A HISTORY OF KENYAN FILM: THE EVOLVING IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MASTER OF ARTS (LITERATURE) DEGREE OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

MARCH 2007

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree or examination in any other university.

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DEDICATION

To Melvin

whose *joie de vivre*

always gave me the impetus to move on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

So many people have contributed to the completion of this thesis that I may not be able to express my appreciation to all of them here. I am greatly indebted to Prof. Oluoch Obura and Dr Garnette Oluoch-Olunya who have been excellent supervisors of this work. Their constant guidance and encouragement even when I never saw sense in what I was doing cannot go unmentioned. I acknowledge the assistance offered by Prof. Emanuel Mbogo, Mr David Mulwa, Mr Wasambo Were, Dr Julia Aurghart, Dr John Mugubi and John Mulwa, all of Kenyatta University.

The success of this study is heavily attributed to the support I received from several people from different organisations and institutions outside Kenyatta University. Albert Wandago and the entire staff of Alwan Communications tremendously boosted my research by providing me with reference material. I am grateful for their friendliness and readiness for discussions whenever I needed certain information. I received similar assistance from Judy Kibinge of Baraka Films, Jane Munene of Cinearts Africa and Ogova Ondego of Commarters. I cannot forget the patience, kindness, guidance and continued availability of Wanjiru Kinyanjui of Acacia Films. I acknowledge the support accorded to me by the staff of Film Studies at the University of Dar es salaam. Specifically, Dr Nyoni, Vivianne and Delphine were more than helpful. Special thanks to Prof. Peter Amuka of Moi University for the references and mentoring guidance he

always gave me. Still in Moi, I must mention the co-operation I got from Dr C.J. Odhiambo, Samuel Ndogo, Vifu Makoti and Amayi.

Not to be forgotten are friends and colleagues whose courageous words always gave me a reason to keep working. Anne Kibanya's insistence on seeing my work moving is highly appreciated. To Dr Evan Mwangi, J.K.S. Makokha, Humphrey and Florence Sipalla, I say thanks a lot. To A.D. Bojana, thank you for finding time to edit this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family whose understanding and support was limitless. I owe my son, Melvin a lot as he never got enough of my time during the trying periods of this study. For my spouse, Nelson, I register my gratitude for your patience and financial support as you ran the family alone and at the same time ensured that I carried out my studies comfortably. I cannot forget to express my appreciation to my mother, siblings and in-laws for their love and patience.

TABLE CONTENTS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Film	-	Feature-length audio-visual electronic theatre
	-	Film industry
Image	-	Characteristic way of appearance, behaviour and way of life in general
Kenyan film	-	A film made and shot in Kenya with Kenyan film practitioners in control of the major roles like directing, editing, acting, producing and (sometimes) funding. It tells a Kenyan (African) story taking the Kenyan (African) perspective
African	-	This is used in this work to mean a black person of African origin
Kenyan Filmmaker	-	An indigenous Kenyan involved in making Kenyan films
African Film	-	Visual works on Africa, telling an African story from an African perspective
Western film	-	In this study we will consider this to mean films made by Western directors
Exoteric	-	Of an outsider, or one who does not belong to a certain community
Isoteric	-	Of an insider
Positive image	-	The representative characteristics of an object or a person
Negative image	-	The usually undesired characteristics of an entity which unfairly represent the entity

ABSTRACT

This is a study of the development of the Kenyan film with specific regard to the evolving image of the African. The study gives a postcolonial exploration of the depiction of the African in selected Kenyan films. It assesses the extent to which the colonial experience influenced the portrayal of the African in the selected Western films. The study proceeds to find out how the portrayal of the African in the Western films has informed the re-presentation of the African in the Kenyan films.

The overall methodological approach to this study is mainly qualitative in nature. The primary sources of data consisted of informal interviews, which enabled the researcher to elicit the respondents' views about the topics of discussion. The researcher also employed free observation when viewing the films. Secondary sources mainly consist of library research whereby critical works on African Cinema were consulted. These included both literature and film material. The study is limited to four purposively sampled films namely, *Out of Africa, Kitchen Toto, Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*.

The theoretical assumptions of the study were confirmed. The study reveals that the Kenyan filmmaker attempts to correct the negative depiction of the Africans in Western films. This, however, fails to give a more truthful depiction of the African than the Western film. This is due to the ambiguities of a post-colonial set-up in which the Kenyan filmmaker as well as his/her audiences operate.

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

For many African filmmakers, cinematic expression is closely linked to decolonization, a theme that has largely dominated the post-independent creative works in Africa[1]. In most African countries, filmmaking gained roots after independence. Consequently, African filmmakers have used film to bring out the impact of Western ideologies on the Africans.[2]

Over time, Western films have characterised the African by an incapacity for rational thought.[3] The African has been portrayed as a debased individual in various works of Literature. This portrayal is part of the false historical and cultural ideology formed about the African, which is best disseminated by cinema (and its by-product, television).[4] According to Michael Parker and Rodger Starkey, this image "... can be seen in much of the television representation of Africa by the Western media, which portrays Africa in perpetual crisis and continues to fix the indigenous peoples as passive, infectiously smiling or suffering backdrops for white politicians and aid workers" (p.6).

Lola Young says "the Africans' skin colour became the defining characteristic, and black, from operating at the connotative level, shifted to a denotative plane: to

be black was to be evil, to be hypersexual, to be morally debased, to be inferior" (p.40). Most Western films on Africa were therefore products of this colonial mentality.[5] The films are replete with this falsifying image of the African. Recently, subversion of the image of the African in cinema has emerged as an area of interest to many scholars.[6] Several Kenyan filmmakers have shown specific concern about the image of the African as portrayed in the western film. Anne Mungai, a Kenyan filmmaker says that in general, this is one of the several concerns of an African filmmaker.[7]

Mungai's position is shared by Wanjiru Kinyanjui, another Kenyan filmmaker, who believes it is her duty to re-present the African through film. She says:

> ... in every film I do, I try to correct the negative image we have of ourselves by trying to portray Africans, from the human side. Of course human beings err, and are never perfect, but there are also positive sides to us, which never surface in films made by outsiders. These I try to include in my films. And if I portray a character as basically negative, it is because we also have such characters, which (sic) exist everywhere. It is a quest to question, to probe, to rediscover qualities using cinema as a tool.[8]

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem examined in this study is two-fold. From the above accounts, this study postulates that among other preoccupations of Kenyan filmmakers, responding to the portrayal of the African in the Western films is pivotal. Formally or informally, several Kenyan filmmakers have admitted that re-presenting the

African is one of their major roles.[9] This is however a claim of responsibility whose validity needs to be established. Therefore, this study is an endeavour to ascertain whether these claims are evident in *Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree.* In doing this, the researcher relied on the negative portrayal of the Africans in two Western films, Harry Cook's *Kitchen Toto* and Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa,* as a backdrop of analysis of the two Kenyan films.

The second part of the problem that this study investigates rests on the nature of the existing studies on the Kenyan film. In reviewing these works, the researcher observed that very few of them have paid attention to the image and re-presentation of the African in the Kenyan film. These studies (Beatrice Mukora and Beti Elerson) have based their studies on the African woman. However, one gets the impression that the African woman is metonymically viewed as a representative of the African fraternity. These studies are quite atomic in their approach and fail to give an overall picture of portrayal of the African in the Kenyan film. The current study therefore attempts a more holistic investigation of the (re-) presentation of the African, whether male or female, child or adult.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

a. Identify the images assigned to the African in the sampled Western films.

b. Analyse the impact of these images on the re-presentation of the African in the selected Kenyan films.

1.4 Research Assumptions

a. Most Western films have misrepresented the Africans.

b. The Kenyan filmmaker consciously or unconsciously subverts the image of the African in his/her films.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Very little study has been conducted on the film industry in Kenya.[10] As such no research has focused on re-presentation of the African through film. This study aims at locating the different images of the African along the history of filmmaking in Kenya. The need to re-present the image of the African has emerged to be of great concern in post-independent African Literature.[11] Maureen Eke, Kenneth Harrow and Emmanuel Yewah see the need to support issues of representation and image of the African in African Literature and Cinema (p.7). It is this recreation of self-image that Chinua Achebe refers to as "re-creating the past in the present" (p.79). This study therefore emerges as one of the contributions towards the corpus of this concern.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Postcolonial literary theory. This theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in (formerly) colonised or (former)

colonising countries and focuses on the colonisation process, its ideology and aftermath. These include literary works whose writing were in one way or another influenced by the colonial contact. Generally, the theory is concerned with the way in which literature by the colonising culture distorts the experience and realities of the colonised, inscribing inferiority of the latter in the literature produced. This action has resulted in the discourse of the 'centre' and its 'margins' or the 'self' and the 'other'.[12] The theory is also built around the impact of these classifications on the literature of the colonies.

Postcolonial studies are influenced by a number of reading techniques. Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism and Post-modernism are among the theoretical currents that have informed various considerations of the Postcolonial approach (Pieterse and Bhikhu, p.10). Some of the key proponents of Postcolonial theory include Edward Said (*Orientalism*), Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*) Gayatri Spivak (*The Post-colonial Critic*) Leela Ghandhi (*Postcolonial Theory: An Introduction*) Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks)* and Ashcroft et al. *(The Empire Writes Back).* To these critics, cultural and spatial displacements originating from colonial contact is a major concern in postcoloniality. The crisis these displacements have caused has led the (former) colonies to question their self-image and try to re-present themselves.

In its re-definition of Literature, this theory transcends artistic frontiers, relinquishing classicism and purity of literary genres.[13] It is at this moment that postcolonial theory gives room for analysis of film. At this point, it can be argued that reading and viewing become synonymous just like writing and filmmaking. In this study therefore, the 'synonyms' are used interchangeably.

Postcolonial literary theory addresses questions of culture and power in Literature. Re-reading and re-writing of the Empire's historical and fictional record is a vital and inevitable task at the heart of the postcolonial enterprise. Employing this feature, the study attempts to re-read the portrayal of the African in the Western fictional film. The role and personality of the African in the selected films is re-examined.

Leela Gandhi, one of the proponents of this theory says, "writers from diverse, formerly colonized areas have adapted the Western form (...) to suit their own purpose: to relate life in their region from the inside, as it is experienced by those who live there" (p.9). In this respect, subversive and appropriative strategies employed in the sampled Kenyan films was explored in order to get a better understanding of the films.

Throughout the history of Eurocentric theory, ownership of meaning has almost always been locked in a contest between the language, the utterer and the recipient. The nature of postcolonial writing has revealed that the situation is not

that simple. The theory has shown that all these three 'functions' of the exchange participate in the 'social situation' of the text. Postcolonial critics like Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin believe that writing is a social practice, with a social function. It therefore follows that the meaning of such writing is a social accomplishment in which the participation of the writer and the reader function within the event of that particular discourse. It frees language from the contingent situation (CS) and opens up horizons within which many more relations than pertaining to the CS can be established. A postcolonial text does not 'create meaning' through the mere act of inscribing it but rather indicates a potential and shifting horizon of possible meanings. The study explores these possible meanings in the selected Kenyan and Western films. Such meanings were obtained from thorough examination of the social informants of the films. Postcolonial theory therefore allowed the researcher to contextually analyse the films, rather than restricting herself to the referents in the texts.[14]

According to Gandhi, Postcolonial criticism favours hybridity and syncretism (p.151). Third world creative writers have appropriated Western genres and moulded them into indigenous realities. Africans have used film, a western invention, in giving local experiences as they tell their own story. Critics like Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (pp.195-6) and Stam (p.287) have noted the necessity of this appropriation. They agree that it is not possible to return to or to rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create

national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise. This concept suits well the approach of this research to the image of the African in the Kenyan film. It enabled the researcher to explore how the Kenyan film (as art) has been shaped by the interaction between Kenya and the Western colonial powers. Due to racial supremacy enjoyed by the 'centre', for instance, it portrayed caricatures of the Africans using negative attributes that were constructed to justify its dominance over the Africans.[15]

We have seen that cultural undermining emerges as one of the numerous yet divergent social informants of the creation of the Kenyan film.[16] Postcolonial theory therefore guides this study in discussing the various ways in which Kenyan filmmakers have projected the image of the African in their films.

1.7 Literature/Film Review

In this section, the study pays attention to documented material on the Kenyan film. Several scholars have researched on the Kenyan film though with different findings.

Wanjiku Mukora, in "Beyond Tradition and Modernity" widely discusses the problem of and need for identity through creative works; basically literary and cinematic creations. She bases her argument on Wanjiru Kinyanjui's feature film, *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994) and Anne Mungai's *Saikati* (1992). The two films revolve around women who find solace in traditional values yet engage in

"modern" practices. She sees the films as a "rich resource for understanding complexities of the postcolonial situation" (p. 220). She finds in the post-independence films what post-independence novels too struggle to represent; the indigenous experience. Mukora focuses on the experiences of the post-colonial African woman. She examines two issues: First, she dwells on how the two films inscribe women within the antagonisms of traditions and modernity, within the contradicting and complex nature of these two forces. She also looks at how women strive to accommodate their individual experiences within the changing socio-cultural circumstances while avoiding conflict between the two.

Mukora's study is a great resource to this study. She shares with this study the position that film is an important and versatile medium through which the postcolonial condition is well understood. Her examination of the representation of the post-colonial African woman provides fresh insights into the researcher's understanding of the image of the African, especially in indigenous Kenyan film. Some of the approaches she has used are also of great importance to this study.

In "Dangerous Affair: Narrating Popular Experiences in Kenya," Florence Sipalla examines ways in which Judy Kibinge's film, *Dangerous Affair*, outlines popular experiences within the urban sphere. This film explores the lives of young elite urbanites in Nairobi. It revolves around the lives of two women, Rose and Wangui, who are caught in a love triangle with Muraguri. Confused, Muraguri takes too

long to choose between the two women. Reality dawns on him only when Wangui divorces him because of infidelity. To Sipalla, *Dangerous Affair* is a popular film inasmuch as it has the ability to give the public a sense of the familiar.[17] Her study delineates the contribution made by *Dangerous Affair* to the whole body of visual works in Kenya.

Beti Ellerson's book and documentary film, *Sisters of the Screen,* make a critical inventory into the works, thoughts and practices of African women in the various areas of Cinema. In the book, Ellerson interviews two Kenyan filmmakers, Catherine Muigai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui. The interview with Wanjiru Kinyanjui focuses on the misrepresentation of the African by the Western filmmaker. Kinyanjui explains that her works aim at portraying the African as a rational human being as opposed to the distorted image that the Western filmmaker has assigned the African. In interviewing Catherine Muigai, Ellerson reveals that the image of the African woman has been very negative in the African films made by men (not necessarily of Western origin). The women are portrayed as lesser beings compared to their male counterparts. They are portrayed as weaklings, sex symbols, dumb, not focused, always just sitting in the house, among other negative presentations.[18] She concludes that, as a woman's position in the society is very important, there is an urgent need to uplift the woman's representation in the film as well as her participation in the film industry in Kenya. This study derives a lot from Ellerson's interviews. These two interviews elicit a representative opinion of

the Kenyan filmmakers about the image of Africans in film. The interviews also equip the study with the contribution the interviewed filmmakers make towards re-presentation of the African through film.

Nyamwaya et al., in "Evaluation Report: Kenya Film Corporation Ltd," find the film industry in Kenya wanting. They acknowledge work in existence like *Mlevi, Bushtrackers* and *The Rise and Fall of Iddi Amin.* Yet they are not satisfied with the part played by film in the promotion of indigenous Kenyan experiences. They see film as a medium for shaping up both social and economic development in a country. They observe that Kenya's film industry lacks confidence and blame the government for not giving the necessary support to the industry. This situation, they say, has made the local filmmaker almost lose hope in ever producing a quality and up-to-international-standards film. But they argue that given the relevant support by the government, the industry can compete fairly well at the international market.

Although Nyamwaya et al seem to blame the government for the slow growth of the Kenyan film industry, it is apparent that their problem is not clearly stated, hence a blurred solution is eminently expected. They raise several issues that need to be revised. First of all, their position risks viewing the government as the ultimate panacea to all the hindrances in the growth of film industry in Kenya. The government may be blamed for not facilitating development of the film industry in

Kenya. It however cannot shoulder all the activities in filmmaking. The recent upsurge in local filmmaking has taken more of individual initiative complemented by government support.[19] Second, calling for films that reflect indigenous Kenyan experience is quite ambiguous. Within Kenya, indigenous experience may be found to be fluid and difficult to define.[20] Third, if this definition was as easy as Nyamwaya et al assume, the contradiction of their problem may not allow for the implementation of their proposed plan. Their attempt to promote Kenyan indigenous experiences gets diluted when they introduce the need for an "up-to-international standards" film. Kenya does not define these standards. The centre has an upper hand on this.[21] Promoting Kenya's "indigenous experiences" and satisfying "international standards" cannot be achieved at the same time.

Paola Moggi and Roger Tessier in their "Media Status Report: Kenya" provide an overview of issues surrounding filmmaking in Kenya. They point at legal, political and economic hindrances to filmmaking in Kenya. Some of these hindrances they posit are already being worked on either by the government or by individual filmmaking firms. Their report gives this study a general background information about the Kenyan film industry.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research was basically qualitative. This necessitated a qualitative approach to data collection, interpretation and analysis.

