# Cinema in Ghana

*History, Ideology and Popular Culture*

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Dissertation for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)
at the University of Bergen

2011

Cinema Studies; National Cinemas; African Cinema

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# Acknowledgements

My gratitude is to God for surrounding me with so many good people whose support and encouragement made the writing of this thesis less stressful. The list of people and institutions to who I owe gratitude is too long to fit into this page, but I will mention a few.

I sincerely thank Statens Lanekassen for sponsoring both my Masters and PhD programmes.

I thank my parents, Peter and Julia Nanbigne for their prayers and encouragement, my brothers and sisters, especially Edward, for their generous support. Special thanks are due my wife Linda for enduring my mood swings during the writing of the thesis, and my son Yengmambo whose birth in Bergen stressed but also inspired me.

I thank the teachers and staff of the Faculty of Social Sciences for the care and concern over my scholarship and especially those in the Department of Information Science and Media Studies for their friendship, generosity and encouragement. I sincerely thank Professor Jostein Gripsrud, Gjartrud Kolas, Rune Arntsen, Terja Thue and Randi Heimvik and many other academic and administrative staff, who never once hesitated to offer assistance when I needed it.

I reserve my very special thanks to Professor Katherine Goodnow who showed a lot of confidence in me in spite of my own frequent shortcomings. She displayed a great deal of patience, care and concern, and continuously encouraged me not to give up, especially when I had returned to Ghana and conditions did not favour my prompt completion of the thesis. But for her prodding, my frustrations could have led to the abandonment of the work entirely. Thank you Kate!

# Abstract

In spite of many years of research, theorizing, debate and contestation, there is always freshness about discourses on national cinema because of its contextual transformations. More importantly, apart from several European nations, North America, Australia, China, and Indian, where national cinema studies have been extensively conducted, nations in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have not received the same academic attention. Discourses on national cinema are also fresh because of changing methodological and theoretical approaches which are dependent on the historical, industrial and cultural contexts of each nation's cinema.

*Cinema in Ghana- History, Ideology and Popular Culture*, is an attempt to start a dialogue about national cinema in Ghana. The primary purpose of this thesis is not simply to provide a historical account of cinema in Ghana, but rather to question and dialogue with the history in order to locate the texts and contexts that inform a national cinema here.

The thesis takes as a point of departure the broader political, cultural and aesthetic nuances of filmmaking in Africa and then focuses on the specific case of Ghana. The literature available on cinema in Africa suggest heterogeneous and complex practices which implicate serious political and cultural discourses, but also offer the mundane entertainment value often associated with popular cultural products.

*Cinema in Ghana* begins by questioning African cinema, and opens up complex discourses of identity, ownership, cultural mediation, industrial and economic practices and the influence of globalisation on the iconography of African films. To understand African cinema is to interrogate issues of ideology, narrative, aesthetics, the economics of ownership and the role or social value of the cinematic product. This thesis is an attempt to identify a national cinema in Ghana as a microcosm of cinema in Africa.

To appreciate the specificity of Ghanaian national cinema requires an engagement with discourses on nations, nationhood and nationalism. Issues of national culture and identity, and concerns over representation are brought to bear on the assumptions of nationalism and national cinema. The thesis acknowledges that the task of isolating a national-

cultural specificity is problematic, just as it is contentious to talk about the cultural specificity of local genres or nation-state cinema movements, particularly in the era of globalisation.

*Cinema in Ghana* acknowledges the limitations of the concept of national cinema as a seamless whole and does not pretend to offer a coherent, unified, and homogeneous concept in the case of Ghana. Rather, it offers a broad theoretical reading of the history of cinema in Ghana vis-à-vis the political and cultural transformations that have taken place over time, and how these have impacted on assumptions of nationhood and therefore national cinema. These transformations started from the colonial period when cinema was first introduced to native people in Ghana, mainly for colonial political purposes. These early film screenings were not important for Ghanaian nationalism even though they set the stage for nationally specific cinema.

*Cinema in Ghana* traces the political and cultural shifts that informed the production and consumption of films in Ghana, with emphasis on particular historical events and films which represented an essence of Ghanaian nationalism, and therefore national cinema. For example, by the start of the 1950s, as independence from colonial rule was imminent, some of the films produced by colonial film crews, ironically, were in the interest of Ghanaian nationalism, such as *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952) and *Freedom for Ghana* (1957).

After independence in 1957, cinema was put to the service of the new nation, and national cinema was born in Ghana. The thesis broadly discusses the short dramas, documentaries and feature films that were produced as part of efforts to consolidate political and economic independence. Using various theories of national cinema, the thesis interrogates the history of film and video production, distribution and consumption in Ghana in order to answer the question, "when is cinema in Ghana national?" This question is important because national cinema was more conspicuous during the first three decades of independence. However, the influx of mainly amateur videos, from the late 1980s to 2009, whose motive was profit rather than serve a national interest, further complicated the concept of national cinema within the Ghanaian context. The thesis therefore concludes by suggesting that new modes of analysis, new models and new approaches need to be discovered for the study of national cinema, particularly in Africa, where cinema is undergoing tremendous transformations.

# Contents

# Introduction

The central question of this dissertation is whether Ghana possesses a national cinema. In other words, when is cinema in Ghana national? To answer this question the study traces the history of cinema in Ghana, within the context of the African experiences of cinema, and identifies the major political and cultural shifts that have shaped cinema here over time. The thesis sets out to deal with the trends, issues and methods in film production and spectatorship in Ghana, in order to engage with the thesis question.

Cinema in Ghana can be traced to the activities of Christian missionaries around 1910 when they first showed slides and later films to natives as part of their evangelism. Around this period, the Basel Missionaries settled in the Osu coastal suburb of present day Accra and introduced films to the natives. Colonial authorities later adopted films as tools for indoctrination and political proganda, until the achievement of independence in 1957 when film was used to consolidate political freedom from colonialism and to serve the interest of the new nation. National cinema in Ghana was born.

Political independence also required economic and cultural independence. The new leaders of the nation therefore sought to animate the various ethnic groups within the country towards a common national consciousness. Cinema became one of the most used tools for achieving this. There was therefore a focus on the political and educational

uses of cinema, and attempts to develop an independent and self-reliant national cinema.

However, the focus on nationalisation and ideological concerns overwhelmed the economic requirements of a national film industry. The neglect of the economics of cinema meant that individual entrepreneurs took up the mantle of growing a national cinema. From 1966, when the first civilian government of Ghana was overthrown by a millitary dictatorship, the state's involvement in the nation's cinema waned. Independent producers became the backbone of national cinema. Their individual efforts produced a repertoire of nationally significant films that are indispensable in discourses of Ghana's national cinema.

The last of these most significant films was produced in 1988, and since then, the nation has been inundated by a phenomenon of video-films. Video-films are feature length movies produced on video formats for commercial distribution, which have become very popular in Ghana and Nigeria. Whilst this new phomenon has introduced new forms of storytelling and spectatorship, their subject-matter often neglects the concerns of the nation and may not therefore fit into the discourses of national cinemas With their unique narrative codes and new audiences it may require a re-conceptualization of national cinema, or rather, the development of new methods for approaching national cinema in the Ghanaian, and indeed, Nigerian contexts.

Even though the thesis is a historical narration, the reader may not find a comprehensive historical account, such as will be expected in some kind of 'History of Cinema in Ghana'. Rather, the purpose of history here is to facilitate the location

of cinema in Ghana within the framework of national cinema. I fear that the effects of globalization and the dominance of Hollywood make this an exercise in futility. However, it is a worthwhile exercise for the simple reason that the frequent opposition by filmmakers here to dominant cinemas qualifies the experience as national cinema.

My arguments for a national cinema in Ghana are framed within the broader context of African Cinema, a fluid and slippery concept, and a context that is problematic in several respects because it is often narcissistic (or essentialist), contentiously homogeneous and practically non-existent. Therefore, in this study I am interested in the political and cultural shifts in Ghana which have informed and influenced film production, and how film, as a product of culture, also influences and reinforces peoples' attitudes and worldviews.

For this reason, I attempt to lay out some theoretical and methodological approaches to African cinema in general, examine the nature of film history and how it applies to the African experience, and review the concepts of national cinema and popular culture in order to sift out the relevant models that could form a framework for Ghana's national cinema.

### *Brief review of literature on cinema in Ghana*

There is not much literature about cinema in Ghana. A few major Ghanaian films are often cited in texts as part of an elite group of acclaimed African films, but

their local Ghanaian contexts are often ignored. There are two significant texts that focus a considerable amount of discussion on cinema in Ghana. The first is *African Cinema- Politics and Culture* (1992) by Manthia Diawara which devotes two chapters to discussions about filmmaking in Anglophone African countries, with particular emphasis on Ghana and Nigeria. The two most important filmmakers of Ghana, Kwaw Ansah and King Ampaw receive a considerable amount of attention and their films, *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1980), *Heritage…Africa* (1988), both by Kwaw Ansah, and *Kukurantumi, Road to Accra* (1983) by King Ampaw, are discussed at length. Diawara also examines the structures of film production and exhibition in Ghana and offers a brief history of the (now defunct) Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC).

*Black African Cinema* (1994) by Nwachuku Frank Ukadike also offers a great deal of information about cinema in Ghana. Ghana features in most parts of the book, particularly in portions where he discusses Anglophone African cinema. Ukadike undertakes, not a historical account of cinema in Ghana, but rather a theoretical and conceptual formulation of Ghanaian filmmaking, both by the government-controlled production company, the GFIC, and independent filmmakers. Whilst the structures for setting up a national cinema are the main concern of Diawara, the ideological considerations of national cinemas are the focus of Ukadike's study.

Besides these two monographs, this dissertation relies on a historical account of cinema in Ghana that was serialized in one of Ghana's major entertainment newspapers by Nanabanyin Dadson, a journalist. Dadson had conducted research into

the history of cinema in Ghana with the intention of publishing a book on his findings, but instead serialized the information in several articles published in the *Graphic Showbiz* newspaper.

Information was gleaned from some journal articles that offered historical accounts or interpretations of cinema in Africa as a whole, and Ghana in particular. For example, information about cinema in Ghana before and during the First World War (WWI), and also the inter-war years was accessed from accounts by James K. Matthews (1982), whose argument about the role of returning Nigerian veterans of war in the rise of African Nationalism was very useful, just as Kevin Dunn (1996) offered important accounts of colonial representations of Africans in cinema.

Similarly, David H. Slavin (1997) presents arguments with regards to the "Political and Racial Economics of 'Cinema colonial', as part of the title of his article reads, whilst Rosaleen Smyth (1979) offers a historical analysis of British colonial film policy and the implications of those policies for African cinema. Rob Skinner (2001) takes up the issue of censorship, education and films during the interwar years, and offers important information regarding the quality, or lack of, of films during this period.

For cinema during WWII and after, several journal articles offer important glimpses at what took place in Ghana, just as in other parts of Africa. For example, Fay Gadsen (1986) examines war time colonial propaganda, with a focus on Kenya, Jane Banfield (1964) reports on film in East Africa, Andrew D. Roberts (1987) is concerned about the representation of Africa in films up to 1940, and Charles Armour

(1984) examines the role of the British Broadcasting Corporation in the development of broadcasting in British colonial Africa, all of which offer insights into colonial motives for developing media in the colonies.

Charles Ambler (2001) offers insights into colonial film audiences and their reception of popular films, whilst H. D. Waley (1942) discusses the uses of British documentaries during WWII. A. G. Dickson (1945), Rosaleen Smyth (1984) and Wendell P. Holbrook (1985) all examine British propaganda through the use of cinema and other media, in mobilizing Africans for the war. John Wilson (1944) the Government Information Officer at the time, offered an interview to a Jamaican writer in which he discussed how cinema was organized in the colony. This interview offers insights into the colonial attitudes towards Ghanaians and how the colonialists used cinema for propaganda and indoctrination.

Arnold W. Hodson (1940), the Governor of the Gold Coast at the time, reports on the efforts of the people of the Gold Coast in support of the war, and David Killingray (1982) discusses the military and labour recruitment in the Gold Coast during WWII. Adrienne M. Israel (1987) examines the experiences of Ghanaian soldiers during the war, and Leonard W. Doob (1953) accounts for the activities of the Information Services in Central Africa, which have similarities in other parts of Africa, such as Ghana. Michael Paris (2002) examines the representation of Africa in post-1945 British cinema whilst Neil Parsons (2004) accounts for one of the many audience studies carried out in Africa during colonialism, the Kanye Cinema

Experiment, and offers insights into British colonial conceptions of African film spectatorship.

The list above is not exhaustive of the material that I consulted. There are many other articles and internet sources that were useful in the study. These texts also informed and supported my choice of theories and methods for advancing the arguments in the dissertation, which nonetheless, posed some challenges.

### *Theoretical Challenges*

Coming to grips with the concept of national cinema in relation to Ghana posed the first hurdle towards the development of this thesis. To consider national cinema as a "descriptive category" or the "conception of 'great works'" (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2000, pp. 2-3) in relation to the country of origin, in this case Ghana, would be simple enough. However, the issues that inform national cinema are more complex, more nuanced, and challenging.

National cinema implicates notions of the nation and assumptions of nationhood and nationalism. Issues of national culture and identity, which are often contentious in multicultural societies, and concerns over representation are brought to bear on the assumptions of national cinema. Even though the thesis is about the specific history of the nation Ghana, it is still problematic to talk about "national-cultural specificity" or "the cultural specificity of genres and nation-state cinema

movements" as Crofts (1998, pp. 387-389) has suggested for the simple reason that cultures in Africa are transnational and borderless.

The study was therefore informed by Hjort and MacKenzie's (2000) argument that "it is important to acknowledge the limitations of a conception of national cinema as a seamless totality that somehow accurately expresses, describes, and itemizes the salient concerns and features of a given national culture" (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2000, p. 4). Admittedly, the cinematic texts and the cultures that they represent in Ghanaian films are reflections of many other cultures in West Africa and indeed other parts of Africa. The study is therefore not strict on offering a coherent, unified, and homogeneous concept of national cinema in Ghana, but rather attempts a theoretical reading of history to suggest a possibility of national cinema. Even though the thesis focuses of feature films, which are not many (very little is mentioned about documentaries even though documentary productions far outnumber feature films) not all of them receive the same amount of analytical attention for various reasons, including the fact that most of these films were not accessible.

For this reason, the study offers a broad theoretical reading of the history of cinema in Ghana vis-à-vis the political and cultural transformations that took place over time, and how these impact on assumptions of nationhood. In doing this, it will be necessary to draw on debates and discussions about the concept of national cinema in order to appropriate models and approaches that have been used for the conception of other national cinemas such as Australia, Germany and France. The challenge with this approach is that some of the models will not appropriately fit into the Ghanaian

experience. I therefore turn to the major approaches to African cinema study offered by several scholars of African cinema. Even though these too do not offer clear-cut cases for national cinemas, they still present a good point of departure.

The study therefore delves into the history in order to identify various aspects of the development of cinema in Ghana that could lend themselves to nationalist interpretations, particularly within the framework of African nationalism. This approach, even though relevant to the Ghanaian experience, presents yet another set of problems. For example, a key question is how to identify the national, beyond the mundane and banal flagging of various colours, symbols, and expressions. Often, one finds out that what is supposed to be the national may turn out to be the hegemonic cultural and linguistic representation of a dominant ethnic group, or an engagement with complex cross-border familial relations, or the simplistic and yet problematic confinement of nationalism to the geographical limitations of the state.

### *Methodological Challenges*

Besides the theoretical challenges, various methodological problems presented themselves during the research for this dissertation. Certainly, in doing film history some of the primary sources of information must be the films themselves (Allen & Gomery, 1985; Casetti, 1999). Unfortunately, most of the films that I hoped to study, some of which are mentioned in the thesis, were inaccessible. Several reasons account for this.

In 1986, a fire at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Television (GBC-TV) destroyed the film library there and wiped out a tremendous amount of audio-visual heritage. Ten years later, in 1996, when the GFIC was divested with majority shares to a Malaysian entity, the film library was emptied and the cartons containing reels of films, including negative prints, were left in the open at the mercy of the weather. This library was supposed to have been destroyed in the 1966 military coup d'état that ousted Kwame Nkrumah, but according to Ghanaian filmmaker Agbert Adjesu and other contemporaries, they defied the orders of the military government and saved the prints. Most of these films were later sent to the Rank Laboratories in London for safe-keeping.

It took the intervention of a number of elderly filmmakers, such as Kwaw Ansah and Chris Hesse, to rescue some of the prints, which were then sent to the film archives of the Information Services Department (ISD). By the year 2000, the films at the ISD were also deteriorating due to poor storage conditions. In London, the Rank Laboratories had also evacuated the Ghanaian films and dumped them in the open at the Ghana embassy in response to Ghana's default in paying for storage.

Whilst many of the films were wasting away, even those that were still fairly good were still inaccessible to me. It may sound incredulous to learn that in Ghana it is unlikely that one would find a functional 16mm or 35mm projector. The ISD no longer possesses any working projectors. The new institution that replaced the GFIC, GAMA, has no functional film projectors, nor does the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI). To the best of my knowledge the only institutions which possessed

film projectors were the German Cultural Institute (Goethe Institute) and that of the French (Alliance Francaise) whose equipment were reserved for embassy programmes only.

Apart from the inaccessibility of films and equipment, another important challenge to this study was the lack of documentary information about the history of cinema in Ghana. After the two disastrous events at the GBC-TV and the GFIC, the literature, in terms of official correspondence, possible contracts, government statements, policies and production notes, could not be found. The national archives did not possess copies of any such documents. In fact it did not even have a section for films. The ISD possesses only a catalogue of short education feature and documentary films made from 1952 to 1972.

Another serious challenge was in finding people, mostly elderly people, who might still be alive and hopefully retain good memories of cinema during the colonial or early independence periods. Unfortunately, time constraints and limited resources did not allow an extensive search for these people. And even when I did locate some, the information they offered was often mundane, peripheral and of no real value to the main concerns of the thesis. It was also difficult (sometimes impossible) to convince prospective interviewers to accept interview requests. I was most amazed and dismayed that some prominent Ghanaian filmmakers turned down my requests for interviews even though these same filmmakers had granted interviews to expatriate researchers in the past. However, rather than be a limitation, this denial became an advantage as I was able to undertake independent analyses of film texts,

supported by the opinions of ordinary film audiences and my colleague film scholars at NAFTI. The thesis therefore relies a great deal on secondary accounts such as Diawara (1992), Ukadike (1994), Dadson (1998) and many journal articles mentioned earlier.

### *Structure of the thesis*

The thesis is organized in eleven chapters, excluding this introduction. The first three attempt to lay out the theoretical framework and methodological approaches to writing national cinemas. Chapter one examines various approaches to studying cinema in Africa whilst chapters two and three deal the the relationship betwen film and history, and the theoretical and methodological approaches to studying national cinemas respectively.

From chapter four to seven, the thesis examines the history of cinema in Ghana from the colonial period to the late 1980s, which is the pinnacle of Ghanaian 'classical' filmmaking, and a period which, I argue, also marked the end of true national cinema.

Chapters eight to ten examine the phenomenon of video-films. Their historical context is of interest to the study, as political and social upheavals in the nation both gave birth to the new form of visual pleasure and industry, and also fed the imaginations of the producers. The chapters examine the concepts and production practices of video-films, and the debates and ideological conflicts that ensued

between the mostly amateur producers and formally trained filmmakers. However, these confilcts will later turn into collaborations as trained filmmakers adopted video and started to produce more assertive stories with higher technical qualities.

Chapter eleven is the final chapter in which the questions of national cinema are re-visited. The argument here is that national cinema in Ghana is only discernible during certain specific periods in the history of the nation. However, for other periods, particularly the period of video-films, to be appreciated as part of national cinema history, it is suggested new concepts and approaches to national cinema need to be developed to accommodate the globalised nature of cultural exchange and the transnational nature of spectatorships.

# 1. Cinema in Ghana- History, Ideology and Popular Culture

CHAPTER ONE

APPROACHES TO AFRICAN CINEMA

This chapter offers a broad overview of the different but overlapping ways in which African cinema has been defined and studied. I have identified eight broad approaches to African film scholarship, which include regional, cultural, thematic, and generic contexts. The rest are prescriptive and descriptive approaches, and, postcolonial and Third Cinema perspectives. These are certainly not exhaustive, but offer broad contexts that could encapsulate other more specific approaches such as economic and formal considerations.

The chapter is organized in two main parts and begins with an examination of the definitional issues around African cinema. This is followed by reviews of the eight approaches to African cinema suggested above. An understanding of these ways of seeing African cinema, I hope, will be useful for understanding the Ghanaian experiences of cinema.

WHAT IS AFRICAN CINEMA?

In most definitions of 'African cinema' the term is actually used as a matter of convenience in spite of the allusion to a homogenous concept or practice, often with

little regard to the wide variety of regional, political, economic and aesthetic experiences of film production and spectatorship on the continent and indeed, its diasporas.

The almost interminable quest for a standard definition of African cinema demonstrates the futility of such an exercise because, as Akudinobi (1997) has argued, African cinema is not a simple concept, but one that "...implicates complex and contradictory spheres, relations and categories" (Akudinobi, 1997, p. 91). Akudinobi argues that African cinema has had to find ways of surviving post-colonial economic relations where, on the one hand, some Africans suffer from French paternalism and on the other, a rejection by the former colonizer, such as in the case of Anglophone countries. In addition, African cinema has always sought a balance between conflicting and complex agenda of protestant anti-colonial representations, the didactic functionalism of cinema and the dire need for commercialisation, which has often occasioned a search for a global audience. This search, according to Ghanaian filmmaker, John Akomfrah, makes African cinema borderless (cited in Akudinobi, ibid).

What then is African cinema? Is it a concept? Is it a form of film practice? Is it a film movement? Is it an industry or a conglomeration of national film industries? Perhaps, the definition of African film by film historian Georges Sadoul is a good point of departure. For Sadoul, an African film is "one produced, directed, photographed, and edited by Africans and starring Africans who spoke in African languages" (cited in Diawara, 1992, p. vii). By extension therefore, African cinema

would be cinema made by, made in, and made for African people. However, this definition alienates many African films such as those from some Francophone countries where most of the technical work, such as the cinematography and editing are actually done by non-Africans, because of the peculiar financial arrangements with the French Ministry of Cooperation.

Sadoul's definition also falls short of the multi-dimensional approaches to African cinema. To have an African cinema, I suggest, implies the existence of an identifiable and self-sustaining continental film industry or a federation of national film industries comprising a network of professional and specialised institutions that deal with the economics, art and business of filmmaking, and working towards common goals. Admittedly, very few African countries can boast of specialised institutions that deal with issues of scripting, raising money, production, marketing and distribution of films, let alone national film industries, even though in recent times, the proliferation of commercial videos in Nigeria and Ghana, particularly, and a few other African countries, has occasioned the development of some institutions that concern themselves with specific aspects of the industry, such as production and distribution.

Understanding African cinema also involves questions of ownership. Due to the reliance on foreign funding and other film production resources, there are African filmmakers who do not own the rights to films they produced. An example is King Ampaw of Ghana, who has no ownership rights to two films he wrote and directed in Ghana- *Kukurantumi- Road to Accra* (1983) and *Juju* (1986). Yet both films tell

Ghanaian stories with Ghanaian actors and a largely Ghanaian technical crew. Rather his production partners Reinery Verlag & Filmproduktion of Germany, in association with North German Television own and keep the films. He only owns the full rights to his last movie *No Time To Die* (2006), which he shot on digital video (personal communication, June, 2006).

