TOWARDS A CARIBBEAN CINEMA - CAN THERE BE OR IS THERE A CARIBBEAN CINEMA?

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By first discussing the past and present state of “Caribbean” filmmaking, the paper will draw on various theories including those of national cinema, cultural identity and representation, to make the case for Caribbean cinema as a cinema of its own. The paper will discuss this emerging cinema in terms of development of Caribbean styles and aesthetics, and the role of adaptation of West Indian literary classics and documentary filmmaking in establishing such a cinema.

Some of the main scholars and writers whose work will be referenced include Stuart Hall’s writings on cultural identity in the black diasporas; Mybe Cham’s work on Caribbean and African cinema, Benjamin Anderson’s theory of nations as imagined communities; the Cinema Novo and Cuban film movements; and interviews with Caribbean filmmakers at the 2nd Annual Festival of African and Caribbean Film.

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Introduction

Arguably, cinema can serve as a captivating journey into the past, a glimpse into the history of a culture, country or group of people. Moreover, as a technological art capable of capturing present moments in time and “representing” those moments for all to see, cinema is part of our present and made up of the culture it represents. Cinema not only reflects the culture it comes out of but also has the power to affect that culture. Thus, cinema functions as a mirror to a culture and that culture in turn can mirror what is seen in films. It is therefore all the more important that the portrayal of a particular culture (or group of people) in cinema express the true sensibilities of that culture. According to writer Dudley Andrew, cinema is a “good index of culture” because it “visibly partakes of the stuff of cultural life” (Andrew, 2). Films present situations and solutions, which can be seen as social solutions for issues facing the cultural life that it represents. The question then is should one culture sit by and allow another to shape its social life through the pervasiveness of one dominant cinema (and by extension one dominant culture)?

Among the issues discussed at the Transafrica forum 2001 in Washington was the status of Caribbean cinema. It was noted that while films and videos of African cinema have
been played at festivals worldwide and have found a promising market, the same fate has not befallen Caribbean film/video works. At the 2003 meeting of this conference, the issues addressed included: the scarcity of resources available to the Caribbean filmmaker (Cuba is the exception); the responsibility of the filmmakers with regards to the images they present of the region; the possibility of Caribbean films achieving commercial success without compromising the region’s culture; and film as a development tool. Thus, Caribbean cinema still struggles to carve a niche for itself and at present can best be described as an emerging cinema. Indeed, when one thinks of Caribbean cinema filmmaking from the Latin American regions usually come to mind, thereby limiting the diversity of the region. For, the Caribbean is also made of the West Indian islands such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Antigua and so on, including the French territories of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as, countries such as Guyana and Surinam. It is primarily these nations that this paper specifically addresses when speaking about Caribbean cinema, though not overlooking the works of the other countries such as Puerto Rico and Cuba.

The Caribbean has been traditionally defined as primarily English-speaking nations in the Caribbean Sea namely:
i. the CARICOM (Caribbean Community) states of Antigua-Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago;
ii. the US Virgin islands;
iii. the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos.

However, the ever changing nature of the region has led to a definition of the Caribbean that is geographically and historically broader than has been. Thus, the definition of Caribbean now includes the above-mentioned countries, Suriname (Dutch speaking), Haiti (French speaking), Cuba, Dominican Republic, and all other dependencies of the United States, Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

The language in the Caribbean is cosmopolitan in nature not simply because of the different European languages from the colonizers. There is also the mixing of these European languages with the Native American languages and African languages brought by the slaves. The result of this mixture is the local patois and Creole languages that are unique to the Caribbean as a whole, and to each of the individual nations. The diversity of the region also exists in the racial composition of the people of the region. The Caribbean person has often erroneously been assumed to be a person of African descent. On the contrary, the Caribbean is
made up of Africans, East Indians, Asians, White Europeans and descendants of Native Americans (the Caribs and Arawaks). Furthermore, there is mixing and inter-marrying among the races giving rise to new terms to refer to persons of mixed racial heritage. And this diversity is represented in any one nation of the Caribbean. For example, the twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago is comprised of approximately 40% Africans and 40%-45% East Indians, with the remaining population comprising Chinese, Syrians, Americans, and other Europeans (Welcome to the Caribbean website). There is thus, a sense of hybridization of Caribbean people which would inevitably extend to the arts, including cinema. More importantly with this kind of diversity in the Caribbean there exists the potential for Caribbean cinema to be a model for a multicultural world cinema.
A History of Cinema Culture

Cinema came to the Caribbean and the Third World for that matter in much the same as any other import from the West did; it was brought as yet another product to be marketed for profit in the lesser developed and lesser empowered regions of the world. The magic of the silver screen had become a form of mass entertainment in the America and Europe. And, with urban folks hungry for what the cinema had to offer filmmaking in these continents soon became industrialized. With the capital necessary to do so, the cinema industry in the West developed systems to support production, exhibition and distribution of films. From the period of the mid 1920s to 1950s Hollywood and its highly organized system of production, exhibition and distribution would not only rise to become the world’s leading producer of films, but would also dominate all things cinematic both at home and abroad. With its aspirations for greater profit, Hollywood would expand its investments to the Third World regions. Studios and production houses began to appear in places like Cuba and Brazil from as early as the 1920s and in Asia around the 1950s. Much of the production, exhibition and distribution were foreign controlled and filmmaking in these regions was in a state of gross underdevelopment compared to the West. Yet, it was a start by these cultures to create their own images a start, which the Caribbean
region did not get around to until decades later. In fact, since the later growth and establishment of cinema in developing countries coincided with the political independence and economic growth resulting from the end of WWII, it is no wonder that filmmaking got a late start in the Caribbean. Indeed, many of the West Indian islands did not gain independence from their colonizers until much later than the majority of the Third World did. For example, while the Dominican Republic gained its independence as early as 1844 and Cuba in 1898, independence for other Caribbean countries did not start until 1962 when Jamaica and Trinidad& Tobago were liberated.

Cinema in the Caribbean islands (often referred to as “pictures” or “theatres” in the West Indian islands) served as a major means of contact for the islands with the outside world. There was great excitement and anticipation by the people, about seeing the latest “picture” even though the images on the screen were not reflective of their own lives. So from as early as the 1940s to 1960s cinema and cinema-going was a strong force in the Caribbean. And the effect of movie-going on the people and the culture was clearly evident. Men would often mimic the actions of the cowboys and gunfighters of the Western; a genre that to this day is still highly popular among the male population. Numerous local steelbands took their names from some aspect of
American films, for example: Desperadoes, Casablanca and Invaders steelbands. Such mimicry extended to the social behavior of the people with both men and women imitating the fashions, styles and behaviors of famous movie stars, some even acting out scenarios from the films of their favorite stars. This credibility and authenticity that Caribbean people attached to foreign films was, according to Warner, because the films were just that - foreign. “The formula is simple: foreign equals good; local equals bad ...and the power of the imported film made the average Caribbean viewer firmly believe that what was portrayed was gospel” (Warner, 50-51). With struggling economies and limited personal resources to travel and visit other places Caribbean people, at that time, had little choice than to believe that what they saw on the silver screen was a true reflection of the world. However, even though it would be decades later before many Caribbean countries would attempt to make their own fiction films, documentaries and newsreels were actively being made in the region in prior to the 1960s. Many of these were of the government informational and educational type yet were still examples of Caribbean cinematic works being made by Caribbean people.

This is not to say that the Caribbean’s presence was not evident in these films that came from abroad. The Caribbean region with its warm climate, white sand,
beautiful beaches and “happy-go-lucky” people has been present in films longer than films have been present in the Caribbean or than the region has been making its own films. The extent of that involvement, besides as a consumer and receiver of these foreign productions, has been as an exotic location for European and American productions. Island in the Sun (1957) and The Mighty Quinn (1989) are but a few of the many films that were conceived outside of the region but exploited the region’s locale for its look and appeal. Such productions did little to represent the true essence of the racial, cultural, geographic and linguistic diversity of the region and the issues facing the people who live there. The initial presence of Caribbean people/characters in films began with entertainers who were given small cameo roles in some of these foreign films. According to Warner, this presence of a recognized local personality “in a medium they considered beyond their reach,” increased the appeal of the films but by no means made such a film an example of Caribbean cinema (51).

Caribbean cinema was not and still isn’t a definitive film movement as say, Cinema Novo was. A film movement should comprise filmmakers, an audience and other persons who share similar needs or desires and wish to see such needs met on the cinema screen. Filmmakers who share similar views on how things should be filmed, what should be filmed,
what devices should be avoided and which ones should be utilized and who pursue such a vision as a collective body are the driving force of any film movement. Furthermore, some sort of an economic support base, whether private or government, is evidenced in a film movement. Since it lacked all of these above mentioned characteristics, Caribbean cinema (outside of Cuban cinema) is not yet a definitive film movement. It is clearly though a reflection of the Caribbean (more so the West Indian) people’s search for their own identity and to have that identity reflected in all forms of art or expression.
An Overview of Caribbean Cinema throughout the years