1.8.1 Data Collection

The researcher gathered data for this study from both primary and secondary sources. The first source of primary data was observation of the selected feature films. This enabled the researcher to give her perceived understanding of the depiction of the African in the analysed films. The second source of primary data involved informal interviews with a number of film professionals. These included producers, directors, actors and screen-playwrights. They were interviewed on film production in Kenya. Secondary data came from already documented materials available.[22]

a). Primary Data Collection

The researcher gathered primary data for this study using the following methods:

i) Observation

The sampled films were observed with an aim of studying their (re-) presentation of the African. During this process, the researcher took observational notes, which were typed and stored electronically for later analysis. Here the researcher paid attention to both artistic and technical means of image enhancement that the films employ. The techniques observed included language, casting and characterisation while the technical modes observed were editing, sound and camera operations. Although the researcher was guided by a checklist focusing on the above

techniques, she engaged in free observation so that any useful information outside the observation checklist was recorded and considered during data analysis.

ii) Informal Interviews

The researcher carried out several informal interviews with the directors/producers of the two selected Kenyan films (*The Battle of the Sacred Tree* and *Kolormask*). The study relied on the director since s/he is the creator or 'author' of the film.[23] By interviewing the director/ producer, the researcher sought to find out how much the interviewee contributed towards re-presentation of the African in these films. Where necessary, the researcher interviewed actors/actresses since they are the conveyors of the image the director portrays. By interviewing actors/actresses, the researcher wanted to obtain the interviewee's opinion about the final image on the screen in relation to the original image or idea in the script.

The researcher engaged the interviewees in open-ended discussions with an aim of giving them the opportunity to take the discussion in the direction that interests them. Much of the time was spent responding to the accounts of the interviewees rather than getting them to react to the interviewer's questions. This, the researcher believed would give the study more objective and uninfluenced response from the interviewees. This, therefore, necessitated unstructured open-ended questions from the researcher. The filmmakers of the Western films analysed in this study were

however not interviewed. Rather, the Western films were used as a background from which a comprehensive image of the African in the Kenyan film was drawn.

To complement the interviews, the researcher used data collection tools. In this study, several checklists of questions and a tape recorder were used. The checklist was meant to guide the course of the interviews and to ensure that the discussions did not veer off the topic of concern. Tape-recording the interviews ensured that the entire talk was captured such that no information from the interviews was left out. The tape-recorded data were therefore transcribed and stored electronically awaiting analysis. During the interviews, the researcher took notes, which would have been resorted to in the event that the tape-recorder failed.

The researcher relied on three separate sets of questions. The first was designed for the directors/producers of the purposively sampled Kenyan films that were analysed in this study. It aided the researcher in eliciting information about conscious and/or unconscious attention paid by the directors to the image of the African in the selected films.

The second set of questions was designed for four other filmmakers in Kenya. Out of a population of "about nineteen filmmaking companies" in Kenya, four companies were purposively sampled and their film directors interviewed.[24] The response of these directors provided the research with information concerning the

general pre-occupation of a Kenyan filmmaker. This information also gave the study the general overview of the trend of the directors' effort in re-presenting the African through film.

A separate set of questions was used to guide interviews with actors/actresses. The researcher interviewed a total of eight actors/actresses. Two major actors from each of the four films studied were interviewed. This is because major characters are usually created in such a way that conveys a film's main concern. The interviews were meant to elicit the actors/actresses' opinions about the roles that s/he played in the films.

b) Secondary Data

Both literature and non-fictional films with information pertaining to the Kenyan film, African film and issues of image creation constituted sources of secondary data for this study. The researcher made use of libraries at the following institutions in collecting secondary data: Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Moi University, Kenya Institute of Mass Communication, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, University of Dar es salaam and Kenya National Archives. Some relevant material from the Internet also provided secondary data for this study. During secondary data collection, the researcher made notes, which were typed, for electronic storage before their analysis began.

1.8.2 Data Analysis

This process involves making sense out of text and image data that has been collected. It involves moving deeper into understanding the data and making interpretation of the larger meaning of the data[25]. Data collected from both primary and secondary sources were considered here.

Data analysis was done in two stages. The first stage involved text analysis of the films observed. Here, the notes taken during film observation were interrogated. This study considers the film as viewed on the screen to be the text. The information was used to evaluate the roles played by the Africans. The second stage involved critical reading of the transcribed interviews. This is a data validation technique, which the researcher applied to minimise inaccuracy in the information gathered from the interviews. This approach gave the study an insight into the contextual background of the interviewees' contribution to changing the image of the African in the film. The researcher also analysed the notes made from secondary sources in order to get information that supports the primary data.

1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on four feature films. These are: *Out of Africa* (1985), *Kitchen Toto* (1987), *Kolormask* (1985) and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994). These were purposively sampled for this study since they capture very well the image of the African within different nodal periods in Kenyan history. These films are also

readily available in video format for viewing. The Western films included in the sample were set and shot in Kenya. This makes them more appropriate for comparison with the films made by Kenyans. It was deemed important for the researcher to compare the production options that were available for the two categories of directors of the sampled films. These were in terms of cast, locations and crew.

The study restricted itself to analysing the selected feature films. Other forms of film like documentary, animation, commercials, docu-drama, were not considered. This is because they basically lack the level of subjectivity found in the feature film. It is this subjective production that helps the director create the image s/he intends to.

The study faced a number of limitations. Kenyan film industry is just developing hence not stable. As a result, research in the industry is just taking root. This status made it difficult for the researcher to get much documented material on the Kenyan film. Most Kenyan films do not get to the Kenyan market for different reasons. It was, therefore, very expensive to access the films used in the study. Many times, very high recording fee had to be paid for a film. Sometimes, films and books useful to the study were not easily accessible to the researcher. For example, Dina Shezer's *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism* (1996) would have been a very resourceful book for this study but the researcher was unable to access

it. The researcher could also not access several relevant films like *I Dreamed of Africa, Mlevi,* and *Mrembo.*

CHAPTER TWO

2. STATUS OF THE FILM INDUSTRY IN KENYA

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a short overview of some of the pertinent issues in the position of filmmaking in Kenya. The development of a film industry is usually closely related to quantity and consequently quality of feature film production in a country. The discussion in this chapter is, therefore, based on the state of feature filmmaking in Kenya. The chapter is mainly concerned with the historical development of the Kenyan film industry. The prevalence of foreign filmmaking in the country is also explored.

2.2 Kenya as a Filming Location

Over years, Kenya has provided a good scenic location for foreign films. This has attracted several foreign filmmakers, whose films may not necessarily be set in Kenya. This interest in Kenyan locations has been sustained to a large extent by her wide variety of geographic scenery and climatic conditions compressed in a relatively small space. Among Kenya's excellent scenes are snowy equatorial mountain peaks, savannah plains, white beaches and volcanic lakes. With such features, the country has been found to be a perfect backdrop for shooting different kinds of film. Kenyan locations have been used in major action adventure movies and wildlife documentaries. Producers find it economical to film in Kenya since

all this variety is within relatively short distance. Some of the foreign films shot in Kenya include Bob Rafelson's *Mountains of the Moon* (1990), *Bushtrackers* (2001), Michael Apted's *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), Michael Radford's *White Mischief* (1988), Fernando Mireille's *The Constant Gardener* (2005), *Ashanti* (1990) and *The Kitchen Toto* (1985), among others.

Kenya's reputation as prime filming location has been boosted by two foreign films, which have won Oscars. *Out of Africa* (1987) and *Nowhere in Africa* (2002) were shot in Kenya, with memorable inclusion of local cast. The latter moved a milestone when it cast in leading role a local thespian, Sidede Otieno. This came as a break from the monotonous use of local actors/actresses in supportive roles as seen in the previous foreign films.

Although many foreign films continue to be shot in Kenya, the country faces stiff competition from other African countries with similar scenery like the neighbouring Tanzania in which *Mighty Joe Young* was shot. The filming of *The Last King of Scotland* in Uganda did not only ensure the authenticity of its location but also indicated the possibility of more foreign films being shot in the country. South Africa is probably the stiffest competitor of Kenya in attracting filmmakers from overseas. A case in point is the filming in South Africa of Stephen Hopkins' *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996), a film based on John Patterson's novel, *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*, which is set in Kenya. Lack of proper infrastructure in some

of the areas with the desired filming sites like savannahs, slums and some remote parts of the country may make Kenya lose more film projects.

Lack of sufficient professional thespians and crew may also limit Kenya's chances of attracting more foreign filmmakers. Such filmmakers always employ the talents of some local artistes during the shooting period. Yet the repetitive appearance of a few professionals on the local screen may not work for the foreign films. Kenya needs to put more effort in training her screen actors/actresses and crew. This may provide the foreign filmmakers with the kind of variety they find in the more aggressive audio-visual scenes like the South African film industry. There is need for the government to improve or provide an enabling environment for the improvement of communication, transport and other social amenities in the frequently sought after filming sites.

2.3 Feature Filmmaking in Kenya

Some of the earliest attempts at feature filmmaking in Kenya were seen in the early sixties just after television was introduced in the country in 1962. Sharad Patel and Anne Mungai in collaboration with the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication's film production department produced *Mlevi* and *Mrembo*. These films dealt with day to day social issues like the effects of alcoholism. From that time the genre received scanty attention until the production of *Kolormask* in

1986. Production of *Kolormask* was a result of the activities of the now defunct Kenya Film Corporation, which collapsed after the film was released.

While Kenya boasts of good filming locations and few but capable crew and cast, it was until the 1990s that consistent film production was witnessed in the country. It is in this decade that films like *Saikati I* and *Saikati II* (1992) *Saikati the Enkabaani* (1997), *Metamo* (1997), *The Battlle of the Sacred Tree* (1994), *Sabina's Encounter* (1998), *The Married Bachelor* (1997) among others were released. Kenya was slowly and steadily picking up in filmmaking by the turn of the millennium. Her filmmaking had risen to yet another level with individual film-houses exhibiting their capacity to produce not less than three films in less than a year.[26]

Particular thematic inclination can be observed in the Kenya films. Apart from Mungai and Patel's films, cultural reaffirmation in *Kolormask* was meant to set the pace for later films. Due to the collapse of the Film Corporation that led to independent filmmaking, the filmmakers freely decided what their films centred on. Subsequent films seemed to have a considerable focus on the position of the woman in society. Welfare of the woman has been a major point in the films like Anne Mungai's *Saikati*, Albert Wandago's *Naliaka is Going, Sabina's Encounters* and *Metamo* and Jane Munene's *The Price of a Daughter* and *Behind Closed Doors* among others.

The stable growth of the film industry in Kenya was boosted at the beginning of the 21st century when a new mode of production was introduced. Commatters in *Africa Film and TV 2004* observes that,

> Kenya is starting to experience an increase in the number of low budget productions modelled on the Nigerian straight-to-video filmmaking style. Examples include *Dangerous Affair* and *Project Daddy* (Judy Kibinge), *Driving to Glory* (Christine Bala) and *The Greencard* and *Azizi* (Brutus Sirucha)
>
> (p.64).

With the more affordable low budget filmmaking, the industry has made a major stride in terms of the average number of productions per year. According to Paola Moggi and Rodger Tessier in their "Media Status Report: Kenya", "Kenyan filmmakers have been producing an average of one feature film in every four years" (p.14). Although Moggi and Tessier give a debatable figure, the rate of production remained very low until the late 1990s.[27] Video Filmmaking is an indication that Kenyan filmmaking has started to find ways of overcoming some of the hindrances that have dragged the industry behind over the years.

2.4 Problems in the Kenyan Film Industry

Kenya's penetration into the African, indeed world film market, has been an uphill task. It has been hindered considerably by the overt domination of foreign productions.

Unfair market conditions have been mentioned as one of the major drawbacks in the Kenyan film industry. Stiff competition from foreign audio-visual material has persisted in Kenya.[28] Television stations are replete with Western programmes and movies. The foreign owned cinema theatres in the country (almost) only exhibit foreign films. Beti Ellerson in her essay, "Africa Through a Woman's Eyes" says, "Africans presently live in a period of neocolonialism in which Western film monopolies dominate distribution, which means that African audiences have little control over which films they can see" (p.192). In Kenya, this "neocolonial" situation has caused Kenyan film practitioners to press for the government to issue a policy that would enable fair competition in the market. They have lobbied for increased local content in the local audio-visual media. This has not been realised since the government's directive that 20% of what was aired on the local television channels be local was not effected. Some media personalities were not comfortable with this proposition, saying it was going to check the flow of foreign material into the local scene.[29] This would negatively affect the privately owned business oriented audio-visual media houses.

Foreign monopoly is anchored in this position by several loopholes in the country's socio-economic and political culture. Film industry, being an expensive venture, has discouraged local investors. This financial impediment spills over to the postproduction activities like processing and marketing. It is not easy to come by film processing laboratories in Kenya. The 16 mm facility at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication has been rendered defunct due to poor maintenance and lack of spare parts.[30] Therefore, it is very expensive to make films using such facilities.

Film distribution poses a major challenge to filmmakers in Kenya. There is fear of films being pirated and sold leaving the copyright owners without benefits. The cost of producing a film does not leave the producer with any room to condone piracy. Filmmaking in Kenya has lately become an independent affair. Individual filmmakers have taken it upon themselves to put the whole production into place. This is a demanding and expensive preoccupation after which the producers hope to make a profit. This is not easily achievable with piracy. Margaretta Wa Gacheru attests to this when she says "Kenya's video market is booming but sadly, practically all the videos are pirated so that while the government may licence local video outlets, the million cassettes in circulation are violating international copyright laws" (p.54).

Film piracy affects Kenyan filmmaking in two major ways: Relatively cheaper pirated copies of foreign films unfairly compete with the local productions, which are usually original works. Local works are usually trusted with the producers themselves or a few trusted retail stores. This situation does not only create an unfair market environment for the local productions but it also ensures that the local productions are not readily available for viewing.[31]

The Kenyan government has given much attention to tourism, being a major source of foreign income. With this, the government has given very favourable conditions to foreign filmmakers, whose productions promote Kenya as a tourist destination. Commatters says "(the then) Ministry of Tourism and Information has removed virtually all obstacles to film licensing" (p.10). Given the availability of varied scenic features that can give different impressions, Kenya therefore remains a preferred location for most films that require shots of the African jungle. Extension of such considerations to the local industry could highly boost the industry.

"The future of the development of cinema and exhibition in Africa is in the hands of the legislators," says Roger Le Comber in his article "The Future Development of Film and Video Distribution and Exhibition in Africa" (p.52). Laxity in enforcement of piracy laws has been a major drawback in the development of film

distribution and exhibition in Kenya. This is an area that needs to be re-visited if the Kenyan film industry is to develop.

2.5 Recent Interest in the Local Film Industry

Recently, Kenya has experienced a growing trend that is (slowly) moving in favour of local films. From 1992, when the government's monopoly of film distribution finally surrendered to outside forces' insistence upon the liberalisation of the economy, there has been a marked expansion in the local filmmaking scene.[32] Although the returns are said to have remained low for the local distributors, this explosion can be viewed in the emergence and fast rise of independent filmmaking in Kenya. Kenya has a great audio-visual potential, which has not been fully explored. She therefore emerges as a strong and all encompassing filmmaking country, which could make maximum use of her capabilities to develop a stable and internationally recognised film industry. "More than 80 (sic) major productions have been made in Kenya as a testament to her great potential in terms of location, crew and cast" (Ogova Ondego p.12).

It is this local talent that Kenyan artists (not only filmmakers) have realised in the recent past. This kind of attitude change has been noted in music as well as in the theatres. Local filmmaking has also taken keener interest in more local productions. Evidently, active participation in and formation of new film festivals has been a boost to the Kenyan film industry. Festivals like the biennial Pan

African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou, Zanzibar's yearly Festival of the Dhow Countries, Amakula in Kampala and Nairobi's annual Africa Cineweek have been a good attraction to the Kenyan films in the recent years. These festivals have provided a suitable space for the Kenyan filmmakers to market themselves. As a result, the rate of production per year has gone up tremendously.

The festivals have provided an arena in which local filmmakers and those from different countries meet and deliberate on various issues in the field[33]. These international ties have also been noted in the modes of operation of film production companies. Even though Nairobi is, metonymically, the core of Kenyan filmmaking, many Kenyan film production houses operate throughout the East African region. Africa Pix, Camera Pix, Ukweli Video Productions, Alwan Communications are among the film houses that have crossed the Kenyan borders into neighbouring countries.[34]

We see the independent filmmaking era coming up with solutions to some of the perennial drawbacks of the film industry in Kenya. Funding has been cited as a major hindrance to filmmaking in Kenya.[35] Filmmakers have taken personal initiatives to seek funds from external funding agencies.[36] Other filmmakers have resorted to private funding.[37] With this rigorous task of sourcing funds, it is mandatory that smart budgeting and expenditure is used in order to cut on costs.

Financial hindrance is not peculiar to the Kenyan filmmakers alone. It is rather a characteristic of most African film industries.