As I noted earlier, the signifier 'African Cinema' is only conveniently used to identify films that are made by people of African descent or who share allegiance to an African identity. As Nubia Kai, an African-American Professor of Film Studies argues, "if an African made it, then it is an African film" (personal communication, March, 2001).

Definitions of African cinema have therefore usually reflected cultural, political, ideological and economic tendencies associated to the African experience. As there is a wide variety of conceptual, formal and aesthetic approaches to filmmaking here, I suggest that African cinema, as a collective, should be approached from specific national perspectives, in spite of the risk of alienating some Diaspora African filmmakers. An example is Ghanaian filmmaker John Akomfra who is often discussed as part of Black-British filmmaking. Should Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993) be Ghanaian, Ethiopian, Caribbean or African-American? Similarly Mauritanian filmmaker, Med Hondo's *Sarraounia* (1986) which depicts the history and culture of the Azna people of Niger and was made with partial funding from Burkina Faso is usually referred to as an African film rather than a Mauritanian, Nigerien or Burkinabe film. Again these questions arise with regards to *Kini and Adams* (1997),

made by Burkinabe director Idrissa Ouedraogo. The film was shot in Zimbabwe with a large South African cast. Should all the Francophone African films funded by the French Ministry of Cooperation belong to France and therefore be counted as part of French national cinema?

For the avoidance of doubt, Nubia Kai, (referred to earlier) suggests that so long as a person is identified as a Black, then that person is certainly an African and their films, if they were in charge artistically, should be called African. She argued that the Chinese were always Chinese no matter where they were and the Indians were always Indians just as the English were always English. Why, she queried, could not Africans be Africans whether they were in the United States of America or in the United Kingdom. Therefore, for her, every black film is an African film. From this perspective, could we then say that the films of Julie Dash, Spike Lee, Mario Van Peebles, John Singleton and other Black filmmakers, are African? This is part of the complexity of African cinema.

In spite of these arguments, by examining African cinema from national perspectives, one is able to apply specific historical, cultural, political and economic phenomena to the cinematic experiences of particular nations. The processes, political, cultural or economic, that led to the emergence of cinema and particular modes of film practice can be better appreciated from national historical context. Such perspectives can explain, for example, why there has been a tendency to adopt the documentary mode of filmmaking in Ghana, the travelling theatre style of filmmaking in Nigeria, the political satire associated with Senegalese cinema and the

melodrama of many North African countries. This is the overriding approach that this thesis will adopt in discussing the historical development of cinema in Ghana.

APPROACHES TO AFRICAN CINEMA

Researchers of African Cinema have produced a wide variety of theoretical and phenomenological/ontological approaches to the critical engagement with cinema in Africa. Some studies locate African cinematic practices within the discourses of film, media and cultural studies (Ukadike, 1994). Other texts contextualise African cinema within broad regional theoretical discourses, such as Third Cinema and Postcolonial Studies (Gabriel, 1982; Armes, 1987; Cham and Andrade-Watkins, 1988; Pines and Willemen (Eds.), 1989; Harrow (Ed.), 1999; Wayne, 2001). Yet others engage in more localised and specialized enquiries, and in some cases, self-reflexive approaches to the understanding of cinema in Africa (Diawara, 1992; Tomaselli, 1988; Bakari and Cham (Eds.), 1996; Eke, Harrow and Yewah (Eds.), 2000; Barlet, 2001; Ukadike, 2002).

There are probably as many approaches to studying cinema in Africa as there are researchers, partly because of the complex cultural and economic heterogeneity of the continent. This probably explains why some writers, such as Diawara (1992) may choose to discuss African cinema in regional compartments and demonstrate how nations in each region have experienced similar political and economic conditions of film production and distribution.

*Regional Approaches*

In 1992 Manthia Diawara published *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Diawara, 1992), one of the significant studies of African cinema that examines filmmaking from regional contexts following post-colonial and linguistic attributes. He discusses the different experiences of filmmakers in three major regions of the continent, and traces various trajectories that mark attempts at building national cinemas.

He notes, for example, how French policies of cultural assimilation appear to have driven the film industries of Francophone countries. This is contrasted with the former British colonies where filmmakers do not benefit from film or cultural assistance from Britain. Diawara is concerned with the economic and industrial processes of filmmaking in Africa and how these relate to issues of aesthetics and representation. This approach underscores the patriarchy associated with foreign funding of African films, the hegemonic control of the film markets of Africa by foreign concerns and the efforts by African filmmakers, albeit often in vain, to break free.

Diawara focuses on three of the four main regions of Africa- the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone regions. What is relevant for the purpose of this study is his categorisation of film practices in these regions in terms of political, cultural and aesthetic tendencies. Diawara builds a historical perspective within which the politics and culture of filmmaking in Africa may be understood, with particular reference to

the economics of film production and distribution and how these have an impact on ideological and formal considerations.

He traces the emergence of film production in Anglophone Africa from the moment that the European colonisers invaded Africa, carved it up among themselves and introduced missionaries and cinema to African peoples. The uses of cinema for exploitative purposes, for the sustainability of colonialism, for war time propaganda and for the maintenance of a neo-colonial system even after African independence, all feature prominently in Diawara's discussion. He also discusses the situation of filmmaking in Anglophone countries particularly in the eighties and nineties, and notes the contributions of indigenous people in both the set-up and collapse of filmmaking in Anglophone Africa.

In Francophone Africa, Diawara traces the historical development of filmmaking there and discusses the influence of French cooperation and funding in film production and distribution. He is particularly concerned about the paternalism of this neo-colonial arrangement, which subjugates African cinema to dictates of French technocrats, and the efforts that some of these Francophone countries, such as Burkina Faso and Senegal, have made to nationalise their cinemas (production and distribution) to be independent of France. He concludes the chapter on Francophone cinema with optimism when he declares that "Ouagadougou is going to replace Paris as the centre of production and postproduction of African film" (Diawara, 1992, p. 83).

A similar exercise is conducted in the Lusophone African countries, with a focus on Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. The cinema of Zaire is discussed in a separate chapter in which Diawara shows how the colonial film infrastructure and film production in this region was not in the interest of Africans, but rather for monthly propaganda newsreels and pornographic films. According to Diawara, at the end of colonialism these countries had no trained filmmakers, technicians or infrastructure for filmmaking and needed to build their filmmaking infrastructure from scratch.

In addition to these regional perspectives, Diawara also discusses African cinema as a whole, examining the various areas of progress and the challenges that confronted its growth. To do so, he draws on the writings of Franz Fanon for a critical ideological argument in favour of a conscious African cinema.

### Political and Cultural Deconstruction Approaches

*Black African Cinema* (1994) by Frank N. Ukadike is one of the few studies of African cinema that undertakes an exploration of a wide array of themes from various theoretical perspectives. In this book Ukadike attempts a comprehensive coverage of cinema in Africa. In a review of *Black African Cinema*, Onookome Okome (1995) argues that apart from Roy Armes' *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (1987) and Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992), "I do not know of any other book on African cinema that has touched on all aspects of filmmaking and spectatorship" (Okome, 1995, p. 197). Of course many other significant publications

on cinema in Africa have since emerged, but Okome's statement still underscores the importance of these texts.

Even though *Black African Cinema* does not cover all of Africa (it focuses on what Ukadike refers to as Black Africa, the region south of the Sahara), it is still considered by many researchers as an enormous and significant contribution to African film scholarship.

*Black African Cinema* is theoretically an exposition of "Fanonian neo-Marxist nationalism," to borrow the words of Stephen Zacks (Zacks, in Harrow ed. 2000, p. 3). Employing African centred philosophical thoughts, such as the ideological assumptions of Pan-Africanism and the writings of Frantz Fanon, Ukadike takes the position of counter hegemonic construction of African cinema. He posits African cinema emerging as essentially in opposition to Hollywood and European commercial film industries, and therefore evolving its own forms of narrative, of visual construction and of representation. Ukadike, for example, argues strongly for a unique African film language devoid of the formal commercial exploitative tendencies of Hollywood. Other major theories, such as Third Cinema and postcolonial discourses therefore serve important contexts for Ukadike's appreciation and analysis of African cinema.

The approaches to African cinema employed in this book, which are also obvious in other publications by Ukadike, are varied. His study builds up a historical context that seeks to locate the political and economic aspects of cinema in Africa within colonial and postcolonial arenas of contestation. His examination of the

infrastructural development of cinema in Africa, the ideological and aesthetic trends, the traditional influences on African film form, and the reception of films by African audiences, are contextualised within the discourses of postcolonial deconstruction of western hegemonic forms of expression, and the efforts by Africans to negotiate their own ideologies, cultural representations and aesthetic forms.

The reader cannot miss the strong political and cultural dimensions of Ukadike's analysis of the regional and national structures of cinema in Black Africa. As Okome (op. cit.) has observed, Ukadike is preoccupied with the politics of black African film and the development of a new African consciousness. This explains his frequent appropriation of the political theories of Frantz Fanon, W. E. B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, among others, who have sought a new cultural orientation for Africans, devoid of colonial tendencies, and therefore have often served as sources for the philosophical and theoretical contexts of African (deconstructive) aesthetic forms in arts and cultural production.

This approach to understanding cinema in Africa is further explored in another of Ukadike's books, *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (2002). Questions regarding cultural colonialism and its pervading influences on the arts in Africa, particularly cinema, are explored through a series of interviews that focus on the filmmakers themselves, their ideological convictions and their experiences with the vicissitudes of filmmaking in this underdeveloped region of the world. However, the study does not offer a uniform context for the questions and answers, such as has been suggested by the proponents of Third Cinema, postcolonial

studies, deconstructive theory, or even of cultural studies. This theoretically non-committal approach is probably because Ukadike is aware of the culturally multifarious nature of cinema on the continent and the dangers inherent in appreciating African cinema from a homogeneous perspective. Instead, the study poses even more questions that set a stage and agenda for the continuous discourse on African cinema at various levels. As Teshome H. Gabriel observes in the foreword of the book, "African cinema is itself a matter of questions and questioning, an ongoing questioning that never merely accepts the supposed givens of African reality" (Gabriel, in Ukadike, 2002, p. ix).

It is obvious that any approach to African cinema must necessarily eschew a totalizing tendency, as this will be quite unwieldy, and rather locate such studies in specific cultural, political and economic contexts. In spite of the homogeneity suggested by the signifier "African Cinema", it is prudent for one to observe that "African cinema… does not simply follow a single path… there are many strands, many threads within it" (Gabriel, ibid, p. x). Gabriel's argument demonstrates the historical, political, cultural and economic complexities of cinema in Africa. For this reason, some researchers may choose, for example, an approach that is specific to certain cultural experiences.

### *Cultural Studies Approaches*

In arguing for specific approaches to African film study, Mhando (2001) also rejects the homogenising tendencies sometimes associated with the study of cinema in

Africa, because that type of approach "suggests a cultural homogeneity that is often false or at least so porous as to leave the fabric of its reflection unwieldy" (ibid, p. 1).

Mhando argues for the observance of patterns that can be identified in African cinema, which are not specific to particular nations or postcolonial linguistic groupings, but rather define culturally specific cinematic tendencies. One can immediately think of examples such as the appropriation of African traditional oral traditions in films. These, for him, should inform the approaches to African film study. He argues further that western criticism of African cinema has often taken thematic approaches based on the presumed notion of a didactic cinema for the continent as imposed by colonialism, rather than an approach that is based on artistic, formal and aesthetic influences. In this way content supersedes formal expressions as a means to understanding cinema in Africa. He therefore suggests that African cinema be studied from specific cultural patterns.

Mhando's suggestion, whilst useful, is only one of several important approaches to African cinema. Whilst culture may certainly be useful for formal constructions of films in Africa, the economic and political conditions are equally useful. For example, Ghana's cinema was born primarily out of a certain political need to create a national and Pan-African consciousness among the people of the continent and not primarily as an effort at cultural regeneration. The cinematic experiences of South Africa as a nation have played out more within a political arena just as Algerian cinema emerged as a political force more than the product of culture. Certainly culture played a role in all these developments but, I suggest, it was not the

primary driving force upon which cinema developed and would therefore be inadequate for the critical analysis of African cinema.

Whilst acknowledging the didactic attributes of African cinema, at least in its primal state, Mhando still suggests an approach to cinema in Africa from a cultural studies perspective that emphasises the deconstructive criticism viewpoint. This is similar to one of Ukadike's (1994) approaches. By emphasizing deconstruction as an element of African film identification, Mhando inadvertently posits a political approach to African film criticism. After all it was the need for political and ideological deconstruction that gave birth to African cinema and provided the impetus for cultural texts that sought to deconstruct the colonial Eurocentric perception of Africans and their cultures. That said, Mhando's cultural studies approach is still worth examining.

Mhando offers three basic reasons for this approach. The first seeks to underscore "the ways in which cultural experience is determined by hegemonic ideologies such as the Greco-Roman dramatic structures built into cinema language" (Mhando, 2001, p. 1). He submits that the influence of western hegemonic production structures and viewing/reception patterns determine the structures and reception of national cinemas elsewhere such as in Africa. This cultural influence therefore offers a historical context for appreciating the particular ways in which cinema developed on the continent.

To a certain extent, Western hegemony may affect production patterns and audience consumption attitudes in Africa. However the argument may appear far-

fetched in terms of the construction of national cinemas in Africa. In many parts of Africa, attempts at creating national cinemas were in direct opposition to the commercial studio systems mainly associated with Western cinema. African cinemas were largely imbued with a high social advocacy role, albeit to the detriment of its economic viability. The production values were therefore often different from those of the West. Independent producers who sought funding and production assistance from the West did not usually pass through the studio system, but endured different approaches to film production that nonetheless bore the marks of Western hegemony. The case of French funding of Francophone African films is a good example of this relationship (see Diawara, 1992; Ukadike, 1994; Barlet, 1996).

Additionally, the deconstructive narrative patterns and formal styles that many filmmakers often engaged in were usually a departure from Hollywood's classical formal techniques. The films of Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambety may also appear to mimic European art house cinema, or neorealist filmmaking. However Sembene, Mambety and such other filmmakers do distinguish themselves in their approaches to film language and image construction.

For example, in early African films of the 1960s and 1970s, there was often a measured pace in the rhythm of the narrative, often reflecting traditional storytelling patterns of the particular cultural background of the filmmaker. The photography often appeared wide and open, as if to reveal the totality of the worldview of the community that is being explored and its broader social contexts. A typical example of this style can be observed in Gaston Kabore's *Zan Boko* (1988).

In a scene where Tinga's wife is having a difficult childbirth, time is spent almost at a casual rate to determine the causes of the difficult labour even as the woman groans in pain. This casual pace of events in that scene may appear to the uninformed as insensitivity to the pain of the woman in labour, yet within the cultural context of the people depicted in the film, it is an essential process for the sake of the labouring woman and the health of the baby.

The second reason that Mhando offers for his cultural studies approach to African cinema has to do with a self-reflexivity in appraising cinema in Africa, a "self-deconstruction" of the perspectives on African cinema and each individual's identification of aspects of cinema that point to his/her conception of Africa. It is, I believe, this self-reflexive approach that informed Barlet's 1996 study of African cinema, which he describes as "... an *invitation to a voyage*. To a voyage to another continent, of course, but also to an inner journey. Opening oneself up to a questioning of one's own way of looking" (Barlet, 1996, p. viii. *Original emphasis*).

Drawing on Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) Mhando argues, using himself as a case, that the self-reflexive approach to film usually foregrounds various cinematic influences within ideological contexts. Self-reflexive films are those that "foreground the filmmaker, the film's production, its textual procedures, its intertext or reception" (Shohat and Stam, cited in Mhando, 2001, p. 9).

The third reason for this approach, for Mhando, is based on the ability of cultural studies to offer "useful tools for understanding other conventional approaches to African cinema like Marxism, semiotics, feminism and other cultural theories"

(ibid, p. 2). Mhando argues that, in order to understand African cinema, one has to "relate the dynamics of culture to the period of its production. This means relating film to environmental social relations, historical pressures, and technological innovations as well as to beliefs, attitudes and conceptualisations of the African people" (ibid, p. 3).

Such relations offer a multiplicity of themes for African film practice which informed another approach to the study of African cinema.

### *A Thematic Approach*

The multi-dimensional nature of African cinema is also observed by the South African film critic Keyan Tomaselli, when he argues that African filmmaking does not necessarily follow similar formulas such as has been popularized by Hollywood (Tomaselli, 1998). Tomaselli observes, with a variety of examples, the many different styles that emerge in African filmmaking, drawing on global themes, cosmopolitan scripts and local legends, and yet challenge conventional ideas of cinema. In his article, *Decolonizing Film and TV: Ways of Reading African Films* (1998), Tomaselli suggests a thematic approach to African films.

He suggests a variety of themes, such as the binary opposition of individuality versus community responsibility, the nexus of human rights and tyranny, the common political themes of corruption through the use of neo-colonial structures, the influence of modern-day corruption and the so-called modernization of rural communities. It

seems that the context for thinking about theme is different from that for genre. In genre studies, scholars may look for certain codes, motifs or narrative techniques that bear similarities and function in similar ways within the overall film text. However, theme suggests the appropriation of specific subject matters irrespective of the filmic and narrative techniques or mise-en-scene that are deployed.

Some of the themes suggested by Tomaselli are discussed in *African Experiences of Cinema* (Bakari and Cham, eds., 1996). This collection of essays focuses mainly on thematic issues that centre on the politics and ideologies of African cinema. Diverse in their individual approaches to the appreciation of the African cinematic experience, the contributions in this volume reflect the individual creative efforts of filmmakers in Africa, institutional experiences and national/regional contexts of cinema. The volume explores diverse themes in African cinema ranging from the representation of social history to rare concerns about eroticism.

But Diawara (1992) offers three broad thematic areas for African film appreciation. These are the social realist narratives, the historical confrontation between Africa and colonialism, and a return to history, or what he refers to as "the return to the source" (ibid, p. 159). Diawara argues that the thematic diversity of African filmmaking "produces a typology of narratives that compete for the spectator's attention" (Diawara, 1992, p. 140). The three contexts he suggests therefore offer broader thematic ways of seeing African cinema.

For the social realist tendency, Diawara argues that films in this category draw their themes from current socio-cultural issues. "The films in this category draw on

contemporary experiences, and they oppose tradition to modernity, oral to written, agrarian and customary communities to urban and industrialized systems, and subsistence economies to highly productive economies" (ibid, p. 141).

Diawara argues that films of the social realist tendency eschew the romanticism of African traditional values as pure and original, and rely on melodrama, satire and comedy in their narratives. This tendency, according to Diawara, forms a break from the intellectualist tradition of African cinema and rather relies on populist themes that ordinary people can relate to. Examples of key films that fall under this category are Sembene Ousmane's films *Le Mandat*, (1968) and *Xala*, (1974), films by Souleymane Cissé, *Baara*, (1978) and *Finye*, (1982). Other films include *La vie est belle* (1986) by Mweze Ngangura and Benoit Lamy, *Nyamanton* (1986) by Cheick Oumar Sissoko and *Bal Poussière* (1988) by Henri Duparc.

The second tendency, the confrontation between Africa and colonialism, is marked by such significant films as *Sarraounia* (1987) by Med Hondo, *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) by Sembene Ousmane and Thierno Sow, and *Heritage... Africa* (1988) by Kwaw Ansah. Diawara argues that the films in this category confront colonial and neo-colonial hegemony and patriarchy by foregrounding an African perception of history.

Diawara argues that these films "... are conditioned by the desire to show African heroism where European history only mentioned the actions of the conquerors, resistance where the colonial version of history silenced oppositional

voices, and the role of women in the armed struggle" (ibid, p. 152). For Diawara, films in this category deal with the redefinition of African history from an African point of view, of liberation from colonial cultural influences and the reassertion of the place of Africans in global history.

The third, and probably the most popular of the three tendencies that Diawara proposes, involves films that "return to the source". *Yeelen* (1987) by Souleymane Cisse is offered as the best example of this tendency. Diawara argues that the "underlying desire behind the making of these types of films is to prove the existence of a dynamic African history and culture before the European colonization" (ibid, p. 160).

The strongest feature of these films is their appropriation of African history and culture to inform their narratives. As Diawara has argued, "these films define their style by re-examining ancient African traditions, their modes of existence, and their magic" (ibid, p.160). To *Yeelen* one can add a very significant film, *Wend Kuuni* (1988) by Gaston Kabore which is idyllic in its exploration of African traditions, humanity and values, set in an era before colonialism. Two films by the young Burkinabe director, Dani Kouyaté, *Keita…The Heritage of the Griot* (1996), and *Sia…The Myth of the Python* (2001), are both significant examples of this tendency.

*A Generic Approach*

The generic approach has reflections of the thematic approaches suggested by Tomaselli and Diawara, but it may offer a more divergent list of values and characteristics. These genres are not clearly defined, but proponents of the generic approach, such as the Tunisian filmmaker Ferid Boughedir, and film critic Martin Mhando, have suggested that there are African films which bear similar ideological, formal and aesthetic traits and therefore can be grouped according to genres.

Mhando (2001), for example, has suggested the didactic film genre as one of the identifiable features of African cinema. This approach, he argues, "is an important issue in our analysis of African films since it shows how the relations between cinema politics and cinematic narration are maintained" (Mhando, 2001, p. 6).

The didactic film emerged from the colonial uses of cinema in Africa as an educational tool and films were "designed as lessons to be learned easily by an indigenous viewer assumed to be developmentally [and cinematically] immature, illiterate, and in dire need of instruction" (Brian Goldfarb, 1995, cited in Mhando, ibid, p. 6).

Following the ideology of Ousmane Sembene's "night school cinema", which implies the didactic uses of cinema, and the recommendations of the Pan-African Federation of Cineastes (FEPACI) for African filmmakers to explore the educational values of cinema, some filmmakers appropriated documentary styles of filmmaking in order to imbue their films with social realist qualities amenable to a classroom situation. Examples of such films include *Mr. Mensah Builds a House* (1956) directed by Sean Graham, and *Flame* (1996) by Ingrid Sinclair.

Boughedir (1978) has also suggested some generic tendencies in African cinema by classifying the film texts "according to the theoretical positions of their auteurs and their effect on the public…their ultimate function" (Bughedir, 1978, cited in Zacks, 1999, p. 6).

Zacks interprets Boughedir's approach as theoretically paradigmatic in which the latter develops tendencies that he identifies to be common in groups of African films. For example, the political tendency is discussed as those films that seek to raise the consciousness of African people and mobilise them for common purposes, such as resisting colonial and other autocratic political habits within nations. There are also the moral tendency, the cultural tendency which engages in the discourses of African traditions, the commercial tendency, the "self-expressive" tendency and the "narcissistic intellectual" tendency which assume the idealisation and celebration of African traditional culture, particularly its histories, myths, morals and legends.

### *Prescriptive and Descriptive Approaches*

Jude Akudinobi (1997) has argued that African cinema has experienced "a shift from a *prescriptive* to a *descriptive* identity. The celebratory hailing of a 'New' (read, commercial) African cinema therefore invites a profound challenge to the analysis of African cultural production" (Akudinobi, 1997, p. 95, *original emphasis*).

This new cinema, which has yet to be clearly defined, is engaged in contemporary cultural movements and social processes, such as youth culture and the

'Americanisation' of African cities and popular culture. Filmmakers of this generation tend to eschew the prescriptive formulas of the neo-Pan-African approaches. It would seem that the need to escape the commercially restrictive strait-jacket of 'classical' African cinema and rather follow global market forces has compelled many emerging filmmakers in Africa to pander to the tastes of popular audiences rather than a so-called ideologically sophisticated discourse. This is mostly true of the new video trend particularly in Nigeria and Ghana.