Most of the films discussed as Caribbean cinema, especially those coming out of the West Indian islands, were made around the 1970s to 1990s with new works as recent as 2003. In Cuba there was more of a film industry and film movement to speak of than there was in the other Caribbean territories. Film production in Cuba began as early as the 1920s, but the films were products of Hollywood companies operating out of Cuba. However, Cuba would then take what its colonizers had brought in and turn it into their own by starting its own film culture in 1959 with the establishment of the Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC. These early films were a result of and reflected the changes and upheavals in social, political and economic conditions in Cuba. It was initially a cinema of revolution dedicated to decolonization and breaking free from the long dominance of Hollywood style of studio filmmaking and structured narratives. The films of Tomas Gutierrez Alea, Humberto Solas and Pastor Vega not only helped build the foundation of Cuban cinema, but also became renowned worldwide. Memorias del subdesarrollo (Memories of Underdevelopment) 1968, Lucia 1969, and Retrato de Teresa (Portrait of Teresa) 1979 are among Cuban films that have been shown in many international arenas.
The small but increasing body of filmmakers from the other Caribbean islands, such as Horace Ove (Trinidad), Raoul Peck and Elsie Haas (Haiti), Felix de Rooy (Curacao) and Yao Ramesar (Trinidad), often makes most of their films outside of the Caribbean. Many of these films though they receive critical acclaim in other parts of the world, are rarely shown in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, there is a body of work to speak of as Caribbean cinema and this can only grow with efforts of new filmmakers such as Howard and Mitzi Allen from Antigua. The start of the 1970s saw Caribbean productions coming primarily from the French Antilles, Guadeloupe and Martinique with the film Le Retour made by a Guadeloupe student in France. A twenty-minute black-and-white short, this film dealt with the theme of Caribbeans living the experience of exile in the large cities of the developed world. Such a theme would recur in many films that followed as many of the noted Caribbean filmmakers have produced their work outside of the region while living in “exile.” Christian Lara, who probably has made the most films coming out of Guadeloupe, began his work with Coco la Fleur Candidat (1978), one of the first films to use Creole. Here, Lara uses a story about a political election to explore the political situation in Guadeloupe at the time. Surinam’s contribution to cinema also began in the 1970s with such films as Pim de la Parra’s Wam Pipel (1976) a
story of an African Surinamese student in Holland who returns home to tend to his sick mother and falls in love with a Hindu woman. The film makes use of three languages indigenous to the country as it explores themes of prejudice, relationships and racial and cultural diversity in a somewhat comedic environment.

The most successful film of the decade and one of the two most celebrated films (as far as international recognition) to come out of this part of the Caribbean was Perry Henzel’s *The Harder They Come* (1973). Shot on location in Jamaica, *The Harder they Come* with its documentary type look provided a more realistic portrayal of the culture, life and issues facing 1970s Jamaicans. Set amid shantytowns and the pulsating rhythms of reggae music, the plot revolves around the protagonist Ivan, a country boy who comes to the city with illusions of becoming famous. Seen by many as a hard-edged Jamaican gangster film based on the real-life story of Jamaican outlaw Rhygin, *The Harder They Come* was criticized for its stark portrayal of the nation’s crime and violence at a time when the country was trying to develop its image as a tourist destination. However, it is to Henzel’s credit that he avoided the romantic images of Jamaica found in many Hollywood productions and remained true to his ideal of allowing the people to see themselves and their island through their own eyes.
Filmmaking in Jamaica and the region continued on into the 1980s with such productions as Rassoul Labuchin’s *Anita* (Haiti, 1982) and Felix de Rooy’s *Almacita di Desolato* (Curacao, 1986). Of de Rooy’s dozen or more films, *Almacita di Desolato* stands as one of his most creative and widely recognized. The film, shot on location in Curacao and utilizing the native language of Papiamentu, reveals de Rooy’s skills as a painter in its story of struggle between forces of creativity and destruction. Like de Rooy, Labuchin in his first film *Anita*, also makes use of his creative background (that of a poet) to explore themes of education, domestic work and servitude in his landmark film that won both local and international acclaim. Furthermore, the film’s unique distribution methods as a result of heavy censorship marked “a turning point in the history of Haitian cinema, breaking from the stifling commercial network to build a real audience among the masses...” (Lafontant-Medard, 92).

Perhaps the most well known filmmakers to come out of Haiti are Raoul Peck and Elsie Haas, both of whom operate outside of their native island. Haas’ repertoire includes *La Seconde Manche* (1979), *La Ronde des Tap-Tap* (1986), *La Ronde des Vodu* (1987) and *No Comment* (1988). *La Ronde des Vodu* (“The Vodu Dance”) has gained international recognition for
its balanced and more critical look at this ancient religion that has not been properly treated in films by such filmmakers as Maya Deren. In dealing with the place Vodu has in the culture, history and politics of Haiti, the film creates “a fairly comprehensive and moving portrait of a society and people struggling to negotiate a legacy of oppression and denial…” (Cham, 28). Filmmaker Rassoul Labuchin has described Raoul Peck’s *Haitian Corner*, as “the best ever made by a Haitian” (Cham, 29). *Haitian Corner*, shot on the streets of Brooklyn, deals with the misuse of power and its effect on others, and how those affected by such abuse learn to deal with and overcome feelings of revenge and anger. It is a clear critique of the abuses many Haitians underwent at the hands of the Duvalier regime and is an example of diasporic filmmaking. *Haitian Corner* has been viewed by large audiences in Haiti and worldwide and Peck himself has become a filmmaker of worldwide acclaim.

Caribbean filmmaking during the 1980s resulted in the second of the two most successful and widely known films to come out of the region, *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) by Euzhan Palcy. *Rue Cases-Nègres* (“Sugarcane Alley”) is an adaptation of a novel by Joseph Zobel and like her fellow island filmmakers, Palcy avoids the usual exotic, “island” imagery and sets the film in the real environment of the people. Simple in its style even down to the use of sepia tones, *Rue
Cases-Nègres was true to the spirit of the novel and the spirit of the Martniquan (and by extension the Caribbean) culture, particularly in Palcy’s use of Creole throughout the film.

Documentary films were also being made in the smaller Caribbean islands during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. With the help of UNESCO, many Caribbean states were provided with video production equipment and training. One independent company, Banyan, from Trinidad and Tobago, was able to orchestrate the production of thirteen documentaries and regional subject matters, and ten profiles of Caribbean artists (Paddington, 379). These documentaries were broadcast regionally through the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), an organization aimed at distributing programming of its member states. While there were other documentaries produced by other countries (Jamaica, Antigua and Barbados) Banyan rally led the way in quality and volume of production. Such note documentaries, which reflected some similar themes as Cuban documentaries, include Crossing Over (1988) by Trinidadian Christian Laird. Laird’s film was a sensitive documentary about the experiences of two musicians, one from Trinidad and the other from Africa, as they visited each other’s country.

Though the 1970s and 1980s produced the bulk of the body of work that is considered Caribbean cinema, some new
works have emerged in this new millennium. These include: Stephanie Blacks’ *Life and Debt* (2001), a critical and provoking documentary on the damaging effects the policies of the World Bank and The International Monetary Fund has had on Jamaica; *The Sweetest Mango* (2000) and *No Seed* (2001), two feature films by a husband and wife team living and making films in Antigua.

This brief overview is a clear testimony that there is or has been such a thing as films made by Caribbean people about Caribbean people. However, there is still some debate about whether there is such a thing as Caribbean cinema. At the second installment of the Annual Festival of African and Caribbean Films hosted by the University of the West Indies in Barbados, there were mixed but similar views by filmmakers about Caribbean cinema. Haitian-born filmmaker Elsie Haas feels that the concept of Caribbean cinema is not structured enough, that there is no globalization of the concept. As a result she wouldn’t say that her film *La Ronde des Vodu* is Caribbean cinema, though in many circles it is considered as such. However, she does feel that her film and others like Henzel’s *Harder They Come* exhibit a Caribbean sensibility. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* edited in 1992, Mbye Cham referred to Caribbean cinema as is “un cinéma au rez-de-chaussée des negres” (“a cinema at the basement of cinema of blacks”). At the 2003 film festival in
Barbados Cham feels that Caribbean cinema is still emerging and that one cannot speak of a film industry in the region yet. He feels, though, that while there is no formal definition or singular style of Caribbean cinema, there is a cultural sensibility that one can look at and begin to say that this is something typically Caribbean. New filmmakers Howard and Mitzi Allen, who have already produced two feature films in Antigua, feel that there is a Caribbean cinema. Indeed, this writer also feels the body of films that constitute Caribbean filmmaking and the recent film festival efforts in Barbados, indicate that there is a Caribbean cinema. However, this cinema is in a state of infancy. What then is needed to bring this Caribbean filmmaking out of the basement of cinema and into the mainstream of society, particularly the society it comes out of is the subject of the fifth chapter of this document. Before that this discussion there is, in the next chapter, the argument for the need for a Caribbean Cinema as a cinema of its own.
Why should there be Caribbean cinema?

In attempting to address the question of is there/can there be a Caribbean cinema one must first address the notion of national cinema. With globalization and the crossing of boundaries and mixing of cultures, the question of can national cinema exist must be discussed when looking at culture or region specific cinema. The notion of national cinema prior to the 1980s was primarily a label used to categorize cinemas that were culturally different from those the dominant Western cinema (Hollywood and European cinema). The term “national” also indicated a territorial context with which to view these cinemas that exhibited certain characteristics with which to read and interpret their films. Thus there existed Soviet socialist realism, German expressionism and Italian neo-realism as just a few examples of cinemas defined by the means of expression specific to the territory and culture they came out of. One of the criticisms of the notion of national cinema is that it homogenizes any cinema labeled as such and limits what that cinema can produce. These conventional notions of national cinema, thus, overlook the heterogeneity that exists in not only the content of the films made but in the manner in which they are made and distributed.

I argue that the unity and wholeness that the concept of national cinema imposes can provide a useful starting
point for persons on both sides of Caribbean cinema that is those who make the films and those who analyze the film. By pointing toward a set of elements common to the films one can begin to give shape and form to Caribbean cinema or any such cinema that is emerging and in a state of infancy. From there one can then begin to look at the variation and heterogeneity within that cinema thereby acknowledging the dynamism within that cinema. Andrew Higson raises the point that there is no single accepted discourse on national cinema and that instead of the term being used to describe the cinema it is used prescriptively, thus limiting and containing the boundaries of that cinema (Higson, 36).