Other innovative ways of advertising Kenyan film have included collaborative activities like formation of associations that have sprung up in the recent years. One such organisation is the Kenya National Film Association (KNFA). Formed in 1997, KNFA has over forty members comprising independent film and video producers in the country.[38] One of the most visible achievements of this association is the inception of Africa Cine week in 1998. One of the association's objectives is to "liaise with the government and other organisations and individuals on matters concerning audio-visual media communication" Ondego (p.20). This has been realised in its alliance with the French Cultural and Cooperation Centre (FCC). The association has been running Africa Cine week while FCC has been the main sponsor of the event since 1998.[39] KNFA, headed by the chairperson, Jane Murago-Munene, spearheaded the formation of Kenya Film Commission in June 2005. The commission's mandate is to sell Kenyan film locations and handle other issues relating to the industry at large. As an official organisation, the film commission is expected to streamline what has otherwise been done by private bodies and to formulate plans for development of a better movie industry in Kenya. It also supports local film projects.[40]

The commission should be able to harmonise the activities in the film production circles and publish a guideline on artists' fees, as payment of cineastes has been a controversial issue in the recent past. Currently, payment is open and decisions concerning fees are wholly dependent on particular productions. The producer makes decisions according to the availability of funds and the kind of the artists employed (whether professional or amateur). In such a situation, it is not easy for the artist to know whether the payment is genuine or not. Complaints have been made concerning the production of The *Survivor* series, *The Tomb Raider 2* and more recently, *The White Maasai*. Coming up with a guideline should eliminate the possibility of undue payment controversies that befall some productions.

To publicise the local film, Kenyan filmmakers have formed Pamoja Film Club (PFC).[41] The club gives Kenyans a chance to watch a local production once every month. These screenings are done at the Alliance Francaise, Nairobi. Every screening is followed by an open discussion between the filmmakers and the audience.[42] This activity goes beyond mere entertainment. It is steadily moving towards a fruitful dialogue between the filmmakers and the consumers. It is becoming a forum akin to stage performance, where the audience's response contributes towards the artist's next move. By the filmmakers and other film artistes attending the discussions, they are able to listen to the views of the audience and realise what to improve on in their subsequent productions.

Kenya Film and Television Professionals Association (KFTPA) is an organisation that has brought together TV and film professionals with the goal of improving the local audio-visual sub-sector.[43] Under the leadership of the association's chairperson, Njeri Karago, KFTPA aims at lobbying for governmental support as far as a conducive working environment for these professionals is concerned. In this view, the government has pledged positive and encouraging provisions towards the film industry in Kenya.[44]

2.6 Emergent Street Films in Kenya

A striking recent development in the Kenyan film industry is the budding of a new genre of street fiction film. The first is the Kikuyu series released in 2004 from John Njuguna. *Mathekanio ma Kihenjo* is a compilation of initially road shows sponsored by Supermatch cigarette company. By mid 2005, *Pengle* (Luo) series by Triple EM Films came into the market. This has extended to other local Kenyan languages like Kamba and Kiswahili.

Comedy on FM radio stations has been a characteristic of the media since its emergence in the late 1990s. This was due to the popularity of the Kikuyu comedy series released on audio-cassette in the 1990s by Githingithia. With the easy access to computers and CD writing, technology has been adapted to release the material as film on VCD format. It is a reflection of the shift from vernacular radio to visual media. The films are basically comedy and the trend is expected to spread to

other major vernacular languages in Kenya. The language in which the film is produced does not seem to be a barrier to the audience since the film's characters rely heavily on a lot of body language. As such, there is a tendency of even non-speakers of these languages to follow the flow of the story-line.[45]

A visit to film stores in downtown Nairobi reveals much more than one expects in such shops: film selling. They not only sell locally produced movies but the core business for a large majority of these shops has been distribution of local music. The genres include both secular and gospel music. Most of the material available is low-priced and in effort to combat piracy musicians have relied on selling their music to these stores. As business goes on, a makeshift cinema screens films by the doorstep. The screening goes on throughout the day. In a day, the same film can be shown on a loop and as a customer tests the video compact disc (VCD) bought, a crowd may gather to watch a few scenes. There is no consistency in audience numbers and the crowd depends on the location of the shop. The shops on the major roads with high pedestrian traffic have a significantly higher proportion of audience.

The primary aim of screening the movies on the television at the premise is to advertise the films to the pedestrians. It is a variant of playing music cassettes at loud volumes, which has been used for the same purpose over time. This is why

the movies are screened for free. Ironically, the producers unlike the mainstream Kenyan filmmakers are less worried about piracy.[46]

The films are produced by people who were initially in the business of producing music cassettes and have diverged into the movie business. Producers like Shalom Communications are known for producing music videos for gospel artists. The producers are well known in the music business by music lovers.

Some of the challenges of exhibiting the films include obstructing customers from the business premises. Security is not ensured in the temporary screening areas hence very few people can risk standing, watching a film to the end. There are no films in most of the local Kenyan languages because this is a relatively new phenomenon in local entertainment and needs time to develop. [47]

The whole process of producing these films is fast and does not rely on professional crew since such personnel are too expensive to hire. The actors are usually amateurs. They are not guided by any script or director since these two will incur extra cost on the production. The artists are, therefore, forced to create their own dialogue and improvise a lot whenever one loses his/her lines. Since they have no director and script, the films lack continuity and can take any direction depending on the actors/actresses' creativity. Therefore, the quality of the films is wanting. The films rely on a lot of humour so that the audience

concentrates on the entertainment at the expense of the obvious artistic and technical flaws. These can be seen in terms of amateur acting, poor shots and editing. Wanjiru Kinyanjui in her essay, "The Booming Show Business in Nairobi's River Road District" observes this:

> Sometimes the actor forgets his line and repeats the last one or the response by a fellow actor is not as suited to the former line. (...) the actors improvise all the time and the camera, not knowing what will come next is safer at a distance. But this is a disadvantage for the sound. In the majority of these videos no external microphones are used. Camera sound only works if the actors are close enough to the camera. This is why in many videos, there is a lot of shouting by the actors. (...) In one such production, we notice the 2nd cameraman running across the screen or hiding when he realises he is in the picture.
>
> (pp.56-57)

With these faults, the videos offer a great challenge to the mainstream filmmakers who spend a lot of money to produce films that are not easily sold out for fear of piracy. In as much as these films offer competition to the mainstream local productions, areas of convergence between the two have been noted. Some mainstream filmmakers have transferred their original video productions to video compact discs (VCDs), which are more affordable and can thus attract customers. But the cost of mainstream production still hinders pricing of their films.[48]

2.7 Independent Filmmaking in Kenya

Filmmaking in Kenya has lately become an individual endeavour. After the collapse of the Kenya Film Corporation in the 1990s and liberation of economy,

privately owned independent film companies fully took up the filmmaking enterprise. The companies work towards achieving their own objectives and seek financial aid independently.

The industry lacks a unified national focus that streamlines the nature of the films produced. Lately, Kenyan cinema is slowly moving out of the didactic style into films with mellower tones. The freedom that comes with independent filmmaking enables one to choose his film on an artistic and/or financial basis. It enables the artist to look beyond just "militancy" or "message filmmaking," to use Ngangura's words, which has characterised earlier Kenyan films.[49] For example, during the 1987 FESPACO in Ouagadougou "*Kolormask* was criticised for being too exotic in its emphasis on documenting African cultures" (Diawara, p.117). Independent films are, therefore, freed from this mission to give prominence to the African and his/her culture. Diawara says:

> The relative freedom that the independent directors acquire in being their own producers enables them to make popular films that are not burdened by didactic and propagandistic precepts imposed by the government.
> (p.119)

This shift has led to the rise of short films, which are easily understood by many as they look at everyday human encounters. The films are popular and the youth easily identify with them. Although this style is characterised by short films like

Rapid Eye Movements and *The Room*, feature films like *Dangerous Affair* have also exhibited this popular approach.

Former colonial powers still play a major role in the sustenance of filmmaking and film training in African countries. Francophone Africa has benefited most from such collaborations. This has its roots in the assimilative colonial legacy that France brought upon its colonies. In Anglophone Africa, the assistance has come from different European countries. The French have extended their help to almost every corner of the continent. This has benefited Anglophone countries as well. Assistance has also come from other European countries like Germany and Denmark. The Federal Republic of Germany was responsible for the production and training centre in Zimbabwe. It also aided the setting up of Kenya Institute of Mass Communication, which trains in film production as well as other courses in the media like Television, Radio and Journalism. The Audio-visual Institute was set up in Tanzania in 1974 with the help of the Danish Government.

There is though a rather dangerous side of independent filmmaking in Africa, Kenya being one of the worst hit. The producers tend to seek funds from different sources. In Kenya, the most influential production finance providers have been the Western non-governmental organisations and United Nations bodies.50 These donors are most of the time interested in making a statement through the films that they fund. The filmmakers are sometimes convinced to follow the donors'

demands in the process of filmmaking. At this point, the image accorded to the African is not always close to reality. This results in films in which helpless African is saved from his/her harmful traditions by Western institutions like school, government administrators and the church. This Western influence variedly interferes with the "independence" of the filmmakers. For instance, a film that finds a middle ground between the Western lifestyle and the African traditions would show some level of independence in the industry. Cham, seeing the danger of the Western grants for African filmmaking, argues that "South/South co-operation in the area of film production is likely to be one of the major shifts in African film production practices in the 90s and beyond" (p.4). Over-reliance on the Western aid is likely to only lead to neo-colonisation of the African screens.

2.8 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the development of feature filmmaking in Kenya from its inception in the 1960s to its present position. It has also looked at some of the hindrances to filmmaking and distribution and some of the interventions implemented by both the filmmakers and the government in order to promote the local film industry. Due to these interventions, we have observed a remarkably steady development in the industry from the 1990s. This has also led to the emergence of a sub-industry specialising in comic street films. This overview aims at shedding more light on the rise of the film industry in Kenya and acts as a backdrop to which reference shall be made in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER THREE

3. DEPICTION OF THE AFRICAN IN *OUT OF AFRICA* AND *THE KITCHEN TOTO*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the portrayal of the African in Western films. The discussion centres on the meanings derived from this portrayal. Two films, Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (1987) and Harry Hook's *The Kitchen Toto* (1985) are analysed. *Out of Africa*, a Hollywood production from Universal Pictures, is set in the 1914 colonial Kenya, and is based on Isak Dinesen's 1934 memoir of her life in colonial Kenya.

The director of *Tarzan* series, Edgar Rice Burough, did some of the earliest Hollywood presentations of Africa through film. Although he never set foot on African soil Burough created fictional images of Africa as well as his legendary character, Tarzan, who was to fascinate generations of Americans and audiences everywhere. Due to the popularity of Borough's romance stories, they inspired a series of Hollywood films. With such films, "Hollywood Commercial Cinema exploited the popular misconceptions already embedded in the African romance-adventure stories of the 19th century writers" (Frank Ukadike p. 40). In an attempt to appeal to the cinema audiences' taste for exoticism at the expense of exploiting the Africans, European racist texts have continued to be adapted for the

Hollywood screen. This later led to the production of films such as *King Solomon's Mines, Ghost and The Darkness, Hatari* and much later *Out of Africa*, among others.

Kitchen Toto is a British production relating some of the political experiences in the 1950s Kenya, a time when *Mau Mau* resistance reached its peak. The two films do not only share the fact that they are both based on reality but also some two issues this study deems important. They are both exoteric presentations of Kenya through the eyes of Western directors. The films also present post-independence tales of the colonial experiences in Kenya.

By analysing the African as depicted in these two Western films, the study is, however, aware that it is not only the Africans whose image has been portrayed negatively in film. It is common to find negative images of the third world in colonial literature and (their adaptation into) film. These works have, in one way or another, presented the colonies as lesser beings. Michael Harris says,

> The continuing appeal of fictional portrayals of the colonies is perhaps even more evident in film. Adaptations of *Kim*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Mister Johnson*, *A Passage to India*, *The Raj Quartet*, *Heat and Dust*, *The Far Pavilions*, Elspeth Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* and Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* have been made (...) for cinema and television. Thus, Western audiences receive a view of the so-called Third World that is largely unchanged from that put forward by the British writers during the colonial era.
>
> (Harris 26).

Most colonial films were based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which justified the popular "supremacy" of the coloniser in the face of the colonised.[51] The popularity of this colonial mentality was enhanced largely by the colonial fictional works, which included film. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that these portrayals were enhanced by the development of cinematography. With the invention of "television, the film and all the media's resources" we came to witness "a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the orient (and all 'others') are viewed" (p.26). To Robert Stam and Louise Spence, these 'others' include "the long parade [in films] of lazy Mexicans, shifty Arabs, savage Africans and exotic Asiatics."[52]

To the African, the most significant factor that this kind of creative works disseminate is "perhaps the negative image accorded to the African character. It is as if everything that is said about the African is intended to demean" (Chemjor, p. 30). Postcolonialism argues that colonial contact is, to a large extent, the genesis of such demeaning portrayals. At the time when abolition of slave trade and slavery heightened in the 19th century, colonisation of Africa and racism were, however, on the rise. Portraying the colonial subjects negatively in film was, therefore, one of the means by which colonial empires in Africa sustained pre-eminence.

In the course of this chapter, this "negative image" and the ways through which it is manifested in *Out of Africa* and *Kitchen Toto* are explored. It should, however,

be noted that Africans have not just been presented negatively throughout the history of Western Cinema. In as much as such Western films have been blamed for distorting the image of the Africans, some of these films have worked towards the need for the emancipation of the African from the prejudiced depiction. *The Black Oblivion* (2003) gives a much improved image of the Africans. With this shift of perception in mind, this chapter concentrates on the negative portrayal of the African in Western films for two reasons. One, several scholars have observed that most Western films have portrayed the Africans negatively and two, as seen earlier in chapter one, Kenyan filmmakers cite this negative portrayal as one of their motivations when they make their films. It is, therefore, necessary that some of these images be revisited in order to provide the background against which Kenyan film is discussed in chapter four.

3.2. *Out of Africa*

In Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa,* Karen leaves her Danish homeland to marry a British, Baron Bror Blixen Finecke in the 1914 Kenya. Although Karen and Bror have planned to engage in dairy farming in Kenya, they end up in coffee farming. This makes her relate closely with the local communities. It is from this relationship that Pollack's depiction of the Africans is clearly observed. Through the relationship between the local population and the colonisers or settlers, the viewer observes certain trends in Pollack's characterisation.

Pollack's *Out of Africa* pieces together the episodes in Isak Dinesen's memoir into a continuous narrative. To remain artistically viable, the film, scripted by Kurt Luedtke, selectively highlights scenes that together foreground the settler/coloniser's life in colonial Kenya. The film, however, relegates the African to the background. The individual attention that Dinesen pays to the Africans in the novel is thus subverted in the film. Even though Dinesen's targeted audience is by all indications Western, her vivid description of the "natives," the farm and Africa in general makes her work more focused on Africa.[53] In the film, this focus shifts to the Western characters. The film's plot centres on Karen's love life and farming. For instance, Karen's marriage to Bror and her love affair with the British adventurer and big game hunter, Denys Finch-Hatton, receive more attention in the film than in the novel. This exemplifies Pollack's point of departure from Dinesen's novel. Pollack's change of focus can, therefore, be viewed as one of the opportunities available for a filmmaker who adapts another work of art into film. This selectivity is usually guided by a filmmaker's preference, which is in turn determined by the interests of his/her targeted audience. Pollack's shift in focus, therefore, prompts this study to examine the different demeaning traits with which Pollack associates the Africans in the film.

3.2.1. Comparison of the African to Animals

There is a very close relationship between the African characters and animals in the film, *Out of Africa*. This is evident in the fascination the squatter children get when the imitation of a bird perched on Karen Blixen's clock cuckoos at the top of every hour. These children are portrayed to have developed a special liking for the "bird." This friendship is, however, not shared with Karen. While the children throng her doorway, she seems so engrossed in her work that she is not even aware of the their presence by her door. When the children abruptly take off in excitement, Karen notices them for the first time. The impression this scene creates is that the children find it much easier to identify with the animal, even if it is an artificial imitation, than to relate with Karen. The children visit Karen's house to see the bird and thus, view Karen's interest in talking to them as an intrusion.

The manner in which the children take off can be compared to the confused movements of zebras running from the car in which Karen and Denys drive. Another similarity is implied by the posture of the buffaloes and that of Africans, which are both followed by abrupt take-off, at the appearance of the settler/coloniser. Group shots are characteristic of scenes with Africans, and animals. Such shots include Africans on queue for treatment, working in the coffee plantation, mesmerised by the plane and running in amazement just like the wild

game viewed from the plane on Karen's way to Mombasa. Similarity of the two can create the illusion that both share demeanour and way of life.

Pollack creates an illusory perception of the African as a close variant of monkeys. The Kikuyu children's conversation and the squeaking of monkeys outside Karen's house are fused in one scene and made to sound similar. The children's conversations may seem to be originating from the monkeys playing among them and vice versa. Gianeti Battetini believes that "the essence of the cinema is basically visual and every sonic intervention ought to limit itself to a *justified and necessary act of expressive integration"* (p.111) [emphasis added]. This requires that only "justified" and "necessary" sound components are implicitly foregrounded such that they create meaning. The sounds emanating from a film are, therefore, assumed to be intentional and their contribution to the overall meaning open for critical discussion of the film.

For an exoteric viewer (Pollack's targeted audience), it is not easy to see the difference between the two (monkey and native) languages that co-exist in this scene. The film presents them as just some noises from the "other." For a keener viewer, and one who understands Kikuyu, the revelation of the implied conversation between the monkeys and the natives can be disturbing.