Ivanga Imunga, a Gabonese filmmaker, has sought to resist what he sees as the restrictive and prescriptive formulas of 'classical' African films (personal communication, 2001). Imunga does not even want his films to be regarded as African films but simply as films. At a press conference during FESPACO 2001 Imunga defended his film *Dôle* (2001) against criticisms that he glamorized and rewarded youth delinquency when he could have used the film to teach responsible behaviour. Imunga's position was that he did not seek to make an educational film reminiscent of the prescriptive formulas of the old school, but sought to depict the daily travails of contemporary urban Gabonese youth.

The shifts in approaches to African filmmaking have been a reflection of the different historical, political and commercial contexts of film production. Since the close of the 1980s, many African films and videos have addressed contemporary issues, not in the manifestly didactic and prescriptive manner of earlier African films, but more in response to the economics of film practice and global audience responses.

Akudinobi (1997) has argued that this shift is even more significant because of an equally shifting demography of audiences and their appreciation of cinema.

Sheila Petty (1992) dates these shifts from the 1970s, from which time she observes that many African films have both sought to reject the Western imperial modes of representation and the so-called 'return to the sources' because the filmmakers recognized the shifting nature of those sources, and therefore have had to deal with constantly emerging new identities. She argues that the temporal and ideological development of African cinema is not simply a dichotomy between the old and the new, but that African cinema has to continuously confront changing notions of identity and global political and economic structures.

### *Postcolonial Approaches*

The postcolonial situation in Africa, often dictated by the discourses of Western philosophy and anti-colonial resistance has informed cinematic practices here and therefore another context within which the practice may be studied. Moreover, filmmaking is a Western invention which Africans appropriated and invested their narrative and ideological forms of visual and cultural representation. This often creates a confrontation between western forms of expression and African ones. Films that take interest in the African condition are often dictated by colonial experiences and their aftermath. They seek to dissect the political and cultural polemics between Africans and their colonial antagonists and to have distinct forms of expression that would separate Africa from the imperial states. *Sarraounia* (1987),

*Sankofa* (1993), several films by Sembene, and films located within Diawara's (1992) "return to the source" category are examples of such postcolonial productions.

Stephen Zacks (1999) also argues that these films "review precolonial African conditions in relation to post-colonial problems and... strive to develop a distinctive African film language" (Zacks, in Harrow, ed. 1999, p. 4). Zacks compares some of Diawara's approaches to African films to the categorisation of films suggested by Teshome Gabriel (1982) in his discussion of Third World Cinema. The films discussed under these categories, according to Zacks, attempt to indigenise the film industry and the style of movie making "favoring the narrative conflict between the past and present" (Zacks, 1999, p. 4).

These films are positioned in diametrical opposition to western ideologies and forms of representation. As Zacks has noted, they not only try to "combat neo-colonialism, but [they] attempt to make explicit anti-capitalist ideological representations" (ibid, p. 14). For example, Ousmane Sembene's films are particularly critical of post-colonial societies and the legacies of colonialism, as he interrogates the postcolonial state of Africans in films like *La Noire de*… (1966), *Mandabi* (1968) and *Xala* (1974). Djibril Diop Manbéty undertook similar interrogations with *Touki Bouki* (1973). In Ghana Kwaw Ansah's *Love Brewed in the Africa Pot* (1976) examines the cultural polarities instigated by postcolonialism.

In spite of these observations, postcolonial cinema is not all about resistance and opposition to the West or so-called dominant forms of representation.

Postcolonial films include films that appropriate some forms and styles from other parts of the World to the service of indigenous African filmmaking.

Zacks has noted, for example, that African filmmakers are increasingly breaking free from the "ideological constraints of Marxism and African Essentialism, [and to] incorporate more and more influences of determinate origins" (ibid, p. 16). He argues that critical perspectives of African film authenticity may become anachronistic in the light of these influences. "The divergent texts of African world cinema necessitate above all that we consider revising or rejecting the question 'what is authentically African?'" (Zacks, ibid, p. 16).

The arguments against authenticity are based on the indelible influences of western forms of expression on African cinema which is the result of the effects of colonialism and its attendant reconstruction of the cultures and modes of expression of people in Africa. As Zacks has observed, "the encounter between Africa and Europe continues to be played out on the basis of the same rules in which Africa serves as a foil for the universalist claims of the West" (Zacks, ibid, p. 17).

Jonathan Haynes (1999) has also observed how the political landscape of the 1990s was overwhelmed by issues of democracy, human rights, women's issues and concerns for the environment, themes which easily receive political attention and financial support from international donor agencies. For Haynes the presence of these themes is not due to the disappearance of neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism, but that it has become more difficult to confront them directly. He argues that "... political resistance is far from dead but takes numerous dispersed forms, often at

lower levels of political expression: in 'the popular,' the politics of everyday life, a 'politique par le bas'" (Haynes, in Harrow, (Ed.), 1999, p. 22).

Postcolonialism in fact has not diminished, but has assumed various forms of political and cultural manifestation and within more complex socio-cultural discourses, economic and international power relations and the subtle perpetration of old stereotypical treatment of African cinema by the West. Haynes has observed how the economic collapse of African nations has had massive and determinate effects on African film production. It has also affected the ability of producers to reach their own domestic markets, and caused the demise of pan-African cinema institutions, except FESPACO. Furthermore economic collapse has allowed "the dominance of co-production with European money and attendant compromises, the ghettoization of African film within the world market, and the unreadiness of African audio-visual producers to deal on reasonable terms with the 'new world information order' created by the multinational corporations" (Haynes, ibid, p. 22).

Haynes identifies postcolonialism within the context of the theories of Third World Cinema proposed by Teshome Gabriel and Paul Willemen, which in turn are in tune with the propositions of Frantz Fanon's stages of progression of the consciousness of the colonized. Willemen offers a more complex view of social formations and their dynamics within which the presence of the West is inevitable. This is the stage of postcolonialism where there is a shift from political and historical militancy to textual confrontations and negotiations marked by hybrid or syncretised representations.

In spite of independence and self-government, colonial domination of African nations did not suddenly cease. The pervasive presence of the West with its attendant influences of, and presence in cultural production is unavoidable in contemporary global information exchange, cultural assimilation and power relations, and evidence of continuous domination.

As Haynes has argued, syncretism is not new in Africa, "but the processes of globalisation accelerate, deepen, and widen it" (Haynes, ibid, p. 26). The result is a growing contemporary urban youth culture that is not uniquely African, but a cross between African and Euro-American traditions. It is a culture that African cinema has largely failed to address, and yet it is evidently one of the strongest reflections of postcolonial hybridism/syncretism in Africa, and at the same time the biggest (potential) market for African cinema.

A few films have however been made in this direction and which have sought to examine and interrogate the socio-cultural predicaments of postcolonial people. Using the anti-colonial political rhetoric of the 1950s, these films employed varying themes located within postcolonial discourses that nonetheless focused on the continuing fight against domination.

Sembene's *Le Mandat* is a stark reflection of Africa's postcolonial political and cultural predicament. Having inherited the colonial administrative institutions, the new governments of Africa are portrayed as inept and insensitive to the plight of the ordinary citizens. Those very institutions, rather than serve to protect the interests of the people, often become avenues for corruption and the exploitation of ordinary

people. Similar themes of insensitivity are expressed in *Xala*. Reminiscent of the horrors that have been witnessed in Robert Mugabe's 2005-2008 Zimbabwe where thousands of people were displaced, *Xala* portrays the unsympathetic displacement of poor people from the streets of Dakar in the ostensible purpose of cleaning the city. Similarly, Gaston Kabore's *Zan Boko* exposes the insensitivity of governments to rural and poor people in the efforts at urbanisation. Just as such urbanisation pushed the Khoisan of Northern Namibia to the fringes of survival, a state of life that has been mocked by Uys' *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, so has the expansion of Ouagadougou caused the cultural dislocation of people from their ancestral land. Kabore sought to use *Zan Boko* as a critique of the European-style urbanisation of Africa that fails to take traditional people and their culture into consideration.

One of several recent films that examine the postcolonial state from inside is Jean-Pierre Bekolo's stylistically eclectic *Quartier Mozart* (1992) which is about the youth in modern day Yaoundé, capital of Cameroon. *Quartier Mozart* does not only conceptualise the syncretism of urban African youth, but is both a visual and aural reflection of the syncretism of many African films. Bekolo was a student of Christian Metz whilst studying filmmaking in France, but he also claims inspiration from Spike Lee. The film has a soundtrack that was locally produced but one easily identifies the heavy influence of American urban pop and rap, and at the same time, it has been described as "French post-modern" (Haynes, 1999, p. 27).

*Dôlé* (1999) by Ivanga Imunga examines the lives of a group of young adolescents growing up in a metropolis in contemporary Gabon, who pursue an

ambition to become rap musicians. When they cannot find enough money to buy the instruments they need to launch their musical careers, they resort to the lottery and stealing. None of these options works out for them and by the end of the film the young people realise the futility of theft and games of chance and that success only comes with hard work.

Even though this film was criticised by journalists at a press conference during FESPACO 2001 (which this writer attended) for glamorising and rewarding youth delinquency, Imunga explained to me later in an interview that he did not seek to reward wrong-doing but rather wanted to portray the difficulties that young people in his native Gabon go through in trying to realise their dreams. Without being explicitly political, *Dôlé* reveals the political and economic isolation of Gabon's growing youthful population and the wide-spread deprivation they suffer, in this oil-rich country, even as the rich minority display their ostentatious lifestyles.

Postcolonial filmmaking also has had a lot to do with the internal politics and society after the demise of colonialism. After independence the rhetoric of anti-colonialism turned its focus away from the outside to the political acquiescence of local leaders to the hegemony of Western neo-colonial domination. The concerns were now about the patriarchy and tyranny of African leaders, state corruption and the abandonment of the objectives of independence.

Whilst the films of Ousmane Sembene (*Xala* and *Le Mandat*) easily exemplify this type of filmmaking, *Guimba* by Cheick Oumar Cissoko typifies the allegorical treatment of Africa's postcolonial discrepancies and misuse of political power. In this

film, a ruler gets intoxicated by his absolute political power which, rather than serve the interests of his people, he uses to terrorize them. At the height of this tyranny, the ruler, Guimba, forcefully takes possession of people's wives both for himself and his son. Soon he has to confront the adverse effects of his own powers when he kills his son over a woman, falls prey to her charms and ends in public disgrace and death. Not only is this film a reflection and a critique of the way many African leaders have sought to acquire unlimited political powers and their misuse of such powers, but *Guimba* shows the futility and vanity associated with such political enterprise. The stories of Mobutu Sese Seku of Congo, Iddi Amin of Uganda, and Sani Abacha of Nigeria are just three examples of the predilection for African leaders to assume unchallenged authority over their citizens and the economy, but only to end in shameful political exits or death.

Whilst African cinema may have largely been preoccupied with matters of the postcolonial, there have been filmmakers who assumed militant stances against injustice and exhibited a tendency to fight against exploitation.

### The Third Cinema Approach

In *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (1982) Teshome Gabriel argues that African cinema espouses the revolutionary zeal and formal aesthetics of liberationist filmmaking. Gabriel is unabashedly neo-Marxist as he posits a resistance role for African cinema against the exploitative tendencies of western hegemony.

Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Frantz Fanon and the Latin American advocates of the theories of Third Cinema (Solanas and Getino, 1969) and Imperfect Cinema (Espinosa, 1969) Gabriel imposes distinctions on the major film practices of Africa, setting apart those that contribute to the establishment of "authentic" African consciousness and those that do not. Appropriating Fanon's three politically revolutionary phases of the development of the African's consciousness, Gabriel identifies three phases in African filmmaking that serve to represent its evolution from an oppressed cinema to a liberated one.

The first is the phase of "unqualified assimilation" which according to Gabriel is characterized by its association with the industrial, technical and commercial tendencies of Hollywood. Films of this tendency only attempt to copy the formal codes of the West, a tendency that he sees as "aping Hollywood stylistically" (Gabriel, 1982, p. 32). The second phase is the "remembrance phase" in which films undertake the move from domination to liberation, but may assume uncritical appraisal of history or the romanticism of such history and tradition. The third is the final stage of liberation in which African cinema is said to be divorced from its links to the colonial metropolis or western hegemonic systems. Gabriel argues that the third phase recognizes film "as an ideological tool" (Gabriel, ibid, p. 34) whose concerns are firmly rooted in, and informed by themes of resistance.

Films of the Third Cinema movement are, as Dudley Andrew (1985) has put it, freighted with political rhetoric and emotional value. All films are political, one way or another, but Wayne (2001) submits that films of the Third Cinema category

comprise the most advanced and sophisticated political films and are "committed to social and cultural emancipation. … Third Cinema is passionate, angry, often satirical, always complex" (Wayne, 2001, p. 5).

Third Cinema is defined by its socialist politics (Gabriel, 1982; Wayne, 2001) and by the "institutional structures/working practices, associated aesthetic strategies and their attendant cultural politics" (Wayne, 2001, p. 6). According to Wayne, Third Cinema is about social and cultural emancipation which cannot be achieved within the political realms of the state but rather through a commitment to social transformations such as its impact of changing gender relations, the changing statuses of women across the African continent, the increasing engagement of the youth in political movements and the overall transformations that occur in Africa's rapidly changing societies. Third Cinema seeks to confront the dynamics, processes and consequences of such transformations and to influence public discourses.

Ousmane Sembene's film *Faate Kine* (2001) reflects the changing nature of Senegalese society in which we witness the mental and economic liberation of women from a patriarchal society. By deploying various motifs of popular Senegalese culture, in fusion with symbols of modernity, such as pepper-sprays and flashy cars, Sembene was not only employing the power of collective memory to criticise the evils of the patriarchal system and its abuse of women, but he sought to bring public attention to the transformations that had taken place in Senegal to free women from male abuse.

Popular memory is an important resource for Third Cinema with which it is able to catalyse societies for change, or at least provide avenues for conscious awareness of the ambivalence of socio-cultural change. Some films from sub-Saharan Africa are noted for their appropriation of popular memory such as legends, mythologies, folktales and texts from popular cultural and artistic products, for political purposes.

*Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1981) by Kwaw Ansah, for example, uses the confrontations between traditional African values and those imposed by colonialism to reveal the ambivalence of society's nouveau-riche in a newly independent Ghana. In doing so, Ansah challenges African people to confront the changing nature of their societies and their nations. Appropriating various images and motifs of popular culture, such as music, public wrestling and marriage ceremonies, Ansah is able to put collective memory to the service of political critique.

Besides employing the collective memories of people, Third Cinema films have also been sympathetic to the sensibilities of the people whose stories they try to tell. The involvement of ordinary people in the making of the films, such as playing roles, has been an important part of Third Cinema. As Wayne (2001) has argued, "Third Cinema has pioneered collective and democratic working practices. In particular, it has sought to foster the participation of the people who constitute the subject matter of the films" (Wayne, 2001, p. 3).

By engaging subject communities in the film production, the practice engendered by Third Cinema is capable of producing a collective awareness and

acceptance of the cultural texts that have been filmed, and a collaboration in production that gives to grassroots voices access to a wider audience beyond their immediate neighbourhoods. By involving ordinary people in the mediatory processes of cultural production, Third Cinema provides a voice to oppressed people and suppressed opinions, thus avoiding, to a large extent, the hierarchical power relations common within the First World modes of production.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to underscore the difficulty in defining African cinema, or what an African film is. The referent "African cinema", as I noted, is largely used for the sake of convenience and has no clear-cut geographical or political borders. I have also tried to summarise the major approaches to African film study. These approaches will guide my approach to cinema in Ghana since the Ghanaian experience is only a microcosm of the larger African experience.

In the next chapter, I examine the relationship between social history and cinema. Cinema has particularly been important in the re-construction and re-evaluation of social and political histories in many African countries. In Ghana, for example, a large part of social history is inscribed in film and video texts in both overt and subtle ways.

CHAPTER TWO

FILM AND HISTORY

This chapter is about the relationship between film and history. I begin with the question "What is film history?" Allen and Gomery have noted that this "might well seem an unnecessary question, given the fact that books announcing themselves as 'film histories' have been published since the early 1910s" (Allen & Gomery, 1985, p. 3). They argue, however, that the question continuous to attract a great deal of attention because of the considerable disagreement that exists among the published 'film histories'.

In this chapter I try to gain a fair understanding of the question of film history by tracing its evolution as a field of academic enquiry, and then examining the inter-relatedness of film history and social history. Of particular interest to me is how social history informs film texts and narratives and how film assumes a privileged position as a source of historical knowledge.

WRITING FILM HISTORY

'What is film history?' is the simple question with which Allen and Gomery (ibid) begin the first chapter of their publication. Vivian Sobchack (2000) also begins her discussion of the subject with the same question. Underneath the apparent

simplicity of the question lies a complex network of discourses concerning film as "an art form, an industry, a technology, and cultural artefact" and its relationship to the history of mankind (Sobchack, in Gledhill & Williams (Eds.), 2000, p. 300).

Cinema has developed from a mere mechanical recording of nature and events into a complex tradition of art, technology, business and intellectual pursuit. As Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin have noted about the transitional development of filmmaking, "[the] important question for the first film audience was "Is the image discernible?" rather than "Is the image meaningful?" (Mast & Kawin, 1996, p. 1). Beyond what is both discernible and meaningful have arisen equally important questions of whether the images are marketable, whether they will achieve their intended effects, how will audiences react to them, and even who decides what images to produce.

I will proceed to examine the evolution of film history as an academic discipline, emerging in the 1960s and developing through the 1970s and 1980s as a major field of enquiry not only of interest to scholars of film but also social historians, anthropologists, sociologists and scholars of cultural studies.

### *The Evolution of Film History*

According to Allen and Gomery (1985) film history evolved as a serious academic discipline during the 1960s following the development of cultural studies and particularly, the elevation of cinema from a so-called cheap side-show

entertainment for the masses to becoming a part of important cultural phenomena worth serious study. Sobchack (2000) has also argued that within the academy, during the 1960s, Film Studies had sought to legitimate itself as a serious field of academic enterprise and cinema as an aesthetic and historical form worthy of serious scholarly attention.

The status of film as a field of serious academic pursuit was enhanced by its progression from a cheap sideshow to serious art following the influx of many directors from Europe whose works were seen as art. In the United States, Allen and Gomery argue, cinema studies proliferated in universities and colleges as a logical extension of other academic disciplines such as literature, rhetorical criticism, journalism, broadcasting and media theory, and history. The boom in film studies and interest in cinema as part of culture "gave rise to the demand for film scholarship-particularly scholarship that could be used as textbook material in film classes" (Allen and Gomery, 1985, p. 28).

The increasing number of texts that emerged between the late 1950s and 1980s (Arthur Knight, 1957; Ulrich Gregor and Enno Patalas, 1962; Jean Mitry, 1968-80; David Robinson, 1973/1981; Georges Sadoul, 1975; Jerzy Toeplitz, 1979) provided a wide variety of methods and approaches to researching and writing film history. Nevertheless, the primary task of the film historian has been to uncover unknown facts about films, interpret them according to culture-specific values, and present them as additional historical knowledge (Andrew, 1998; Sobchack, 2000). Early attempts at film history often involved simple excavations and "accounts which told

the history of the cinema as the story of fearless pioneers, of 'firsts', of adventure and discovery, of great masters and masterpieces" (Elsaesser, 1990, p. 3).

In a way, film history was essentially a chronicle of inventors, inventions (technology), businesspersons and business arrangements (economics), and about film directors and the forms and styles of the films themselves (aesthetics). Over time, this history has been re-created, re-conceptualised and re-contextualised in multiple and complex ways involving philosophical analysis of texts, political approaches, gender and feminist perspectives and cultural contexts. Often these histories are not concerned with the mere dissemination of information about films, but also determine how films, by their nature, may complement other media and contribute to the evolution of societies. This determinism may lend itself to various forms of historical mediation to the extent that the bare facts may no longer matter in the representation of history.

Sobchack has observed these mediatory processes and argues that "contemporary history is practiced and written not in the certitude of concrete 'historical facts' but rather in the productive unreliability and partiality of lived and invested memories, murmurs, nostalgias, stories, myths, and dreams" (Sobchack, in Gledhill and Williams (Eds.), 2000, p. 313). The preponderance of myth, memory, and other mediatory influences on historical representation, rather than facts, was probably due to the absence of tested and proven methodologies for researching and writing about films. As Allen and Gomery have observed, the early film historian, unlike his or her counterpart in social and other histories, did not have adequate research tools and texts to rely on.

Francesco Casetti argues that it was rather during the 1980s that a resurgence of interest in film history occurred following, as he claims, a momentary lapse in the 1960s and 1970s. This resurgence, he argues, was "partly because of the weight given

to approaches like the semiotic or the psychoanalytical" and the attempt for contemporary film historians to distance themselves from "traditional histories of cinema" and introduce some "novel elements" in the study and writing of film history, (Casetti, 1999, p. 289).

Casetti identifies some major areas in which the historians of the 1980s differed from their predecessors. The first was that the object of the history was just films when in fact cinema involved a complex interweaving of technological invention, economic factors and social relations that were not necessarily seen in the works (films) themselves. Additionally, traditional film historians were said to use inadequate research tools for data collection and analyses. In Casetti's words, "…traditional film histories – from Ramsaye's in the late 1920s to that (decidedly more complex) of Sadoul in the 1940s – were mistaken in their choice of object of study, their method, their 'slant' or shape, their writing" (Casetti, ibid, p. 290).

The second point of difference, according to Casetti, was the growing availability of film texts as a result of the recovery of lost films, the restoration or reissuing of others long unavailable and that many films were transferred to tape. Casetti argues that many other favourable circumstances emerged that made films easily accessible and that interest in films then went beyond mere conservation to include emerging areas of study such as film philology.

The third difference involved a growing awareness of the difficulties in doing history in general. Film scholars were therefore aware of the need to reconceptualise frameworks of historical research such as the "concept of the event … the broadening of

the idea of chronology … the redefinition of the idea of documentation … [and] the changes in the expository techniques of history" (Casetti, ibid, pp. 290 – 291).

Casetti adds that there emerged new frames of reference, such as using the experience of political history to gain an understanding of cinema as an instrument of propaganda, using economics to understand the "business history" of cinema and the use of "social history" to understand cinema's relationship to peoples' behaviour and the orientation of communities. This third dimension leads me to explore some of the major approaches that have been used for writing film histories?

APPROACHES TO FILM HISTORY

Some of the earliest volumes on the history of cinema were thought of as biographies that chronicled the events surrounding the birth of cinema and its development, particularly after the Second World War.  Other film histories were an exercise in the study of films and film directors that were considered worthy of being recognized in the history of cinema based on a hierarchical value system (Andrew, 1998).

"This attitude paved the way for the auteurism of the 1960s and 1970s, when the critic Andrew Sarris (1969) could claim to be providing film history by delivering his notorious seven-tiered ranking of film directors" (Andrew, ibid, p. 178). Andrew argues that the values of such a canon were only of aesthetic rather than of historical interest. During the 1960s and 1970s, as Andrew concludes, and as noted in the previous section, film history "[Done] well or badly,… was in essence a chronicle of inventors, businessmen, directors, and, most importantly films" (Andrew, ibid, p. 178).

Other film histories ignored the value system of ordering films from high to low standards, and simply focused on describing the themes and factual events that characterized the evolution and development of the cinema. Vladimir Petric (1975) has observed that some film histories are mainly concerned with descriptive and interpretive written material and less about the analytical and critical study of the films themselves. These film histories "investigate the evolution of cinema from a thematic, factual, biographical, bibliographical or social point of view, avoiding the cinematic qualities of the great films and their specific auditory/visual structure" (Petric, 1975, p. 21).