However, writer Benedict Anderson, in his notion of nationalism has put forward more useful theories which (I argue) can be extended to view and frame the idea of Caribbean Cinema. Anderson proposes a theory of nationhood that speaks of nation as an “imagined community.” By imagined he suggests that though people belonging to the smallest of nations may never come face to face with or know most of their fellow members, each one still has in his/her imagination the notion of nation. The nation is an imagined community because “regardless of the very real inequities and injustices that exist in society, it is always perceived as deep and horizontal comradeship” (qtd in Hill, 143). Thus communities, for Anderson, are to be distinguished by the
manner in which they are imagined. This idea of an “imagined community” sharing many commonalties in the minds of its members can be seen in the implicit commonality of histories, aesthetics political, social and cultural experiences of countries of the Caribbean. In Latin America where cinema was largely defined through its expression of underdevelopment, “national cinema” is viewed as a regional alternative to films from the United States and Europe, as well as “a cumulative history” (Cham, 2). This concept allows for the conceptualization of both cultural similarities (within a regional and geographical context) and social and cultural differences (within a political context). Therefore, the region itself can provide the narrative space for a beginning framework for looking at Caribbean cinema as a national cinema. In other words, the region and its similarities can be taken as the primary context for enunciation, and from there one can then acknowledge the differences that are also part of it and therefore its films. Furthermore, the notion of imagined communities allows for a more dynamic rather than a static notion of Caribbean cinema as the idea lends itself to changing identities, migration of peoples and crossing of boundaries that is common today. It will extend the Caribbean beyond the islands washed by the Caribbean sea to include the Caribbean diaspora; places where Caribbean
people have migrated to and formed a community for example, the east coast of America, Canada and England.

Stuart Hall also sees the validity of exploring the homogeneity in the region for shaping a Caribbean cinema. In speaking about cultural identity and representation, Hall highlights two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position would define the Caribbean identity in terms of “one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 220). This oneness is for Hall the true essence of “Caribbeaness” which a “Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation” (Hall, 221). This first perspective looks at transforming the cinematic representation of the black/Caribbean subject by visually reconstructing the unity that all Caribbean people have. Though Hall seems to address only the black Caribbean person, I extend his sense of oneness to Caribbean people of all races. For, all of us in the region share a collective identity as Caribbean people and it is this identity that we must discover and bring to the cinema screen. Hall’s second perspective seeks to acknowledge the significant difference which constitutes “what we are” and “what we have become” (Hall, 223) as Caribbean people. It is
precisely these differences which constitute the Caribbean and its uniqueness. Cultural identity in this sense is as much a matter of becoming as it is being; as much a matter of belonging to the past as to the future.

Furthermore, the Caribbean has historically sought after a unity or oneness among its members and has always had an impulse toward Caribbean nationhood, irrespective of colonizers. The move toward integration began in 1958 with the establishment of the British West Indies Federation, a union of ten Caribbean islands. This union dissolved in 1962 and in 1965 the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) was formed. CARIFTA aimed at establishing free trade in the Caribbean, and with its formation came the addition of more Caribbean countries to the union. CARIFTA would, over the years, evolve into what is today, the Caribbean Community/Common Market (CARICOM). CARICOM focused on promoting the integration of the economies of its members and an overall cooperation in social and human development of Caribbean countries. Again, from its inception in 1973 the number of member countries increased from that of CARIFTA and today is made up of countries that have the status of member, associate member and observer. With these three designations, practically all countries of the Caribbean region are in some way part of this union. In 2001, the CARICOM heads of government signed into effect a
treaty to establish a CARICOM Single Market and Economy to replace the Common Market (CSME). The CSME would strengthen the region’s economic ability in both the global arena, as well as, the local arena. Furthermore, with internal migration within the region and a mixing of races, culture, languages and dialects that this brings, the notion of nationhood applied to the Caribbean region is by no means far fetched or inappropriate. We have always sought a sense of oneness, with shared common mythologies and histories that can go a long way toward establishing a Caribbean cinema.

The terms “otherness” and “other” refer to those persons, groups or entities outside of the dominant realm of cultural representation. These terms are often used when speaking about homosexuals, people of color, women, the poor and generally any kind of minority. The Caribbean and its people fall into the category of other for North Americans and Europeans, since they have been pushed aside, neglected and omitted from the mainstream arena of visual/cinematic representation. So, clearly Caribbean cinema is/would be a cinema of “otherness” allowing the Caribbean “other” to be represented outside of the conventional norms of cinematic representation; outside of commercial Hollywood cinema. But why is it important that the other be represented in unconventional ways outside of Hollywood norms? The answer
is that if we image the Caribbean “other” within Hollywood conventions then “otherness would cease to exist and nothing would be changed” (Plate, 5). Nothing would be changed because Hollywood or dominant Western cinema attempting to create or represent another culture would continue to foster a relationship of dominance between a primary subject and a secondary subject. Given that the other exists yet is neglected attempts by dominant cinema to image others would only assimilate them into the dominant hegemony so that their difference is minimized. Rather it is important in representing and imaging the other to seek to envision “relationships between others, not between a primary subject and secondary subject” (Plate, 5). Thus, to truly imagine the other’s image what is required is the practice of learning to see differently. According to Plate this entails “both a difference in the images that are being looked at and a difference in the way they are looked at--a difference, again, of images and imagings” (6).

The semiotic structures of the visual images of Hollywood and films of the West are grounded in the culture of these regions. The dominant Hollywood cinema expresses capitalist and bourgeois ideas. It is a cinema of mainly spectacle with standardized modes of production, duration and exhibition designed to satisfy commercial goals. These ideas and goals are not foreign to the Caribbean region,
since it has been in the web of American values and aesthetics for a long time. However, the availability of these commodities and the ability to achieve the goals of the United States’ society have been out of reach of the average Caribbean person, unless that person is of the bourgeois class or migrates to America. As such these films - their signs, signification and the way they construct meaning - do not adequately speak to or represent the Caribbean. Though Caribbean people continue to view movies from the West they do so because they are so pervasive and there isn’t much of a local alternative. It is not really because these films articulate viable meanings. For cinema to truly reflect and have resonance for the Caribbean culture it must use symbols specific to the people it speaks about. The postmodernism idea of deconstruction aligns itself with the need to change the way one looks at and reads images of otherness. The deconstruction idea seeks to challenge the grand narratives of the dominant cinema by doing away with binary thinking along the lines of an either or framework, favoring instead the recognition of diversity and difference. Deconstruction is based on the experience and context the reader brings to the film and thus shows that there are multiple meanings and interpretations of a given film. It is the act of seeing/reading what is hidden
in the language of film, what is not said or seen on the screen, the omissions in representation.

Furthermore there is a large audience demand both within the Caribbean and in its diaspora for films that reflect a true Caribbean sensibility. One only has to look at the success of Antigua’s first locally made feature, *The Sweetest Mango*. This low-budget movie was digitally recorded using a prosumer Canon GL1 Mini-DV camera, and then edited on an imac. Though lacking in the style, sophistication and overall technical polish of the Hollywood films that have dominated Antigua’s television and cinema screens, the film stands as the highest grossing film ever to be screened on the island. Why? Because the film was able to give the local people what they were sorely lacking and in desperate need of. That is seeing the real image of themselves, their region and their culture reflected on the cinema screen. So great was the power of one’s own image that lack of technical polish was not enough to deter the locals from seeing the film and their own local actors, two or three times. However, it would only be matter of time before the audience’s thrill of seeing local people and local issues cease to outweigh the lack of gloss technical polish that competing Hollywood films have. So, while filmmakers need to begin putting something on film that comes out of the people, they also need to keep working at perfecting the
film product. This is so that the audience does not lose interest and that Caribbean cinema does not remain at the basement of filmmaking.
What is/should be Caribbean Cinema?

Going back to Hall’s perspective of cultural identity in the Caribbean and its diaspora, he suggests two positions of cinematic representation, in relation to cultural identity, that can help shape Caribbean cinema. The first position of oneness, discussed earlier in this paper, seeks to transform the cinematic representation of the Caribbean subject by visually reconstructing the unity that all black people have as a result of their ties to Africa. I extend this point to Caribbean people of all races in that, the unity that all Caribbean people is also be a result of having been transported from a Motherland. It is a position that acknowledges similarities in the experience of black/Caribbean people, through texts that address the historical experience of separation and dispersal by seeking to recount “the lost world of signification” that resulted from dispersal and fragmentation. By restoring “forgotten connections” these texts are, for Hall, “resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways with which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West” (Chrisman, 34). Hall’s second perspective is one that recognizes differences in cultural identity. Defining identities as
“the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within” (Chrisman, 32), Hall feels that these identities are not fixed because of their relation to the past, but are subject to “the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Chrisman, 32). This perspective challenges the fixed meanings, and by extension the fixed ways in which these meanings are constructed in film, the dominant media imposes on the Caribbean people and such groups of otherness, leaves the signification and representation of the Caribbean and people of color open to supplemental meanings.

According to Cham, Caribbean cinema, if it does exist, is very complex with ever-changing elements and as such if difficult to define. Haitian filmmaker Elsie Haas also feels that there is no definition of Caribbean cinema because the concept is not structured enough, since there is no globalization of the concept of Caribbean cinema. The notion of Caribbean cinema also brings into play issues involving the filmmaker and his nationality and location from where he/she makes films; and the issue of content of those films that are to be considered Caribbean. Christian Lara puts forward a definition of Caribbean cinema as one that addresses the nationality of the filmmaker, as well as, the location where films are made. In his definition, Lara states five criteria for a film to qualify as Caribbean:
“the director should be from the Caribbean, the subject matter should be a Caribbean story, the lead actor/actress should be from the Caribbean, Creole should be used, the production unit should be Caribbean” (qtd. in Cham, 10). Lara’s definition seems a bit restrictive since hardly ever are all five criteria met. Furthermore, any definition of Caribbean cinema should be more flexible and dynamic since the cinema itself will also be dynamic and changing with the times and experiences of the culture it speaks for or about. However, with this attempt at a definition as a starting point, Caribbean cinema should first and foremost deal with a subject matter that is distinctly Caribbean, whether it is shot on location in the region or not.