For colonial cinema, portraying the Africans in such romanticised and limiting manner would serve the colonialist inscriber's emotional, psychological and social interests by proving the latter's superiority. The Empire's superiority played a major role in the survival of the colonial regime. However, viewing such portrayals in *Out of Africa* today may have varying allegorical implications, depending on the viewer and his/her background.

3.2.2 Unintelligence of the African

On viewing the film, one notices a pattern that facilitates the notion that the Africans are unintelligent. Fanon says that a close variation of the animal simile in the depiction of Africans in colonial fiction is the child.[54] That Africans are made to reason like small children, who without the help of the adult (represented by the coloniser/settler), cannot make rational decisions. In *Out of Africa*, the "squatters" are depicted as children who cannot take care of themselves in the absence of Karen. When Karen is finally leaving for Denmark after she runs bankrupt, she asks Farah, her trusted servant, to: "make them believe that I will not always be there to speak for them." Viewing the Africans as not capable of speaking for themselves has far-reaching effects as the film unfolds. The Africans get to believe that they are really incapacitated. This is why Karen is about to leave for Denmark and Farah still hopes to follow her and find her on the way. Farah finds it difficult to live without Karen, whom he has served for long.

Karen implies her ownership of the natives and her parental role to them. She says she always knew *her* squatters' children. She justifies her possession of the squatters at the New Year ball when she says to Denys:

> Karen: (…) you don't think they (the Kikuyu) should learn to read?
> Denys: I think you'd better ask them.
> Karen: Did your mother ask you when you were a young child?
> Denys (…) Did you want to change them?
> Karen: (…) I want *my* Kikuyu to learn to read.

When Denys cautions her about her tendency to possess the Africans, she strongly puts it that "I pay the price for everything I own." To her enlightening the Kikuyu by teaching them to read is the self-imposed cost of being their guardian. Likening the African to children uplifts Karen's position to that of an adult, a thinker, source of livelihood, of health and ultimately source of life. She believes that she should guide the Kikuyu just the way Denys' mother supposedly did to Denys when he was a child. For instance, Karen knows that she is not a medical practitioner but she goes ahead and administers medication to the squatters. They visit her in larger numbers day by day. They however get better although Karen admits that she does not know how.

Vaughan says that in the Hollywood epics' depiction of the African, "the African people play either scenery props (picturesque crowds with spears) or curiously

unintelligent menials"[55] The latter part of his description explains the roles assigned to the Africans in *Out of Africa*. The semi-skilled labourers that work on Karen's coffee farm provide the scenes with a complete picture of Karen's efforts to keep busy the otherwise lazy natives. In most cases, they appear in groups, representing the orderliness the settler/colonialist has imparted on them. A similar scenario is observed when the natives queue for medication at Karen's house.

3.2.3 Solitude of the African

There is an unusual homogeneity of the Africans in this film. Africans are believed to resemble one another and have no individuality; perhaps the reason for their collective long shots.[56] The individual identity of the native is suppressed while collective identity is foregrounded. But within this collective identity, it is ironical that each African seems to live in solitude. We do not see them in relation to one another. Although most of them serve as scene props, very few Africans are closely introduced to the viewer. These include Farah, Kamante, Juma, Mariamu, among others who enjoy proximity to the settler/coloniser. The viewer, therefore, does not get to identify with the Africans since they do not possess any state of emotion.

They are moulded in such a way that they do not have relatives or friends, through whom we can gauge their emotional capability. Here Pollack's focus differs again from that of Dinesen. Dinesen's Africans belong to families and have friends. They mix with each other, and through this, the reader gets to understand them better. For example, in the novel, Farah has a family (p.27) and a friend who also did business with Karen (p.133). Kamante's family is also mentioned (p.134). In the film, the Africans sharply contrast their European counterparts who include Karen, Lord Delamere, Denys, Bror and his many girlfriends, among others. Members of the latter group have relatives and friends. They show human emotions that enable the viewer to either like or dislike them.

Since they do not associate, the African lives in seclusion. There is no single scene in which Africans converse with one another. The only time the Africans move closest to such conversations is when Farah translates Karen's message for chief Kinyanjui. Pollack's image of an African is that of an inhuman being, lacking all human feelings and inability to relate to fellow intelligent beings. This trait is attributed to all Africans through metonymic association as discussed in the next sub-section.[57] The contemptuous manner in which Pollack presents the African serves the purpose of drawing the viewer closer to the European, around whom the story revolves.

3.2.4 Foregrounding of the Environment

Out of Africa is based on a true story of the tragic life of Baroness Blixen in Kenya. It therefore adds to the corpus of historical accounts of colonial settlers in Kenya. Although historians believe that "the subject matter of History, (...) is man, man in the society," (Odhiambo, 82), Pollack's historical presentation highlights the importance of the environment rather than that of its occupants. The occupants are consciously relegated to the background and the African jungle is highlighted so that the viewer's attention is constrained between the European and the wild jungle. In Karen's farm, the dedication of the natives is hardly recognised while her appreciation of the Ngong Hills and its surrounding is far overwhelming.

Although the "natives" provide labour to the farm, Karen still does not have a close relationship with them. This is Pollack's making unlike the case in Dinesen's novel, where she even finds time to share the plot of *Merchant of Venice* with Farah. In the film, Karen does not expect any of the Africans to pine for her when she eventually returns to Denmark. Even her faithful servants will not remember her when "the full moon throws a shadow over the gravel of the drive that was like me (Karen)" or when "the eagles of the Ngong Hills look out for me (Karen)." She has developed a close and reciprocal friendship with the land and the animals that inhabit it such that her absence becomes impossible for them to comprehend. She talks of a letter from Africa in her last monologue. The content of this letter gives

the viewer the impression that after leaving Africa, Karen and her friend still find the game and the plains at the foot of Ngong Hills very important. Karen reads:

> After you went away the ground round the (Denys') grave was levelled out into a sort of terrace. I suppose that the level place makes a good site for the lions. There, they have a view over the plain and the cattle and the game on it.

Ukadike asserts that there is good reason to be weary of the films that portray "cultural and historical inaccuracies, clichés and the condescending attitude with which black characters are treated." (pp.36-7). These images only further the misguided notions about Africans being mere savages with whom people should not mix. This explains why the marriage between a European and Mariammu, a Somali girl utterly shocks Denys and Karen. Denys cannot understand why the now ailing man had to marry an African and offers to take him back "home" for "proper care." When the man finally dies, Mariammu cannot be allowed into the cemetery, as the Africans are not allowed in. She says nothing but only sobs. The Africans generally reside within this film silently as Other. The images discussed in this section tend to promote the hagemony of the Centre's superiority and its ideas about the Periphery and its backwardness.

3.2.5 Pollack's Diction and the Targeted Audience

Out of Africa is presented as a narrative, based on Karen's memory. It begins as a dream, with Karen in bed, relating her experiences in Africa. Pollack "structured the movie in six distinct segments, separated by seven voice-over monologues – beautifully spoken by Meryl Streep (Karen), together, they tell the story of Karen Blixen's time in Africa."[58] Karen comes out clearly as a good storyteller in the film as she tells her stories to Denys. Although we do not see Karen's audience, she pays a lot of tribute to Denys as she narrates to the audience this story. Like any other narrator, her choice of words is construed to appeal to her audience. One can, therefore, conclude that the story is structured for Denys and his cohorts. She says,

> (…) This is the way it was intended
> I've written about all of the others
> Not because I love them less
> But because they were clearer … easier
> He was waiting for me there…
> But I have gone ahead of my story
> Denys would have hated that
> Denys loved to hear a story told well.
> (First Monologue)

> (…) I suppose that the level place
> makes a good site for the lions
> From there they have a view over the plane
> And the cattle and the game on it.
> Denys will like that.
> I must remember to tell him.
> (Seventh Monologue)

Her story begins and ends with a strong reference to Denys. Out of the seven monologues, Karen refers to Denys in five. She assumes that her audience is familiar with Denys, and will easily understand the story. From the strict social restrictions we see in the film, her audience is largely Western. With this, the film tends to eliminate alternative viewership.

Her story is more about the Europeans with little intermittent interjections from the Africans. It extensively uses the plural marker when referring to the Africans.

> If I know a song of Africa
> Of the giraffe and African new moon
> Lying on her back
> Of the ploughs in the fields
> And the sweaty faces of the coffee pickers
> Does Africa know a song of me?

In the film, Karen lives in Nairobi, a small portion of Kenya. When referring to her life in Kenya, she talks of 'Africa.' To her, what she experienced in Nairobi goes for what happens in Africa. She understands the uniqueness of her "little country lying beside Germany," as Delamere refers to Denmark but cannot see individuality of the African communities. The vast continent has different communities with different historical experiences. Linked to this is the plurality with which the Africans are addressed. Words like "the natives", "the Kikuyu" and "the Maasai" indicate that none of these are part of her intended audience. They

are, therefore, exempted from the audience even though they feature as vital plot enhancers, creating suspense and excitement in the story.[59]

Depending on the viewer's interest or background, Pollack's diction may have a different impact on the meaning s/he derives from the film. An alternative viewer may find Pollack's reference to the African disturbing. The film, paints a picture of Africa akin to that presented in the earlier colonial films, which perpetuated many of the misconceptions concerning the African.

3.3 *The Kitchen Toto*

3.3.1 Introduction

As opposed to the Hollywood explorative films, for the British, justification for occupying Africa was a more important concern than cinematic exploitation of exotic décor. This explains why most British colonial films reflected the ideological currents that were propelled by the British imperial government. *The Post Office Savings Bank* and *The Tax* are some of the 1930s colonial films made in East Africa that attest to the above statement as will be seen later in the chapter. The films presented Africa and its native peoples as a locus for the European civilising mission.

After the 1884 "scramble for Africa" meeting in Berlin, the European countries took it upon themselves to "civilise" Africans. The pioneers, who first introduced cinema in Africa, argued the same way.[60] Realising that commercial films, like those of Charlie Chaplin, could show the colonies the negative side of the European and North American life, these pioneers lead by Major L. A. Notcutt, decided that:

> With backward peoples unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, it is surely in our wisdom, if not our obvious duty, to prevent as far as possible the dissemination of wrong ideas. Should we stand by and see a distorted presentation of the white race's life accepted by millions of Africans when we have it in our power to show them the truth?[61]

The British spearheaded this move by creating the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE).[62] In East Africa, the BECE was stationed in Tanganyika (now Tanzania). The films made were later translated into local languages spoken in Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. The project ended in 1937.

By 1939, the British set up Colonial Film Units (CFU), with branches in East, Central and West Africa. The CFUs distributed films, which aimed at spreading propaganda to enable Africans to take part in the World War II. This required that films from Europe and North America be re-edited to suit this goal. There was, however, a concealed motive in re-editing films from the West for the African audience. Jean Rouch says, "if the immediate goal of the Colonial Film Unit was to make war propaganda, its organiser, W. Sellers, in fact, had in mind a long-

range project – establishing a systematic way to utilise film with an African audience."[63] After the war, CFU's role changed from distribution to production. The films produced aimed at convincing the Africans to adopt Western etiquette.[64]

These activities officially justified colonial misrepresentation of Africans in film. Coalitions such as National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in America have worked towards the positive portrayal of the Africans and the African Diaspora. Many voices for change in Africa have also expressed similar sentiments since independence.[65] In spite of such efforts, portrayal of the African has continued to be negative in films made long after political independence of the African states. Ukadike says "partial or falsified images of Africa have not ceased and (...) the desire to make a profit continues to be the basic motivation for this endless exploitation." (p. 58) The motivation may have changed from spreading colonial ideology to profit making but the impact has been the same – cultural displacement of the African. An example of these films is Harry Hook's *The Kitchen Toto*.

3.3.2 Colonial Master's Attempt to 'Civilise' the African

The Kitchen Toto tells the story of two families of an African Pastor, Kariuki and colonial policeman, John Graham. The families fall victims of the terrorising *Mau Mau* fighters. Two distinct groups emerge in the film: British colonisers and the

African squatters. Mwangi, the first son of pastor Kariuki, loses his father in a furious *Mau Mau* attack on his family. The pastor living in between the two groups refuses to yield to the demands of the *Mau Mau* fighters. This leads to his murder. Mwangi, pushed by circumstances, gets employed as Graham's kitchen toto. It is during his stay at Graham's that the viewer gets to understand Mwangi better.

Unlike Pollack, Hook creates Mwangi's background in a stable family. As the film begins, we see a still photograph portrait of Mwangi's family. This enables the viewer to understand Mwangi in relation to his relatives. The introduction of his family paves way for the understanding of the later scenes in which his family appears. For example, after pastor Kariuki's death, his wife and all their children visit Graham's home. The wife begs Graham to employ Mwangi so that the family can secure a source of income. The scene shows several children running beside their mother while she carries the youngest in her arms, pleading with Graham. This reflects the extent to which the family is in need of the policeman. Mrs Kariuki's words express how important it is for her son to get employed by Graham:

> Bwana, one thing please to help with (….) Bwana, you know it is not easy at the farm without mzee (her late husband). So many small children to feed … Bwana is it possible you will find employment for my firstborn? (…) You can't refuse, he is number one!

When Mwangi gets his first salary, he goes back home to share it with his family. His homecoming is a great joy to his mother and siblings. Even though he resists at first, his mother convinces him to go back to work. To the mother, it is important that the son uses the opportunity he has and works for the 'master.' Mwangi says he does not want to go back to work since the working conditions are unfair but the mother is not ready to accept this:

> What did you say?
> Your father would be ashamed of you!

The fact that the whole of Mwangi's family is introduced does not improve the viewer's perception of the African character in any way. Mwangi's family is used to draw the viewer's attention to the cruelty of the *Mau Mau* fighters. It grieves the audience to see the happy family being torn apart by the ruthless gang led by Kamau. Hook seems to have taken a position different from most colonial filmmakers by anchoring the African in a family. Nevertheless, the colonial master and not Mwangi's loved ones determines the latter's traits. This comes out in the manner in which Graham treats Mwangi when Mrs Graham is accidentally shot dead by her son, Edward. Despite the help Mwangi offers Graham's family by alerting them to the *Mau Mau* attack and subsequent death of Mrs Graham, Graham suspects Mwangi had a hand in it. This warrants Mwangi the painful torture he undergoes at the hands of Graham.

The coloniser's 'civilising' duty propels him to integrate the local population in his culture so that his stay in the colony is not viewed as an arrogant bother to the natives. This integration can be seen through language. Unlike in *Out of Africa*, *The Kitchen Toto's* Africans and Europeans both try to speak the other's language. The pastor's wife tries her best to speak in English to the policeman and his son, Edward. Although she speaks Kikuyu to all the other Africans in the film, the little English she speaks is reserved for the Europeans. Where she cannot find English equivalent of what she wants to say, she intentionally uses colloquial Kiswahili, which she is sure the British understand. She calls Edward "Bwana Kidogo" to avoid confusing him by saying "Bwana Mdogo" (Small Master), which is a more grammatical version.[66] On the other hand Mrs Graham, although domineering, brings herself closer to the natives by speaking in Kiswahili. She asks Mugo, her cook to "'koroga' (stir) more" the food before letting it stew. Language therefore comes out as a means by which Hook expresses the need for a symbiotic co-existence between the colonial administration and the local people. With the colonised, Mwangi's mother, breaking English and the coloniser, Mrs Graham breaking Kiswahili, we find a middle ground on which the two intelligibly communicate. It is through this middle-ground language that the coloniser imparts his lifestyle into that of the African. Mugo, the cook, is instructed on how to prepare the master's meal using the new language as seen above.[67]

The created language also enables Mwangi to get employed at the Grahams,' a place at which he gets exposed to the culture of the master. His mother's plea to Graham convinces the latter to employ Mwangi as a kitchen toto. As a kitchen toto, Mwangi undergoes a cultural transition symbolised by the thorough cleaning he undergoes before Mrs Graham allows him to work for her. The almost silent scene shows Mwangi, stripped naked, being scrubbed with a brush. Mrs Graham ensures that her family is away from the exercise. We see her reprimand Edward, who has been watching Mwangi from a distance. She orders him to get to the house. The manner in which she does this implies that the dirt from Mwangi might as well infect her son. After the wash, Mwangi is dressed in white new clothes and his earlier clothes are burnt. As Mugo dresses him, he tells Mwangi that "even your own mother wouldn't recognise you now." He has made contact with the new world and he cannot be the same again, not even to his closest kin. This is his first step towards the coloniser's civilisation. Here, Mwangi and Mugo emerge as hagemonic receivers of the coloniser's mission.

3.3.3 Character Traits of the African

Harry Hook, like Sidney Pollack, draws from colonial reservoir of stereotypical characterisation of Africans in film. Colonial British films show African characters who are not well developed, nor given a chance to express their feelings but are structured to further the ideological justification for the imperialists' presence in

Africa. Some of these films include *British Palaver* (1926), *Trader Horn* (1931), *Sanders of the River* (1935) and *Rhodes of Africa* (1935). A similar trope can be observed in *The Kitchen Toto* (1985).

a). The African as a Servant to the Colonial Master

Two opposing factions of master versus servant come out clearly in *The Kitchen Toto*. Ukadike, describing the colonial films, says such films over-extol the virtues of the colonisers' police officers, District Commissioners, civil servants and settlers. "The real power is centred around British-delegated officers. Here the importance of the British presence is always asserted" (P. 45). *The Kitchen Toto* presents a case where the police officer commands all the power while the local population serves the policeman. This is aimed at keeping the empirical power stable. Any attempt to dis-empower the colonial administration is immediately eradicated. *Mau Mau* resistance has challenged this central power, causing the main conflict in the film.