So what are some of the specific major approaches to the writing of film history? Allen and Gomery have suggested four major approaches that have been used particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

*1- Aesthetic film history*, which studies the history of the cinema as an art form. Aesthetic history involves the ways in which films offer sensory pleasures to, and create meanings for audiences. It does not only involve the study of directors, their styles of filmmaking, and various artistic movements in the cinema, but also considers why some aesthetic uses of cinema have dominated others in film history.

*2- Technological film history* involves the study of the evolution and development of the technologies that make it possible for movies to be produced and consumed. Film is "inseparable from a specific and fairly complex technology" (Allen and Gomery, 1985, p. 37). Without the technology to produce film stock, the laboratory processing of film, cameras, lenses and projection equipment, there would

be no cinema. Questions pertaining to the study of technological film history will include how the technologies came to be, what changes they have undergone and at what times, why those changes occurred and how the technological changes influenced the overall development of cinema.

*3- Economic film history* is concerned with the financing of film, the processes involved and the reasons for anyone providing money for films to be made. Filmmaking is an expensive enterprise and therefore every film emerges from an economic context. Movies in America, for example, have been an economic enterprise since their inception and have developed within a complex industrial network of businesses charged with matters of production, distribution and exhibition of films – "what we have come to refer to as 'Hollywood'" (Allen and Gomery, ibid, p. 37).

*4- Social film history*. Allen and Gomery define this category in three broad questions; "(1) Who made films and why? (2) Who saw films, how and why? (3) What was seen, how and why?" According to them social film history deals with questions of decision-making at the studio level and issues involving the social functions of movie-going. "Much social film historical research had dealt with individual film content as a reflection of social values and attitudes" (Allen and Gomery, ibid, p. 37).

The above categories have no teleological or hierarchical importance in their arrangements, even though Sobchack has observed that often cinema and film history,

albeit discreetly, are organized in hierarchical categories, "that is aesthetic history kept relatively distinct from (and untainted by) economic or technological history, or cinema as an art form privileged above movies as a cultural artifact" (Sobchack, in Gledhill and Williams (Eds.), 2000, p. 300).

From the 1980s onwards, the approaches to film history did not appear to undergo radical changes because the major contexts that informed film historical studies during the 1960s and 1970s, as outlined by Allen and Gomery, continued to serve as theoretical and methodological guides for writing film history. Francesco Casetti (1999) has isolated three main areas from which, he argues, film history was approached from the 1980s.

*1- Economic and industrial histories*. The first approach examined the economics of film production within industrial set-ups, vis-à-vis the technological developments of cinema. These aspects of the cinema, Casetti argues, were the most unified area of film history. The reason was that films and their "authors" (that is the aesthetic aspects of cinema) could not be seen in isolation, but rather, they were better understood when viewed within a dialectics of technological, financial and industrial production relations. "Thus, a film is also the final result of the conditions of its existence" (Casetti, 1999, p. 292). These conditions were usually dictated by questions of the role that technology plays in the production of cinema, how the industrial-financial relations affect the product (for example, the decisions of Wall Street, banks and Hollywood production executives).

*2- Social implications of cinema*. The second area of focus on film history was the social implications of cinema. This kind of historiography engaged in the study of how cinema reflected the behaviour and attitudes of society. Accordingly films were considered a valuable testimony to the actions and ways of thinking of communities. Films were thought of as a "mirror", in a reflective way, of "the acts, customs, aspirations, beliefs and values that constitute a culture" (Casetti, ibid, p. 297). Furthermore, this approach to film history emphasized the intervention of cinema in social processes. Films were interpreted as social agents that mobilized people towards common aspirations.

*3- Aesthetic-linguistic histories*. The third major approach to the study of film history deals with the aesthetic values of the field. It is an approach that interrogates the processes that give films their unique forms of expression. Here the focus is not on the quality of individual films, but rather on the ways in which films in general are constructed in order to emphasize their collective value as a form of expression and communication.

From the brief overview above, it is clear that the history of filmmaking is not in itself a complex network of relationships but the processes of studying and writing it bear the burden of social, cultural and economic analyses and the necessity to locate such appraisals within specific contexts. One of such relationships, which recur in the discourse on film history, is the relationship between social history and film history as an area of academic and journalistic enquiry. Of particular interest is how films, especially African films, assume privileged positions of providing historical knowledge. This probably informs the political and cultural deconstruction approach to the study of African cinema (see Chapter 1), and for

which reason many films that fall under this category are often read (or misread) as anthropological sources and their aesthetic values appreciated more than their formal qualities. I will therefore examine how films can serve as historical memory for communities and nations.

FILM AS HISTORY

Developments in cinema studies, such as the use of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, semiotics and psychoanalysis, and film's social functions, have broadened the relationship between social history and film history. This was true for a long time in colonial and post-colonial Africa because most of the films produced here were often received as propaganda products with serious social and pedagogical intent, or as anthropological actualities of real events, or as socio-cultural phenomena that transcended the commercial and entertainment values of films (Pfaff, 1996; Diouf, 1996).

Not only have films acquired the unique status of revealing history in various ways, but historical events, memories and myths of the past have served to inform the aesthetic and social values of cinema. Whilst film historians have frequently appropriated the methods and values of social history to guide and inform their study of film history (Allen and Gomery, 1985), social historians do also turn to cinematic texts for evidence of the history they may be interested in (William Murphy, 1972; John E. O'Connor, 1973).

*Film as a Source for the Study of History*

Francoise Pfaff, (1996) and Mamadou Diouf, (1996) have separately argued that African films have been largely consumed as anthropological products that reflect cultural and historical facts. Not surprisingly, the circumstances under which African cinema emerged, and the responsibilities it assumed, positioned African films to be consumed and appreciated as such. African cinema, especially south of the Sahara, emerged just as many nations were gaining their independence from colonialism. African politicians and filmmakers, who gained their ideological freedom and the control of production facilities, were concerned more about public education, the resistance to European cultural hegemony, and the creation of new national identities. These concerns reflected the broad political and ideological discourses that leading African politicians, philosophers and writers, such as Franz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah, were engaged in.

The political impetus offered by these leading thinkers in Africa was recognised at various meetings of African filmmakers, such as the Federation of Pan-African Cineastes (FEPACI), who agreed that cinema and filmmakers in the Third World should serve to oppose imperialism and neo-colonialism (Resolution of the Third World Film-makers' Meeting, Algiers, Algeria, 1973). In 1975 the Algiers Charter on African Cinema built on the 1973 declarations to call attention to the insidious nature of imperialism and for a continuous resistance against neo-colonialism. This was also followed by the Niamey Manifesto of African Film-makers in 1982 which spelt out the need to invest cinema with the cultural heritage of

Africans. The manifesto was an ideological blueprint that assigned political and educational duties to African filmmakers. It also recommended the technical and administrative arrangements that would serve African nations in building workable national cinema industries and to engage in mutually beneficial co-productions with one another.

The relevance of these films to the sociological discourses of African societies is even more apparent as many African films tend to reflect, in social-realist modes, the individual and collective memories and experiences of nations, ethnic communities and groups of people who share historical roots, such as *Wend Kuuni* (1982), *Yeelen* (1987), and *La Vie est Belle* (1987). These films can therefore be said to be products of the political and cultural histories of the societies from which they were produced.

As Pfaff has observed, "progressive films from the Third World such as Latin America and Africa… aim at conveying a particular socio-cultural and political message mirroring the aspirations and/or needs of their increasingly Westernised nations" (Pfaff, in Bakari & Cham (Eds.), 1996, p. 223).

Films often serve as mirrors of the producing nations, consciously or otherwise, even though the processes of such mirroring are far more complex than this simplistic assertion. For example, Hollywood never tires of glamorising the American style of democracy, the allegiance of Americans to their Presidency and their oft sung "American Dream." From *The Birth of a Nation*, *Citizen Kane*, *Gone With The Wind*, through the *Rambo* series to *Air Force One*, *Amistad*, *Black Hawk*

*Down* and *SWAT,* American cinema has sought to create an image of American invincibility, righteousness, conquering spirit and a strong personality. At the same time American cinema also reveals racial discrepancies within the nation, a drug and gun culture that seems impossible to change, and the media stereotyping and political marginalisation of minorities in a society that claims equality for all men.

From the United Kingdom, the *James Bond* movies are unabashedly exhibitionist in their portrayal of British intelligence and valour. Many other British films contain representations of the British as high-cultured, exuberant and lively people.

Similarly African films, particularly fiction films, often tend to represent Africans in realistic, and often idealistic, ways. Many such films are informed by myths obtained from social and political history. Examples include several films by Ousmane Sembene (*Ceddo*, *Emitai*, and *Camp de Thiaroye*), Djibril Diop Mambety (*Hyenas*) Med Hondo (*Sarraounia*), and Kwaw Ansah (*Heritage… Africa*).

This claim is further strengthened by the appropriation of documentary traditions and modes of representation in the fiction films coupled with a neo-realist style of film production that seeks to portray nature and society in its bare reality. The films of Gaston Kabore, *Wend Kuuni* and *Zan Boko* for example, are known for this quality and are sometimes seen as anthropological representations of the cultures in which they are set (Pfaff, 1996). Once upon a time, Africans were the objects of filmic observation, but when they acquired the means for film production they sought

to re-present and represent themselves on their own terms by visually reproducing their history and recreating images of themselves (Shiela Petty, 1992).

Ironically, it is this ostensible purpose of African films that often leads to their being read for evidence of anthropology and for illustrations of traditional and modern African customs and beliefs (Petty, ibid). This reading often tends to relegate the formal qualities of many African films to the extent that they are often judged more for their ideological content and less for their formal qualities (Mhando, 2000).

### *History as a Source of Film Ideology, Form and Narrative*

In many ways the social, cultural and political histories of nations have provided impetus at various levels for artistic and cultural production and representation. There is a growing collection of films that are dedicated to the interrogation of the past and to link the past to the present and future. Dani Kouyate's *Keita...The Heritage of the Griot* (1995) is an example of a film that reflects on historical events in relation to contemporary cultural identity.

In a paper delivered at the international conference on film history in Cape Town, South Africa in 2002 (retrieved from the internet in 2003), Mbye Cham noted that most of Africa's cultural and artistic representations reflect the history of events on the continent. He argues that:

A significant portion of what constitutes African cultural, symbolic and intellectual thought and practices – be they oral, written, dramatic,

visual or filmic – can be characterized as responses to and interventions in the factors and forces that have shaped Africa over time (Cham, 2002, para. 2).

Citing Kwame Nkrumah, of Ghana, and Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan historian, Cham identifies the historical factors and forces that have largely shaped African film practice. These are indigenous African influences, Arab-Islamic factors and Euro-Christian forces. For example, in his book, *Consciencism* (1964), Kwame Nkrumah acknowledges the presence and influence of two foreign forces, Islam and Christianity, but advocates for "a new harmony" that will allow mutual co-existence "in tune with the original humanist principles underlying African society" (Nkrumah, 1964, p. 70). Nkrumah argues that contemporary African society is not the old one but a new one that has been expanded by the influences of Islam and Christianity, and yet, that Africans must not lose sight of their humanistic principles. The merger of Christianity and/or Islam with African traditional systems has produced various cultural and social tendencies and syncretistic identities, often quite ambivalent, that many African films have sought to interrogate. *Ceddo* and *Love Brewed in the African Pot* are two examples of such films.

In a television documentary series, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986) Mazrui traces evidence of the forces of Islam and Christianity on traditional African societies. In Part Three of the nine-part series, for example, Mazrui examines the host of factors that have influenced religion in Africa. He explores the extent to which

Christianity and Islam are being practiced within Africanised contexts, and their impact on African life, language, law and learning.

Just as the actual history of Africa informed Mazrui's documentary series, which in turn examined that history, many other African films have their ideological and narrative roots in the social history of the continent. Cham argues that the appropriation of history by African filmmakers has become a prominent characteristic of cinema on the continent. He submits that:

Since its inception in the 60s and 70s, a significant portion of African cinema has focused and continues to focus on issues of racism, colonial exploitation and injustice, tradition and modernity, hopes, betrayals and disaffections of independence, immigration and many other social justice issues. Historicizing these issues, as well as creating narratives based primarily on events, figures and subjects of history, has emerged in recent years as a prominent trait of African film culture (Cham, 2000, para. 4).

Because of the post-colonial context of their emergence, many African films have focused on issues of history, not just for the sake of revealing it, but rather to contest previous narratives that may have been seen as disfigurements of historical reality, and to negotiate a revision of the culture and history of African peoples. The ostensible task of African cinema was to repair the 'historiographic' and psycho-cultural damage caused by the negative and stereotypical portrayal of African peoples by European and other foreign films.

Whilst many Africans viewed these films with pride and were satisfied that their histories had at last been written from an African point of view, European spectators saw them as "polemic, poorly constructed, and belonging to the 1960s rhetoric of violence" (Diawara, 1992, p. 152).

According to Diawara, both the French and British governments used the above argument and rhetorical labelling to shun *Sarraounia* and *Heritage…Africa*. In the United States, Gerima's *Sankofa* suffered similar rejection by the main stream.

Diawara declares that "with regard to *Sarraounia* and *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), it is remarkable that the French government has deviated from its commitment to the production and promotion of African cinema; neither film was selected for the Cannes Film Festival" (Diawara, ibid, p. 152). Even though Diawara does not give exact reasons why the two films were rejected, it is inferred that the contents of the films were politically unsavoury to the French.

Acceptable or not, African films that appropriate historical realities often set out to achieve three broad objectives; to re-present the history of Africans from purely African perspectives, to re-present the fight by Africans against all forms of colonialism and to re-present the role of women in Africa's development.

Sembene is a good point of departure to illustrate this point. His film *Emitai (God of Thunder)* (1971) is set during the Second World War, and is a narrative about the resistance of the Jola people of Cassamance (Southern Senegal) against the oppressive behaviour of the French colonial army. In the film, which is based on actual WWII events, the French army forcibly drafts able-bodied African males to be

sent to the war front. They also coerce the villagers into parting with their harvest of rice to support France's war efforts. When the villagers resist, the French soldiers torture them in an effort to weaken their opposition.

Similarly, *Camp de Thiaroye*, which Sembene co-directed with Thierno Faty Sow, is based on factual incidents that France would have preferred left untold. The film reconstructs events in a transit camp for African soldiers returning from WWII. Its power lies in the portrayal of the French colonial authorities as insensitive to the sacrifices that the African soldiers had made in favour of France during the war. Rather than grant the African soldiers their demands for fair treatment the French chose to massacre them at night whilst they slept.

In both films Sembene, a former draftee himself, reaches back into history to produce images that invoke deep emotions, especially for African spectators, and strips colonialism of its false cloak of civilisation to reveal its true ugliness. Having fought for France in WWII himself, Sembene's rendition of this piece of history is from personal experience, and his attention to detail and building of credible characters allows him the  artistic licence to tell the story "with irrefutable credibility, its authenticity being a hallmark of a truly revisionist history" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 292).

Ethiopian filmmaker, Haile Gerima is also preoccupied with reconstructing and re-presenting history in order to rescue African history from the margins of global history and into the spotlight. His films *Sankofa* (1993) and *Adwa, An African Victory* (1999) are motivated by the need to re-conceptualise history in 'Africanist'

perspectives. *Sankofa* is a fictionalised story about a spiritual journey into the past that reveals the lives and experiences of black slaves in the American South, and their resilience and subsequent revolt against oppressive enslavement. On the other hand *Adwa* is a documentary that relies on African oral traditional narrative techniques to re-present the victory that Ethiopian forces won over Mussolini's invading Italian armies.

*Keita...The Heritage of the Griot* (1995) by Dani Kouyaté derives its essence from the actual history of the legendary 13th century Mande king Sundiata Keita. Kouyate picks on a slice of this history, re-conceptualizes it for the benefit of contemporary society. In the film, as in many others, history is not presented merely for the sake of it, but rather for audiences to be able to engage critically with that history in relation to their present identities and perceptions of society.

There are many other films that are informed and aesthetically influenced by historical events and experiences in Africa. Some best known titles will include *Sarraounia* which re-enacts the confrontation between French colonising forces and the Aznas of Niger. War epics such as *L'Opium et le Baton* (1970) by Ahmed Rachedi and *Chroniques des Années de braise* (1975) by Mohamed Lakhdar-Hamina are informed by events characterising the struggles of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FNL). *Sambizanga* (1972) by Sarah Maldoror is set in Angola and is informed by the struggles of the Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA).

The films mentioned above are by no means exhaustive. There is a plethora of examples of films that have relied on social and political history to inform their

ideology, stylistic form and narrative, what Diawara (1992) refers to as "return to the source". These films attempt to re-present history in order to problematize and question the post-colonial predicament of African nations. By engaging in the social and political histories these films easily serve as sources for the appreciation of the real histories of nations, of communities and of cultures.

### *The Return to History*

Amidst the flurry of intellectual and anthropological work to re-discover the African past, history is beginning to reveal that the African world view was reflected in the way people communicated with each other, in music, dance and other art forms, in their practice of religion, their concepts of God, and their general approach to life in relation to their physical environments.

Examples are given of ancient Ghana, which had stable and well functioning political, educational, religious and economic institutions and its trade with neighbouring Kingdoms - a flourishing mutual relationship. There are numerous stories about the great kingdoms of Axum, Kush, Mali and Songhai. Civilisations like Egypt and Kemit (the life centre of the ancient world) are said to have attracted educationists, philosophers and many other pilgrims, such as Plato, Pythagoras and Thales, who travelled to Africa seeking knowledge of science, the arts and philosophy. Africans are credited for discovering the elements of the arts and sciences and the civil and religious dogmas and systems that still govern the universe. The Greeks are said to have been so intrigued by the African accomplishments that they

represented their most favourite goddess of wisdom, Minerva, in the image of an African princess.

The rationale behind this investment in history to define an African consciousness is motivated by the need to resist pre-colonial and colonial misrepresentations of what was believed to be the unspoilt African universe. This consciousness, which alludes to an African identity, in a sense, is a generalisation of all the individual and unique ethnic, cultural and physiological features of peoples and communities that make up the African world-space. The argument is that all Africans suffered, albeit in varying degrees, the dehumanisation and cultural alienation caused by colonialism and that this offers justification for a collective project of returning to history and reclaiming those individual and unique qualities.

This project of cultural renewal is not only for the benefit of African people but also the rest of the world. Most of what people outside of Africa knew about the continent and its people were from European explorer travelogues and manuals or from early European films about Africa.

There is textual evidence of the arrogance of Western culture and discourse, which even tends to colonise history, (Mudimbe, 1994) such that the existence of a people, especially in Africa, their configuration and styles of living are to be decided solely by Western philosophy and anthropology. In this way, only the civilisation of the West matters whilst the rest of the world pales into historical insignificance.

For example, many history books have indicated that Africa was discovered in the 15th century. "Professors teach it, students accept it as truth" (Mudimbe, 1994, p.

16). This discovery, with its fellowship of media texts and cultural (dis)order of general knowledge in what Mudimbe calls the "colonial library" is from the perspectives of European explorers and merchants and directed towards their economic and political favour. Part of this perspective was to allude to the inferiority of dark-skinned peoples (Mudimbe, ibid).

David Hume is an example of some European philosophers who believed in the inherent inferiority of the Blackman to the Whiteman and that the former could not possibly possess the consciousness of a full human being. In that sense the African could not have contributed anything meaningful to human development.

If by denying a people their history, or by distorting it in order to deny them their real identity, then it seems reasonable that rediscovering that lost history is equal to regaining the lost identity, from which position one is then capable of negotiating a new space in the global community.

As has been visually demonstrated by Gerima with *Sankofa*, Africans and people of African descent need to return to the past in order to rediscover their true and profound identities. Moreover, for the filmmakers themselves, the appropriation of history was an intellectual process "aimed at demystifying the ideological distortions of the colonial historiography of Africa and African cultures, the explication of the nature and structure of the history of the African continent and its people in the diaspora [which] could assist in bringing to fruition the liberation of Africa" (Ukadike, 1994, pp. 92-93).

The assumptions of the role of history in defining contemporary African identity have not passed without criticism. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992), a Ghanaian philosopher, has offered insights into the complexities of African identity by tracing and interrogating the many preconceptions about the African race and exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of an African identity. Even though Appiah's focus is on the philosophy of African identity and how it has influenced African literature, one can draw parallels with the same influence on African cinema.

Appiah argues that African literature is influenced by centuries of contact with the West. The Western values that have imposed themselves in these cultural constructions and the multi-cultural nature of Africa itself are very important in any evaluation of African identity. Moreover, in contemporary times, the conflicts of interest and identity crises that characterise the tension between Africa's aspirations to a modern society and the nostalgic desire to invest in its cultural roots are indispensable considerations in the analysis of African identity.

The controversy about the recovery of the past is one of the issues that Appiah interrogates. He questions whether it is worthwhile for Africans to go back into history in order to define the present with ancient cultural traditions. African philosophers working for clarity of these issues need to examine carefully the delicate balance between what is historically retrogressive and what is useful about so-called ancient traditions.

Appiah has even criticised major political and philosophical movements like Pan-Africanism and Negritude as being inadequate in present times for the African

political and cultural agenda. For Appiah, the myriad problems that confront Africans today cannot be solved with the same old philosophical thinking of many decades ago. He argues that philosophies like Negritude and Pan-Africanism are old-fashioned and incapable of the task at hand. This position is supported by Ukadike who also contends that "these movements have proven inadequate to the profound challenges of independence" (1994, p. 67).

It seems that the post-colonial state of Africa, with its trail of syncretised identities and multiplicity of philosophical allegiances, is what will define contemporary identity, consciousness and indeed, the characteristics of nations and nation-states on the continent. Framing national cinemas in Africa therefore must take on board the role and consequences of postcolonial cultural relationships, the shifting identities which are influenced by globalisation and post-modern consumerism, and the ambivalence of self-consciousness. The next chapter considers some of the concepts of national cinemas and methods for studying them.

CHAPTER THREE

NATIONAL CINEMA- CONCEPTS AND METHODS

This chapter reflects on the concept of and methods for approaching national cinemas, drawing mainly on Elsaesser (1989), Higson (1995), Rowley (1998), Crofts (1998), Hjort and MacKenzie (2000), Schlesinger (2000) and Hayward (2000). I start with a brief look at the definitional problems and then proceed to examine some methods or approaches to its study.

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL CINEMA

National cinema emerged in the sixties along with *auteur theory,* as the two categories that shaped the discipline of film studies during its institutionalization, particularly in North American universities (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2000). During the sixties and seventies, according to Crofts (1998), most writings on cinema "adopted common-sense notions of national cinema" (Crofts, in Hill & Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 385). That is, Crofts argues, prior to the eighties, ideas of national cinema tended to focus on film texts produced within particular territories whilst ideas of the nation-state which underpinned the concept of national cinema, remained unproblematic.

The rethinking of the nation-state, from the eighties, sought to eschew essentialist conceptions of the nation-state and national identity. Since then,

according to Crofts, most nation-states have failed to retain their congruence of polity, their culture and economies, following developments in information technologies, the spread of hegemonic ideologies and the transcendence of national boundaries through the dispersal of people by way of various forms of migration. These developments have informed recent accounts of national cinemas. Crofts therefore proposes "states and nation-state cinemas rather than nations and national cinemas" (Crofts, in Hill & Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 386).

Susan Hayward (2000) suggests that a starting point for thinking of national cinemas is the concept of nation, national identity(ies), nationalism and culture. She proposes that such an exercise must draw on the work of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, Patrick Hall and Thomas Erikson, "because between them we can come up with the first set of useful rubrics (or key words) for leading our discussion of framing national cinemas" (Hayward, in Hjort & MacKenzie (Eds.), 2000, p. 88).

