of 2005, including review of the NCA Act, introduction of a new Telecommunications Act, and legislation regarding Radio communications, Electromagnetic Spectrum, Broadcasting, and Electronic Commerce.

2007: Fespaco Festival
Special colloquium on digital video technologies and filmmaking in Africa.

Endnotes:

1 Some of the outfits I visited include Imagine Training Institute run by Gaston Kabore, Worldwide Motion Pictures Training School run by William Akuffo, Venus Films, Danfo BA/Movie Africa by Socrates Safo, Film Africa/TV Africa run by Kwaw Ansah, and NAFTI.
2 The Ghana Population and Housing Census 2000 report was published by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in March 2002.
6 Jean-Claude Méda is a journalist from Burkina Faso. He made this observation in an article published in a book by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a German NGO that champions the course of media freedom and democratic values entitled ‘State of the Media in Burkina Faso’ in *State of the Media in West Africa 1995-1996*.
7 Stanislas Méda is a former Director of Burkina Faso’s CNC, formerly DCN. He is a filmmaker, film administrator and an academic.
8 Bruce Klopfenstein in 2001 was the guest editor of *Convergence*. He made this observation in the editorial of *Convergence 2001, Vol. 7, No. 4*
9 Terry Flew defines digitisation to mean that:

…diverse forms of information (i.e. text, sound, image, and voice) are encoded in a single 0-1 binary code. Digital information exists in only one of the two forms: 0 or 1, which are called bits (a contraction of binary digits). The sequence of 0s and 1s that constitute information are called bytes. The computing systems...
that carry digital information are indifferent to the forms that were initially transformed into digits, or what the digits represent when accessed by the end-user (Flew, 2005: 9).

Along similar lines of thought, Lev Manovich sees digitisation as the conversion of ‘continuous data into a numerical representation’ (Manovich, 2001: 28). Both definitions imply the processes of ‘sampling and quantization’. At intervals of equal pace, grid of pixels is used to denote the digitised image giving it its resolution during sampling. At this level the continuous data becomes discrete according to Manovich. The sampled data or digitised information which Flew says ‘exists in only one of the two forms: 0 or 1’ is denoted numerically (quantified) within a specified range. Digital information as shown above then takes on such characteristics as being manipulable, networkable, dense, compressible and impartial (Flew, 2005: 3).

10 Gaston Kabore, (2003) Interview in Unesco Culture about film production in Africa vis-à-vis digital technologies. He is a filmmaker and a specialist on African Cinema. He currently runs the IMAGINE film training institute in Burkina Faso.

11 Araba Sey (1999), Cultural Implications of Television Broadcasting in Ghana, University of Ghana, Accra. This is an unpublished MPhil theses presented to the School of Communication Studies of the University.

12 Both AFNOR and DCI in their quest to ensure that film industry professionals undertake their business guided by the very best internationally recognised practices and standards, make efficiency and reliability their watchwords. By emphasizing the importance of systems of interoperability, content security and copyright, they ensure that manufacturers, content carriers, producers, and audience all operate with a mutually intelligible system or technological language that is secured and economically rewarding to all stakeholders.


14 Both of these films were shown at the 2007 edition of FESPACO. Ezra went on to win the coveted Stallion of Yenenga prize.


16 In Ghana for example, in 1983 US$1 was Cedis 2.75, but by 1991 the cost of a dollar had rise to Cedis 389 (Ukadike, 1994: 306).

17 Between 2007 and 2010, I have regular personal communications with Africanus Aveh about the video film industry in the region and particularly the Ghanaian scene.


19 Kpiin daa is a Dagara word for an effigy of a deceased.

20 Joseph Hundah is the MD of MultiChoice Nigeria. He was speaking on “the impact of the development of technology on the pay TV industry: the MultiChoice Africa experience” at an International Media Conference in Lagos. It was organised by the School of Media and Communication of the Pan African University, Nigeria.

21 This figure from The Economist conflicts with the Unesco Institute of Statistics’ figure of 800 films per annum. Such variations in data are as a result of the relatively informal degree of organisation and regulation of video making. Statistics therefore have a degree of inbuilt inaccuracy.

22 GSS (2011) 2010 Population and Housing Census Provisional Results: Summary of Findings, Accra: GSS.

23 David Steele is the Head of UK Film Council’s Research and Statistics Unit. He presented these findings based on a 2007 report at an EOA Workshop at Cannes in May 2008.


27 The source of the data is from InterMedia Reports held at BBC WST, London. The viewership figures are based on “When TV viewed last” and reported as in the original BBC WST findings.
28 NCA digitalghan, NATIONAL DIGITAL BROADCASTINGMIGRATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE: REPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF GHANA ON THE MIGRATION FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL BROADCASTING IN GHANA, Final Version, August 2010.
29 Mr Fritz F. Andoh made this point to me during an interview with him at High Commision, London, in April 2004.
30 Emeka Mba is the Director General of the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board. He was speaking on the challenges of regulation in the digital era at the launch of the African Media Centre of the university, November 29, 2009.
31 The filmmaker Socrates Safo sharing his experiences at the 2007 Illinois African film conferences as a guest speaker said he travelled to Togo once and found to disbelief one of his films being shown on national television. He did not know how they acquired the film and ‘broadcast rights’.
32 Kunle Afolayan, a Nigerian filmmaker, made these observations in a personal communication with me during the launch of the African Media Centre at the University of Westminster, 29/11/2009.
33 ‘No Movie Release Until January 15’,