In this film, the coloniser is inherently at the centre of power, age not withstanding. The natives are on the other hand, perpetual servants of these 'masters'. This explains why Graham is referred to as 'Master' while young Edward is called 'Small Master.' The servants, old or young are referred to by their real names. By showing the African as a consistent servant to the colonial power, the impression created is that it is a plausible and normal occurrence that

the African serves the colonial power. The circumstances leading to Mwangi, one of the servants, getting employed by the 'Master' are explained to the viewer. The family has no other way of generating income. Therefore, Mwangi has to work for Graham so that he can provide for his family. The viewer gets the impression that the only way out for such a family is to receive help from the "White Messiah" as Micere Mugo puts it in *Visions of Africa*.[68]

b). Presentation of the African as Dirty

Kitchen Toto juxtaposes two boys: It compares Mwangi and Edward who are about the same age. Edward, depicted as the embodiment of civilisation and cleanliness foregrounds Mwangi's opposite traits. Mwangi, seen as dirty and uncultured, is continuously separated from Edward to avoid any contamination of the latter. This is why Graham stops his son from hanging outside the door of the car, a position that Mwangi has come to be identified with. The two boys are also not allowed to play together. Whenever they play together, they do so in the absence of Edward's parents and it is as a result of Edward's demands since most of the time he is lonely and has no one else to play with.

Initially, Mwangi and his family are viewed to be too dirty to come in contact with 'people' in that state. Mwangi's mother finds that the 'Master' is not in. She expects Edward to control the dogs and open the gate for her and her children to get into the house and wait for Graham. She is surprised when Edward asks them

to go round and wait behind the Kitchen. It is in the kitchen that they find Mugo, who entertains them until Graham comes.

Edward and Mrs Graham's perception of Mwangi only improves when Graham employs Mwangi as a kitchen toto and he is cleaned. When she bumps into Mwangi in her kitchen before he is cleaned, she cannot believe that this is her employee and she goes straight to demand an explanation from her husband. She does not calm down until she gets a solution to her problem: She commands Mugo to thoroughly clean Mwangi. The boy can only work in her house after undergoing such a process. This reminds the viewer of one of the scenes before pastor Kariuki is murdered where we see Mwangi's siblings being washed by their mother. This indicates that the Africans are not dirty as the coloniser chooses to view him.

c). Subservience of the African

Out of the two overtly antagonistic groups in the film, we have some Africans on the side of the coloniser. Pastor Kariuki, Mugo the cook, the Samburu askari (number 303), and the non-Kikuyu askaris represent this category of Africans. They believe in the hagemony of the Centre and docilely serve the colonial regime. In reference to Edward Said's description of hagemonic relations within postcolonial thinking, institutions, persons or their ideas may work on the others - in this case the Other - by consent, leading to social cultural and political

domination of the latter.[69] In the case of colonial rule in Africa, the European institutions became influential in major decision-making. Associating with the church and the colonial administration was metonymically viewed by some of the colonised subjects as having acquired European civilisation. For example, Pastor Kariuki infers that since he has become a Christian, he has nothing in common with *Mau Mau* freedom fighters. He tells Kamau, the resistance's leader, that "there are no private matters between *me* and *my enemy*." Since Kamau's group rebels against the coloniser, the group has become Kariuki's opponent. This is because at the time within which the film is set, Christianity was seen as a step towards becoming westernised. Hanna Mallemsether in "Gendered Images of Africa?" states that:

> In the mission discourse, a Christian African was more 'equal' than a non-Christian. The image of the Christian Africans was created in accordance with European standards – the more the African tried to become like the Europeans in appearance, practices and ways of thinking, the more 'equal' he/she was.
>
> (p.193)

Having climbed the ladder to the level of becoming a pastor, Kariuki views himself as belonging to a very different group from Kamau's.

Kamau requests Pastor Kariuki to advise his church congregation to join hands with the *Mau Mau* members in fighting the colonial power. He wants the pastor to encourage the church members to secretly take the binding *thenge* oath. Kariuki

does the opposite and calls upon anyone who has taken the oath to renounce it and be forgiven by the Lord. He is adamant not to antagonise the very source of his new way of life. He does not see anything wrong with the regime but believes that his "enemy" is the problem from which the church needs to be restored. Kariuki's obstinacy propels the *Mau Mau* fighters to murder him.

The oath administrators later corner Mugo to take the oath against his will. After that, he is sent to kill his employer, Mr Graham. Mugo cannot imagine killing such a powerful man, who happens to be the source of his livelihood. Mugo hangs himself. Mugo and Kariuki's deaths come at the right time for those supporting the *Mau Mau*. The two have been a stumbling block in the way of the fighters, who finally overpower the colonial master.

When Mugo commits suicide, Graham suspects that the *Mau Mau* have hanged him for failing to co-operate with them. Graham, therefore, dismisses all the Kikuyu askaris and employs Samburu askaris as a security measure. The Samburu askaris only need to be spruced up before they start working devotedly for the policeman.

d). Cruelty of the African

The Africans in *The Kitchen Toto* exhibit a marked improvement on those in *Out of Africa.* In *The Kitchen Toto*, Hook depicts the African as having come to

understand the mission of the European invasion of Africa and consciously reacts to it. In this sense, we can identify two variants of the African.

First, there are the combatant Africans, who are out to bring an abrupt end to colonial rule in Kenya. They use force, where necessary, to destroy the colonial system. They take it upon themselves to administer the oath to fellow Kikuyus. They spend sleepless nights attacking those who support the colonial administration as well as the government's administrators. Kamau and his followers belong to this group. Hook draws the viewer's attention to these fighters' brutality through some of their merciless activities in the film. For instance, the group has a problem with Pastor Kariuki and they decide to murder him because he is one of the people barring the *Mau Mau's* way to freedom. When they raid the pastor's home, they do not just kill him and take off. They burn huts in the homestead including livestock. They beat up his wife, leave her bleeding and suspended upside-down on a rooftop.

The two babies in the film, Kariuki's and Graham's, suffer severely due to the activities initiated by these rebels. The *Mau Mau* are presented to be so cruel that they do not spare even infants. This is a rather widespread view in the history of colonial library on Africa. Bjorn Lindgren in "Representing the Past in the Present" observes that the Ndebele of South Africa have often been presented as cruel in the Western library since the 1830s onwards. Hook's depiction, therefore,

contributes to this collection. This category of the Africans finally triumphs at the end of the film.

The second group is the African who acts 'obedient servant' to the master yet he is fed up with the regime. S/he silently detests the coloniser yet s/he does not show it. Mwangi, the kitchen toto belongs to this category. When his mother asks for the missing portion of his salary, he frankly tells her:

> She (Mrs Graham) took off a whole one week. It is not right.
> I don't want to work.

He prefers not to work if his rights are to be violated. He holds a different opinion from his parents. Mwangi has even taken the binding *thenge* oath to signify that he is a supporter of the *Mau Mau* movement. Nevertheless, he diligently works for Graham's family until he is killed by the askaris, who suspect that he closely associates with the *Mau Mau* raiders. Mwangi is shot dead, trying to cross the river after saving John's baby-girl from the forest where the *Mau Mau* had dumped her.

Mwangi's death at the river, and the survival of the baby pre-empts the beginning of a new era. Graham resents this death and sits down by the bank, psychologically disturbed. Mwangi has been his favourite servant. Throughout the film, the river is symbolically used as the borderline between the master and the servant. The river appears in five scenes, out of which Mwangi is seen in four. He crosses this river

three times and the fourth time he is killed. His frequent crossing of the river and subsequent death can be equated to his father and Mugo's betrayal, which leads to their deaths. Mishra Vijay and Bob Hodge (p.277) say, "the empire would not have lasted a week without such collaborators among the colonised people,"[70] The essence of this statement is realised after Mwangi's death. Mwangi has become very familiar with both sides of the river that his presence becomes dangerous to the success of the ongoing revolution. Elimination of the three paves way for the Mau Mau to see the country through its independence as the film ends.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the debasing attributes with which the African is associated in *The Kitchen Toto* and *Out of Africa.* In so doing, the chapter has briefly spelt out origins of negative portrayal of Africans in cinema. Colonialism and its ideologies, which were highly dependent on racism, largely contributed to the debased image that the Africans came to be identified with in Western Cinema. Both The *Kitchen Toto* and *Out of Africa* present Kenya under colonial rule. Therefore, their depiction of the African under colonial regime in Kenya conforms, to a large extent, to the colonial mentality, which emphasised the otherness of the colonised subject.

Although the two films were produced long after Kenya's political independence from British colonial rule in 1963, their characterisation heavily relies on the

colonial ideologies, depicting the Africans as sub-humans. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the researcher opted to concentrate on the negative image of the Africans in order to build a base against which portrayal of the Africans by Kenyan filmmakers is interrogated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN IN *KOLORMASK* AND *THE BATTLE OF THE SACRED TREE*

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter focuses on the presentation of the African in Western films. The portrayal of the African is generally negative and inaccurate as has been observed by several scholars of African Cinema.[71] This chapter undertakes an evaluation of the depiction of the Africans through an insider's perspective. The chapter looks at the different approaches employed by two Kenyan films in re-presenting the African. The films analysed are Sao Gamba's *Kolormask* (1986) and Wanjiru Kinyanjui's *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1995).

4.2 General Concerns of the Post-independence African Cinema

The birth of African filmmaking coincided with political independence of most African countries. It "emerged with the independent movements to liberate African states and coincided with the black consciousness movements of the Diaspora" (Ukadike, p.60). Francophone Africa established an early lead in the development of national film industries in Africa. This is largely attributed to the continued support from France in terms of training, financial aid and co-productions. Colonial filmmaking in Africa provided a sound base upon which the newly independent states built their film industries.[72] In Anglophone Africa, only

Ghana and Nigeria maintained a steadfast cinematic culture. This was due to their governments' support as well as the presence of the already stable film training institutions in the countries by the time of their independence.[73] East African countries lagged behind in developing national film industries until the 1980s when filmmaking started attracting local attention in the region. In Tanzania, *Arusi ya Mariamu* was made in 1985. In Uganda local productions only came in 1992 with the production of *Feelings Struggle*.[74] Yet in Kenya, films like *Mrembo, Mlevi, Bushtrackers, The Rise and Fall of Iddi Amin* and *Kolormask* had been made by mid 1980s.

Given the coincidence, African cinema inevitably joined the other arts in articulating the need for cultural liberation of the African. It, therefore, emerged as a means of bringing to the fore, the African and his lifestyle, which Western films marginalise.[75] The cinema also came up as a means of re-writing history. To a large extent, the preceding Western productions as well as the atrocities of the colonial encounter moulded African cinema. It is, therefore, evident that the concerns of the African film are in many ways similar to those of the post-independence African literature. Harris says,

> The post-colonial writers' self appointed mission to forge their countries' national consciousness is largely defined by the Anglocentric portrayal of their culture and people by the earlier British colonial writers. Indeed, the fiction of many Third World writers can only be fully understood through an awareness of its interconnection with earlier British fictional works. Before the emergence of post-colonial fiction, Western readers were given

> the British view of the empire, and thus, naturally came to see the various colonised lands and peoples as the colonisers saw them.
>
> (p.179)

In addressing the above concerns, African filmmakers have adopted various narrative approaches to film in Africa. A number of scholars have observed different trends of re-presentation of the African in African cinema. However, Manthia Diawara's opinion in *African Film: Culture and Politics* remains a major point of reference to any work on approaches to African cinema.[76] He gives three distinct voices that attempt to re-create the Africa lost to the Western productions.

The "colonial confrontation" narrative style presents Africa confronting its former coloniser, Europe. The productions situate the viewers to identify with the African resistance against colonial and imperial powers. Such historical narratives are motivated by the need to bring out of the shadows the role played by the African people in shaping their own history.

The second narrative style calls upon the Africans to 'return to the source' and locate value in the so called 'primitive' African cultural practices. The return to the source filmmakers turn to this style in order to show that there existed a "dynamic African history and culture before the European colonisation" (Diawara, p. 160). The films, therefore, attempt to unearth pre-colonial traditions and present them for consideration in solving current socio-cultural problems.

Finally, Diawara identifies the social realist narrative in African cinema. It thematises socio-cultural concerns of the time. Mbye Cham summarises Diawara's observation in his "Introduction." He believes that the themes that dominate African films tackle the day to day social realities and colonisation and its legacies. The experiences that emanate(d) from the encounters between Africa and Euro-Christian or Arab-Islamic cultures have provided African cinema with a lot of raw material.

The three typologies reflect Africa in its quest for social and economic justice. It is, therefore, advisable not to pick out one narrative as the apex of developed African film. They all work towards the same goal. In the analysis of the Kenyan film hereafter, I will constantly refer to these narratives in placing the Kenyan film within the larger context of African cinema and its general mission.

4.3 The Kenyan Film Industry

Like many national film industries in Africa, the film industry in Kenya has its background in the British colonial administration, where film was used as a tool for education and propaganda. Some of the earliest Kenyan films like *Mrembo* and *Mlevi* were made by independent filmmakers in the 1960s. Later on, *Kolormask* was made using state funds. According to Mukora, "indigenous filmmaking in Kenya began as a counter-colonial discourse similar to that found in the work of

such novelists as Meja Mwangi, Grace Ogot, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o" (p.227). *Kolormask* aimed at contributing to this debate.

The discussions preceding the production of *Kolormask* reflected some of the resolutions of several manifestos, declarations and resolutions, which had been made concerning African cinema. From the early 1970s, African filmmakers and other prominent cineastes sought to build a common approach to African filmmaking. Between 11th – 13th December 1973, third world filmmakers met in Algiers, Algeria, to deliberate on the possible use of third world cinema as a popular tool of re-making history. They saw cinema as a means of seeking cultural liberation and progress. Solidarity in terms of co-productions among the third world countries was viewed as a means by which the countries would express "anti-imperialist solidarity"[77]

The Algiers Charter on African Cinema was adopted at the second Federation Panafricaine des Cineastes (FEPACI) in Algiers in January 1975. It observed that cinema has an important role in the development of the third world countries. It recognised the capability of cinema to educate, inform and raise consciousness among the masses. It proposed that for African cinema to accomplish these, it has a duty to question the image the Africans have of themselves and their position in the global society. The charter called upon the individual governments to "take a leading role in building a national cinema." (Mbye and Bakari, p. 26)

The Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers was held between March 1st – 4th 1982 in Niamey, Niger. Its participants, drawn from different areas of cinema, observed that African cinema needed a commitment for it to assert the cultural identity of the Africans. It also recommended that governments should support national film industries in terms of policies, financial assistance and distribution of films in particular countries. The governments were also to establish national film corporations to centralise all matters pertaining to cinema in these countries. Many more recommendations have been made from the 1980s to date.[78]

All these recommendations focus on the need for African, indeed third world, filmmakers to use cinema to liberate and re-present themselves to the world. These were the same concerns that Kenyans had in the years that preceded the production of *Kolormask*. These culminated in the report written by Nyamwaya et. al in the early 1980s concerning the film industry in Kenya.

The report observed that an African filmmaker should produce films that identify with his own environment, that is, films that have relevant meanings to his people. The authors of this report, who also included Sao Gamba, felt that the African film viewers were left with no alternative but to accept films which reflected the cultures opposed to their own cultural and traditional values. The report's preferred film was opposed to the Western films that flooded the market yet were

quite foreign to the indigenous populations. Nyamwaya et. al also complained of cultural undermining of Africans in Western films (p.3).

They saw an urgent need for the Africans to play major roles in filmmaking. This, they believed would present a different Kenya from the one depicted in some of the foreign films made in the country. To the African filmmaker, it had become evidently clear that in order to consolidate his cultural and traditional values, through this medium, it is necessary to play a major role in the production and distribution of his own films (ibid). For a long time, Kenyan thespians only played supporting roles. "I was dismayed to see David Mulwa play houseboy to Richard Harris in *To Walk with Lions*, yet his superlative talents require that he gets a bigger role," says Albert Wandago, a Kenyan filmmaker.[79]

From the above recommendations, we see that the individual governments were called upon to collaborate with the filmmakers and the other film practitioners to achieve the objectives of African cinema. The Kenyan Government took up the challenge when it sponsored the production of *Kolormask*. The film in many ways, though locally, conforms to some of the resolutions and declarations put forward regarding African, if not Third World Cinema in general.

The above recommendations demonstrate a case of 'appropriation' of the coloniser's medium by the former colonies. Appropriation is a Postcolonial feature

whereby the colonised adopts the coloniser's forms of creative works in order to articulate issues of relevance to the colonised.[80] Cinematic medium has its roots in France, where two Lumiere brothers made the first film in December 1895. This invention, coming at the peak of colonial rule in Africa, made Cinema a timely and vital tool in the colonisation of Africa as we have seen in chapter three of this work. After independence, African cineastes have used cinema in trying to reclaim or coming to terms with cultural displacement incurred as a result of colonial encounter.[81] *Kolormask,* pioneered this tendency in Kenyan cinema

4.4 Re-presentation of the African in *Kolormask*

Kolormask criticises cultural alienation that has its roots in the colonial contact between Kenya and Britain in the 19th century. John Litodo, a young Kenyan marries Eliza, a British-born American lady when he goes to study in London. While in London, he adopts British lifestyle to ease his stay in the foreign land. The couple relocates to Kenya when John completes his studies. Their two half-cast children, Toby and Susan, are already grown when John realises how withdrawn from his people he has become. Suddenly, John and Eliza's differences magnify as John finds it necessary to trace his way back to his cultural roots.