Secondly, the filmmaker whose work is to be considered part of Caribbean cinema should not necessarily have been born on the island or should have Caribbean heritage of some sort. However, the “Caribbean filmmaker” should have such close ties to the culture and experiences of the Caribbean people that his/her films exude a Caribbean sensibility. I say this because a complete outsider cannot accurately create images or tell stories of Caribbean people since that person will be constructing those images from his/her own cultural affiliations. This definition of the Caribbean filmmaker is by no means restricting filmmakers from working outside of the region. In fact, it allows for films to be
made outside of the Caribbean itself, since the migration of many Caribbean nationals to Europe and North America especially, has broadened the Caribbean experience and sensibility.

A fusion of content and form to produce a style that is distinctly Caribbean is necessary to both transcend the stereotypical images of the region and to help establish the concept of Caribbean cinema. Cham adds that while there may not be any one style of filmmaking that is a Caribbean style, there are however, a cluster of styles and aesthetics that can be explored and articulated in film to create the notion of something typically Caribbean. One such aesthetic is language. Indeed, the way we in the region use language both verbally and non-verbally is quite unique. From our inflections to the local vernacular to “picong” which is a part of everyday life of Caribbean people, there is opportunity to articulate a Caribbean sensibility on film, through language. Being on the ‘margin’ of filmmaking in relation to America and Europe, the Caribbean filmmaker is free to restructure the medium to fit his own unique perspective. In other words, with Caribbean cinema being at the basement of filmmaking and there is no film industry to speak of, then there is also no semiotic structure that the filmmaker must adhere to. Since the filmmaker is not bound by the cultural restraint of the semiotic structures of
Hollywood films (or any other kind of filmmaking), there is the greater potential for him/her to reinvent the visual language of cinema to express his/her culture. By striving to develop a unique filmic language that is free of Hollywood and colonial influence, the Caribbean filmmaker is also helping to develop each nation’s cultural identity.

Film theoretician Sylvia Wynter calls for a deciphering practice to replace the present from of film criticism when exploring aesthetics in film. This deciphering practice would be “linked to an ongoing cultural revolution of an emergent global and popular Imaginary” and would work against “our present hegemonic Imaginary” (Wynter, 239). Wynter is attempting to shake current modes of film criticism and filmmakers as well, out of the established ways of thinking about aesthetics. Her idea of a deciphering practice aims to “take the image/sound signifying practices of film (and television) as objects of a new mode of inquiry” that would “reveal their own rules of functioning rather than merely replicate and perpetuate these rules” (Wynter, 261). Hence, Wynter’s deciphering practice seeks to look at what film aesthetics can be deciphered to do rather than what they can be deciphered to mean. For example, music and rhythm, would be used as part of the narrative structure providing dialectical critique or commentary on the events
taking place in the story or issues that the film tries to address.

Furthermore, cinematographer for *The Harder They Come*, Franklin St. Juste has spoken about the employing the flora or the Caribbean region as cinematic devices in creating Caribbean cinema aesthetics. And knowingly or unknowingly it seems that *The Sweetest Mango* was able to do just that. In the movie there is a scene that centers on the protagonists raiding a mango tree at the height of the mango season. The mango season in the Caribbean is as much a season as the four seasons of North American and can be used as transitions in film. Mango season, when mangoes of varied colors and tastes are ripe and bursting with juice, signals the start of the summer vacation for Caribbean school children. It symbolizes a time of fun, relaxation and opportunity for new experiences. Indeed, in the movie it is while both seeking to sneak into a yard to pick mangoes off a tree, that the male and female protagonists encounter each other for the first time and their romantic interest is kindled.

For Stuart Hall the issue of Caribbean cinema aesthetics requires a rethinking of cultural identity by looking at what Kobena Mercer calls a "diaspora aesthetic" (Mercer, 58). Instead of looking to the past (colonialism) or some supposed homeland (Mother Africa or Mother India and
so on), Caribbean people can look to the diversity of the diaspora experience for self definition. He speaks of “diaspora identities” as those which are “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 234). For Caribbean people, this means those things that are unique to our region such as: mixing of races, the unique blend of rhythms in our music, the rhythm in the way we move, and our Caribbean cuisine. Identity would then be shaped from within the very things that represent the Caribbean people. The result is a cinema whose aesthetics work “not as second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists but as that form of representation which is also able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects and thereby enable us to discover who we are” (Hall, 235). Thus it might be important to examine and analyze the ways in which the various cultural practices of the many races of the Caribbean intersect, to see how these intersections can shape Caribbean cinema aesthetics.

The role of documentary filmmaking in shaping, building and sustaining any new cinema cannot be overlooked. The documentary film – its look, ideals, sense of authenticity and filming techniques – has provided a strong base for the revolutionary filmmaking that took place in Latin American and other Third World cinema. According the writer Bill
Nichols, the documentary film is the more effective means of accessing a historical construct that Third Cinema (in which Caribbean cinema may be classified) links itself to because it does not just provide access to a world, it allows the viewer access to the world. It provides direct and immediate access to the world it documents through such significations as language, social, political and economic systems and cultural practices. However it is not enough for the Caribbean filmmaker to just document the world but to transform it. To do so Caribbean filmmakers should question the conventional means of representation in both documentary filmmaking and ethnographic representation. We need to develop our own style of capturing the image of our culture and not hold fast to the traditional sense of objectivity in documentary filmmaking. After all as Bill Nichols notes, the documentary film is more a re-presentation of reality than a representation of reality. Filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha also has a similar perception of the documentary film. For Minh-ha, the documentary is a presentation of truth as shaped by the filmmaker, who thus is responsible for making meaning. By presenting the truth from the influences of one’s Caribbean culture and heritage the Caribbean cinema filmmaker can transform the world and help correct the misrepresentations of Caribbean people and issues.
This does not mean that narrative films do not have a role to play in increasing the body of films that is/will be Caribbean cinema. However, the images and the structure of the fictional story must signify the reality of the culture and ideals of the Caribbean region, and not those of the Hollywood and the Western world. It is not enough to change the language to reflect the Caribbean’s varied dialects and vernacular if the styles and themes are still those of Hollywood. To so would only result in mimicry if the style and ideology of the films are those of Hollywood cinema. Rather, a narrative style that is historically analytic and specific to the Caribbean culture (as is found in the wealth of Caribbean/West Indian pose and poetry) is essential. Perhaps even a mixing of the documentary and narrative modes will lend to the effort of culture-specific representations of the Caribbean reality. In the very popular and successful *Memories del subdearrollo*, Tomas Alea injects documentary footage into his drama about a bourgeois Cuban businessman faced with confronting the uncertainty of living in Cuba after the revolution. Still photographs, television broadcasts, newspaper headlines and voice-over narration are devices utilized by Alea to add realism to his commentary on the upheaval resulting from the Cuban Revolution. Alea’s work in this film shows a conscious effort on his part as a
filmmaker to manipulate cinematic devices to adequately address his culture.

As a cinema of otherness, Caribbean cinema would be “one in which the structure of production and the style of a finished film would necessarily be different than what we are expecting to see, indeed, what we are trained to see” (Plate, 6). The three main components of cinema are: the framework of film production, the texts that characterize a film, and the distribution and exhibition of a film. First of all, based on the success of Caribbean films mentioned above, the Caribbean filmmaker should take heart that he does not have to aim to compete with Hollywood films (in terms of style, content and technical polish) to find an audience or to get his film sold. They should primarily aim to tell Caribbean people’s stories so that they see themselves and their region from a new, more realistic perspective. One only has to look at Latin American cinema to see this. It is not the aesthetic quality of these films that enabled the film industry in Cuba to flourish, but rather the content and message of the films, which were politically and historically specific to the people and the region. By being a bit imaginative, we can find ways to distribute and exhibit our films. This would involve looking outside of the normal channels of distribution, since the film industry of America and Europe generally try to
frustrate the Third World filmmaker. As such the use of the Internet and homemade DVDs are a viable and effective means for the struggling filmmaker to get his/her work out there. Billboards around the country and posters in stores are a way of advertising the film in one’s own country. In fact it was an enormous billboard for *The Sweetest Mango* that not only helped furnish the large audience that the film has gained, but also caught the eye of Ian Craig who then brought the film to the film festival in Barbados. There is also the CBU (Caribbean Broadcasting Union) and local television stations as avenues and outlets for local productions. Thus, the role of television in distributing local films and promoting a local film culture cannot be overlooked.

Furthermore, the Caribbean filmmaker should not be too concerned about getting his film shown outside of the Caribbean or Caribbean diaspora communities. International distribution and exhibition will come about though not as rapidly or as soon as one would hope. Here is where perhaps CARICOM, particularly the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) can play a role in promoting the distribution of Caribbean films. Also, local filmmakers can try to furnish relationships with distributors of Caribbean music to get their films distributed, since these distributors already have an established and thriving market. Still, what is more
important is that we make films for the Caribbean people, about the Caribbean people to be seen by Caribbean people. It is crucial therefore that the Caribbean countries put up a united front to deal head on with the problem of distribution. This united effort should seek first to distribute Caribbean films within the region and then secondly outside of the region. The Cuban filmmakers are fully aware of the blockade imposed on Cuban films by America, yet that has not stopped filmmakers and ICAIC from producing numerous films each year. It should be added that the demand to see a new perspective of the Caribbean is not limited to the region as globalization and movement of people and mixing of cultures has fostered an appetite among people to learn more about each other and each other’s culture.
Interview with Mbye Cham

(Recorded at the 2nd Festival of African and Caribbean Films held in Barbados in October 2003.)

Desiree: What in your definition should make up Caribbean cinema?