Hayward argues that, in defining or framing a national cinema it is instructive to consider the discourses that are mobilized in doing so, such as the typologies, and the political and cultural considerations, so that "the artefact 'film' speaks of/for/as the nation" (Hayward, ibid, p. 91) even though she observes that the territorialisation of the artefact, as nationally bounded, posses problems.

Presumably the framing of nations or nation-states, depending on one's point of view, also offers the framework for thinking about national or nation-state cinemas. Such framing is often informed by a certain historical development in

politics and culture, which then finds expression in the arts, such as cinema. For example, Elizabeth Jacka (1998) argues that Australian national cinema was "framed by the idea of a national culture and involved a set of explorations of Australia's complicated colonial and post-colonial relationships with Britain and America, and the influence this had on its film culture" (in Hill & Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 517). What then are some of the approaches to national cinemas?

APPROACHES TO NATIONAL CINEMA

National cinema emerged in the sixties along with *auteur theory*, particularly in North American universities, only to serve descriptive purposes and as means to systematising the emerging university curriculum (Hjort & MacKenzie, 2000). According to Hjort and MacKenzie, studying national cinemas during these early periods was marked by a focus on film texts produced within specific nations and were mainly about great film directors and their works, and how these were synonymous with nations' cinemas.  For example Ingmar Bergman represented Sweden, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut for France, and Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and John Ford stood for the United States of America.

This approach to studying national cinemas changed in the seventies and eighties following the rise of "grand theory", such as "semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralism and feminism", which were then applied to film theory and criticism and popularised by several journals- "*Screen, Ciné-tracts, Cahier du*

*cinéma, Cinématique, Frauen und Film* and *Camera Obscura*" (Hjort and MacKenzie, ibid, p. 3).

From the eighties on, studies of national cinemas took on even more complex dynamics as they integrated the discourses of nationhood and interrogated the role and effects of nations and nationalisms in the production of film texts (Crofts, 1998). With the use of grand theory in examining national cinemas along with the inherent problems pertaining to the discourses on nations and nationalism there was a tendency to identify cinemas that were specific to each nation-state and, particularly, differentiated from the dominating presence of Hollywood.

Thomas Elsaesser has noted two such models in writings about the 'New German Cinema' as national cinema, that is, "concentrating on individual directors or on specific themes and genres" (Elsaesser, 1989, p. 1). Elsaesser himself prefers an approach that outlines the history and economics of German filmmaking as a "social space" and film as a "commodity". Elsaesser is also concerned about "the modes and models of production in West Germany" (Elsaesser, ibid, p. 3). He discusses the economics of film production, the role of government subsidies, and audience expectations and appraisal, as a way of isolating a film culture in West Germany.

Elsaesser interrogates the concepts of nations and nationalism in the construction of national cinema, particularly as they impact the interpretations and perceptions of audiences (especially foreign audiences) of German cinema. According to him, this "inevitably implies an analysis of what sort of mythical construct emerges of the 'nation' and of 'Germany' (Elsaesser, ibid, p. 6). For example he argues that

whilst domestic spectators of German films may identify and empathise with specific characters in the films, international audiences will see such films as narrative images of an entire country, or as Crofts puts it, "as expressions of a putative national spirit" (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 386).

The likely influence of international audiences in determining national cinemas opens up another way to approach national cinemas. Crofts (ibid) for example has argued that the idea of national cinemas allows the identification of non-Hollywood cinema, which then serves to identify the cinemas of particular nations. As Philip Schlesinger (2000) puts it succinctly, "it is precisely the extra-territorial cultural pressure of Hollywood's production, imported into the national space, that sets up the contemporary issue of national cinema" (in Hjort and MacKenzie (Eds.), 2000, p. 24).

The massive dominance of Hollywood over the rest of the world's film industries has left the latter facing a choice between emulating Hollywood in order to compete directly or instead to produce films that are dramatically different and highlight the unique qualities of each nation's cinema. Germany, France, and Italy may have taken this latter option and registered great successes. At the same time, the dominance of Hollywood in world cinema appears to have influenced the shape of many national cinemas. The relentless search for profits has led to the internationalisation of cinematic texts, and this offers little scope for national cinemas.

Apparently national cinema approaches have transformed and transcended the boundaries of earlier film histories which had examined films as "aesthetically great works... and as great moments" to more complex modes of analysis that examine "the industrial factors enabling the films to be produced" (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 386). Crofts mentions the factors which are important for thinking about national cinemas.

*1- Production*. Drawing on Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) Crofts argues that the industrial effects on film production, such as economic, technological, and ideological factors are important in the construction of national cinemas rather than the "simple reflectionist thesis of text-context relations" (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson (Eds.), 1998, pp. 386-387). Furthermore, he argues, stylistic norms, such as those of Hollywood, exist in mutually sustainable ways with the specific modes of national film production.

*2- Distribution and Exhibition*. Films in circulation within nation-states need to comprise a category of national cinema study. Drawing on Higson (1989) Crofts points out that "attention towards 'imported' cinema is becoming more common in nation-state cinema studies" (Crofts, ibid, p. 387). He mentions Thomas Elsaesser's *New German Cinema* (1989) as an example of this approach. Furthermore, he argues, there are many nations that do not possess film production industries and yet can be said to possess national cinemas because "nation-state cinema should not be defined solely in terms of production" (Crofts, ibid, p. 387). Other factors, as mentioned below, are equally important.

*3- Audiences*. According to Crofts, audiences within identifiable nation-states have been under-researched and mainly analysed according to box-office statistics. Alternatively, Crofts draws on Hill's (1994) submission that audiences have been analysed according to the problems locally produced cinemas often experience when faced with the transnational domination by Hollywood, or their efforts in sustaining an indigenous 'art cinema'. An example was the New German Cinema's desperate search for audiences, especially by those practitioners who were funded by the state (Elsaesser, 1989).

*4- Discourse*. This category centres on the discourse on culture and films that are circulated, and which tend to affect the production of particular film texts and audience reception. "Hence, since the 1980s nation-state cinema studies have less commonly treated films as objects for the exercise of aesthetic judgement than as instances of (national-)cultural discourse" (ibid, p. 387).

*5- Textuality*. This involves the identification of various patterns that may characterise a particular national cinema. According to Crofts writers were able to identify textual conventions, mostly generic, which characterized a national cinema. Crofts argues that such generic categorisations are appreciated more as socio-cultural tendencies rather than in industrial terms.

*6- National-cultural specificity*. This is differentiated from the discourses of nationalism and national identity because nationally specific cinema "is not bound by the homogenizing myths of nationalism and national identity" (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 388) but also by the construction of nationally specific

culture which includes and determines how both national identity and nationalist discourses are constructed.

*7- The cultural specificity of genres and nation-state cinema 'movements'*, Crofts argues, can only be established with the ability of the nation-state to sustain production levels that can support a requisite infrastructure and audience familiarity, and based on the resources of local cultural traditions.

*8- The role of the State*. Crofts notes that in the construction of national cinemas the state plays a pivotal role through the institution of policies and legislations intended, among others, to regulate and control film subsidies and tariffs, offer industrial assistance and censorship, oversee copyright and licensing arrangements, and set up training institutions.

Apart from Crofts, Andrew Higson (1995) has also offered several contexts for the study of national cinemas, some of which replicate Crofts categories. Higson suggests that national cinemas can be identified by looking at particular features such as the industrial and business aspects of cinema, patterns of exhibition and consumption and how these impact on national culture, issues of cultural policy and critical enquiries, and finally, the questions of representation.

Films often derive their essence and textuality from nationally specific contexts, just as they in turn influence the collective imaginings of nations in coherent

ways, the same way print media did in the creation of imagined communities (see Anderson, 1983/1991).

Schlesinger (2000) has argued that the coherence of the nation-state is dependent on the sharing of the memories, habits and values of people through existing facilities of social communications. Drawing on Carl Deutsch (1966) Schlesinger argues that "nations and nation-states are strongly bound by their socially communicative structures of interaction" (Schlesinger, 2000, p. 20). The nation-state also serves as the scope for national cinema, the argument being that the concerns about the role of cinema in a nation are "internalist", in as much as "the production, circulation and consumption of the moving image is constitutive of the national collectivity" (Schlesinger, ibid, p. 24).

The case of French cinema as discussed by Susan Hayward (1993) is an example of national cinema that is deeply rooted in a statist paradigm, collective myths about Frenchness and a long established opposition to Hollywood. This raises a further complication in the delineation of national cinemas which Hayward frames in a question "When is a cinema 'national'?" (Hayward, 1993, p. 1).

To answers this question I return to Crofts (1993) who submits that national cinemas acquired their national statuses when they performed various functions relevant to particular states under a variety of historical circumstances and in a variety of ways.

With such a wide variety of issues to consider, a single grand theory may be insufficient for investigating national cinemas (Higson, 2000). Rather, Higson argues,

one needs "more piecemeal historical investigations of specific cinematic formations" (in Hjort and MacKenzie (Eds.), 2000, p. 63).

This is the approach that this thesis will adopt. The history will show a strong presence of culture as a framework for thinking about national cinema. I will therefore briefly examine culture, particularly popular culture as an important approach to national cinema.

POPULAR CULTURE AND NATIONAL CINEMA

As a starting point, I will recall some of the preceding approaches mentioned above and pose further questions, such as, what kinds of mythical film texts are required to unite a culturally diverse nation like Ghana? How are both domestic and foreign audiences likely to appreciate these texts? Often, the tendency is to appropriate popular cultural symbols and motives to represent an imagined national community.

The most common reference to popular culture alludes to its subordination to high or elite culture. In this sense popular culture is seen as the vernacular of the masses of people in a particular (modern) state, whose content is mass produced by the cultural industrial machinery, usually based on profit motives. The complex network of production and consumption creates an equally complex set of interactions between producers and consumers which then results in the popular cultural texts, tastes and consumption attitudes.

In general discourse, therefore, popular culture is considered the 'other' of high culture. That is, popular culture is the demeaned, low level and uncritical expressions and representations of the under-privileged classes. However, the contextually-bounded nature of popular culture makes the above perception unwieldy and faulty. There have been a number of criticisms of this polemic as arbitrary, imaginary and simply mythical. Critics of the differentiation between high and low culture point to the difficulty in drawing distinct lines between the two. For example, DiMaggio (1982) and Levine (1984), in their separate studies, and drawing on Bourdieu, trace with scepticism the origins of the socially distinct forms of popular and high/elite culture.

Sometimes the distinction is an arbitrary conjecture emerging from the academy, but as Storey (2003) argues, it has no basis in textual properties and modes of production, even though "this should not lead us to ignore the institutional embeddedness of this distinction" (Storey, 2003, p. xi). For example, Turner (1998) submits that both Film Studies and Cultural Studies posit different approaches to the analysis of popular culture, yet both academic fields share common trajectories in their textual analysis, popular forms, histories and the industrial systems that produce those forms and texts (in Hill & Gibson (Eds.), 1998).

Storey (2003) argues that popular culture is an invention by intellectuals, which in Marxist ideology, was intended to distinguish the bourgeoisie from the proletariats and working classes. According to Storey, what needs to be examined is not the distinction at the level of textuality or mode of production, but rather how this

"distinction is maintained and deployed in strategies of power" (Storey, 2003, p. xi). The strategies of power are themselves located not only within the commercial field of cultural production within which such distinctions are made, in order to carve out audiences for specific products, but also within the academic realm where the analyses of media and culture often seek to create such distinctions.

However, I will argue, such distinctions in Africa, as far as cinema is concerned, are not easily discernible. As a consequence of cinema's mass appeal, and more importantly because cinema emerged in Africa as a medium for popular mass mobilisation, the films, whether didactic or purely commercial entertainment, often appropriate cultural discourses and texts which are familiar to many people.

In fact, in most parts of Africa popular culture is not downgraded to a lower other of high culture. The mostly Eurocentric focus on industrialisation and urbanisation as the roots of *popular culture*, which also reflects Marxist theories of social classes, the role of capitalism in the creation of classes, and taken further by the Frankfurt School with its theories of commodity fetishism, (John Fiske, 1989; Karin Barber, 1997; John Storey, 2003;) cannot apply in a strict sense to the African experience. For example, most African cities emerged as commercial centres where a great deal of trade was and is still undertaken by ordinary people with significant migrant populations from neighbouring sub-regional countries. These cities did not grow mainly as urban-industrial centres.

The creation of class societies in many African nations is therefore not the result of industrialisation, and therefore the distinction between high and popular

culture cannot be drawn with visible lines (Barber, 1987). Barber argues that the "slippery" nature of the term *popular*, particularly within a European context, where rapid industrialisation and developments in communications technologies have eroded, displaced or replaced folk culture, or placed *popular culture* in counter positions to a high culture, cannot be appropriately applied to the African situation. What is important and worth noting is that popular culture, in the sense of mass acceptance of particular practices, narratives and myths, has been an integral part of the formation of various national cinemas in Africa, alongside other statist, legal, industrial, and ideological considerations. How is this link achievable?

Susan Hayward (2000) has argued that nationalism (the overarching context for national cinemas) leads us to think of bounded cultural objects. She explains that "cultural artefacts are *made* (in the French sense of *fabriqué* [fabricated] and *obligé* [obliged]) to represent a nation, to function as evidence of the nation's distinctiveness" (Hayward, in Hjort and MacKenzie (Eds.), 2000, p. 89, *original emphasis*). The reification of culture, for Hayward, is to create a sense of wholeness and belongingness within a nationalist discourse.

In this way, Higson (1995) argues, individual films may often represent the national and collective by constructing imaginary bonds that hold people within a nation together as a community. These films may do this by "dramatising their (*the people's*) current fears, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations" and to invite a diverse and "often antagonistic" group of people to "recognise themselves as a singular body

with a common culture and to oppose themselves to other cultures and communities"
(Higson, 1995, p. 7).

Such developments would often produce what is usually referred to as national
culture, which in turn informs cultural production that is specific to particular nations.
According to Hayward (2000) national culture is "a product of nationalist discourses
and is based on the principle of representation and (of course) repression" (Hayward,
in Hjort and MacKenzie (Eds.), 2000, p. 98). Hayward posits that in the same way
that nationalisms have invented nations, national culture does not represent an a priori
existence but rather what is imagined to be there; some form of homogenised fixed
culture. At the same time, Hayward argues, conceptions of national culture are also
repressive because they tend to alienate what they cannot tolerate, such as individuals
and minorities cultures, and underprivileged people.

To frame national cinema within the context of national culture requires an
interrogation of the symbolic practices of cultural production and various other
enunciations of power, knowledge, identities and hegemonies. The
internationalisation of media and global commodification notwithstanding, culture is
still a key issue in national cinema discourses since, as Crofts (1998) has argued, it
provides the unique contexts for nations to assert their identities and common
consciousness against the hegemonic powers of large global commercial interests.
France and Germany are two countries that are said to have been fairly successful in
creating and preserving "a national film ecology amidst the ever-expanding

international film, media and information economy" (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson (Eds.), 1998, pp. 392-393).

Cinema is an index of culture in better ways than the other arts "because it visibly partakes of the stuff of cultural life" (Andrew, 1985, p. 24). For a long time in Africa, arguably until the late 20th century, no other medium had invested in itself the stuff of cultural life than cinema for the purposes of social communication. Cinema has the capacity to hold a mirror to society not only as a means of revelation, but more importantly as a means of social and cultural diagnosis of the challenges that confront people on a daily basis.

Andrew (1985) points to the qualities of cinema being able to mirror societies' culture even though such mirror images are often modified through cinema's agency. He notes that "the power of the camera to set the scene of culture is a power much stronger than that of mere reflection. The cinema literally contributes to a culture's self-image, inflecting, not just capturing, daily experiences" (Andrew, 1985, p. 24).

In appropriating culture to inform its thematic and narrative forms, cinema has often exhibited a potential to create a universality of expression that is appreciated by most people within particular cultural spaces. For this reason audiences in a village in northern Ghana may understand the symbolism and expressions in a film produced within a southern cultural context.

With cinema's use of cultural symbolism, which is often grounded in popular idioms, opportunities exist for cultural interaction and the unification of people of varying socio-cultural backgrounds. Many films by Africans have often used popular

cultural expressions to represent particular nation-state experiences in a collective way. Even when such idioms emerge from particular cultures within the nation-states, they still had the capacity to address national or even universal African themes that enabled cross-cultural appreciation of the discourses engaged in by the films.

For example, Ukadike (1994) has observed that the styles of African films were often rooted in African concepts of storytelling, with specific narrative qualities attributed to African oral traditions. "The fusion of oral tradition with filmic narrative structure became an important characteristic of African filmmaking, towards which almost all filmmakers now lean and to which the level of its maturity is attributed" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 166).

During the 1970s and 1980s many filmmakers, operating from various nations shifted their focus from the pedagogically political and conspicuously propagandist concerns to more popular themes which could be found within the realm of culture. The appropriation of culture notwithstanding, some of these films were still significant in their engagement with political issues confronting post-colonial African nation-states.

For example, Sembene's *Emitai* is an indictment of certain African cultural practices and a questioning of their contemporary relevance. The narrative revolves round the women of a village who resist the autocracy and economic exploitation of the French colonial army, a confrontation that involves their torture by the French. Meanwhile the men of the village go into hiding to ponder over why their gods have deserted them in their time of need. Whilst Sembene does not disrespect the tradition

of the Diola to seek divine intervention in difficult times, the juxtaposing of the seemingly cowardly attitude of the men against the bravery and resilience of the women certainly implicates such traditions in backwardness which alludes to the necessity of their abolition.

There are many other films that perform the tasks of cultural representation and socio-political critiques of nation-states and these will be discussed in subsequent chapters of the thesis. What I have attempted to do in these first three chapters is to lay out a theoretical and methodological framework which I hope will adequately guide the historical narration of cinema in Ghana and the theoretical reading of that history. The next chapter therefore begins the history with how cinema came to Ghana.

CHAPTER FOUR

EARLY CINEMA IN GHANA (1900 – 1938)

The early period of the Twentieth Century witnessed the proliferation of films across the globe. In Africa, cinema was introduced to native peoples shortly after the Lumière Brothers had held their first public commercial screening in Paris, and from that moment various groups of explorers and adventure seekers, colonialists and Christian missionaries brought films and filmmaking to the continent. The same period marked the colonial domination of Africa by European nations. Between 1900 and 1938, Africa experienced a mixture of pain and fortune through colonial subjugation, economic exploitation, the magic of cinema, the First World War and the beginnings of African nationalist movements.

In this chapter, I trace the major political developments in Africa, with a focus on the political and economic shifts in Ghana, and how these impacted on the kinds of films that were produced and exhibited here. I trace the introduction of cinema to Africa, and to what uses it was deployed during various stages of colonialism. Finally I look at how Africans acquired knowledge and skills in film production.

BACKGROUND TO EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT IN AFRICA

Accounts of the earliest settlement of Europeans in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) can be found in Anquandah, (1999), who writes that it was Portuguese explorer-traders who first landed on the coast of Elmina during the late 15th century to prospect for gold. According to Anquandah, "[in] 1471, Martim Fernandes and Alvaro Esteves 'discovered' the rich gold lands straddling the valleys of the Ankobra and Volta Rivers" (Anquandah, 1999, p. 8). By 1482, Anquandah argues, the Portuguese had constructed a Castle in present-day Elmina, from where they traded. For more than half a century, following the Portuguese initiatives, other Europeans arrived and set up various trading posts along the coastline of West Africa, many of which were established on the Gold Coast.

By the close of the 15th century the lure of gold had given way to the trade in slaves. Several coastal trading posts were converted into transit centres for African slaves destined for the Americas and other lucrative markets. For over four centuries, well into the middle of the 19th Century, African people became commodities to be sold,

During the second half of the 19th century, European interests in Africa underwent another shift, this time from the trade in human beings to the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources of the continent. This shift in interest resulted in the infamous scramble for Africa between 1884 and 1885, in which the continent was arbitrarily carved out among four major European colonial powers – Belgium, Britain, France and Portugal, except for countries like South Africa and Ethiopia, which strictly speaking, were not colonized.

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE, THE BEGINNING OF COLONIALISM AND AFRICAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century most of the peoples that occupy present day Ghana had already settled and established firm ascendancies over various territories (Forde and Kaberry, 1967; Wilks, 1975). Trade among various cultural and linguistic groups in Africa, and between them and Europeans, already flourished. What became the most prominent aspect of this trade relationship around that period was undoubtedly the slave trade.

However, in 1833 when the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, interest in the Gold Coast, and in fact most parts of Africa where slavery had dominated other forms of trade, shifted to regular trading and the exploitation of natural resources to feed European industries.

This shift in interest also meant a change in tactics. It compelled a major European policy change in which they no longer waited on the coastal shores, from where they had done business with Africans, but ventured into the heartland of Africa, "a move aimed at consolidating their 'effective' occupation of the continent" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 29). It was this shift in policy that effectively set in motion the processes that led to the scramble for Africa, the Berlin Conference of 1885 and the colonial construction of Africa.

According to Ukadike (1994) the European colonisers were at first hesitant in venturing into the African heartland, because their conception of the Blackman was still that of a savage and a dangerous being. They therefore needed to find a way to neutralize so-called African antagonism and court the latter's hospitality. Christian missionaries were employed to undertake this task, which they did effectively by using Bibles and slide projectors at first, and later film projectors. They managed to infiltrate most of the interior, ostensibly to preach the Gospel and show films about Jesus and other Bible stories to the people. Not only did the pictures attract keen audiences, but their effect produced many Christian converts.

Ukadike argues that the missionaries accomplished two objectives by using these visual means: first, they were able to draw and convert larger and more curious audiences and second, in what amounts to a "cultural rupture with Africa's past, they were able to infiltrate Africa's culture" (Ukadike, ibid, p. 30). Only then did the colonizers move in to establish their political authority and to institute exploitative political and economic programmes.

During the early colonial period, in order to facilitate the economic exploitation of the land, the Gold Coast began to develop rapidly through the expansion of the road and rail networks, the building of shipping harbours and the expansion of cocoa production. Educational institutions were also set up and Western style education was introduced, culminating much later in the establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948, now the University of Ghana, in Accra.

Indigenous people were quick to appreciate the various functions of cinema. But whilst they were being indoctrinated into Christianity, a combination of cinema and the western educational system also produced a corps of African aristocratic elite, who began to appreciate their colonized status and feel a need for improved social services and a share in political power.

As early as 1897 *The Aborigines Rights Protection Society* was set up by Western Christian educated natives in the Gold Coast to fight for political and social rights. This society, arguably, was the harbinger of African nationalism. After the First World War (WWI) many other nationalist movements arose from among the African elite. Some of them were from missionary societies who wanted to see an end to the European control of missions and therefore founded their own churches. Others were political movements that engineered anti-colonial rebellions and fostered moves towards self-determination.

It was the realization that their land had been invaded and taken over by Europeans, the imposition by the colonizers of very harsh working conditions, unfair colonial laws, a discriminatory social system and an abusive and exploitative tax regime that engendered among the natives a deep resentment towards the Europeans, an agitation for their land and rights, and subsequently the formation of what were to become nationalist movements.

The earliest modern movements that employed the ideology of nationalism in a relatively coherent way formed the "primary resistance movements which lasted until some time around World War I" (Randrianja, 1996, p. 23). These movements,

however, were not very well organised politically or militarily, and were rather backward-looking. Randrianja (1996) argues that these movements "drew inspiration mainly from the pre-colonial past and, in cases where they adopted a political programme, their aim was the restoration of an old order" (Randrianja, ibid, p. 21).