The film exhibits Diawara's concept of "Return to the Source" by accentuating traditional African practices. In giving these practices a voice within the multicultural set-up of the Kenyan society, Gamba silently gives the African a

different outlook. The African becomes a major stakeholder in the post-independence society, in which he lives. His position is, therefore, withdrawn from the peripheral observer and continuous follower of the decisions made elsewhere or by the "master" as witnessed in *The Kitchen Toto.*

The African viewed as unintelligent and backward in Western films can now, in African cinema, find space to justify his cultural practices. *Kolormask* provides this alternative space in which the African showcases the significance of such rituals as, shaving of hair and wailing while mourning, circumcision and the importance attached to it. These are some of the backward activities that colonial films that were shown to the Africans discouraged.[82] African cinema also underscores the intelligence of some despicable people who have been viewed as icons of savagery in the Western cinema. For example John's father in *Kolormask* reminds one of the ghostly old woman with magic power in Souleymane Cisse's film, *Yeelen* (Brightness). Her looks notwithstanding, she brings brightness in Nianankoro's future. Eliza, unlike Nianankoro, bases her judgement on the outward appearance and quickly dismisses her father-in-law as a dirty sight that should not spend the night in her house. This inaccurate judgement leads to her destruction at the end of the film.

Although Eliza is against African traditions, her son is curious to learn more about his father's culture. His great confidant, Auntie Maria informs him that even John

had gone through the circumcision ritual, which his community views as a passage into manhood. Toby, therefore, abandons his affluent home in Nairobi to go into the wilderness in search of this identity he deems necessary in his life as an African man.

As seen in the Western films, the colonised is generally portrayed as a silent observer of events and perpetrator of the "master's" desires. They are viewed as lower beings with which the coloniser/settler do not freely mix. The Kenyan film positions the African to closely interact with the West as seen in John. John and Eliza's happy life in London, seen through flashback, suggests the acceptance of their marriage in that society. This can be compared to the dramatic scene in *Out of Africa* where Denys discovers that his fellow British settler has secretly married Mariammu, a Somali woman with whom he has been living for five years. This shocks many settlers as this kind of mixing is unacceptable. For John and Eliza, the spectator is convinced that their marriage was based on genuine love. Eliza reminisces:

> John you were such a beautiful lover! And the nights, Ah! But now look at you. Lying there in bed like a log. Just like a piece of dead wood. When I think of those early days in London --- they were so sweet and John, so handsome and strong, black and beautiful. What happened on the road? What happened to our love?

Kolormask is an example of the African films that attempt to redress the inaccurate and incomplete portrait of the Africans and their culture. The films tend to move

the indigenous characters from scenery backdrops to the foreground while the Western characters find new positions in the background. In *Kolormask,* the story revolves equally around John and Eliza. This enables the African characters to be developed better hence the viewer gets to understand him/her more.

Kolormask counters Western films' portrayal of the African as an isolated figure. It does this by defining a character in relation to the people around him/her rather than the solitary African servant. Presenting the characters together with their extended family and community at large, helps the spectator to understand the character better. The spectator's knowledge of the character is, therefore, based upon several relations between the character and his people, what he thinks about them and how he treats their beliefs. For example, John is anchored in his extended family. His interaction with relatives, friends, employees and his immediate family all work together in explaining to the spectator what kind of a person John is. For instance, through his conversation with his girlfriend, Dorothy, we get to understand that he does not have a problem with white people, but with his wife's disgusting philosophies.

Kolormask looks at individual characteristics of man. This goes beyond the colour-mask that creates a rift between peoples of different racial categories in *Out of Africa* and *Kitchen Toto.* The vices are criticised in general, no matter who commits them. The fact that Eliza (whose behaviour is most condemned) is

European does not automatically make her the perpetrator of these acts. John, who doubles as the filmmaker's mouthpiece as well as the most offended, by Eliza, says:

> I am not anti-white. No! My doctrine is simple. All human beings are equal irrespective of colour, creed or even race. You see, people talk of colour, colour, colour… but no! The colour of the skin is not the most important thing, you know. Scientifically, we are all human beings. The colour of the skin does not control our brains.

Sao Gamba justifies this position by presenting to us Susan and Toby, who are half-casts but hold totally opposing views about their identity. Toby believes he is African while Suzy is convinced she is too "civilised" to be an African. She asks her brother to remove his clothes and jump into the forest if he feels like being an African. Suzy's worldview is a replica of her mother's. Gamba, therefore, condemns these worldviews and not the race of their perpetrators.

This is further heightened when Agnes's position that contrasts Eliza's is stressed upon. Agnes is a European lady married in John's village. Although we do not see Agnes' husband, people like Auntie Maria appreciate her respect for the community's customs. Agnes believes that "Africans are real people" and that one just needs to understand their philosophy about life. The Wilson family, although of African descent, are fully metamorphosed into Western lifestyle.[83] Their views about Africans are similar to Eliza's. Eliza admires the Wilsons so much that she even asks John why they cannot live like the Wilsons. Incidentally, we see roles

dramatically changing from what we observe in colonial films that were initially shown to Africans. The Africans' admiration and awe towards Western life no longer follows the neatly stipulated conventions seen in the Western films. With Agnes and the Wilsons shifting positions, *Kolormask* dismantles such social frontiers, a common observation in postcolonial reading.[84]

Diawara's realist tradition is quite visible in post-independence African films. These are opposed to the romance or boy's adventure style adopted by Hollywood's depiction of Africa. This tradition blends history and fiction in a more believable way. In so doing the African spectators find icons and heroes with which they can identify. These were some of the concerns that led to the making of films like *Kolormask* in Kenya. In describing a "good African film", Nyamwaya et al say that the famed Ghanaian production, *Love Brewed in the African Pot* was such a success because "Africans enjoy and associate with films that relate with their social environment." (p.13)

Kolormask, therefore, depicts the situation of the post-independence elite in Kenya. The subject matter revolves around an experience many Kenyans have witnessed in their day to day lives. For Kenyans looking up to the West for their tertiary education, and the consequent interracial marriages that are sometimes disturbed by culture-clash, John and Eliza are part of the society. The Wilsons who despise their traditional ways of life after a close mingle with the outside world as

well as the Tobies and the Susans, caught up in an identity quagmire, all provide a mirror to the society in which the film is set.

In highlighting the African lifestyle, which John now yearns for after living in alienation, Gamba subversively paints the Western lifestyle as, too demanding, boring and generally stringent. He does this through Eliza, Johnson her lover and Susan. In postcolonial discourse, subversion, an inversion of colonial oppositions, is one of the ways through which the creative artist resists demeaning portrayal of the colonised. Susan and Johnson are the only people who hold views similar to Eliza's.

They, therefore, share with her the inverted position in the film. Eliza is perceived as an un-accommodating wife, who completely fails to integrate into John's family. Eliza does not accept that they now live in Africa and should adjust to the lifestyle of the majority, which is John's community. She insists that they should stick to the British beliefs, as it is a more civilised lifestyle. She does not understand why she should not receive imperial treatment when her family goes to the funeral of John's mother. She complains to John:

> John, I know you don't feel well but it is so uncomfortable here. It is cold! And I can't eat the food. And, look at this place. Is this the best that you can get for us here? What kind of a house is this? I wanna go back to Nairobi, OK?

Eliza fails to adapt to the idea of respect for elders as it is expected in John's community. She retorts to John's uncle who is compelled to curse her. She also talks back at the village elders and literally fights her father in law. This is an abominable act in that society. John is extremely embarrassed by Eliza's conduct and her rigidity that contrasts Agnes's character. This makes her live harmoniously with the society. Agnes tries to advise Eliza but she never listens. Eliza mounts so much pressure on John that causes him to get into a relationship with Dorothy, a young African lady who just attained a Law degree from the University of Dar es Salaam. In emphasising the distaste that has accumulated between him and his wife, John compares the two women:

> What is wrong with this woman? I really have tried my best. Yet the more I try, the more we drift apart. Why is Eliza so blind? Remember, Eliza, Just remember. A white cat is not more intelligent than a black one.... And look at Dorothy, just look at her! She respects me as a man, but Eliza wants to use me as a tool.

John knows what is good for him and goes for it. He wants a woman who can show him affection, respect him and one who will not watch his every step like Eliza. He finds this in Dorothy.

Eliza, to a large extent, as Madeleine Cottenet-Hage observes of fictional white women in love with African men in African cinema, "serves to enhance the black male's image of self (and public image)" (p.114). Eliza's significance in the narrative is symbolic. She is the wife to the main protagonist, whose tormented

self is exposed to the viewer through his wife. Through her, we are introduced to the inner and secret life of John. John' inner tensions can only be seen when his actions, thoughts and fears are provoked by Eliza's behaviour. For instance, finding Eliza in his own bed with her lover aggravates John's innermost hatred towards her, the supposed emblem of "civilisation" in his life. He realises that "there is nothing worth fighting for" and allows Johnson to escape scot-free.

Through Eliza, the viewer is able to understand John's urge to recuperate from a lifestyle alienated from his community's. She therefore on one plane represents the key to John's private and sincere world. On the outer level, John's pretence hides a lot that is going on in his life. At the clinic for example, he has to earn respect from his employees hence he is forced to cover up a lot. When he is with his family members, especially Eliza, his desire to reconcile with his ancestral traditions becomes more intense.

4.5 The African in *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*

This film tells the story of Mumbi, a young woman who finds it impossible to continue with her marriage to a tyrant living in Nairobi. She decides to quit once and for all and go back to her "backward and primitive" village in Githunguri to live with her poor family. She realises that she needs a source of income. Her request to join a local Christian Mother's Union, hoping to participate in the union's income-generating activities meets stern rejection. The women cannot mix

with her since she has failed to keep her marriage. The women find this unacceptable in Christianity. Mumbi's daughter, Thoni, requires school fees yet her mother has no source of income. The pressure gets too much for Mumbi to resist. As a result, she opts to become a barmaid in a local pub in order to meet her needs.

At the same time, the Mother's Union wages war against all the 'evils' in the village. They are out to "carry out the work of the Lord". Their radical Christianity is at war with almost every activity going on in the village. They fight the pub, at which Mumbi works, and all its patrons. They see Mumbi as a failure, who should not be allowed to mix with 'upright' families. They believe that Mumbi's traditional herbalist father, and the sacred *Mugumo* tree are propagators of 'backwardness' in the society. This manichaean clash of interests is solved when the mothers decide to bring the tree down on their own, only to face the wrath of the gods.

Wanjiru Kinyanjui's personal conviction to make a film that presents a more authentic picture of Africa ends in much the same way as Sao Gamba's *Kolormask.*[85] In *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*, Kinyanjui light-heartedly presents a scenario similar to the clash witnessed in *Kolormask*. She employs satire to depict the conflict between the radical Christianity espoused by the women's union and the traditional African culture in a lighter manner. The film however focuses more

on religious beliefs. In this endeavour, we see the African trying to actually find pride in the traditional African religion. Two sides emerge in the film. The Kanyore Christian Women's Union are out to wipe out any form of "primitivity" in the village. On the other hand, the rest of the village finds the women too antagonistic towards the so called "backward ways." The latter group has come to realise that the Euro-Christian dismissal of African religious practices is baseless and closely linked to the colonial process. A shopkeeper tells one of the Christian women who asks him to support the cutting of the tree that he has "never read anywhere in the bible against a tree." Viewing *Mugumo* (The Sacred Tree) as a symbol of sin is not based upon biblical teachings. Like John in *Kolormask*, the shopkeeper shows the viewer that he is indeed capable of making an informed choice between what is good for him and what he does not need. He has chosen to be a Christian but not to interfere with his ancestral traditions represented by the *Mugumo*.[86]

The *Battle of the Sacred Tree,* like many return to the source films, is "intent on positioning religion where anthropologists only see idolatry, history where they see primitivism and humanism where they see savage acts" (Diawara, p. 160). It is in this view that Mama Njenga, Mumbi's grandmother, who respects African religion, says that cutting down the tree means putting an end to history. The *Mugumo* therefore is a symbol of history, whose origin no one knows. Muleka, a

tailor from Uganda, is told that nobody knows who planted the tree. It is as old as history itself.

By giving much importance to the *mugumo* in this film, Kinyanjui contributes towards one of the roles of African cinema Cham says, "African cinema also takes as its subject matter the questions such as the need to rewrite African history from African points of view."(p.5) It is clear that Cham acknowledges the diversity of Africans and their possible worldviews. Given the possibility of different worldviews, Muleka's contribution towards the debate becomes significant. Where he comes from, the tree is respected because it sheltered their first king, Kabaka. Different meanings are ascribed to the tree but it basically remains sacred and respected as a marker of religion and history in African cinema.[87]

Kinyanjui's rural setting brings the day to day life of an ordinary African village to the silverscreen. African village life that is equated to the jungle in Western film is now confidently presented at the global arena for the world to see. The characters use vernacular language to ease the official film convention that tends to associate film technology with the language of the empire, through whom cinema was introduced to Africa. With actors speaking in Kikuyu, Kinyanjui sets up the stage for a popular film whose actors play their roles with ease and express themselves with clarity. This ensures that display of culture is done clearly. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind* says "language, any language has a dual

character: It is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." (p.15). Although he accepts that language is universal, Wa Thiong'o submits that "specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. (ibid)

4.5.1 The Role of Western Social Institutions

Of all the colonial institutions that still represent the vestiges of British hagemony in Kenya, political administration, school system and Christianity are among the most deeply imprinted on the society. Kinyanjui's film consequently evokes a critical look at the role of these institutions in the lives of the people they purport to serve. The film ridicules the significance of these institutions in the lives of the ordinary Kenyan. Chief Njoroge, the government's administrative representative, is never seen performing any administrative work. Most of the time he is at a local pub, drinking and having fun with his friends.

Several scenes show the chief in his office. We would expect to see him a different person the moment he gets to work but he remains the same unconcerned man we see in the pub. We only see him read newspaper in the office. The way he treats the Christian women's case is not only ridiculous but also childish as Mumbi puts it. He runs away from the women and locks himself up in an inner room. At some point, his secretary lies to the women that the chief is in Nairobi while he is right

inside the office. The way the chief handles this case does not reflect his socio-political position as a leader.

This film challenges the school as the main source of knowledge. Traditional informal education embedded in oral literature stands out as an alternative source of knowledge. Mama Njenga and Mzee, Mumbi's father are the teachers of this alternative education. Being the oldest people in the film, they tell their grandchildren (Mumbi, Thoni and Thoni's friend) educative oral narratives. Although the learners are not familiar with the stories, they are more enthusiastic about the topic than the school pupils who are busy passing coffee beans to each other during an alphabet lesson. School gives the pupils an education that lacks touch with their history and traditions. Thoni wonders why they are never taught about their traditions in school. They more easily identify with it than the school curriculum. Thoni feels that she is a part of the society that created the story of Mumbi and Agikuyu since she quickly notices that Agikuyu's wife was named Mumbi, "like Mummy."

The Christian women's interpretation of Christianity is the most ridiculed in *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*. As the representatives of the Church, the women's perception of Christianity only gives the so-called "sinners" victory. The women create enmity with the "sinners" rather than convert them into Christianity. After Mumbi deserts her husband, due to physical and emotional abuse to which he

subjects her, she first turns to the Christian women for assistance. The women believe that since Mumbi cannot keep her marriage, she is a prostitute yet Christians cannot work together with prostitutes. Instead of finding ways of helping her out of her marital problems, they brand her a prostitute and distance themselves from her. In this sense, Christianity as viewed by the women's union fails to provide solutions to social problems.

The Battle of the Sacred Tree, therefore, emerges as one of the return to the source films by letting Mumbi find solution to her predicament at the foot of the sacred tree after stern rejection by the Christian mothers. It is after consulting the *mugumo* that the guilt of being a barmaid leaves her. The film portrays the African traditional religion as a more reliable solace to the dejected than Christianity, whose principles are still not well understood by the African converts. Here, the African is free to explore alternative ways of solving socio-cultural problems that face him/her. One of these possibilities is looking back to his pre-colonial traditions.

The need to retrace the ancestral traditions seems to have caught up with the old and the young alike. Thoni's friend, the girl who is caught offering sacrifice to the *mugumo* tree believes that her prayer and the coffee bean sacrifice will be answered. She prays that god helps Thoni to get a nice father. Her prayer is answered towards the end of the film when Mumbi and Muleka's love affair is

eminent. Mumbi's father, Mzee, opts to rely on traditional medicine rather than tablets and injection that his patient asks for. He tells the sick man that the herbs have been known to cure such illnesses from time immemorial. Ukadike finds the treatment of traditional healers in the films made by the British colonial film units ridiculous. They "are often objects of ridicule, portrayed as representing the forces of darkness and the epitome of evil (p.45). This is the same position held by the Christian women as seen in their letter to the chief:

> (...) The other issue is Mzee's so called medicine. It is so backward and primitive that we shall not comment further. Sir, we expect you to respect Christianity and support our efforts to fight evil.