Cham: I’ve been getting myself into trouble deliberately refusing to answer questions along the lines of definition of African cinema or Caribbean cinema because I think it obliges sometimes, and I know that you’re not expecting it. But sometimes when people ask you what’s an African film or what is a Caribbean film they are expecting a one sentenced, ready made, packaged description definition of something that is very, very complex; that is shuttled with all kinds of factors, tensions contradictions and ever-changing elements. So in general I would just say that Caribbean cinema like African cinemas something that is very complex. One can look at it from a variety of perspectives, from a variety of ways. The filmmaker, where does she come from, is she Caribbean, was she born on the islands, was she born outside of the islands to Caribbean parents and so on and so forth. You can also look at it from the point of view of the content, the subject matter of the film. Does it have Caribbean subject? And then that gets you into the issue of
what is a Caribbean subject. Is it a story that takes place
only on the islands? Or if you do a film like Raoul Peck’s
Haitian Corner, which was done in New York, does that
qualify as a Caribbean story, as a Caribbean film. So there
are all of those elements there. But I think for me, one of
the important things that I look for is really the feel, the
mood, that sensibility, that cultural sensibility that
style, you know, which will sort of begin to narrow the
film. Because I think that there is something, as
unadvisable as it is to say, I think there is something that
could be called not a Caribbean style in the singular but a
cluster of styles that one can begin to...

Desiree: ... like an aesthetic maybe?

Cham: Well, an aesthetic yeah but I would say a cluster of
aesthetics that one could begin to look at and begin to see
that yeah ok these are expressive of something that is
typically Caribbean, that is typically African and so on and
so forth. I know it’s a roundabout way of answering our
question but I just find it very, very difficult to really
pinpoint an answer to that. And in the introduction to Ex-
Isles I think there is a reference to a definition, an
attempted definition along those lines, a definition that
was given by Christian Lara. But again, I think if you look
at it in terms of its general shape I think its one that one can pretty much use as a point of departure without really seeing it as a final resting place, something that is made once and for all, that is tabled. Because I think these things like identities you know are continuously being reshaped by experiences.

Desiree: What might be some of these aesthetics or styles? Like, for instance Gloria (Rolando) she mentioned a Caribbean aesthetic. She said music would be one, nature would be one.

Cham: Exactly. Music definitely. And I think also the language, you know the inflection both verbal, as well as, non-verbal languages. The motions, the way people move, the dress and there are things like very subtle movements of body parts which I think, again I cannot pinpoint them in any specific ways, but there are some when you see them you say aha this reminds me of or you can connect it to certain space, Caribbean space or could be in the broader sense an African space, African sensibility, African style. This notion of habitués is one that perhaps one can begin to look at and begin to see the ways in which the notion of habitués encompasses just the whole ensemble of being and of the was that we relate to our environment, the ways we respond to
stimuli and all of those things. So definitely music, language, the way that we dress, for example, our dress styles. Now with the proliferation of hip hop culture emanating from the United States and aspects of this culture being absorbed and made refashioned in various ways in those contexts I think you are beginning to see certain elements of this being expressed also in Caribbean cinema. I saw in a film like *The Harder They Come* for example, I mean it’s an old film, but then I think it’s a very important film and there are resonances of some of these that you find in some of the newer more recent films. That pulsating reggae beat which today perhaps have transformed itself into other forms, other styles but basically having their affiliation with reggae, which filmmakers try to express just orally in terms of the audio but also using that as part and parcel of the structure; the way that you put the film together; the way that you pace the film in terms of the rhythm and the movement of the narrative and so on.

**Desiree:** Since you mentioned *The Harder They Come*, what do you think Perry was going for with the whole male identity, the way the male is depicted in terms of Ivan in *The Harder They Come*?
Cham: It’s a very interesting issue and I think it was Tom Cross or Perry himself who addressed that issue in response to one of the questions that was post on the whole macho the whole male thing in the Caribbean at that moment in time and perhaps even there are expressions of that still with us today. But I think it also has to do with the story itself, with the narrative itself which was the story of this guy coming in to the urban area from the rural area and needing to become his own, to construct an identity and the mechanism for doing at the particular point and especially the choices available to Ivan were basically masculinist. The gun culture, and there’s that play which has brought us on a parody of the whole gun slinging, western culture that again was somewhat part and parcel of the imaginary, of Jamaica at the time being bombarded with these Western films and people sort of appropriating and imitating this and eventually turning it around and making it their own. So also with the case of Ivan. And I think at the moment the discourses were very, very masculinist whether it was in literature, film. I’m not too sure about the art but as Perry said most of the filmmakers tended to be male and I guess it’s just natural so too speak, to expect the portraiture, the narratives that they tell were from these predominantly male, masculinist points of view.
Desiree: But that in no way means that that’s a correct view of shaping identity.

Cham: No, not by any means. It’s just the position that was available to Perry at the time. And I think if you were to do The Harder They Come part one, even though he says he is going to do a sequel, if you were to do The Harder They Come part one in the year 2003 I’m sure it would be very, very difficult to get away with some of the things that you see in part one of the 1972 version.

Desiree: One last question. Since you compiled Ex-Iles till let’s say today, at the festival, one: is there definitely a Caribbean cinema; and two: where do you see it going or what strides have been made since Ex-Iles?

Cham: Well I think it’s still an emerging cinema in a lot ways because of the infrastructure. I mean you cannot talk in terms of an industry yet, like in Africa too, it’s very, very difficult to talk in terms of an industry …

Desiree: Even with the popularity of FESPACO?

Cham: Yes, yes, yes. Because if you see industry in the conventional sense of what constitutes an industry, the mechanisms, the infrastructure from the conception to finish
to distribution and all of those things there, that are the elements that constitute the structural framework of an industry, I don’t think you can say that there exists in Africa, even though there are elements of it here there in Morocco, South Africa and other places. And I think the situation is even direr here in the Caribbean. And given the fact that most of the filmmakers who work of Caribbean descent, those who are working in the space of Caribbean cinema I think still quite a significant number of them reside and work outside of the Caribbean. I think there have been some interesting developments since the 80’s with the advent of new technologies, the DV technology, the Internet and all of those things making the production process less cumbersome, less demanding. But for those who still want to work on celluloid with 35mm especially, it’s still a major challenge. I don’t think there has been that much movement at all even if you take the example of Euzhan Palcy. Euzhan has to go to Hollywood and has been doing stuff in Hollywood that perhaps she is obliged to do in order to eventually be able to what she really may want to do, which is the stories ... Caribbean stories. Sarah Maldoror has this really fantastic script on ... Guadeloupe. I read the script. Fantastic. She gave me a copy of the script about six, seven years ago and it still hasn’t been made yet. So, you know, the struggle is still there. There’s movement but also there
is some kind of stasis and the areas where you see movement tend to be with those individuals who have opted to go with different technologies, new technologies using video and similar formats to make their films.

Latin American countries began the move to make their own film movement before the islands of the Caribbean did. One such movement in film was Cinema Novo coming out of Brazil. Cinema Novo was as much a phenomenon as it was a film movement. As a film movement its goal, and that of the filmmakers involved in it, was to take the people as theme and give human form to fundamental problems. Neither a school nor dogma, Cinema Novo was a committed, conscious cinema that allowed for freedom of expression and freedom of treatment. As a phenomenon it was part of the general transformation taking place in the 1950s and 1960s. Cuban cinema, as stated earlier, arose out of the people’s need to reflect their own histories and socio-political and economic conditions on screen outside of foreign modes of filmmaking.

The potential of these movements as a spark or starting model for other emerging cinemas is laid bare in a statement by Glauber Rocha. In his essay, “An Aesthetic of Hunger”, Rocha states that, “wherever filmmakers, of whatever age or background, place their cameras and their profession in the service of the great causes of our time there is the spirit of Cinema Novo” (70). Cinema Novo then became a phenomenon not just limited to the people of Brazil but to people and cultures everywhere. Filmmaker Tomas Alea defines Cuban cinema as “a kind of light, agile cinema, one that is very
directly founded on our own reality” (Burton, 124). Thus, there are a number of principles that led to the success of both these movements, both financially and as far as creating a new cinema for its people that can be applied to help establish Caribbean cinema as a cinema of its own. In the case of Cuban cinema, especially, the resilience of the filmmakers and the industry to survive the harshest of economic times (those of the 1990s) is an inspiration to any emerging cinema.

Just as the rise of Cinema Novo paralleled the transformation taking place in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s, so too did the emergence of a Caribbean cinema parallel political, cultural and economic transformations taking place in the region. Cuba’s revolutionary period began in the 1950s and was reflected in its cinema. Many other Caribbean countries did not move toward self-governance and independence until the 1960s to mid 1970s. This political transformation also resulted in Caribbean islands (the islands of the West Indies in particular) beginning to take their cinematic destiny into their own hands. Around this time Cinema Novo was already entering its third and final phase (1968-1970) and indigenous filmmaking in Cuba had taken root.

Firstly, the Novo filmmakers felt that films should reflect the truth and should show real people real
situations and real environments. They endeavored to take their cameras to the streets, towns, villages and beaches to film stories about the reality that the people lived; to give human form to the fundamental issues facing the people. To accomplish this they adopted the style of Italian Neo-Realism. One of the important filmmakers of the Cinema Novo movement, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, sums up the significance of neo-realism:

“The influence of neo-realism was not that of a school or ideology, but rather as a production system. Neo-realism taught us, in sum, that it was possible to make films in the streets; that we did not need studios; that we could film using average people rather than known actors; that the technique could be imperfect, as long as the film was truly linked to its national culture and expressed that culture” (122).

It would be to the service of Caribbean Cinema for its filmmakers to not simply mimic neo-realism mentioned, but to use it as an influential force in the search for our own culture-specific forms of representation. It was this movement away from mere mimicry of Italian neo-realism and Italian cinema forms to mixing various narrative and filmic strategies to create their own reality, which marked a turning point in Cuban cinema. To a certain extent many of the early films coming out of the Caribbean reflected a strong sense of realism that was more a result of a lack of stars or studios to do otherwise for example, Henzel’s The Harder They Come (1973). Those who criticized its realism
were more of the elitist class more concerned with the nation’s tourist image and not those of the mainstream population who relished seeing themselves realistically portrayed on the big screen. Hence, the Caribbean filmmaker should not seek Hollywood polish and glamour at the expense of reality. The people are now beginning to see themselves represented on screen, so a more realistic portrayal will have greater resonance for them than the facade of Hollywood aesthetics.