When Britain declared war against Germany on August 4, 1914, it effectively commenced WWI. By extension all the British colonies were involved in the war as tens of thousands of African men were drafted into the army and sent to various war fronts. Whilst some saw the war as a burden on Africans, because of the loss of energetic young men who should have stayed home to work, the loss of family members at the front and the massive exploitation of natural resources for the war efforts, others saw an opportunity for a revolutionary accession to political power. As a result, many uprisings took place, especially after the war, but these were brutally repressed by colonially aligned forces.

"After World War I and the failure of rural rebellion against European conquest, African nationalism initially adopted an organisational form in order to confront European expansion" (Randrianja, ibid, p. 20). This happened as the second wave of anti-colonial movements emerged in Africa to confront European occupation. These movements were generated principally by educated urban dwellers and supported by returning WWI African soldiers who had gained a new vision of the world. As Wendy McElroy (2004) has argued, WWI was the eye-opener for African political consciousness. It was an experience that allowed colonial peoples to take the first steps toward political independence.

At about the same time, Africans in the Diaspora, particularly those in North America, also started agitations, both intellectually and politically, for Africa to be freed of colonialism and for the establishment of a fair world order where all human beings were equal irrespective of skin colour, religion or geographical location. These agitations led to the formation of the Pan-African Congress, and in 1918, it issued a resolution urging that the natives of Africa be given the right to participate in government and that such governments should exist for the natives and not the natives for the governments.

Within the colonial territories too the agitations for political reform and rapid economic development intensified. The colonial governments frequently rejected such demands but that did not discourage colonized people from regularly evaluating their conditions and seeking new ways to improving them.

One such demand was for the improvement and expansion of educational facilities, which then offered Africans broader perspectives on the world and a better understanding of their subordinate position. It also empowered them with the requisite knowledge and linguistic means to resist colonial oppression. Across West Africa, this trend culminated in a broad sense of nationalism. Inspired by their colleagues in the diaspora, such as Edward W. Blyden, John P. Jackson, C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois, the leaders of African nationalism often set up newspapers and other forms of accessible media, to champion the nationalist cause.

By the end of WWI nationalist movements had proliferated across the continent and, as noted earlier, returning African soldiers added impetus to the

nationalist struggles for self-determination. The cumulative effects of these activities led to the weakening of the imperial empire. For example, in 1919 the *Native National Congress of South Africa* indicated the tremendous contribution that the South African Native Labour Corps had made to the war and demanded political recognition and participation. By 1939 nationalist groups in Africa could be found in nearly every colonized territory. Most of these nationalist movements operated within the individual territorial boundaries until the emergence of Pan-Africanism after the Second World War (WWII), which attempted to develop a cohesive continental movement for self-rule by Africans.

Cinema was an integral part of these political experiences even though for most part of the colonial period, the colonizers were the producer and the colonized only served as subjects and spectators.

CINEMA COMES TO AFRICA

Even though films had been introduced into many parts of Africa before the arrival of European missionaries, in most parts of Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, it was Christian missionaries who introduced films to native people.

There is a popular legend that cinema was first introduced to Africa in 1896, barely a year after the first public commercial show in Paris by the Lumière Brothers. There are suggestions that a bioscope may have mysteriously found its way to Cape Town, South Africa, with which public screenings of films were carried out. No details are available regarding this incident but in his article '*The Awakening African Cinema*' (UNESCO courier, 1962) French anthropological and documentary

filmmaker Jean Rouch confirms this. According to Rouch (1962) cinema made its debut in Africa in "the very first years after its invention" following the theft of a "theatregraph" by a vaudeville magician from the Alhambra Palace Theatre in London, with which he "introduced motion pictures into South Africa" (Rouch, 1962, p. 10).

There is the probability that at about the same period, Africa may have experienced the production and consumption of cinema in other parts, particularly in the Northern-most parts of the continent. According to documentary film historian Erik Barnouw (1993), shortly after the famous Paris show, the itinerant operators of the Lumière Brothers travelled to many countries, including Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, filming activities and giving public shows. "Within two years Lumière operators were roaming on every continent except Antarctica" (Barnouw, 1993, p. 11). According to Barnouw, the history of cinema in many countries started with the visit of a Lumière operator.

Ukadike (1994) supports this position when he suggests that films may have been projected in the Maghreb region as early as 1896. In fact, the Algerian born Felix Mesguich, one of the most popular of the Lumière operators may not only have projected some Lumière films in the Maghreb but also "made some films in that region in 1905" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 31). Similarly Keyan Tomaselli (1996) reports that a pathologist, Felix-Louis Regnault in 1895, used "chronophotography" to record a film about a Wolof woman (probably of Senegalese origin) making a pot. Most of these films are not accessible today.

According to the sources mentioned above, (and several others not cited here) most of the early foreigners who entered Africa with the cinematograph only used the continent as a canvass against which they could stage their stories and fantasies about Africa in which the customs and traditions of local peoples were often appropriated to support their fictional narratives. *White Goddess of the Wangora* (1913) by Hans Schomburgk is an example.

Between 1897 and 1903, George Méliès, one of the earliest masters of the art of cinema, is said to have made some films in Senegal – *Le Musulman Rigolo* (*The Funny Muslim* or *The Comic Muslim*) (1897), *Ali Bouffe à l'Huile* (*Ali Eats with Oil* or *Ali Bouf in Oil*) (1903), which mocks the Muslim Arab religious and culinary habits, to be followed by *Ali Barbouyou* (1903), (Ukadike, 1994; Shohat and Stam, 1994). By 1905 the people of Dakar in Senegal and surrounding communities were enjoying animated cartoons projected from mobile cinema vans.

Ukadike suggests that in the former British Colonial territory of Tangayika (now Tanzania) some of the earliest contacts of Africans with the cinema were the films of Martin Johnson. *On the Borderland of Civilization* (1920), *Simba* (1924-1928), and *Congorilla* (1929-1932) are examples. Ironically Africans took part in these productions "by acting or appearing before Johnson's camera, albeit as victims of exploitation" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 33). Beyond this point, in most parts of Africa, cinema was introduced by European colonial establishments.

Early cinema in Africa complimented the visual representations of the continent through early photography. Elements of Africa were photographically

recorded by European explorers, ostensibly to serve as documentary evidence of the continent and its people. Such photography, and later films, served both the missionary interests and colonial agenda. The images were interpreted mainly in Europe as evidence of the pre-conceived political, social and cultural inadequacies of Africa, and therefore as justification for the colonial and missionary intervention on the continent.

As Frances Harding (2003) has argued, "these images were now inserted into the narratives imagined by the colonizers' cultural ambassadors, primarily to illustrate the putative superiority of incomers to the indigenous people, thus justifying the various invasive enterprises" (Harding, 2003, p. 70). Two notable examples of such films are *Sanders of the River* (1933) by Alexander Korda and *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) by Robert Stevenson  which has been remade several times; in 1950 by Andrew Marton and Compton Bennett, in 1985 by J. Lee Thompson and in 2003 by Steve Boyum.

In pursuit of the justification to colonize Africa, cinema was introduced in most parts of the continent as a colonial enterprise and put to the service of the colonial exploitative agenda (Ukadike, 1994). Cinema supported the military and political exploitation of most parts of the continent by the colonial empires. The film camera became part of the technology that the colonizers employed in the exploration and expropriation of large parts of the continent.

Alain P. Nganang (2003) argues in a discussion of French colonial incursions into Africa, that the introduction of the automobile and the camera into tropical Africa

did not only serve to record the racist and often fictive imagination of what the African was expected to be, but also served to demonstrate the ability of the colonizer to master the hitherto impenetrable continent through the use of technology, the kind of advanced technology that they sought to prove Africans did not have and therefore were inferior. The camera then served to produce images that validated the colonial conquest and the justification of the colonial enterprise.

Following the success of the missionaries in showing films to Africans and to open up the communities for other expatriate habitation, Africa soon became a location for many filmmakers who sought exotic landscapes and cultures. Earlier attempts at filmmaking did not focus on the humanity of Africans or on the natural beauty of the land, nor did filmmakers concern themselves with the socio-cultural dynamics of the people they filmed.

## THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR COLONIAL CINEMA

Cinema during the colonial period was ironically significant for the development of national cinema in Ghana because the underpinning political perspectives inherent in colonial filmmaking later provided the impetus for a counter cinema by indigenous Ghanaian filmmakers. These perspectives, particularly relating to representation and the presumed European knowledge of Africa and Africans, were not unique to Ghana though.

Edward Said (1995) has observed British colonial attitudes towards Egypt. Said has described how Arthur James Balfour lectured the British House of Commons on June 13, 1910 on "the problems with which we have to deal in Egypt" (Said, 1995, p. 31). A man said to have had an enviably long list of credentials, achievements and experiences, and an almost impeccable academic record, Balfour is said to have spoken with great 'knowledge' and 'authority' on the issues concerning the colonisation of Egypt. According to Said, Balfour's remarks and his justification for the continued occupation of Egypt were dominated by two main themes: "knowledge and power." These two themes were to serve as the ideological foundations of imperial authority in many parts of Africa and other nations that fell under the rule of the British.

Using Balfour and the power and authority that he appeared to represent, or rather which he (Balfour) presumed, Said argues that the claim of the imperial power to the knowledge about the colonised was used to justify their assertion of the power of speech and representation on behalf of the subjugated. Said quotes Balfour as saying,

> "England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt; for the Egyptians, Egypt is what England has occupied and now governs; foreign occupation therefore becomes 'the very basis' of contemporary Egyptian civilisation; Egypt requires, indeed insists upon, British occupation" (Said, 1995, p. 34)

The Egyptian, and by inference the colonised, is not given the choice to speak for him/herself. After all, Balfour is reported to have said about the Egyptians that,

"…they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves. Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies" (Said, ibid, p. 35).

This presumed knowledge of the colonised was to be put to maximum use in British colonial projects, the implications of which for the colonised was to have "their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power" (Said, ibid, p. 36). These projects led to the imposition of religions alien to Africans, the imposition of British culture and the establishment of mono-crop economies, the harvests of which were channelled directly to the benefit of industrialisation in Western countries.

Mudimbe (1994) has also pointed out the dominance of Africa by foreign powers through a claim to unsurpassable knowledge about Africa and therefore a

superiority of existence and a moral obligation to embark on a civilising mission. *The Idea of Africa* (1994) delves into a wide range of sources that Mudimbe synthesizes in an exploration of the origins and development of the negative European conceptions of Africa. From Greco-Roman histories, Romano-Christian and Missionary decrees, to 20th Century art, Mudimbe interrogates European ideas of Africa by their assumption of authoritative knowledge of the continent and its people. That Africans were considered a-historical, savage, and unintelligent and needing salvation (aka, civilisation) European style emerged from these so-called authoritative literature and art.

In introductory remarks Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1997) note that the business of 'knowing' other people had for long been the most formidable ally of economic and political control and imperial dominance and also became the mode by which the colonised were persuaded to know themselves as subordinate to Europe. They argue that "[a] consequence of this process of knowing became the export to the colonies of European language, literature and learning as part of a civilising mission which involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control" (Ashcroft et al, 1997, p. 1).

Cinema joined the imported European language, literature and learning, to determine the presumed knowledge of Africans by Europeans and the privileged position of the latter over the former. It was a period that saw the production of films about Africa by foreigners and importation into Africa of many other films that sought to degrade the personality of African people. Many of these films are

inaccessible now, but examples will include *Congorila*, *King Solomon's Mines*, (noted earlier) and *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) by Elmo Lincoln.

Shohat and Stam (1994) have argued that the story of colonialism was told from the colonizer's perspective through a combination of cinema and narrative. According to them, the Western imperial project rationalised the human cost of colonial domination by assuming a philanthropic mission to Africa, and other colonized territories. Relating their arguments to cinema, they point out that,

"…dominant cinema has spoken for the 'winners' of history in films which idealized the colonial enterprise as a philanthropic 'civilizing mission' motivated by a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny. Programmatically negative portrayals helped rationalize the human cost of the imperial enterprise" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 109).

Whilst using cinema to justify colonialism, the coloniser also applied censorship laws that prevented portrayals of Europeans to native Africans that may appear uncomplimentary. For this reason, films that were shown to African audiences were re-cut in order to remove "scenes intended to ridicule or criticise unfairly" British ways of life, or scenes that portrayed "White men in a state of degradation amidst native surroundings, or using violence towards natives, especially Chinese, negroes and Indians," or scenes that showed "equivocal situations between men of one race and girls of another race" (ibid, p. 112).

Shohat and Stam report that by 1928 the British censorship codes applied to global audiences to the extent that even American producers had to respect them. The censorship worked in two ways. Firstly, the codes sought to prevent "the portrayal of the white man and woman… in a way that might degrade him or her in the eyes of the native, nor will they permit anything in films tending to incite the natives against the governing race" (ibid, p. 112). Secondly, the colonial authorities prevented, as much as possible, indigenous film production that might rival their own and also opposed any influences by indigenous film production, particularly as Egyptian and Moroccan cinemas were beginning to grow.

Whilst most of these films were imported from abroad, there was an increased interest in Africa as a subject and a backdrop for films. There was also a considerable increase in political and economic readjustment characterised by renewed interests in the continent as centres for commerce, investment, and settlement. As a result, the period between the two world wars particularly saw an increase in film production in which native people were regularly made to perform various roles in front of cameras held by foreigners (Woodham, 1989).

The return of peace after WWI allowed filmmakers to turn their attention once more to the "exotic scenes which had been clearly demonstrated in the cinema before the outbreak of war" (Roberts, 1987, p. 196). This renewed interest generated many types of films, and prominent among them were the travel adventure films such as *From Senegal to Timbuktu* (1924) and *From Red Sea to Blue Nile* (1925).

According to Roberts, during the interwar years, British filmmakers took a particular interest in educational films for the colonies.

"In the course of the 1920s and 1930s British filmmakers began to present African subjects for educational purposes: travel film was appropriately re-edited, or simply re-issued, while new expeditions addressed themselves to specifically ethnographic tasks. In the Gold Coast in 1920 the administrator R. S. Rattray made a film in the course of his ethnographic research on the Asante" (Roberts, 1987, pp. 196-197).

Apart from largely controlling film production in the colonised nations of Africa, the colonisers, particularly the French and the British, sought to know African audiences in particular ways that would justify the kinds of films that were shown to them. The result of such endeavour was what appeared to be the first studies of African film audiences.

One of such studies was conducted in 1929 by Julian Huxley, who had acquired three films of different levels of 'difficulty' to be tested on school children in Tanganyika and Uganda. In his report, he concluded that "education was the 'intellectual hormone' that could stimulate the development of Africa, and the cinema was one of the central media of this process" (Skinner, 2001, p. 4).

Skinner quotes part of Huxley's report which was intended to support the immense potential of cinema in education. I reproduce it below.

"The African enjoys the film with an almost childlike delight; he will come to see a film where he would not attend a lecture; and in the present state of his development, what he can see on a film makes a much stronger impression upon him than what he can hear... there is no aspect of native welfare which could not quite legitimately be encouraged by them in this way" (Huxley, cited in Skinner, 2001, p. 4).

The condescension in the above quote is of no significance to this study at this point. One can easily notice a predilection to demeaning Africans in order to achieve European supremacy, and within this context, an audience study of Africans will lean towards their negative portrayal. What is interesting is that such experiments were conducted at all, and one of the most significant was the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment.

THE BANTU EDUCATIONAL KINEMA EXPERIMENT

The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), sometimes referred to as the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE) in some texts, was a cinema project jointly sponsored by the International Missionary Council, the Carnegie Foundation and the British Colonial Office (Jane Banfield, 1964) and took place between 1935 and 1937 in East and Central Africa. It included a psychological study

of African film audiences and their responses to various genres of films. As such, the BEKE is also probably the earliest type of cinema audience study to have been conducted on the African continent. The project also involved the production of films specifically for African audiences. The BEKE was a colonial initiative aimed at exploiting African audience sensibilities for both political propaganda and socio-cultural indoctrination.

According to Neil Parsons (2004), an American Congressionalist, John Merle Davis, proposed in 1930 to conduct a comparative study of peasant responses to cinema. The experiment was intended to find out how cinema impacted peasant societies in Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South Africa and the Soviet Union, who were beginning to experience industrialization. However, the Carnegie Foundation, which offered the most money for the experiment preferred a different type of experiment which became the BEKE. Some funding was also provided by some East African governments.

Responsibility for executing the BEKE was entrusted to G. C. Latham, a former director of African education in Northern Rhodesia, and L. A. Notcutt, an amateur filmmaker who managed sisal plantations in East Africa. The experiment was conducted by the colonial authorities based on their conviction that cinema presented the best means of political propaganda and mass mobilization for the achievement of colonial social and cultural indoctrination. Usually the messages of propaganda films dealt with some political agenda or some social or economic message.

As Roberts (1987) recalls, the subjects of the films "encompassed technical instruction, especially in agriculture; propaganda for government health and savings services; and simple entertainment. At the suggestion of a provincial commissioner, one film was made to attract labor to the new Geita goldmine" (Roberts, 1987, p. 201).

Parsons (2004) reports that between 1935 and 1937 the BEKE made thirty-five 16mm films about improving the hygiene and living conditions of rural folk. The films were said to be of poor technical quality with simple-minded plots. There were colonial agriculturalists, educationists and medical officers involved in the production of BEKE films. According to Roberts, the BEKE engaged the services of local people to perform various roles and also to be trained in some technical tasks in the film production process and in exhibition. However, Parsons argues, in spite of attempts to integrate local communities into the filmmaking processes, the characters of the films and plots were never indigenized, whilst attempts at post-dubbing the voices of actors was never successful.

Moreover the filmmakers faced the daunting task of producing the same films in many different African languages to meet the particular linguistic needs of various communities. Banfield (1964) notes that the films had original commentary in English and translations into at least eight African languages, and were on subjects "ranging from the Post Office savings banks, erosion, infant malaria, Boy Scouts, and coffee marketing" (Banfield, 1964, p. 18).

Parsons (2004) observes that the plots and characterization of these colonial films were based on the simplistic contrast between 'Mister Wise and Mister Foolish', an analogy of good judgments against wrong ones, but couched in quite puerile narratives aimed at the so-called unintelligent and unsophisticated minds of Africans.

When the British established the BEKE, their intentions were not to develop a culture of filmmaking and viewing in Africa. Rather, the experiment was based in part on the idea that Africans should see films that would educate them on their roles in the colony rather than films from the West (Goucher et al, 1998).

The BEKE was adjudged to be successful and both the Colonial Office and the International Missionary Council were keen to see further developments. However, these hopes were frustrated by some East African governments, who declined to offer any more support to the experiment. "Many local officials were wholly sceptical, while others believed that such efforts were best left to local initiative" (Roberts, 1987, p. 201). Nigeria was cited as an example, where several educational films on health had been produced by William Sellers with equipment provided by the Colonial Development Fund, and where he had established a mobile health propaganda unit.

According to Roberts, it was the professional and quality work of Sellers that impressed the Colonial Officers sufficiently for the decision to be made in 1939 to create Colonial Film Units in other colonies in order to produce propaganda films to

support the British WWII efforts. Sellers was in charge of these productions and worked mainly in British West Africa.

The BEKE inadvertently set the stage for indigenous African film production, especially in most parts of Anglophone Africa. Ghana did not participate in the BEKE but at the end of this experiment, when the Colonial Film Units were set up, Ghana was a beneficiary. But, having looked at Africa in general, I will turn my attention to the specific case of Ghana and describe how cinema was introduced to native people here.

EARLY CINEMA IN GHANA

In Ghana it is suggested that the first contact of any people here with cinema dates back to the period around 1910 when a trader of the Basel Mission, George Geppert projected slides to groups of people at the YMCA at Christianborg, a suburb of Accra, as part of Bible classes (Dadson, 1998). According to research conducted by Dadson, a writer on Arts and Culture, for the *Daily Graphic* newspaper of Ghana, Geppert's slide shows were possibly the first experience of projected images by local people here.

The Basel missionaries belonged to a German "peasant missionary church" who ventured into Africa because of their "desire to find free land to which German

peasant communities could escape" the spread of German urban industrialisation (Ranger, 1983, p. 213).

Later Baptist and Catholic missionaries joined in the effort to use cinema for evangelism albeit as part of a colonial programme of getting acquainted with Africans. Once the colonialists achieved contact with most parts of the country, they explored the propaganda potentials of cinema both to reinforce their colonial authority and to keep native people obedient and dutiful. Many films, both documentary and fiction, were made that sought to teach lessons in citizenship, taxation and hygiene.

Other films were made about the economies of the colonies, mainly to showcase the achievements of the British Empire. For example, as Roberts (1987) reports, in 1913, Cadbury (the British chocolate maker) made a film to advertise their model factory at Bournville. In 1930 they also made *Message of the Drum* "a film about cocoa production and marketing in the Gold Coast, followed in 1933 by one about coastal forts and fishermen" (Roberts, 1987, p. 197).

Between 1927 and 1928 many other films were made in the Gold Coast showing local industries, markets, traditional rulers and many development projects such as roads, railways, bridges, mining activities and the opening of the deep water harbour at Takoradi.

According to Roberts, most of this material was later re-cut and put together to produce a film, *West Africa Calling* (1928), "a film sponsored by the Conservative

party (then in office): This underscored the progress achieved under British rule and West Africa's value for British manufacturers" (Roberts, 1987, p. 198).

Whilst the colonialists largely explored the potential of film for mainly political ends, the earliest commercial film shows are credited to a few individual entrepreneurs, including a Ghanaian. This is a slight departure from the experience in some African countries where the missionaries and colonialists were the key players in pioneering the commercialisation of cinema. It must be noted that such private initiatives were limited to a few urban centres and mainly in the more developed southern half of the country. In most parts of the country, however, it was the missionaries, a few itinerant exhibitors and later the mobile cinema units of the Information Services Department of Government that ventured outside the urban areas.

Dadson's report and my personal conversations with Adjesu (2004) and Hesse (2004), indicate that as early as 1913 the first commercial film exhibition enterprises were beginning to thrive in a few urban centres. For example, the W. Bartholomew Company established a commercial film viewing house called the *Merry Villas Cinematograph Palace*, which admitted mostly expatriates. Within a few years other entrepreneurs ventured into commercial film exhibition. A cinema theatre in an area of Accra called Azuma was one of such centres. There is no information available about this theatre beyond the fact that it was one of the earliest to be established. Who built it, what films were shown and who were the audiences remain, for now, unanswered questions.

Not long after these early initiatives, a local businessman, Alfred John Kabu Ocansey also set about to establish the first chain of film theatres in several major cities. The most popular theatre in the chain was *The Accra Palladium Cinema*, which opened in 1925. Ocansey exhibited silent films to paying audiences using a hand-cranked projector. Audiences were noticed to engage actively in the narratives through commentary and loud reactions. For example, audiences were said to shout and urge the operator of the projector to crank faster when there was a chase sequence, a fight or some other action (Dadson, 1998).

People easily identified heroes and villains and soon, terminologies such as "killer" used in reference to villains, and "jack" used to identify the protagonist, emerged. Often, the protagonist was an intelligent, strong and victorious character who defeated the villain at the end of the narrative. Again audiences knew that when the villain died the film naturally came to an end. Soon another popular statement emerged that portrayed the critical appraisal of cinema by Ghanaian audiences. In the northern parts of the country and among West African immigrants to Ghana, when the protagonist, villain or a main character in a film was killed, people would rise to leave and did not wait for the denouement. For them, "Jack yaa mutu, cine yaa kaare", a Hausa (West African language) statement that translates as "If Jack is dead, then the film is over".

Ocansey cinemas later incorporated gramophone sounds to accompany the silent films, and by 1933 when colour cinema emerged, Ocansey did not miss the opportunity to continue the full exploitation of the business of film exhibition.