Incidentally, the sick man is cured and goes out to spread the news. The African here tries to retrieve the glory of his traditional practices that were eroded by colonial mentality.

The film generally criticises the Africans who are in leadership positions but do not seem to comprehend the purpose of the institutions they represent. Kinyanjui challenges these institutions in her bid to highlight the capability of the African to live with minimal help from them. If Christianity is all about what the Christian women tell us, then the African is better worshipping his ancestral gods. If Chief Njoroge's activities constitute the practice of Western administration, the Kanyore people seem to be satisfied without his services. As seen from Thoni's complaint

and Mumbi's ignorance concerning her people's history, the school syllabus is due for reconstruction.

In the process of Kinyanjui's criticism, the people in these leadership positions are portrayed as laughingstocks. This, therefore, confirms Kinyanjui's claim of presenting the African as a normal human being, capable of erring. *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*, like *Kolormask* gives the African viewers icons to identify with. Kinyanjui's round characters are capable of making mistakes just like the people in the society that the film mirrors. Kinyanjui says:

> What actually drives me is the need to give Africans images they can say are truly themselves and not what Hollywood gives them. I would like to hear, as I heard from many Kenyans after they saw *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* 'that is how us women in groups behave.[88]

4.6 A Reflection on the Africans in the Two Films

Kolormask and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* concur with Diawara's narrative styles as reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. The two films exhibit Return to the Source and social realist techniques in their attempt at reclaiming the negative portrayal of the African in Western films. In so doing, the two come out as films whose directors heeded the call by a pioneer African film critic, Tahar Cheriaa that "your cinema shall be a militant cinema, it shall be first and foremost a cultural action with social (...) value, or it shall be nothing."[89]

The two films tend to overemphasise the superiority of the pre-colonial African way of life, painting the centre and its reminders as the backdrop through which the significance of the formerly marginalised African practices is stressed. In *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* for example, Mzee's medicine triumphs over tablets that the patient asks for. The patient believes that the Mzee's herbs are useless. On recovering, he goes to the open market, proclaiming the power of Mzee's medication. This is an inversion that a contemporary viewer may not easily identify with. This is a film that only reached the market in 2005, ten years after its release. It is difficult to expect the viewer to incorporate the use of traditional medicine when the "tablets" are at his/her disposal. For a majority of Kinyanjui's audience, given the time of the film's watching, it becomes unrealistic.

For *Kolormask*, drawing the viewer's attention to the importance of funeral and initiation rites as an African way of life is easily debatable. African, in fact, Kenyan communities are so diversified that presenting how one community treats death or initiation does not reflect how a majority of the communities treat the same. This makes Gamba's depiction of the processes and the importance attached to each stage of the rites unrepresentative of what happens in African communities. These variations are not only present within inter-communal boundaries but are also found in the intra-communal spaces that continue to widen owing to spatial movements that characterise former colonies.

Although *Kolormask,* through John, claims not to be racist, it reveals some conscious attempt by the director, who doubles as the scriptwriter to relocate the former coloniser to the periphery. Eliza is ridiculed and people like John's relatives, Dorothy, the maidservant and Toby all question her position. We see a similar questioning of the former centre in the restaurant scene, where the minister and his friends wonder why the waiter overlooks their presence, yet serving the Europeans with much detail. At this point, the film tries to overtly negate the perception of the Centre as the absolute authority as seen in the Western films in this study. Bhabha asks, in "commitment to Theory" that,

> Can the aim of freedom or knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor oppressed, margin periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our only way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of an originary counter-myth of radical purity?
>
> (p.111)

Such inversions run the risk of reproducing the very racism that they were designed to combat. This study has seen that the colonial representation of the African was bound to gain Western superiority. For other Western filmmakers, it aimed at fulfilling their audiences' desire hence raise box office collection. For the post independent filmmaker like Gamba, such militant cinema that may not even receive keen interest from the local audience may not be beneficial more so at a time when anti-colonialism is slowly giving way to the globalisation process.

As seen earlier, the two films also fit well into Diawara's description of the social realist style in African cinema. Such films usually question social plausibility of the African in Western films, casting the African as the person sinned against hence the need for the filmmakers to provide a more honest re-presentation of the same. The question of truthfulness in representation remains rather contested as it depends on the filmmaker's spatio-temporal position as well as his/her point of view as s/he approaches the object of representation. Using such a moralistic approach only "casts the question as simply one of errors and distortions as if the truth of a community were unproblematic, transparent and easily accessible, and lies about that community easily unmasked" (Stam, p.276). It can be argued that the Western filmmaker, coming from the outside, portrays the African from an outsider's standpoint. For the colonial cinema, other than the vested economic interests at stake, could be presenting the society as it seemed to be from the coloniser's point of view. A post-independent portrayal coming from an insider is definitely bound to be different.

Bhabha says that the postcolonial world is culturally and historically hybrid.[90] This gives the post-independent Kenyan filmmaker an extra task; of having to redefine the African he wants to re-present. The outsider's African has surely changed due to the historical processes like colonisation which have had direct and inevitable impact on the way of life of the African today. Even for the outsiders like Pollack and Hook, who share time space with the Kenyan filmmakers, their exotic view of

the African cannot have the same results as the insider's. An outsider's record may be faulty but cannot reflect an insider's. The Kenyan filmmaker's re-presentation of the African in film may only add to the Western filmmaker's observation but cannot replace it due to the shifting paradigms of their different observations about the same object.

The situation is even worsened by the African filmmakers' movements between the South and the North as the distinct locations of the (ex) coloniser and (ex) colonised. Sao Gamba and Wanjiru Kinyanjui are among the many African filmmakers who study their art in the developed countries. *Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* are products of skills acquired in Poland and Germany respectively. Such movements make the viewer question the authenticity of their 'authentic" view of the African. This study agrees with Trin Min-ha's position in "Inside Out Outside In" that "the moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside" (p.145). From the filmmakers' journeys between the two worlds, their worldviews become an amalgam of the multiple cultures they interact with. This raises another concern about the credence of their re-presentation of the African compared to that of the locally trained filmmakers.

Even in the hands of the Kenyan filmmakers, the image of the African still remains ambiguous. This is reflected in Vyera Paulin Simarou's "African Cinema:

Solidarity and Difference." She associates the varied nature of African cinema with the film directors' disparate backgrounds in terms of training and individual preferences.[91] With such differences, it is evident there no longer is a position of authority from which one can definitely judge the verisimilitude value of the representation. Tin-ha says that "the questioning subject, even if s/he is an insider is no more authentic and has no more authority on the subject matter (p.146). The call for African filmmakers to work against imperial oppression through cinema becomes even blurrier in the age of independent filmmaking in Kenya.

Even as Gamba and Kinyanjui's works attempt to improve on the portrayal of the African through the two films the films give a contradiction of this. Gamba's attempt to elevate John to a decision-maker and breadwinner in his family is pegged on the source of that superiority. John is introduced to the spectator at a point when he has successfully incorporated Western education and professionalism. This depicts London as an admirable "centre," where economic success is attainable. Gamba, therefore, hints at a more optimistic image of the coloniser than expected, given the pre-meditated need to underscore African personality and culture.

The film also ridicules the independence of the African from the colonial regime. In the restaurant scene, the post-independence minister who has taken over political leadership from the coloniser fails to acquire the respect that he expects to

come with the position. The waiter neglects the minister's table and gives personalised service to the European patrons. The minister and his friends summon the waiter for over fifteen minutes and are always being told to wait. The waiter only serves them after being told that the patron is a minister and after the minister demands dialogue with the manager of the restaurant. The next scene moves to a nearby table where a white customer talks about the false independence of the colonies. This scene seems to mock the very self-governance that it tries to praise. The imprint of colonial encounter is thus highlighted through the mentally colonised waiter, who represents the masses.

Similarly, *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* makes fun of the Christian Women's union. The women's understanding of Christianity does not help them or the society they live in. The viewer may wonder whether laughing at the women gives the African audience a better understanding of himself than watching Mwangi in *The Kitchen Toto*. As observed in this section, the question emerging is, therefore, not that of merely "correcting" the images the Western films have of the African. Sometimes, the image of the colonised in his/her own creative works may betray his quest for a better betrayal by the coloniser. Judgement of the image is also dependent on the position of the viewer and what informs his viewing. A viewer's interpretation of a film could be contrived by his/her socio-political, historical or even racial background.

4.7 Conclusion

The chapter has given an overview of some of the discussions that surrounded African filmmaking from the 1970s. It has explained how these impacted on the Kenyan film industry. Following the recommendations of these discussions, *Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree have* attempted a re-presentation of the African. The director/scriptwriters of the two films are among the filmmakers who hold the view that one of the roles of the African filmmaker is to present to his audience an African with whom they can identify. This is opposed to the continued negative portrayal of the African in Western films.

This view is observed throughout the two films. In trying to meet this objective, the films adopt two of the tendencies that have been commonly used by African filmmakers in trying to re-present Africa: The return to the source and realist tradition. Their portrayal of the African is however questioned. The films give contradicting images, which leave the ownership of authority and authenticity of re-presentation ambiguous.

Thus, the chapter concludes that one cannot assume an automatic connection between control over representation and the production of positive images. The fact that the oppressed - be it the colonised in postcolonialism, women in Feminist theory, homosexuals in Queer theory - did not have an ultimate say on the manner in which their oppressor - the coloniser, men and the heterosexuals respectively -

present them should not mean that given the powers, the oppressed are bound to give a positive representation of themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to indicate the major findings of the study. These are tied together in formulating the conclusion of the study. The researcher concurs with Sipalla and Mukora when they observe that Kenyan film has received minimal scholarly attention.[92] Therefore, it is imperative that areas of possible future research be identified as Cinema research plays a major role in the development of a film industry. The findings of the research, and conclusions drawn from them, will be used to briefly outline the areas that need further scholarly interrogation.

5.2 Summary and Conclusions

The study set out to examine the portrayal of the African in four films namely, *Out of Africa, The Kitchen Toto, Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree.* It sought to examine how the image of the African in Western films impact on his portrayal in the Kenyan film. To provide a base for this analysis, an overview of filmmaking in Kenya is given in chapter two.

Out of Africa and *The Kitchen Toto* are Western films set and shot in Kenya. Although the two were produced after Kenya gained political independence, they largely exhibit continuity from the colonial view of the African as a lesser being. The study identified some of the attributes that depict the African in this manner. *Out Of Africa* portrays him/her as a close variant of animals, unintelligent, solitary and of lesser importance than his environment. *The Kitchen Toto* views the African as uncivilised, dirty, compliant to the colonial ideologies and cruel.

The study shows that colonial films depicted the African negatively as one of the ways through which the coloniser maintained supremacy in the face of the colonised. On the other hand, some Western filmmakers have followed this tendency in order to meet their audience's desires for exoticism in films that depict the African in this manner. This is a common motivation for the production of Western films set in Africa even after the independence of the former colonies.[93] The study, however, noted that not all Western films give this portrayal. The researcher only focused on negative representation as it provided a base upon which the analysis of the Kenyan film was done. This is because several Kenyan filmmakers have quoted the need to change the negative image of the African as one of their roles.

Sao Gamba and Wanjiru Kinyanjui are among the Kenyan filmmakers who hold the above view. The researcher, therefore, purposively sampled their films *Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree,* respectively for this study. The two films are also grounded on the need for African filmmakers to present an African with whom the society can identify. In their re-presentation, the films tend to emphasise the value of indigenous African lifestyle, questioning Western supremacy. Indeed, the two films' protagonists are Africans who find value in traditional rituals and religion.

Having extensively consulted works on postcolonial discourse, the researcher interrogated the plausibility of the films' version of the African. The films tend to reverse the colonial view of the African, creating yet another polarised view of the Centre and the Periphery. This challenges globalisation, a process through which borderlines between the two formerly distinct locales are becoming porous. In trying to improve the image of the African on the screen, there emerges a conflicting view of the African that is as humiliating as that of the Western film. The filmmakers' training backgrounds in the Western countries make one question the credibility of their view of the African. This compared to how the locally trained filmmakers see the African, makes the re-presentation even shiftier.

The study also observed heavy reliance on Western donors for financial support of film productions. Different production funding agencies prefer to fund films that take particular stands on the issue at stake. This drastically hampers the independence of filmmakers who seek funds from these organisations. The filmmakers may not exercise total control over the images their films portray about the Africans.

From the above observations, the two objectives of the study have been met. The study reveals that portrayal of the African in western film influences his image in the Kenyan film. The Kenyan filmmaker's attempt to re-present the African through film is still not conclusive in itself. This is because ownership of the authority to "correct" the negative portrayal of the African remains unestablished.

5.3 Recommendations

African women are very strong people and play a very significant role in the societies they live in. They struggle to fend for their families and their contribution to development has been found crucial. The Kenyan cinema has continuously portrayed the woman as a creature in perpetual troubles. Films like *Behind Closed Doors, Dangerous Affair, Naliaka is Going, Saikati, The Battle of the Sacred Tree, Project Daddy,* and the list is infinite. These films taken literally present a woman almost overpowered by forces propelled by the society. It would be worthwhile for research to be carried out to ascertain if there is anything positive in a Kenyan

woman on the screen. Kinyanjui suggests that "the reality of the strong African (and I suggest Kenyan) woman still needs more emphasis, especially in today's world – where she is fighting a battle of liberation from both traditional and 'Victorian' laws, which keep her down.[94]

Kenyan cinema is gradually picking momentum. With new attempts at new and different technologies, more opportunities continue to arise in Kenyan film criticism which needs to be attended to.[95] Film appreciation helps market local productions as well as generating productive discussions between the critic and different stakeholders in the film industry. This would significantly contribute towards stabilising the industry, which is currently rejuvenating. Possibility of thematic analysis as a focus in the development of the Kenyan film could be one of the areas that could be studied further.

Style of the Kenyan cinema is another area that can be explored. Does the Kenyan film have a voice? So much has been written in attempts to define the distinctive style of African cinema. However, it has become difficult to postulate the paradigms that outline African cinema. Given the multi-cultural as well as the disparate historical experiences of different parts of Africa, this task is justified in being so elusive. With the smaller area between the margins of Kenya, it should be possible to get the definition or a theoretical construct that generates what can be termed Kenyan or even East African Cinema.

Notes

[1] Decolonization runs through not only the creative works but also the critical writings of many post-colonial authors in Africa. Some of these include writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981&1972); Chinua Achebe (1975) Olivier Barlet (2000) Kanyinda Bakupa (2004) and Historians, Ochieng' & Ogot (1996) among others.

[2] Mukora, W.B. in "African Cinema", www.pacweb.org 2005.

[3] The Africans in the western films are almost always static even if they are creations of different directors. This therefore leaves the viewers with only one African type who is found in almost all the films on Africa. Ochieng' (1992) is convinced that this is a strategy employed to make the works on the third world more authentic hence easily marketable.

[4] See Bakupa, (2004).

[5] The colonialist mentality is discussed at length by Louis (1999).

[6] One good example of such is the collection of essays in Eke et al. *African Images: Recent Studies and Text in Cinema.*

[7] Interview with Beti Ellerson at FESPACO. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 1997.

[8] Interview with Beti Ellerson in Sisters of the Screen. Africa World Press. 2000.

[9] Interview with Jane Munene, at Africa cineweek, Nairobi, 2004. Discussion with Njeri Karago during Africa Cine Week, Nairobi. 2004. Also see Mungai with Ellerson 1997; Kinyanjui and Muigai in Ellerson 2000.

[10] See Literature Review.

[11] One such writer is wa Thiong'o (1972) who sees the need for us to view Africa in three broad phases: Pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. He describes the last phase as a period of Africa's search for her "true self-image." This search indicates that Africa's both internal and external pressures have caused her cultural needs and subsequently her cultural image to change during her development. Ali Mazrui in his documentary film, *The Africans* expresses the need to understand Africa through her history, which has been influenced by several contacts (with both Asia and the west), giving Africa a "triple heritage." This has ultimately necessitated her search for her true image.

[12] See John Lye's article on "Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory" at http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/postcol.html

[13] Daniel Gover, John Conteh-Morgan & Jayne Bryce agree with Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin on this. Kofi Anyinefa also explains this in his essay, "Postcolonial Postmodernity" in Gover et al, 2000.

[14] Existing documents that can give historical and socio- political background to the creation of both Western and Kenyan films selected will be looked at rigorously. Where necessary, the filmmakers and actors will be consulted for clarification. See the Methodology section for a detailed elaboration of this process.

[15] Young (1996) asserts that a lot of literary production during the late nineteenth century is full of examples of 'knowledge' about the character of Africans based on white supremacist attitudes towards race. The texts are saturated with metaphors of 'darkness' infused with the presuppositions of the positive associations of whiteness, light and so on, and negative attributes of blackness, dirtiness, ignorance, evil, among others. Similar tropes are evident in the films of the 1930's such as *Sanders of the River* (1935), *The Song of Freedom* (1936), *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) *The Drum* (1938) and *The Four Feathers* (1939), and indeed, later in *Men of Two Worlds* (1947) and *Simba* (1955).

[16] See chapter two. Other informants range from popular experiences in the society, personal past or aspirations, social injustices, among others.