No doubt, Caribbean cinema needs to develop and use aesthetics that relate to the Caribbean people. One such aesthetic is the music/art of the region, something the Cinema Novo filmmakers also recognized the value of. In films such as Carlos Diegues’ Orfeu (1999) and Bye Bye Brazil (1980) the directors made use of Brazilian music not as a commodity, but as a means of commentary and symbolism within the story of the film. For instance, in Orfeu the director seems to suggest that music and art are a means of getting out of the slums. The movie’s main protagonist, Orfeu is a gifted musician and carnival bandleader who has won the carnival competition many times. In the film his success and popularity through his art have left some wondering why he continues to live in the slum when he can easily live in much wealthier neighborhoods. Furthermore, as with the reggae music in Henzell’s The Harder They Come, the
music in *Orfeu* comes out of the slums, out of the people, thereby indicating that the people have the power to produce a culture that is uniquely theirs. However, unlike *Orfeu* the reggae music of *The Harder They Come* was used more as a commodity for Western consumption and less as a meaningful symbol of the people. On the other hand many Cuban documentaries moved away from using background music and voice-over narration in the film. This was in effort to liberate documentary from the conventions of commercial film” which include “insistent but insensitive background music” and the “paternalism of commentary” (qtd. in Chanan, 79). So, here again is where perhaps the Caribbean filmmaker can learn from the Cinema Novo and Cuban filmmaker by challenging himself/herself to use his/her local art more in the service of the people rather than in the service of outsiders.

Cinema Novo was essentially low budget, independent filmmaking. Dos Santos’ adaptation of a literary work, *Vidas Secas*, which bore many similarities to the adaptation of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, was made for a fraction of the cost of the Hollywood production. The production cost of *The Grapes of Wrath* was thirty times the $25,000 cost of Dos Santos spent to make *Vidas Secas*; the film rights alone for Steinbeck’s novel amounted to three
times the cost of making *Vidas Secas*. Yet with its lack of glamour and polish, Dos Santos’ film was able to nourish those viewers who sought knowledge over “conventional sensations” (Johnson & Stam, 127) through its exploration of the issue of drought and exploitation that face peasant families of the north. With underdeveloped and scare resources available to the Caribbean filmmaker (as was the case with the Brazilian filmmaker), the director is freed from the control of studio and financial bosses, who usually try to impose their will on the film being made. The director of under-funded, struggling films has the freedom to develop his/her own style and aesthetic and has much greater control over his/her work than their Hollywood counterparts. This leads to the potential of a variety of styles that will stimulate the viewing audience and not lead to redundancy and repetition; a plague affecting the films coming out of Hollywood today.

A number of the successful films coming out of Cinema Novo were drawn from Brazilian literary classics and historical myths: *O Padre e a Moça* (“The Priest and the Girl”) based on a poem by Carlos de Andrade; Walter Lima Jr.’s *Menino de Engenho* (“Plantation Boy”), an adaptation of a novel by José Lins do Rego; and Carlos Diegues’ *Xica da Silva*, a fictional recreation of events that took place in colonial Brazil during the eighteenth century. Caribbean
literature has gained wide success and recognition within the region as well as abroad. There is a significant body of anglophone and francophone literary works that have been read, studied, enjoyed and analyzed by people and institutions all over the world. These works hold a valuable reservoir of story ideas for many films. As Keith Warner states, “there is a wealth of...major literary works just begging to be adapted to the screen for popular consumption” (57). Caribbean literature (including plays) from writers such as Samuel Selvon, V.S Naipaul, Joseph Zobel and Derek Walcott reflect a Caribbean view of the world. Caribbean cinema needs to also reflect a “Caribbean world view to the rest of the world” (Warner, 57); a view that can be realized through the adaptation of Caribbean literature for the cinema screen. It should come as no surprise then that one of the most successful films to ever come out the emerging Caribbean cinema was Euzhan Palcy’s 1983 hit, Rue Cases-Nègres (“Sugar Cane Alley”), an adaptation of a Joseph Zobel novel. If potential filmmakers would likewise draw from the reservoir of Caribbean/West Indian literary classics a more significant body of Caribbean film will exist to speak of. For instance Michael Anthony has written two short stories that center on the early childhood of Winston Spree Simon and Ellie Mannette, two pioneers credited with inventing the steel drum. An adaptation of these two stories (both of
which are set at Carnival time) into one film will both tell a story of creativity and ingenuity, correct misconceptions about where the steel drum originated, as well as, showcase the culture and flavor of Trinidadian people.

An increase in film production in Caribbean cinema would not be of great importance for the region if these films did not reach the public it comes out of. One significant move that helped Cinema Novo and Brazilian cinema in general to reach the local audience was the establishment of systems to aid the distribution of films. This came in the form of two entities. Firstly, producer Luiz Carlos Barreto and other Cinema Novo filmmakers formed a distribution cooperative called Difilm. The cooperative helped the filmmakers put the masses into the theatre seats, since after all it was their images that were on the screen. Unique distribution methods are indeed helpful for an emerging cinema to gain a foothold on a market dominated by one kind of filmmaking. And such methods do work and have met with some success even in Caribbean cinema. Haitian filmmaker Rassoul Labuchin’s first film, Anita (1980), came under heavy censorship and was cancelled from commercial theatres after just 15 days (Lafontant-Medard, 90). To get the film to the masses Labuchin decided to train a group of people to use projectors and screens and then sent them out all over Port-au-Prince with this equipment to show his
film. With this unique distribution method and the debates it sparked, Aníta “turned out to be a turning point in the history of Haitian cinema, breaking from the stifling commercial network to build a real audience among the masses…” (Lafontant-Medard, 92). The film, as a result, was widely distributed in Haiti and went on to win regional and international awards. Such innovative efforts, which, as Labuchin has shown, can be done in the Caribbean, are a refreshing and tremendous help if Caribbean cinema is going to build its audience.
Interview with Antiguan filmmakers Howard & Mitzi Allen

(Recorded at the 2nd Festival of African and Caribbean Films held in Barbados in October 2003.)

Desiree: Tell me about the first film you shot in the Caribbean.

Mitzi: What aspects it?

Desiree: The production process - how difficult or easy it was? What obstacles you had to overcome to get this film done?

Mitzi: When we started the producing aspect of it we first had to convince a number of people that what we were about to do could really happen, because there had never been a feature film produced in Antigua before. So we had to get a lot of people onboard and we were very fortunate in that we were able to find like-minded individuals who wanted to be part of the process, particularly our stars - the leading lady and the gentleman that we chose - who were very keen to be a part of it. So putting together the actual team was easy. The discipline that’s involved in filmmaking was not. So we had to come up with some nice little tricks like we picked everybody up from their home and we transported people around. We didn’t count on anybody to show up, so we moved the cast around and they had to stay with us
throughout the entire day. We didn’t let them out of our sight. And, we had the support of people who basically gave up their homes for us to do some of the filming. We were able to secure for our first project three product placements, because both our films and everything we do in the future will be self-funded. We use our own money and we started out with very a small amount. We went over budget, we exploded our budget about three, five times what we thought we were going to spend. Fortunately we made it back. The film was a huge, huge success for us. But pulling the team together, convincing them, making them see that it is something that would be fun to do and that it is possible was one of the challenges that we met successfully. In the end over one hundred or one hundred and fifty people were involved in this production in some way, whether it was in front the camera or behind the scenes. So from a producing standpoint it worked. We had to employ different things that you wouldn’t normally do in mainstream filmmaking but it worked for us in order for us to get what we wanted.

**Desiree:** What were some of those different things?

**Mitzi:** Some of those different things were spending extra money on catering because Caribbean people won’t work on an empty stomach, so food was very important. We fed them well
as strange as that may sound. And transportation, instilling this idea that you have to be there and we will pick you up. We wake them up at four in the morning, we give them a wake-up call and then the bus goes and picks them up at their house. We take them to the location and they stay with us for the entire day. I don’t think many film productions employ that kind of baby-sitting service. But we had to do that, number one to stay on time, to stay on budget, which was very crucial. So we knew that was some extra money we were going to be spending but we saw that was necessary to make sure that this project did get completed. And we had contracts with them. We didn’t just say hey show up and do a movie, which is sometimes the Caribbean way of starting some projects. We approached it in a way that they knew right off the bat that we were really serious about it and I think that one of the strengths that we had was our ability to source people who really just wanted to do it. And were easy to work with and was ready for getting up early, for doing it over. Because remember these people had never acted before, never been involved in anything like this before, (they) just wanted the opportunity.
Desiree: Did you do any sort of casting?

Mitzi: Yes, we had a casting call. For The Sweetest Mango we had a casting call and about fifty people showed up and we only had eight roles to fill. We kept a lot of those people in parts as extras because we knew we would need them anyway. We had a lot of people from the theatre community come out to auditions. Strangely enough those weren’t the ones that got the main parts, much to their chagrin I can tell you. So that has been good. The second film, when we did our casting call, over a hundred people showed up and it was even a smaller cast for No Seed so a lot people were a little disappointed. They were like oh gee they missed out on the first one but they would be involved in the second one but really wanted to have a much smaller cast. So we went through the whole casting process and they came out - a little skeptical at first wondering what these people are up to. They heard casting call they thought Hollywood had arrived in Antigua then showed and realized, oh it’s just you guys. But the entire experience for all of us turned out to be a lot of fun and we want to try and keep the productions that way.

Desiree: Tell me about the actual filming – what did you shoot on, edit on and so forth.
Howard: The film was shot on a Canon GL1 camera and I chose that camera because basically I liked the features. I thought it had a good lens and I liked the feel of the camera and the images that I saw from it. It had a lot of flexibility. One of the things I knew going into the production was that I was going to have to do a lot of the things myself, because we don’t really have a filmmaking history or anything in Antigua, so the infrastructure is not there. Things like lighting and sound and all of that, those were things I’d have to be responsible for myself.