Possessing the largest chain of cinema theatres meant a monopoly of film distribution and exhibition in the country. It is not clear then why this did not develop into a well-structured business of distribution in Ghana and neighbouring countries.

Probably his closest competitor at the time was John Holt Bartholomew, a British Merchandising company that used a section of its premises to show films to paying audiences. Whilst Ocansey used the gramophone to provide sound for the silent films, the Bartholomew theatre employed an organ player, who only provided music before the film show itself.

Besides these pioneering entrepreneurs, there were several itinerant film exhibitors who toured small towns and villages, where they would usually hire the walled compounds of large homesteads and charge entrance fees. Dadson reports that such occasions were very social. Not only did the audiences externalise their appreciation of the films but they also engaged in conversations with the operators.

Dadson mentions one such popular operator, Ataa Joe, who would usually run live commentary in a local language, to accompany the films he showed. Sometimes these commentaries did not relate directly to the film images but provided humour and subtext to the film's narrative. It was also observed that often the commentary ran a few seconds ahead of the narrative. When the picture went bad or the projector developed a problem, the eager audiences might shout obscenities at Ataa Joe in order to get him to fix things quickly. Joe himself might shout back at the crowd. What was interesting in such exchange was that there was really no animosity between exhibitor and audience, but a common sense of shared euphoria, socialisation and humour.

John Wilson, a former Government Information Officer in the Gold Coast has described the work of commentators on films during the silent era, such as Ataa Joe. In an interview with a Jamaican writer, Una Marson in April 1944, Wilson describes the creativity and humour of these commentators as follows;

"It's a very interesting fact that, while we use silent films, the effect on the audience is the same as seeing and hearing a sound film; because the interpreter (*commentator*) now begins to play a most important part. As the films are shown, he gives a specially prepared commentary in the correct African language, full of local references, fable and traditional lore. He cracks topical jokes and even introduces his own sound effects. Everything is dependent on his skill; and these men are highly trained and hold very important posts" (Wilson, 1944, p. 112).

The commentator thus becomes a very important mediator between the film text and the audiences. Based on his/her understanding of local culture, lore and wisdom, his creativity in making spontaneous jokes and witty comments offers a unique perspective within which the audience can begin to appreciate the texts. Moreover, the dialogue that might be established between audience and commentator created new social consciousness and particular understandings of film texts.

These accounts comprise the beginnings of cinema in Ghana. In spite of the significant roles played by individual business men in the commercial popularity of

cinema here, it was the colonialists who controlled production in the country and reached out to more people in diverse locations with films. So far we have noticed the shifts in colonial policy which determined the shift in approaches to filmmaking. The next chapter examines a continuation of these shifts and the resulting cinema that people in the country experienced.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM PROPAGANDA TO EDUCATIONAL CINEMA- WWII AND AFTER (1939-1957)

Reports and oral accounts indicate that most of the films that were shown to native Ghanaians during WWII were newsreels and documentaries as part of systematic and well-designed propaganda programmes aimed at winning local sympathies and support for the colonial war efforts. Furthermore, cinema during the war and immediately after, partook in the consolidation of colonial authority over native peoples by presenting films that called attention to British generosity, colonial development efforts and to justify their continuous rule (Paris, 2002).

Ironically, WWII also provided an opportunity for Africans to realise their capacities, and therefore to have reasons to demand a share in governance and equal economic and social privileges. Returning African soldiers from Burma and other war zones, for example, better appreciated their humanity, and discovered that their 'White Masters' had the same human frailties, emotional desires and shortcomings just like them. This realisation also coincided with rising nationalism across the African continent. Consequently, a combination of the experiences of war veterans and the knowledge of home-grown intellectuals, who now better appreciated their colonised situations, gave rise to demands for immediate change.

The ensuing political activities informed the kinds of films that were produced by the Colonial Film Units and shown to Africans via the mobile cinema units of the Information Service Departments, particularly as a response to the shifting political and social tensions of the war period and after.

This chapter examines this part of the history in four main parts. First, I trace the rise of nationalist movements, then the development of cinema during the war, followed by the

shift in film policy after the war, and conclude with the story about setting up a film training school for Africans.

THE RISE OF NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

Even though nationalist activities in Africa can be traced back to the period of early colonialism, it was after WWII that such activities became intense and coherent partly through the influence of Pan-Africanism, to pave the way for African self-governance. According to Wendy McElroy (2004) there had been various forms of African resistance to colonialism but these had always been brutally suppressed. However, the publication of the *Atlantic Charter*, an agreement between President Franklin Roosevelt of the USA and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Britain, gave hope to colonised peoples of Africa, particularly since the third clause of the document affirmed that every people had the right to choose the kind of government under which they wished to live.

At the same time the US, the USSR and the *Labour Party* in Britain spoke strongly against the colonisation of other people. Spurred on by these developments, labour movements, such as those in Nigeria, blossomed. In Nigeria, for example, the unions joined forces to form the *Nigerian Trades Union Congress*. Moreover Egypt had already gained independence as far back as 1922, and the rest of Africa watched with interest as other colonies, such as India, Ceylon and some countries in Asia, made progress towards independence, or were lost to the Japanese in the war (McElroy, 2004).

In many parts of Central Africa, it was also during the forties and fifties that African acquiescence to Portuguese colonisation began to weaken, and various associations were formed to set the pace for the liberation movements of the 1960s. For example, the *Party of the United Struggle of Africans of Angola* (Partido da Luta Unido dos Africanos de Angola – PLUA), which was formed in 1953, later combined efforts with other nationalist

organisations to form the *Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola* (MPLA) in 1956. Together with the *National Front for the Liberation of Angola* (FNLA) and UNITA, the MPLA was to spearhead the liberation struggle, led prominently by Eduardo Dos Santos.

In the Gold Coast, by 1942 the colonial government had taken the lead among British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean to respond to incessant demands by native people for a share in government. As a consequence, the colonial governor, Sir Alan Burns, appointed two distinguished Ghanaians to serve on the executive council. One of them, Nana Sir Ofori Atta I, was a traditional ruler, the Paramount Chief of Akyem Abuakwa, and the other was Sir Arku Korsah, a lawyer who would later become the first Ghanaian Chief Justice after independence. In spite of this gesture, the people had no effective representation on the executive council.

In Nigeria, the *National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons* (NCNC) was formed in 1944 and led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, to champion Nigerian nationalism and the pursuit of independence. The following year, 1945, the 5th Pan African Congress was held in Manchester, UK. It was attended by many African delegates some of who would later emerged to lead their respective countries to independence and after. For example, Hasting Banda became the President of Malawi, Nkrumah the President of Ghana, and Jomo Kenyatta the President of Kenya.

When in 1947 Britain granted independence to India and Pakistan it encouraged Africans to intensify their efforts at self-government. India particularly had a great deal of influence on African nationalist movements. The role of Mahatma Ghandi in Indian nationalism and independence, particularly his doctrine of non-violence and his resistance against racial prejudice had a huge impact on African nationalist. Nkrumah's policy of positive defiance against British rule in the Gold Coast is an example.

Shivji (2003) argues that the nationalism of the post-WWII Africa was a movement for people who had been denied their humanity by centuries of slavery and colonialism. Their struggle, according to Shivji, was against imperialism and African self-discovery. For example, in Kenya, the arbitrary occupation of native lands, and the institution of harsh colonialist working conditions, unfair laws, an abusive tax system and a discriminatory social system caused a great deal of resentment among Africans for the European settlers, and this added to the nurturing of African nationalism during the post-war period.

By 1951, it became necessary to draft a new constitution in Ghana since the Burns constitution did not satisfy the nationalist, and this paved the way for as many as eight Ghanaians from the Convention People's Party (CPP) to be appointed as Ministers of State. One of them was Kwame Nkrumah who was made leader of Government Business, and in the following year, 1952, became Prime Minister. By this time Ghana was on course towards achieving political independence in 1957. I will discuss this process in detail later.

On December 6, 1958, more than a year after Ghana had attained independence, the All Africa People's Conference (AAPC) opened in Accra, Ghana, following a series of conferences of independent African states. The AAPC was attended by over five hundred delegates from political parties, trade unions, and organisations involved in African nationalist activities (Shivji, 2003). The leading ideologies that informed the conference were Nkrumah's 'African Personality', Senghor's 'Negritude', Kaunda's 'Humanism' and Nyerere's *Ujamaa*. All these ideologies expressed one common theme- nationalism.

However, two major ideological forces drove the African quest for self-assertion and African political realization. These were Négritude and, to a wider extent, Pan-Africanism. These two ideological movements are note-worthy because they informed a tremendous amount of literary and artistic production which augmented the political demands for autonomy, and later, the consolidation of independence once it had been won.

*Négritude*

When Négritude was born in the 1930s it set the political stage on which Africans began to oppose colonialism and its prejudices. Soon the movement was to influence a wide range of literary works that "challenged the colonial enterprise by mocking its excesses or undercutting its epistemic presuppositions" (Harrow, 1999, p. xiii).

Négritude was launched as an ideological movement in the 1930s by a coalition of intellectuals from Africa and of African descent. The major proponents of the movement were Aimé Césaire, Alioune Diop, Léon-Gontran Damas and Leopold Sédar Senghor. Their literary objective was to celebrate the best in African culture, heritage and history. Politically, they aimed to unite Africans with the one identity, that is, one that recognises and celebrates the uniqueness of the African personality- physically, spiritually and culturally.

The proponents of Négritude sought to state the visible fact of the Blackman's blackness, for which reason he can claim authenticity and difference, and yet be equal to the rest of humanity. Their argument was that, after all, it was based on the same fact of blackness that the Blackman was ambushed on his own land, enslaved, demeaned, colonised and exploited. Therefore, according to Négritude, rather than bow down in the shame of inferiority, the Blackman must reject any notions of an abstract and colourless humanity, and instead claim his blackness, uphold it with dignity and face up to Whites or other detractors.

Négritude is usually defined from two perspectives. On the one hand it is a political philosophy that paraphrases the resistance of Black people against all forms of colonial discrimination and oppression and the institutionalisation of a colour-complex society in which the Blackman is identified as inherently inferior to the White, thus perpetuating a colonial rational of the coloniser abrogating to himself a superior political and social position. Négritude sought to rally Africans together behind the same ideological and philosophical principles based on the total consciousness of belonging to the beautiful and proud black race,

and on the strength of that consciousness, reject the political and social domination of the West.

From a second perspective, Négritude reflects the creative literary and artistic productions of the African intellectuals who formed the Négritude Movement and used their work to promote the cultural identity of the African by recalling with nostalgia a glorious past and also painting an exotic picture of a beautiful, sensuous and motherly Africa. It was an effort of resistance against the positioning of the African by the 'power' and 'knowledge' of dominant (domineering) Western representations.

In spite of the good intentions, Négritude has been criticised for being incapable of solving Africa's problems, and that the concept itself was essentialist and racist. The emphasis on 'Blackness' was said to reflect an 'antiracist racism'. Critics of Négritude felt that propagating an Africa-centred racism was not the appropriate rsponse to Euro-American racism.

For example, in a study titled *Négritude et négrologues* (1972) Stanislas Adotevi rejects Senghor's racial explanation of Africa's economic and political experiences and prefers a Marxist model to understand global capitalist exploitation which is blamed for the suffering endured by African people.

Other critics, mainly in Anglophone Africa, considered Négritude to be ideologically narcissistic with no economic prospects. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel literature laureate, is said to have stated that "the tiger does not stalk about crying his tigritude" (Soyinka, cited in Nesbitt, n.d.), meaning that there was no reason for Black people to proclaim the obvious nature of their blackness.

Nesbitt (n.d.), discusses some of these critics, such as Edourd Glissant, a former student of Césaire, who argued against the dissolution of black culture in the cultural imperialism of the West, but which must not limit the former in a provincial entrapment.

Other critics, such as the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé does not support the idea of black Antilleans returning to Africa, and offers a trenchant warning against the fetishization of blackness (Nesbitt, n.d.). Nesbitt mentions Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, who collectively criticised the concept of Negritude for being "a sentimental and empty trap… an illusory 'racial' community" and a "mythologization of Africa" (ibid).

Whilst Negritude bore a heavy burden of criticisms of essentialism and racism, another nationalist movement with an international appeal was to appear with similar ideological constructions, but different assumptions which supposedly did not exhibit the same levels of essentialism and racism.

This was Pan-Africanism, which also sought the dignity of Africans, the development of a uniquely African personality, albeit not based on the fact of blackness in terms of skin pigmentation. Moreover, Pan-Africanism sought the political, economic and cultural unity of Africans. Pan-Africanism also offered an ideological space for African film practice and for the construction of national cinemas, at least in a few countries in Africa that attempted to establish national cinema cultures. As we shall see later, some African filmmakers were inspired by the nationalist assumptions, presumptions and aspirations of Pan-Africanism.

### *Pan-Africanism*

There is no clear-cut definition of Pan-Africanism as many such attempts are usually shrouded in controversy. Pan-Africanism is understood as a set of assumptions and principles that have shaped political action, literary and other artistic production and socio-cultural theories. Rather than discuss definitions, I will attempt to sketch a picture of an ideology that is framed in intellectual and philosophical traditions and developed over time. Suffice it to say for now, that Pan-Africanism is an ideological construction of pre-African independence and pre-American civil rights actions that sought to elevate the status of African-Americans in

American society, to liberate Africans from colonialism, to establish a cultural union between Africans and their compatriots in the diasporas, and ultimately to unite all African states into one nation.

The ultimate goal of Pan-Africanism is 'A United Africa'. In its most obvious version, Pan-Africanism posits the political unification of all African nations into one, to which Africans of the Diaspora can then return. In a more social-cultural context, Pan-Africanism has been the ideological basis for literary and artistic projects that aim to bring together people of African ancestry. To achieve this goal, the proponents of the concept formulated various theories and social-cultural assumptions which were to lay the intellectual and ideological foundation for the construction of a united Africa.

Pan-Africanism as a concept assumed several philosophical positions often directed towards the avoidance of wars, to ensure stable civil societies, equitable distribution of wealth and natural resources, to bring about the unity of peoples – particularly in Africa – and to eliminate all vestiges of the slave trade and colonialism.

Pan-Africanism was a form of global consciousness with the notion that no Black person would be free until all Black people were free. It emerged to confront the old race-based global consciousness which formed the basis for capitalist expansionism. Pan-Africanism was aimed at defending human equality and human rights, resisting racial discrimination and organizing the processes that led to the liberation of black people from subordination. "The key concepts here have been the 'redemption of Africa' and 'Africa for the Africans' (Geiss, 1974, p. 3).

As an intellectual movement Pan-Africanism started with the works of Delany, Crummel, Blyden and Du Bois. But as an institution, it emerged from the activities started by Henry Sylvester Williams, a London barrister born in Trinidad, who organised the first global political meeting of people of the 'African race' in 1897. The first Pan-African conference to

address the problems of African people worldwide was held in London in 1900 and convened by Sylvester-Williams during which delegates campaigned for African peoples' rights.

The term Pan-Africanism may have emerged from these earlier meetings, but the first known conference that actually made use of the signifier 'Pan-African' was held in 1919, organised by W. E. B. Du Bois. This conference had the aim to gather Africans and people of African descent to discuss the conditions of Africans under colonialism. A series of other Pan-African congresses were to follow during which there was consensus in the intellectual community that the world must recognise the equality of races, that there must be a diffusion of democracy in Africa and an eventual return of Black people to their homeland – Africa.

Following the emergence of independence agitations in Africa after WWII, the philosophy and principles of Pan-Africanism served as the battle cry, and the focus of the movement shifted from its Diaspora foundations to the continent. In 1945 the 5th Pan-African congress was held in Manchester, England, and was led by Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere from Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Nnandi Azikiwe of Nigeria, who sought a more active and concrete pursuit of the main Pan-African ideology – African independence and unity.

It was against this historical backdrop that cinema gradually shifted from its colonial focus towards more nationalist pursuits, particularly after some Africans had acquired skills in filmmaking and could tell their own stories. As a point of departure I will examine propaganda cinema during WWII.

CINEMA IN GHANA DURING WWII (1939-1945) – PROPAGANDA

By the start of WWII in 1939, colonial authorities believed that film surpassed all other inventions in its potential for creating propaganda (Waley, 1942). In 1939 the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), which had been set up to promote British culture and trade in the

colonies, was disbanded and its Film Unit was taken over by the General Post Office (GPO) with Grierson still in charge of the unit. By the time WWII broke out Britain already possessed a vigorous tradition of documentary filmmaking dating back some ten years. That experience was employed in the service of British war-time propaganda under the aegis of the Ministry of Information, the "department responsible for government wartime documentaries" (Waley, 1942, p. 605), and the British Colonial Film Unit (BCFU).

In the British colonies, films were initially produced from a central production unit in Rhodesia, East Africa, known then as the Central African Film Unit (CAFU), whose activities were supported by the Rhodesia Information Service's (RIS) Film Unit. For more than three decades, ending with the attainment of African independence, the CAFU and RIS produced hundreds of films that were distributed particularly across Anglophone Africa.

The films mainly represented and reinforced colonial policies, whether it was for the manifest colonial exploitative objectives, or the presumed British partnership with the colonies that alluded to a metropolitan support for independence. At the start of war, the Information Services Department (ISD) of the Gold Coast was set up in Accra with the responsibility of conveying information, particularly newsreels and other films about the progress of the war to the people. The ISD for example distributed many films made by both the CAFU and the RIS.

For this reason, many of the earliest records of colonial history are films made in the colonies (Goucher et al, 1998). Waley (1942) reports that by 1942 the Ministry's Central Film Library held 217 titles made up of war time documentaries, newsreels and short fiction stories ('five minute films' as they were then called), many of which were on health, education and agriculture. This focus of the films was not surprising as the man who headed the CFU, William Sellers, as said to have enormous experience about Africa, particularly in the areas of health and education. He was tasked with mobilising support, through the use of films, for the

war effort throughout the empire (Paris, 1990). However, according to Paris, the activities of the unit eventually focussed on Africa south of the Sahara since other film units had already emerged in "India and elsewhere" (Paris, 1990, p. 826) to undertake similar tasks.

During the war, the CFU served two main discernible objectives- (1) "the emphasis on what the white European has contributed to the quality of life; in effect, justifying their presence in Africa as the sole agents of progress and improvement" (ibid, p. 826) and (2) an agenda for cinema that was integrated with other media- newspapers, magazines, radio and many Information bureaux- for direct propaganda to influence opinions and attitudes of local people about the war and to encourage recruitment and financial/material support (Waley, 1942; Wilson, 1944; Killingray, 1982; Holbrook, 1985).

According to Ghanaian filmmaker, Egbert Adjesu (personal communication, 2004), cinema was used by the British Colonial authorities in the Gold Coast to propagate information about the war in order to win the sympathies and support of local people and get them to contribute young and strong men, and material things towards the war effort. This use of cinema, he said, was not isolated but was a part of an elaborate multi-media propaganda campaign to rally and sustain enthusiasm and support for the British. As Holbrook has argued, "[the] Gold Coast became the site for the most extensive propaganda initiative in West Africa during the Second World War" (Holbrook, 1985, p. 348).

By 1940, the British colonial authorities had started a comprehensive programme of itinerant cinema screenings using a mobile cinema van that the ISD had acquired. Often a local interpreter would keep pace with the film and run commentary in the local dialect. The term 'Aban Cine' meaning government cinema, which pertained to free and communal movie-watching, became popular, just as 'Silima Ife' in Nigeria. The films that were shown included pictures from the war, slapstick comedies featuring Charlie Chaplin and other films on the progress of development in the colonies.

Adjesu fondly remembers these communal screenings. He told me that "[One] of the slogans that became popular then was "BBB" which stood for "Buy British Bombers to bomb Berlin" (personal communication, 2004). This slogan reflected the ideological orientation of the kinds of films that were shown to local Ghanaian audiences. The purpose was to convince people that Britain had a just cause in the war against the villains in Berlin. Most of the films, according to Adjesu, portrayed an invincible British side that possessed superior weapons and the slogan BBB was geared towards encouraging recruitment and financial contributions from Ghanaians to buy Spitfire combat aircrafts.

In a report published in 1940, H. E. Sir Arnold W. Hodson, then Governor of the Gold Coast, wrote enthusiastically about the support that Chiefs, Headmen and local people were offering to the British war effort. For example, Hodson claims that, although the Gold Coast had a small territory and population, its contribution of man-power to the war compared "very favourably with the other African crown colonies" (Hodson, 1940, p. 303). According to Hodson, the Gold Coast not only supplied a large corps of army personnel, but also made financial contributions into various war charities. According to Hodson's report:

"To the Red Cross and similar Societies the sum of £9,000 has already been contributed, and the sum of £10,000 was collected in a week towards the 'Spitfire Fund' which has been started for the purchase of such types of aeroplanes as the Imperial Government most desires. The Chiefs are at the time of writing busy establishing an organisation further to swell this fund and a very ready response is anticipated" (Hodson, ibid, pp. 304-305).

But Holbrook (1985) argues that support for the war by local people was not as enthusiastic as official reports would have everyone believe. Most native people thought the war was a Whiteman's war and had nothing to do with them. Moreover, the departure of the

young and energetic men from villages meant a loss of man-power for farm activities. Holbrook argues that few men volunteered for the forces, and the colonial government had to use other tactics to recruit. These included quotas for Chiefs, forced conscriptions and the appropriation of technical man-power from the mining companies and cocoa farms.

As a young man growing up in Accra, Adjesu remembers the activities of British and American soldiers, and later in life, he was able to reflect on the level of propaganda, particular with cinema. At a point, whilst still a student at the Achimota Secondary School in Accra, the American marines, took over the school and partially turned it into a military base. Many boarding students were forced out of the campus. According to Adjesu, the Americans were there to assemble war planes in Accra for the North American and European Alliance. The Gold Coast also became a main training centre for the allies and of course for the thousands of local recruits. The Gold Coast probably contributed some 65,000 soldiers to the war under the command of British officers of the Royal West African Frontier Force (Israel, 1987).

Many films of the period portrayed Ghanaian soldiers on the war front, but mostly they portrayed the political and military perspectives of the British and their allies- the high level of endurance, valour and fortitude of the African troops, which served simply as a bait to recruit more men and urge people to contribute palm kernel and other crops to the army. What were missing from the films were the many forms of discrimination and racial inequalities that Ghanaian soldiers suffered at the war front (see Israel, 1987).

Adjesu recalls that thousands of students would usually be sent out to pick and crack palm kernel from which oil was extracted to be used for the war. Other activities included the harvesting of rubber, which was used in the manufacture of vehicle tires for military transport. Cocoa production also became important and the colonial government sought to encourage farmers to produce more of it. The Gold Coast therefore became a raw material base for the

war. Adjesu remembers that when pilots returned to base after serving their turns, they would usually be put on a resuscitating diet of cocoa drink.

The war films shown to local people often demonstrated how soldiers performed at various training sessions, what tasks they undertook and how the battles were fought. Captain A. G. Dickson, a former colonial officer in charge of the Mobile Propaganda Unit of East Africa Command, argues that the direct purpose of the film production units during the war was "to demonstrate modern weapons and equipment; to explain news of the war and its significance to Africans; to stimulate greater interest in their relatives in the Army; and to encourage an intensified war effort by the civilian population" (Dickson, 1945, p. 10).

Even though the films did not directly call for voluntary recruitment, similar to American military advertisements- 'The US Army needs you!'- Adjesu contends that these demonstrations were often intended to inspire and impress young men to join the army or to reduce the resentment that local people had for the forced recruitment of their relatives.