[17] Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon, in their essay, "Popular Signs: Or Everything You've Always Known about American Culture (But Nobody Asked)", concur with Sipalla's position. In their discussion on signs of popular film, they give one of the salient features of such a film as that of providing "one world" in which we do what we do in everyday life, from the way we entertain ourselves to the way we educate ourselves. They see the old artificial wall between everyday life and the ivory tower of life in the arts coming down.

[18] See "Catherine Wangui Muigai" in Ellerson (2000).

[19] In the 1990's, there was a marked rise in independent filmmaking firms in Kenya. This has been the most productive decade in terms of filmmaking in Kenya. The independent filmmakers take it upon themselves to source for funds, train their thespians and crew where necessary, and manage their own activities all the way to the final stage of marketing and exhibition. The independent film firms have also been involved in training filmmakers. Such films include Acacia Films, Alwan Communications, Baraka Films among others. In all this, the government's involvement has been far from the expectations of Nyamwaya et al, who would like the government to provide for filmmakers in all the stages of filmmaking.

[20] Due to different backgrounds as a result of migrations, Kenyans have very diverse experiences. The differences range from cultural, linguistic and even racial.

[21] Ashcroft Griffith and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* believe that valuation of a text is greatly influenced by the critic's background; a relation between the object and the criteria brought upon it. The centre imposes its criteria as the universal, hence dictating an order in which cultural margins should always see themselves as "disorders and chaos." Kenya being a resident of the "margin" finds her position among the "chaos" if not "disorders". Kenyan experiences have no particular reason to be the focal point of the centre's interest.

[22] See secondary data collection section. Some of this material has been reviewed under Film/Literature Review section.

[23] See Robker (1979) and Weiss (1975).

[24] Refer to the presentation given by the inaugural Kenya Film Commission during the 8th Africa Cineweek of Nairobi on 6th October, 2005. The commission members talked about "The Mandate and Scope of the Commission's Operations as well as how the Film Industry will Benefit from its Formation." This information has been retrieved from the researcher's report on the 8th Africa Cineweek.

[25] See Creswell 2003.

[26] One such filmmaking house is Baraka Films. It premiered its second local feature film, *Project Daddy* in July 2004. By early 2005, *The Aftermath* was made, closely followed by a mini television series, *Pumzika*, whose shooting began in mid February 2005.

[27] Moggi and Tessier's report dated 2001 might have considered the late 1990s' bumper feature film production which brought to the silver-screen films like Ingolo wa Keya's *The Married Bachelor* (1997), Albert Wandago's *Metamo* (1997), Catherine Muigai's *Saikati the Enkabaani* (1998), *Sabina's Encounter* (1998), *Tough Choices* (1998). All these do not average to one film in four years. Their figure serves one purpose of emphasising the extremely low rate of film production in Kenya, a situation that is currently being salvaged through the various mechanisms discussed in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

[28] Basically Nairobi and Mombasa. This is another major hindrance to Kenyan film exhibition. Once in a (very long) while, a local film is shown on these screens. The population outside these two largest cities in Kenya have no access to the cinema theatres.

[29] One such case is the Nation media Group's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Wilfred Kiboro, who was sceptical of the minister's directive. He believed the deal would only turn expensive and stifle liberation in the industry. Also Mr Patrick Quarcoor, the Managing Director of Kiss FM, a popular radio station in Kenya, expressed his fear that obtaining local material good enough for the television programmes would not be an easy venture. (See Sipalla 2004 p.5-6).

[30] Moggi and Tessier. in "Media Status Report: Kenya" (P.14).

[31] Due to the large number of pirated films, they are readily available everywhere including the streets and every other retail store as well as in the video libraries. Almost every Kenyan has access to these products. On the other hand, getting to the few designated outlets in Nairobi only a handful of Kenyans, who can afford it, access the local films, let alone having watched them.

[32] See Wa Gacheru Margaretta, p.54.

[33] Personal communication with Jane Munene, a Kenyan filmmaker and the chairperson of the Kenya National Film Association.

[34] Nargbils Productions filmed a documentary in Ethiopia for Ethiopian Airlines. Camera Pix's Mohammad Amin has done regular jobs in Uganda Seychelles. Mohinder Dhillonof Camera Pix has also shot documentaries in East Africa as a representative of a number of Western channels.

[35] See Nyamwaya et al and Moggi and Tessier.

[36] Films made out of such initiatives include Cinearts Africa's *Price of a Daughter* and *Behind Closed Doors*, both made in 2004 and Alwan Communications' *Naliaka is Going* (2003).

[37] Baraka Films has employed this in producing its two feature films, *Dangerous Affair* (2002) and *Project Daddy* (2004).

[38] See Commatters, 2003 (p.20).

[39] Personal communication with Philip Oketch, the co-ordinator of Africa Cine Week.

[40] This information is from the panel discussion led by the film commission members during the 8th Africa Cineweek of Nairobi in October 2005.

[41] Pamoja is A Kiswahili word meaning collaboration. Choosing it for the club's name insinuates the need for independent filmmakers in Kenya to work together in order to forge ahead and stabilise the infant Kenyan film industry.

[42] Personal observation since I started attending the monthly shows, which are held every first Monday of the month.

[43] See Sipalla 2004 (p.4).

[44] In his inaugural Independence Day presidential speech, Kibaki gave film professionals more hope when he gave a satisfying response to the persistent Karago's quest for the re-establishment of the Kenya Film Co-operation. In this speech, Kibaki saw film industry as a way of marketing Kenya as not only a filming destination but also tourist destination. Improving the industry would also help create employment opportunities. Unfortunately, KFC has not been re-instituted over two years later.

[45] Informal discussion with Roy Ogolla, the producer of *Pengle* Series during the Africa Cineweek of Nairobi, 2005.

[46] These producers are not as worried about piracy unlike mainstream filmmakers, some of whom would rather keep their films on the shelves than sell them and see their work dubbed for free by the opportunistic vendors.

[47] I visited five stores in four streets in Nairobi City: Accra Road, Duruma Road, Ronald Ngala Street and River road. The information given on Street Films was derived from informal interviews with the film vendors and/or producers and from watching five of the series in the market.

[48] An example is Wanjiru Kinyanjui's recent re-do of her film, *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994), which was initially produced in film format. The VCD is now selling faster because of its much reduced price at Kshs. 400. In VHS format the film cost about Kshs. 3,500, including recording fee.

[49] The concept of "militancy in African Cinema is discussed at length in Mweze Ngangura's "Militancy or Entertainment?" in Bakari and Cham, (1996 pp 60 – 64).

[50]Some of these include: *Naliaka is Going, Behind Closed doors, Price of a Daughter*, among others.

[51] See Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

[52] Quoted in Ukadike 1994, p.36. Other scholars who share similar sentiments include Yvonne Vera 2001, Bernth Lindfors 2001, Louis Tyson 1999, Lindgren Bjorn 2001, and David Kerr 1995.

[53] See Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* 1937.

[54] See Fanon 1985 p. 32.

[55] Quoted in Ukadike, p. 41.

[56] see Zins 1982:101.

[57] Chemjor 1998 has also discussed metonymy of the African in Izak Dinesen's memoir, *Out of Africa*, upon which this film is based.

[58]Quotation from http://www.destinationhollywood.com/movies/outofafrica/feature-monologues.shtml. Accessed on 20th October 2005.

[59] See Ukadike 1994, p. 37.

[60] See Diawara 1992, p. 1.

[61] Quoted in Diawara 1992, p.1 and Ngayane 1998/99 p. 12.

[62] This was founded in 1935 by Major L.A. Notcutt. The programme had a mandate to educate adult Africans to change and adapt to new ways of life, prescribed by the British colonisers, It also had a duty to entertain. Notcutt trained and directed the native actors.

[63] Jean Rouch. Quoted in Diawara 1992.

[64] Diawara 1992, p. 3.

[65] These 'voices' can be located in the post-independence literary as well as cinematic products of the African states. Most of these works have employed several techniques in attempting to re-present the African, highlighting what is African.

[66] This and all other translations from Kiwahili are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

[67] Although it is currently common to find African men preparing meals, in most African communities, it is more typical for men to distance themselves from the kitchen as it is regarded as women's territory. With the colonial masters employing male cooks and domestic servants the colonised subject is left with no option but to comply since the wages they earn out of such jobs not only provides food for their families but also enables them pay tax to the colonial government.

[68] See Githae-Mugo 1978, pp. 70-96. . The concept of 'White Mwessiahs' is discussed in chapter five. She talks about several other forms of the so-called white saviours who come to the rescue of the African trapped in 'backward' life. These include: priests, prophets, doctors, missionaries, 'civilisers' teachers, politicians, demagogues among others.

[69] See Said 1978

[70] Mishra Vijay and Bob Hodge 1994 (p.277), quoting Salman Rushdie.

[71] See Ukadike 1994, Diawara 1992, and Pfaff 2004.

[72] See a discussion on the colonial filmmaking in chapter three. Ngayane Lionel's "For Africans, With Africans By Africans" in *Africa on Film* and Diawara 1992 also discuss this transition in African filmmaking.

[73] See Ngayane and Mgbejume, Oyero's *Film in Nigeria: Development, Problems and Promise*, 1989. and Balogun, Francoise's "Blooming Videoconomy: The Case of Nigeria" in Francoise Pfaff, 2004.

[74] From a talk given by the film's director, Ashraf Semwogerere, during a panel group discussion on *The Challenges of Filmmaking in East Africa* at the Second East African Film Congress organised by Amakula, Kampala international Film Festival 2005.

[75] See Chapter three.

[76] Diawara (1992) has made a major contribution in the field of African Cinema. This is in reference to the continued reference made to Diawara's classification in works collected in Imru Bakari and Mbye Cham's *African Experiences of Cinema* (1996) and Francoise Pfaff's *Focus on African Films* (2004). Mukora B. also refers to Diawara's classification in her "Beyond Tradition and Modernity" (2003).

[77] See Cham and Bakari, (p. 23).

[78] See Cham and Bakari (1996), Nyamwaya et al and Francoise Pfaff (2004).

[79] www.afrique30.com

[80] See Gandhi 1998.

[81] My concern with cultural displacement does not overlook the other different forms of displacements that have been identified within the postcolonial debate. Physical displacement and its consequent psychological conditions of the colonised has been an important subject in African films like Djibril Diop Mambetsy's *Touki Bouki* (1973).

[82] See Mwakalinga 2003.

[83] Wilson, an African whose extended family resides in rural Kenya, is married to an African-American lady. The wife refutes the historical relationship between Africans and African-Americans. The Wilsons have so much identified with the Western life that they find Wilson's extended family unbelievably backward. According to Chief Nanga, in his *No More Lies About Africa,* "The mere fact that African people live in the Americas, the West Indies and Europe, having fast been chained and taken against their will to strange lands as captives, does not, in my opinion, remove their link with mother Africa.... " (29). Similarly, Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind*, locates African connections to the Four Corners of the earth. He says these people are historically linked through biology, culture and struggle. Ngugi believes that the Afro-Americans, for example, share with Africa the same "bio-geographical roots." He therefore refers to the Afro-Americans as "Africans who a few hundred years ago were brutally uprooted from the African continent." (98). He concludes that They both have shared the same past of humiliation and exploitation and they have similar aspirations "for total liberation of all black people in the world." Harris (Insiders and Outsiders) and Fanon (The Wretched of the Earth) share the same position, referring to this link as the shared history of subjugation which leads its subjects to a common destiny of liberation.

[84]Kofi Anyinefa, in "Postcolonial Post-modernity" focuses on the similarities in approach between postcolonial and post-modern criticism. One of the areas in which the two share, he says is on the fact that they both question the social as well as artistic frontiers in a work of art. (15)

[85] Wanjiru attests to this in Elerson 2000.

[86] This assertion is made with regard to the story about the (Kikuyu) tribal origin as narrated in Jomo Kenyatta's book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938). In this myth, it is said, that at the beginning of time, there existed Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi (which means creator or moulder). God enabled them to have nine beautiful daughters, but no single son. Since Gikuyu was the first man on earth, there were no other families. So Gikuyu offered sacrifice to the god under a *mugumo* tree after which god provided nine young, handsome men to marry the nine daughters of Gikuyu. The whole community of Kikuyu tribe sprung out of these nine marriages. *Mugumo* has ever since been viewed as a sacred tree under which the Kikuyu traditionally offered prayers to god (locally called *Ngai*).

[87] Several African films refer to this tree with varying meanings. In general, the tree remains a significant source of help to the Africans torn between aping the West and returning to their ancestral roots. Apart from *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*, some of the African films that make symbolic reference to the sacred tree include: Djibril Diop Mambetsy's *Touki Bouki*, Gaston Kabore's *Wend Kuuni*, Mohamed Camara's *Denko* Souleyman Cisse's *Yeelen* and Sembene Ousmane's *Borom Sarret*.

[88] Kinyanjui in Ellerson, 2000.

[89] See Mwenze Ngangura 1996 p.61. Kinyanjui infers her commitment to this call in Elerson 2000. Gamba is one of the people who wrote the report on Kenyan Cinema which is referred to in this work as Nyamwaya et al. The most memorable impact of this report was the Kenya Government's support for the production of *Kolormask*.

[90] See Bhabha's "Commitment to Theory."

[91] My use of the expression, "African Cinema" is however different from Vyera's reference to the same in her essay as "African Film". She believes that filmmaking in Africa has not reached the status of being called "a Cinema." Her definition of 'cinema' in the same work is not pegged on the process of development but relies on content. She says Cinema includes filmmaking, training, television and all types of films produced within a particular region. This applied to Africa, concurs with what has been referred to by Cinema scholars as African Cinema.

[92] See Mukora, (2003, p. 219) and Sipalla (2004, p. 2).

[93] This explains the remake of films like *King Solomon's Mines*, Film adaptation of novels depicting the Africans as lower beings like *Out of africa, I Dreamed of Africa, Constant Gardener* among others. *Out of Africa* recorded one of the highest box office returns for its director, Sydney Pollack. The film also won five out of its eight nominations at the Oscars.

[94] Kinyanjui in Ellerson, 2000.

[95] I have argued elsewhere ("Cinema and Development: Necessity for Film Studies in the Kenyan Public Universities") for the need to pay more attention to film criticism as a way of fostering a film's understanding and consequent realisation of its utilitarian value. Film criticism also encourages discourse that will be beneficial for filmmakers in their next projects. As filmmakers venture into newer modes of production, more discussions need to be mooted to elaborate what these modes mean for the direction of the regional film industry.

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www.imdb.com

www.commatters.org

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Checklist for Interviews with Directors/Producers of the Sampled Kenyan Films

1. What motivates you to make films?
2. How do you view the image of the Africans in the Western films?
3. Do you find it necessary that as a Kenyan filmmaker, you should respond to some of these images?
4. If yes, which approaches do you use in responding to these images?
5. Do you think Kenyan filmmakers have what it takes to completely overhaul the negative image of the African in some of the Western films?

Appendix 2: Checklist for Interviews with Actors in the Sampled Kenyan Films

1. As an actor, do you take in and reproduce all that your director tells you to do on set, or do you sometimes put in your opinions?
2. Why?
3. As the conveyor of the final image on the screen, what role do you think actors play in the negative depiction of the African in some Western films?
4. What do you think makes an African actor play a role so demeaning to his/her cultural roots?

5. What is your take on the role you played in *Kolormask/The Battle of the Sacred Tree*?
6. Do you believe in what you were made to do or say in the film?

Appendix 3: Checklist for Interview with other Filmmakers/Producers in Kenya

1. What is your experience as a filmmaker in Kenya?
2. From its inception to date, are there certain trends you have observed in filmmaking in Kenya?
3. What is your opinion on the portrayal of the African in the Western films?
4. In what ways do you think this influences the Kenyan filmmakers' productions?
5. What are some of the thematic inclinations of the Kenyan films you have watched?
6. Why do you think certain themes are so recurrent?

Appendix 4: Observation Guide for Image of the Africans in the Western Films

1. Are there any social groups emerging from the films?
2. How do the groups relate with one another in terms of reference to each other, mixing etc
3. Are there any cases of an assumed intellectual lack?

4. Look out for technical inputs that enhance the negative depiction of the
   - Consider close-ups
   - Camera pans and narratives.
   - Camera illusions
   - Sounds
   - Music
5. Observe the emotional and social development of the African characters.
6. How is the environment presented vis a vis the Africans?
7. Is there a common type by which the Africans are characterised?
8. Who uses the plural markers more frequently, and on whom?
9. How are the native and European cultures represented?

Appendix 5: Observation Guide for Image of the Africans in the Kenyan Film

1. There are several treaties signed concerning African cinema. In what ways does the film attempt to respond to some of these agreements?
2. What are the thematic concerns of the film?
3. What narrative style does the film employ in articulating its subject matter?
4. Is there a particular mention of the Western cultures, institutions (religion, education system, marriage etc) or ideology?
5. If so, how are these treated in relation to their African equivalents?
6. What is the relationship between the Africans and fellow Africans or Africans and the people from the West?

7. How are the characters in this film developed?
8. How does the filmmaker appropriate cinematic techniques for use in and enhancement of the African film?
9. Is there any form of resistance employed in the re-presentation of Africa?
10. How does the African character in the Western films (analysed in chapter 3) compare to the Africans in the Kenyan film watched here?
11. Does the film's use of cinematic techniques reflect the meanings accorded to the same techniques in the Western films?