Desiree: Did you source your own lighting…

Howard: Well I have a small production house so I do have lights and things like that. But a feature film is a pretty big production compared to shooting a thirty second commercial. And so the responsibility is greater. So that was a huge challenge because normally I’m not using that many lights in one production. We’re scene after scene. We shoot a lot of scenes in a day.

Mitzi: I forgot to mention that part, that we had a different scheduling process. I mean because we were using in some cases somebody’s home, and they said sure you can be here over the weekend or for two days, all the scenes that
take place in that house, if there’s six or seven scenes we shoot them all that day.

Howard: Like in the case of the first film we had a setting that’s supposed to be a graphics publishing house kind of thing. And the local newspaper gave us their office to use for the setting for the weekend – the Saturday and the Sunday up to a certain time, because the staff had to come in because they had to prepare the Monday paper. So we were like shooting one scene after the next, after the next...

Mitzi: And some of the scenes were pretty long. So, we arrived at their office at about six in the morning after picking everybody up and we were there until six in the afternoon. On our last day we went into the evening to about eight. That wasn’t too bad because we’ve had longer shoots. We had a very short scene to shoot when we first started. We were ready to go. Our first scene was shot in this woman’s kitchen, the screenwriter’s kitchen. She said you can use my kitchen and it’s a short scene so we thought we’d be there for a couple of hours. And it was a Friday night so we arrived at her house at seven thirty and we figured that we would be done by about ten eleven o’clock, midnight at the latest, because our leading man had a gig. He sings with a band so he had to go play out that night. Also we had another shoot, another pick-up scheduled for the morning. So
we arrived at her house at seven thirty and got to work. We did not leave her house until three o’clock the morning and we had a pick-up at four for the next shoot. So we went around the clock and it was our first introduction into filmmaking. It was like oh my God this is taking forever! At the end of that everybody was stressed out and tired and I remember thinking on the bus going back: My God what are we doing?.

Howard: What’s going to happen with the other scenes, because that scene wasn’t supposed to be like a long scene. But there were a lot of logistical things that had to be worked out.

Mitzi: And when you watch The Sweetest Mango the scene in the kitchen at his sister’s house, that’s the scene we’re talking about. That took all that time. And it’s a short scene in the movie, not very complex. Howard was trying to figure out how we’re going to shoot it because remember now one of the handicaps that we have is the fact that the homes are not sets. They’re people’s homes. So you are shooting in a much smaller space...

Howard: ...a restrictive space and you have to move people’s furniture around...

Desiree: And you couldn’t cut out a wall!
Mitzi: No we couldn’t cut out walls. I don’t think Giselle would have said yes to that!

Howard: You have major continuity concerns. So it was a real experience for us, a learning experience for us doing that first scene, those first couple of scenes. By then we kind of got an idea how to deal with the other stuff. For editing, I did the post on a Power Mac 7100, 80 megahertz with a video card in it. That system was okay for most of the other productions I was doing at the time, but the film really pushed it. I really kind of squeezed the video out of that thing because it was so slow in trying to handle those large video files. Because I didn’t have a lot of hard drive space, what I did was I would edit scenes together and burn them to CD, which is a method I kind of like because once you burn them to CD you have it in sort of indestructible form. I felt comfortable that I had this thing here and the tape is not going to get messed up or anything like that. But that was a huge, huge challenge doing the post production on this very slow computer at the time. But with some ingenuity we were able to squeeze it out and squeeze it out and then get it back to tape. The movie is about an hour and forty five minutes and at the time I think I had maybe about 18 gigabytes of hard drive space, which at the time was quite a lot. But the computer itself not being a fast
computer, it was still a struggle working with that many large files.

Desiree: So is this the same editing process you used for No Seed, where you edit a scene and burn it to CD?

Howard: Well for No Seed I did the same thing as far as burning the scenes to CD, because I really liked ...

Mitzi: But we had a much faster computer; we were able to upgrade.

Howard: Right. With No Seed we were working on an IMac, a 500 megahertz IMac. The post production process now was a lot less stressful. I still used the method of burning scenes to CD. So what I would do is I’d edit a scenes burn it to CD, edit another scenes burn it to CD, or edit a couple scenes burn them to CD based on the size of the file and all that. And then I’d go through the whole process now of compiling all these scenes together and putting them to tape.

Desiree: So do you, then, capture just what you need for one scene and then edit that scene?

Howard: Yeah. Sometimes depending on how two scenes flow together I may want to edit the two scenes together to get a real feel for how the two affect each other or play off each
other. I probably wouldn’t want to edit one of them in isolation. But generally I just capture what I need for a particular scene, edit that and then put it to CD. And I was using three programs. I used Adobe Premiere, Final Cut Pro and Adobe After Effects. Now, when we record our sound, the sound is recorded directly into the camera. There isn’t like a DAT machine or anything. Not even an audio mixer, like there isn’t a field mixer that sound goes into, it goes straight into the camera. And that introduced some other challenges too, because we don’t have manual control over the sound levels and things like that. And so we had some areas where the actors had to shout and we ended up with a little distortion. On Mango I used a mixer when we were indoors because I had a mixer that I could plug in. But because I didn’t have an actual field mixer when we were at remote locations things were going straight into the camera. So there were some little quirky things there that come into play when you don’t have all the necessary equipment.

**Desiree:** But do you think the new technology now like mini DV is opening up cinema to people who didn’t have access to it before?

**Howard:** Oh yes! Well for us like I always wanted to make a movie from the time I was maybe ten. It’s something I always
wanted to do and from the time I started working in TV back in like ’83, I started exploring the cost of equipment and stuff like that. And it was ridiculous. What I can do now on my home computer and a DV camera back then, even up to 1990 when I was checking out the cost of equipment and stuff, would’ve been $200,000 at least $100,000 for the same kind of versatility that is offered right now. My camera only cost me $2500 and the computer much less. So accessibility is definitely there with digital video. Just about anybody that has a good DV camera can get into filmmaking.

Mitzi: But can I just say something here, though. The advantage that HAMA Production has is that we have, in Howard, somebody who has a lot of those other skills that you would normally have to go and find somewhere else. Howard shot it, edited it, lit it, did the Foley work on The Sweetest Mango. We did a lot of that stuff ourselves. He was putting in footsteps and water pouring and all of that. So that’s why we could even think about it. Because I think even if you do get a digital camera and you’re ready to go you still have to pull a crew together, most people do, to make the simplest thing. And we didn’t have to. I mean there are some areas where we know that okay, let’s call in the big boys. But first we have to do a few of them, make the money from them and then we call in the big boys. But only
in the area that we need to in terms of getting sound technicians and things like that.

**Howard:** Well like in the case of *No Seed* I actually was able to get a sound engineer to assist me with sound design and that kind of thing. Whereas I did all of that myself on *Mango*. But, one of the things people forget, even with the new accessibility because of digital video, is that still the most important thing is content; actually having a story to tell and a story that people care about. Because people still get carried away I think with more just the technology - pictures are pretty and that kind of thing - and totally forget about the fact that people have to care about the story that you’re telling. And to me that’s the hardest part. That’s really the most difficult part coming up with a story or something that will captivate people’s imagination and that they want to be involved in or participate in.

**Desiree:** Now *The Sweetest Mango* was successful in Antigua. How did you go about getting it out? I assume it was a challenge.

**Mitzi:** Yes it was. After we finished doing the film, we made a movie trailer because, I don’t know if you heard yesterday when Ngangura talked about the fact that after you finished doing your movie you have no money left. Well that was us,
we had actually gone over budget, so we were busted. But we knew in an environment like Antigua where it had never been done before, where the television station does not really produce anything of any standard or quality that would make people think oh yes this is possible, we had to go overboard with the hype, and the promotion and the publicity for it. But we had no money to do it so we made a trailer. We showed it to a bank. We went to the private sector basically, the Antigua Commercial Bank, and we told the marketing people, 'Hey look at this. Do you want to attach yourself to this? We just finished shooting this and this is the trailer.' They, I think, were so impressed with the fact that we actually made a movie on our own, we didn’t come to them.

Howard: The reason we chose that bank actually, it is an indigenous bank and they had the same kind of start up that we had when they started forty years ago. It was just a bunch of local guys starting a bank and people were like...

Mitzi: ‘Yeah right why should I give you my money.’ So they understood where we were coming from, because we were pioneering too. So they said sure and because of their input, their investment we had gloss movie posters, we had billboards, we had a black tie premiere. We invited regionally known actor, Carl Bradshaw from The Harder They Come to the premiere so that there was a lot of hype. We had
limos and gowns and black tie and that stirred people up. They were like ‘Wow this is like Access Hollywood.’ So that started the hype. Then we had screening and word-of-mouth spread. The first screenings were a very limited amount of people, it was like people had to go and see first and then they would tell a friend. And then it just grew and grew and grew, and then we had what we called mango mania where there was literally hundreds of people pushing and shoving and screaming to get in to see our work. That was so very gratifying and even to this day it has been successful. The videotapes have been sold in Antigua but they don’t stay in Antigua. They buy them and they send them to their family and friends wherever they are in the world.

Howard: People are very proud of this achievement and so they buy the tapes and send them to relatives like Antiguans that are living in the (United) States or England or wherever. So, most of the tapes are outside of Antigua.

Mitzi: And earlier this year the performing arts society in Antigua honored us with an award, the Bert Williams Award for “pioneering work and excellence in filmmaking.” So that told us just how proud they were of what we had done. So the pressure we have now, apart from our internal pressure to get better, is that when they see us they are like, ‘What’s the next movie?’ Because if you think about it we produced
two feature films in two years, while Mango was being screened we were working on No Seed. So now we have this pressure from people even now, because now we want to slow things down. We now have made some really nice connections with our work and we have inspired a number of people. We inspired Ithaca College to send their students to us to assist us with productions and so on. So now we want to take our time. We have two in development and one in pre-production. So the thing is in Antigua, When is the next one? When is the next movie? That’s all they say and ‘Don’t forget me I want a small part.’ The funny thing is people don’t want to come to auditions because they don’t want to be turned down. They want you to come to them and say be in the movie. And it’s what we wanted. I mean, maybe we don’t dream big enough, I don’t know, but it’s really nice just in Antigua to have that kind of impact. Because we’re changing the lives of the young people too. There are actually now young people interested in going away to study filmmaking and are looking at brochures to find out what aspect of filmmaking they interested in. I have a lot of young women come up to me and want to talk about what is the producer does. So for us it’s our contribution to our country, to preserving our culture, to promoting everything that’s unique about us. Because one of the things we do is we make sure our films promote every aspect of our culture. We use
our local musicians to score our music, we produce music videos that would promote them as artists, we use our local screenwriters. As a matter of fact, with The Sweetest Mango the entire production is 100% Antiguan. And that was totally deliberate, we make no apologies for it. Because on the island I might add, we do have ex-pats (ex-patriots) who have done film work in North America. They’re older, they’re settled and I’m sure they would have loved to have come and give us a hand, but we didn’t want it. Because in Antigua there’s a gentleman who is retired and lives there, who used to do some work on Star Wars, that’s his claim to fame a special effects artist and he does a lot of other work. If we had pulled him into a project like that and its any good people would …

Howard: …assume that its because of his involvement.

Mitzi: And so we were very conscious of things like that. We wanted to own it whether it was good bad or whatever. So that was our approach and we accomplished that so that when we were ready to do No Seed we opened up the casting call. We had people from all over the Caribbean involved in No Seed in the cast. There’s a Jamaican in the cast, there’s somebody from Montserrat in the cast, there’s somebody from England in the cast, you know, a Trinidadian is in the cast. So it’s a very, very good mixture. Now instead of being a
total one man production it was like a three man thing, because we had someone helping Howard with the post on sound design. We had another young man who was Howard’s assistant. So we were growing. And so at this point now with the next projects we’re working on we’re gonna have a lot of film students running around. One of the things we had to do when we were doing Mango and No Seed is to train people. So what will be nice now when we get interns is that somebody’s already taught them a thing or two. So they are now getting hands on experience and then our local people can watch them in operation and can be there as part of the process, so that when they (interns) are gone, when we’re doing another project they (local people) can come on in because we know you know how to do this. And what that does for them is that they can say I’m gonna go to New York and study filmmaking because we’re making movies in Antigua.

Howard: Caribbean people didn’t always have resources but they have always been resourceful and I think that when we were a colony we had a lot of that resourcefulness. And for some strange reason when we became independent we lost the resourcefulness and became dependent. So now that we are supposed to be independent people we are like, ‘I have no money so I can’t do anything’ and I’m thinking no you can do it. You can do it. It’s just about being creative and
finding ways to make it happen, because that’s how other people make it happen. It’s just through their resourcefulness. So you have a camera, you have computer and you just find ways to make it happen. And if you believe in what you are doing, I think it kind of all just comes together. Because most often someone starts to do something and they’re really focused more on the money, the financial gains. And so the minute that doesn’t come in fast enough they drop it. And so you have to have a passion for what you do and stick to it.
In Closing

Apart from maybe in Cuba and Puerto Rico, no state film enterprise in the Caribbean islands exists to speak of, either on a regional or national basis. This is a significant factor if filmmaking in the Caribbean (particularly the West Indies) by Caribbean people and for Caribbean people is to be regarded as a serious entity.

Slowly the realization of the need for state/government support for local cinema in the Caribbean is beginning to take root in the region. At the University of the West Indies’ 2nd Annual Festival of African and Caribbean Films held in Barbados in 2003, discussions took place on getting state involvement in the Caribbean cinema effort. Local culture officials took advantage of the presence of Perry Henzell at the festival to seek his input on how Barbados could begin producing local films. Hopefully more would come out of these meetings than just talk. Hopefully other countries will likewise make efforts to build a Caribbean cinema.

With the advent and drop in price of digital filmmaking there is now very little excuse why someone wanting to make movie should not be able to get it done. Howard and Mitzi Allen did just that when they shot their first movie, The Sweetest Mango, with a Canon GL1 Mini DV camera and edited
it on an imac. The film, though practically unknown outside of Antigua, was the largest grossing and most successful film ever to show on screens in the country; more than any Hollywood film that ever showed in theatres on the island. Such was the local people’s desire to finally see each other on the silver screen. Since then, the couple has made a second film, a political thriller entitled, No Seed (2002), and has had film students from Ithaca College in New York do an internship with them in Antigua. Thus, the desire is there, the technology is there, and a growing film movement is there that can provide a model on how to go about developing local cinema. What is then needed help Caribbean cinema take off is the support of state and local business entities and openness on the part of the viewing public to receive the efforts of their own aspiring, local filmmakers.

Therefore, in light of the success of the Cinema Novo and Cuban film movements, and given the efforts already taking place in Caribbean filmmaking, I put forward a sort of action plan that can move Caribbean cinema into full gear.

- The establishment of or expansion of existing local film commissions and the establishment of a regional film commission.
• Encouraging film education at the primary, secondary and tertiary school level not just as a nice distraction, but as a meaningful subject.

• CARICOM taking an active role in developing a film culture in the region by:
  • Providing financial support for acquiring video equipment and for training of people to use the equipment.
  • Developing strategies for distributing Caribbean films among its member states.
  • Putting in place tax incentives that benefit the local filmmakers more than the foreigners who come into the region to make films that have nothing to do with us.

• Fiscal measures to provide funding and tax breaks for local film activity.

• Use of public funds to:
  • Encourage the use of video and digital video production technology as a high quality, lower cost alternative to using film.
  • Develop training programs in all aspects of filmmaking from scriptwriting to production to editing to distribution
  • Encourage members of the local theatre industry to apply their talents to film.
• Foster public support for local filmmaking by facilitating more local and regional film festivals.
• Establishment of set quotas of local film/video works that must be shown in the theatres and on television.
• Foster links with distributors of Caribbean creative works (music, films, books, etc.) in North America and Britain.

In a May 5th article published in the Trinidad Express, a reporter referred to Disney and Paramount Pictures’ recent interest in Trinidad as a film location as, “a strong sign of revival of the nation’s film industry.” I’m not sure I agree with this viewpoint. A strong indicator of a revived film industry would be films being made in or about Trinidad and its people’s experiences, by Trinidadians or people of Trinidadian heritage. Thus, I see the recent startup of a community network television station in the country, Gayelle TV, which promises to offer over 90% local content as a greater sign of revival. We (Caribbean people) need to stop waiting for foreigners to come into the region to make films in the hope that this will help us build a film industry. We aspiring filmmakers need to find ways to start creating our own films no matter how crude they may be at the start, with whatever technology is most readily available to us. It is a difficult task, yes, but we must
start somewhere and as we persevere, a growing body of skilled professionals will develop that can teach others that may come along after.
Bibliography


The “2nd Annual Festival of African & Caribbean Films” hosted by the University of the West Indies in Barbados represented more than just a celebration of creative activity taking place in the region. It stood as a growing manifestation of the increasing need among the local people to see themselves represented in the major forms of audio and visual media. In quoting a late Senegalese filmmaker, festival organizer Dr. Jane Bryce stated that, “cinema is magic in the service of dreams.” For Caribbean people underserved by the pervasive medium of cinema, that magic is beginning to serve them.

The opening night’s screening of Jamaican filmmaker Perry Henzel’s, *The Harder They Come* marked the 30th anniversary of the film; a film which has gained cult status in the region and abroad. The Olympus theatre was packed with standing room only for this screening, which provided an opportunity for many younger folks to see this film for the first time on the big screen. Henzell was honored with an award for his “significant contribution to film” from the Barbados National Cultural Foundation.

The festival showcased the works of both African and Caribbean directors: Mweze Ngangura (Congo), Howard and Mitzi Allen (Antigua), Elsie Haas (Haiti/France), Tunde
Kelani and Onokoome Okome (Nigeria), Yao Ramesar (Trinidad & Tobago), Roger Gnoan Mbala (Cameroon), Gloria Rolando (Cuba), Moussa Sene Absa (Senegal) and Mahmood Patel (Barbados). The festival’s theme was not intended to blend the two cultures together but rather to open up dialogue between these cultures through film. This year’s festival also aimed at spotlighting the work of female filmmakers from the two regions. Complementing the discourse provided by the filmmakers were film experts: Mbye Cham, Dr. Samba Gadijo and Bruce Paddington.

Roundtable discussions and workshops, which offered an opportunity for participants to interact with the directors, comprised the daytime agenda of the festival. With the popularity of Nigerian video films and the success of the Allen’s *The Sweetest Mango*, which was shot on digital video, the new video technology was a point of discussion. It seemed that the filmmakers felt that the new digital technology was a feasible and more realistic avenue for the regions to begin developing their own cinematic works, given the paucity of filmmaking resources available in both the Caribbean and Africa. Other issues raised at the festival were finding unique ways to distribute the filmmaker’s works; the need to find our own Caribbean cinema aesthetic; the challenge of creating quality work with very limited resources; the need for support for the Caribbean
filmmaker’s efforts from government, business and the average population; and the training of young people in the art of moviemaking so that they can inject energy into the developing film movement.

The festival organizers along with business and governmental agencies expressed a genuine interest in setting up a film industry on the island. At the festival opening, Senator John Williams openly offered the government’s support for the festival’s efforts to provide alternative viewing options to the public. More importantly, Senator Williams said that the government was working towards developing a film industry in Barbados. This commitment to a film industry led local officials to draw on the experience and knowledge of Perry Henzell to guide them in their endeavors.

One thing was certain from this festival: all involved felt that there definitely is such a thing as Caribbean cinema though it is still underdeveloped and in a state of infancy. Activities such as this festival and the involvement of Caribbean governments and businesses will help nourish and strengthen this emerging cinema.