The shift in policy from educational films during the inter-war years to war propaganda necessitated an increase in production levels within the colonies themselves. The financial prohibitions of this task on the central film production unit led to the creation of other film units in the early 1940s in individual colonial territories that were then tasked to finance and produce films independent of the office in London. The units were still controlled by British and other expatriate staff and adhered to the official colonial policies of Empire.

This arrangement was made under *The Raw Stock Scheme*, which allowed film equipment and film stock to be sent to the colonies for the recording of local content that was then returned to London for processing and assembly. The Gold Coast Film Unit, established in 1946, was one of such units which then worked in collaboration with the ISD and some private film theatres such as African Pictures Ltd. which served as a regular venue for showings films by the Gold Coast Film Unit.

Soon after the war, cinema as propaganda transformed to one of social realism and for education. This marked one of the most significant policy shifts that would shape the history of cinema in Ghana.

CINEMA IN GHANA AFTER WWII – EDUCATION

After WWII there was a concern about the continuous propaganda approach to cinema in Ghana. The predominance of wartime cinema and the over-emphasis on legitimating British politics and foreign policies became distasteful to some colonial officials such as W. Sellers (Dadson, 1998). In what amounted to a major policy shift, there was an option to diversify the subject matter of films produced for the colonies to more educational films that would introduce new tastes to Africans and also promote British goods and culture.

The pedagogic style of educational documentary became a mark of British colonial cinema following the success of the British Documentary tradition established by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), and also became a legacy for independent former British colonies. For example, in Ghana, from independence till the end of the 1980s, far more educational documentaries than narrative fiction films have been produced. The balance only shifted after the proliferation of home videos in the 1990s.

Sellers, who was the director of the Gold Coast Colonial Film Unit, was more disposed towards developmental films (Dadson, 1998). Sellers sought and acquired the authority and funding to produce instructional films and this approach was to become the focus of filmmaking for many years. Apart from producing developmental films locally Sellers imported similar films from other parts of Africa into the Gold Coast, particularly films produced by the EMB.

One such film, *Mr. Tea and Mr. Skokiaan* (1945), produced by the Tea Marketing Expansion Board of Johannesburg, which was widely distributed in Africa, did not only seek

to promote the drinking of tea and thus create a larger market for the crop, but also sought to discourage the consumption of alcohol. The narrative simply contrasted a prosperous tea-drinker against a wasted alcoholic. Similarly, *Travels of Mr. Jack Tea-Drinker*, was another simplistic educational film. It depicts the travelling experiences of the main character, Mr. Jack Tea-Drinker, through beautiful and exotic locations in the southern part of Africa, particularly where tea-drinking is noted to be popular. According to Parsons (2004), each of these promotional films by the Tea Marketing Expansion Board ended with the slogan TEA IS GOOD FOR YOU. The slogan became so popular, as the mobile vans traversed many rural communities that at the end of each of the films the audiences shouted in unison, "Tea is GOOOOOOOD for you!" (Parsons, 2004).

Once focus had shifted from war propaganda to educational films, a new form of propaganda was instituted, this time to indoctrinate the native people into obedient and responsible citizens, such as in paying their taxes, in keeping their environments clean, and to abandon their herbal treatments in favour of visiting government hospitals, and finally in patronising European goods such as the transistor radio.

Cooper (2002) has argued that, in the context of this policy shift, the colonial authorities no longer sought to civilize Africans per se, but sought to "conserve African societies in a coloniser's image of sanitized tradition, slowly and selectively being led towards evolution" (Cooper, 2002, p. 18). All these were done in calculated attempts to make the exploitation of peasant crop production and mining outputs easier and more accessible.

The use of films as a means of communicating the policies of the colonial government was in line with the general approach to using mass media to consolidate political power, enforce the hegemonic presence of British culture and compel the obedience of the natives. These were colonial communications objectives that all the Heads of the Colonial Film Units

were acquainted with and pursued with loyalty (Wilson, 1944; Doob, 1953). Doob (1953)

observes, for example, how these Heads of Units strictly adhered to these policies.

> "The men in charge of the information services are Europeans who, as civil
> servants, are thoroughly acquainted with official government policy. That
> policy is clearly and in most instances explicitly formulated. It includes general
> objectives (promoting 'loyalty to the Crown' and demonstrating 'the benefits'
> of a colonial administration) as well as specific ones (reducing automobile
> accidents or increasing the size of the cotton crop)" (Doob, 1953, p. 9).

Doob argues that the information services, which included the press, with occasional

African editors albeit under general European supervision, supported the attainment of

colonial objectives. The media were not simply means to public entertainment or general mass

education, but rather had to be directed at achieving specific goals in contributing to the

general legitimacy of colonial authority. Even when Africans served as editors, writers or

presenters of media content, they were bound to tow the line of colonial policy, for various

reasons. As Doob has argued:

> "These Africans are not necessarily closely supervised; their scripts for
> example, are often broadcast without being checked by a European official.
> But they need not, in fact, be supervised because it is virtually certain that
> their products will support official policy. They are carefully selected and
> hence known to be reliable, they are often provided with materials which
> afford very little initiative, and they know very well that they will lose their
> prestigeful positions if they deviate significantly" (Doob, ibid, pp. 9-10).

Similar allegiances were enforced with regard to film production. In a paper delivered at the First International African Film and History Conference at the University of Cape Town in July 2002, Michael Paris argued that:

"…until the 1960s, British films both represented and reinforced official policy. The empire genre was popular in the inter-war period and reached its climax with the successful lavish epics of Alexander Korda like *Sanders of the River* and *The Four Feathers*. Alongside these features and the seemingly endless ethnographic and expedition films, were the officially sponsored documentaries specifically designed to 'sell' the empire from the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit and the GPO Film Unit" (Paris, 2002, p. 2).

According to Paris, many of the earliest empire films were simple adventure movies such as *The Sneaky Boer* and *Attack on the Chinese Mission* which reflected heroic moments of the story of empire. "Together with newsreels and topicals celebrating all manner of imperial occasions, (these films) promoted the imperial idea, glorified the qualities of colonial administrators and soldiers, and emphasised the benefits of British rule for subject peoples" (Paris, ibid, p. 2).

Paris argues that WWII had introduced new attitudes and therefore the British conception of partnership in colonialism was reflected in the representations of Africans in British films. "Most cinematic representations of colonial Africa were concerned to justify the British presence – to make clear that Britons were in Africa as benefactors and not exploiters. An interesting example here is the work of the Colonial Film Unit" (Paris, ibid, p. 4).

After WWII, there were simmering tensions and agitations by returning soldiers, coupled with home-grown revolutionary and nationalist forces and a corps of native elite for a

share in governance. The Pan-African movement was vehemently calling for native African governments in place of the colonial ones. As Armour (1984) puts it "[The] writings, newspapers and utterances of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Kwame Nkrumah were having their impact and resonances outside Nigeria and the Gold Coast" (Armour, 1984, p. 363). As a result of these political developments the Gold Coast Film Unit was compelled to focus more on films that ostensibly sought British cooperation with native peoples to offer rapid socio-economic development. Hence, most of the films focused on rural-urban migration, citizenship, rural development, professions, health and agriculture. Examples were *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952), *Theresa* (1956), *Progress in Kodjokrom* (1953) and *Mr. Mensah Builds a House* (1956).

In 1946 a team of filmmakers arrived in Accra from the Unite Kingdom, led by Sean Graham as the producer/director to be in charge of the Gold Coast Film Unit. The unit possessed a post-synchronisation sound-proof studio with a multi-channel recording system, generators and other facilities for celluloid film production. The unit developed rapidly from a two-man technical team to seven, excluding many African assistants, and became the best equipped 35mm film production unit in tropical Africa.

In Ghana, and other Anglophone countries, the experience of training local talent emerged after the establishment of the various semi-independent Colonial Film Units. When these film units were formed in the colonies, the Gold Coast Film Unit virtually detached itself from the central office in London and preferred to collaborate with "independent English producers, or with first rate producers such as Grierson, one of the masters of the English documentary film" (Rouch, 1967, p. 113). According to Rouch's report on cinema in Africa, which appeared in a UNESCO publication in 1967, (a section of which was later serialised in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*), the Gold Coast unit, led by Sean

Graham, and assisted by a Canadian cameraman, George Noble, produced "an impressive number of outstanding quality films between 1950 and 1955" (Rouch, ibid, p. 113).

By this time, on the political front, Africans were beginning to assert themselves politically. In Ghana, the Convention People's Party (CPP) had won landslide elections and Nkrumah became Prime Minister. But whilst the nation was consumed in political agitations for independence, the enterprise of filmmaking was also undergoing various transformations. As indicated earlier, by 1950, the Colonial Film Unit of the Gold Coast had started to gain a significant amount of autonomy from the Colonial Office in London, even before the withdrawal of the London office as an umbrella production body that had overseen all the units in Africa. This autonomy allowed the unit in the Gold Coast to experience a shift in film production policy.

Mainly under the direction of Sean Graham, the focus shifted from the purely didactic to contemporary issues of acculturation, urbanisation and themes relating to the nationalist progression towards independence. Graham's film activities were carried out under the watchful eyes of the Ghana Government, particularly as Kwame Nkrumah was then the Head of Government Business (1951) and Prime Minister (1952).

With Nkrumah having a keen interest in the use of the media to pursue his socialist developmental agenda, and with the British still presenting themselves as development partners, it came as no surprise that films would focus on socio-economic development.

For example, *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952) by Graham is about the perennial migration of young people from the rural areas to the cities in search of better opportunities. However, as is often the case, rather than achieve the dreams for which they leave the relative peace of their villages, they are often caught up in the corruption and vicissitudes of urbanisation, and may turn from humble and law-abiding people to delinquents and criminals.

*The Boy Kumasenu* is a cross between fiction and documentary and follows the experiences of a young man, Kumasenu, who is growing up in a typical Ghanaian fishing village, and who has ambitions of going to the city and experiencing the rich and glamorous life that he has heard so much about. With an authoritative voice-over commentary that allows the viewer access to the lives and private spaces of the characters, and also offers background information, we see Kumasenu in his open natural village surroundings and later trapped by the crowded city with its inhospitable urban culture.

This was the first feature-length film of the unit, and blends the stylistic and ideological affinities of the British Documentary movement of the 1930s with dramatised fiction to make an allegorical statement about the problems of rural to urban migration intended to dissuade further migrations.

The film opens with a wide shot of the coast, revealing a beautiful sea-shore with a sandy beach and coconut trees. This scene is quickly followed by a scene in a drinking bar in the city of Accra, where people are dancing and having fun. The commentary tells us that "this is the story of the old and the new" and that "there is no buffer between the old and the new." We are then returned to the coastal village where Kumasenu and his cousin Egbo, who had neglected to go fishing, play on the beach and dream about going to the city. Later Egbo runs away to the city leaving Kumasenu behind, whose uncle refuses to let him go.

Then when the fish catch in the village is poor, it is believed that it is due to Kumasenu's restlessness about going to the city. His uncle therefore decides that he could go to the city. But first he must work in a bar in a nearby town for a little experience. It is here that he is introduced to 'the 20th Century'. He discovers a wide variety of imported drinks, the gramophone player, gas lamp and of course new styles of speaking and dancing. Kumasenu is fascinated and eagerly awaits the day he will leave for the big city.

Whilst at the bar, his cousin Egbo visits from the city, well dressed and displays a lot of money. He convinces Kumasenu to run away to the city where such wealth awaited him. Kumasenu complies and arrives at the city, hoping to find people welcome him with open arms. He is rather greeted with rejection and rude dismissals. He wanders round the city with no money to buy food and nowhere to sleep. He is rescued by a lady, his first real friend in the city, but he soon discovers that the lady is "a friend to many men but faithful to none." But he does not mind, so long as he has a place to lay his head and something to eat.

It is not long before the vicissitudes of the city catch up with him and he loses his lady friend and finds himself out on the streets again without food and shelter. He tries to steal some bread and is caught and jailed. Luck falls on him again, when a visit to a medical doctor proves to be redemptory, and he is adopted by the doctor's family.

For a while, he is comfortable and behaves well. He even trains to be an auto-mechanic, until his past catches up with him when he runs into his cousin Egbo. Egbo begins to molest him and make him an accomplice to his criminal activities. This harassment extends to the house of the doctor, whose office and pharmacy are vandalised. Soon Kumasenu cannot take anymore of Egbo's harassments and decides to abandon his sobriety and fight back in order to gain his freedom from the evil stranglehold of the city.

In a way *The Boy Kumasenu* reflected the development policies and interests of Nkrumah and the government. By this time Nkrumah was Prime Minister and responsible to an Assembly composed fully of elected local representatives. Nkrumah was already beginning to synthesise his ideas for rapid national development. The modernisation of agriculture for increased food production was one of his priorities. The targets for agricultural modernisation were the rural small-holder farmers. Unfortunately, many young and able-bodied people (men and women), particularly those who had had some education, were migrating from their villages and small towns to larger urban areas, which threatened agricultural expansion. It was

therefore necessary to dissuade people from migrating to the cities, where life was ostensibly more difficult.

Other films were made on a variety of topics, including matters of national importance, such as rural development and the choice of professions. *Jaguar (High Life)* (n.d.) by Sean Graham has been described by Rouch as a "ballet based on the theme of a popular song making fun of 'been to' Africans who had studied in Great Britain" (Rouch, 1967, p. 7). *Progress in Kodjokrom* (1953) was made to show the value of paying taxes and of course to encourage compliance in this civic duty. The story is about a malcontent, who refuses to pay his taxes, but who later becomes patriotic and performs his civic duty.

*Theresa* (1956) was intended to promote the vocation of nursing in Ghana, even though the revelations of the difficulties of nursing threatened to dissuade young people from choosing it. According to Rouch, this film was a "shattering document on the difficult life of nurses. The government hesitated for quite a while over releasing this film, fearing that there would not be a young woman in Ghana with enough courage to embark upon such a testing career" (Rouch, 1967, 113).

*Mr. Mensah Builds a House* (1956) is a propaganda film that was aimed at popularising housing loans among native people. The story is comedic and centres on a man, Mr. Mensah, who has been trying for many years to build a house, but in vain. Eventually he entrusts the supervision of the project to his nephew who spends the money on himself and his extravagant girlfriend.

There were many films that focused on improving agricultural yields by demonstrating modern processes of farming and fishing. *Swollen Shoot* (1952) told the story of two farmers and emphasised the symptoms of the cocoa swollen shoot disease. The film demonstrates how the infected trees are to be cut down to prevent the infection of other trees, and the re-planting of new trees in their place. *The Two Farmers* (n.d.) is a film that contrasts the

success of one farmer who follows the advice of an Agricultural Officer to cultivate a new farm, and another who declines the advice and gets a failed crop. *Kofi the Good Farmer* (1953), *Fuseini's Cash Crop* (1953), *Musah the Mixed Farmer* (1954) and *Mixed Farming* (n.d.) are examples of films promoting improved farming methods.

Besides education, there were films made purely for entertainment, in spite of their moral sub-texts. Others were based on local folklore or inspired by local wisdom. *Three Red Boys Left for Sabey* (n.d.) is a humorous film with a strong moral lesson about the wisdom of saving through the Post Office. *The Friendly Three* (n.d.) has a vast West African village as its setting within which Orlando Martins uses puppetry to tell a local Ananse (spider) folk story. The story is about two friends who disagree but are reconciled by a wise elderly man. The dialogue portrays the frustrations of one friend over the other, but how his patience and perseverance eventually earns him some satisfaction.

Political activities in the country also provided topics for documentaries. For example in 1956, a plebiscite was held to decide whether the Trans-Volta Togoland region would be part of the new nation Ghana or continue to be under the former German protectorate which had now come under French colonial rule. The plebiscite was organised under the auspices of the United Nations in May 1956. The Ghana Film Unit, a transformation of the Gold Coast Film Unit, recorded this event and produced a documentary film *Plebiscite in Togoland* (1957).

*Beyond the Volta* (1956) is a documentary record of the general developments in Trans-Volta Togoland, now the Volta Region of Ghana. Having won over that region to be part of Ghana, it was necessary to demonstrate to the rest of the country and indeed to outsiders, that the new region was not left out of development initiatives. It is not clear why this film was released earlier than the one on the plebiscite.

Sean Graham made his final documentary film for Ghana in 1957, *Freedom for Ghana*, before he left the country. *Freedom for Ghana* chronicles the tortuous road to self-governance and celebrates the achievement of independence on 6th March, 1957. A combination of Nkrumah's political energy, the euphoria of the period when people revelled in their newly found national identity and Graham's preoccupation with educational filmmaking resulted in a film that was unapologetically propagandist. Even though this followed the colonial module for the use of cinema, it nonetheless depicted a counter ideological focus to colonialism. Rouch has criticised the film for its "irritating propaganda" (Rouch, 1967, p. 56), even though its historical value is enormous to Ghanaians.

These developments in film production in Ghana offered rare opportunities for local people to shift from their menial roles on film sets to bigger and more responsible ones. Not only did they get formal training from a film school that had been set up in Accra, but working as assistants allowed them to understudy their more experienced expatriate counterparts. Both Sam Aryetey and Egbert Adjesu, who had worked many times under Sean Graham, together with the rest of the unit's team, would take up leading roles in laying the foundations for indigenous filmmaking in Ghana.

THE ACCRA FILM SCHOOL

Diawara (1992) reports that in 1949 John Grierson submitted a report to the UNESCO, which prompted the establishment of a film training school in Accra. Grierson argued that the films that had been produced by British filmmakers, particularly under the BEKE, were not attractive to Africans because they (Africans) were not able to identify with the films. For this reason, the colonies would benefit more if the indigenous people were offered the chance to make films for themselves instead of projecting to them films from the

West. Moreover, as Diawara has argued, Africans found the "paternalistic and racist" British films to be "boring and clumsy" (Diawara, 1992, p. 4).

Grierson's report marked a significant part of the process to remit control of film production in Anglophone West Africa to indigenous people. The following year, 1950, the Accra Film School opened and six African students (Sam Aryetey, R. O. Fenuku and Bob Okanta from Ghana, and Awuni Haruna, Otigba and Fajemism from Nigerian) were recruited to be trained in Africa's first film training school. The school ran courses in basic cinematography, lighting, sound recording and editing for a period of seven months. The school was moved to Jamaica, then to Cyprus and finally to London. "In all, about 100 students were trained during this time" (Rouch, 1967, p. 113).

According Rouch, the courses taught in the school were intended to equip the students with knowledge on how to use 16mm and 35mm film equipment. The initial idea was that after the seven-month training period, the students would break into groups and engage in film production. However, this initiative did not materialise into the active possession and control of the means of film production in Ghana, nor did the students have any control over the content of films. By this time Graham and Noble were in charge of the Gold Coast Film Unit, and made all the decisions whilst the trained Africans assisted. As Rouch observed, citing Georges Sadoul, by 1960, no African had produced any "single true feature length African film" (Rouch, 1967, p. 51).

A report by Van Bever, cited in Diawara (1992) suggests that the experiment with the film school was very successful, and that "'African students were trained in this manner to become *excellent assistants* to the production teams sent to West Africa by the CFU's central organization in London'" (Diawara, 1992, p. 23, *emphasis added*).

This attitude recalls the proposition that had been made in the report by Notcutt and Latham in 1937, that "[intelligent] young Africans can be trained to do much of the routine

work of the darkroom and the sound studios and even some of the semiskilled work" (Notcutt and Latham, 1937, pp. 183-184).

I have emphasised the notion of intelligent Africans trained to be *excellent assistants* in order to underscore the fact that the arrangement was not directly intended to benefit Ghanaians themselves but rather to assuage the financial insolvency of the unit, a burden that had been off-loaded onto it, like other units, by the central office in London. It is also proof of the continuous condescension with which the British colonial authorities treated talented Africans who sought to acquire the techniques of film production.

Diawara (1992) has described the British attitude towards cinema in Africa as "paternalistic and racist" because they continued to under-rate the intellectual capabilities of Africans both as filmmakers and audiences. Diawara argues further that, with these attitudes, the British failed to develop filmmaking in the colonies to reasonable levels. It is probably appropriate to conclude that the British only wanted Africans to serve as assistants and carry out mundane and semi-skilled jobs because, after all, if Africans learnt to make films then the British would no longer be needed here.

In spite of the criticisms, the training of Africans this way was definitely a significant step towards independent African film production as the British gradually withdrew their control of filmmaking in Ghana and other colonies. By 1955 the Colonial Film Unit had all but outlived its usefulness and declared that "it had fulfilled its goal to introduce an educational cinema to Africans" (ibid, p. 3). Diawara reports that the colonies were therefore asked to finance their own film productions, and the Colonial Film Unit (in London) changed its name to Overseas Film and Television Centre (OFTC).

Diawara argues that the OFTC only served to coordinate the various autonomous units and to offer training to film and television crews. It also served as a sales point for film production equipment and for Africans to undertake post-production work. "In other words,

Britain no longer had the economic burden of producing films for the colonies, and this policy also assured that the colonies would be dependent on Britain in developing their film production" (ibid, p. 4).

Predictably, as independence was imminent and Africans gained greater knowledge and skill in the processes of filmmaking, the British had no choice but to withdraw. The film units, such as that in the Gold Coast, effectively came under the control of locally trained technicians.

Unfortunately, most of these units, except notably for Ghana and Nigeria, could not be transformed into effective national film production centres after independence, either because there had not been adequate training of local staff to take over, or that the training had fallen short of the skills needed to manage an entire national film industry. Even in the case of Ghana, for many years after independence, there were no trained film directors and producers, and the GFIC had to rely on foreign directors. The film production facilities were also utilised mostly by foreign filmmakers.

In spite of the availability of up-to-date equipment from 1957, it was only in 1966 that Ghanaians themselves began to direct and produce films. Many newsreels and documentaries were produced, particularly to support the political activities of the government. The first feature-length film by a wholly Ghanaian film crew, *No Tears for Ananse* by Sam Aryetey, was made in 1968, eleven years after independence. The next chapter examines this first period of Ghanaian independence and the cinema that it produced.

CHAPTER SIX

CINEMA AFTER INDEPENDENCE (1957 – 1970)

In this chapter, I examine how the political shift from colonialism to independence informed a kind of filmmaking that mirrored the ideological quest for an African identity and nationalist aspirations. Few though they were, Ghanaian films of this period replicated similar attempts in other African countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania to represent a sense of nationalism and cultural identity. The discussion will draw on some of the theoretical assumptions of nationalism and of national cinemas in chapter 3.

I first examine the role of cinema in postcolonial Africa as whole, particularly how filmmakers interrogated the legacies of colonialism that continued to affect their contemporary national lives. The second focuses on the specific case of Ghana, and examines how new found freedoms motivated new found forms of cinematic expression.

THE ROLE OF CINEMA IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

If colonialism in Africa was the manifestation of the Eurocentric epistemic claim to the knowledge of Africans, whose existence was subordinated to that of the Western World, then independence for African nations was an indictment of that epistemology. The European episteme produced what Said (1995) referred to as an existential creation of the imaginative fantasy of the West, which was supported by a colonial library of writings, art and of course cinema (see Mudimbe, 1988).

As I noted in chapters four and five, cinema was particularly useful in reinforcing this colonial episteme. Tomaselli (1988) has argued that cinema in Africa as a whole has always been a powerful economic and political weapon, originating

from the colonial use of the medium to maintain political and economic influence over the colonized. As he puts it:

> "History is distorted and a Western view of Africa continues to be transmitted back to the colonized. Apart from the obvious monetary returns for the production companies themselves, the values Western cinema imparts and the ideologies it legitimates are beneficial for Western cultural, financial, and political hegemony" (Tomaselli, 1988, p. 53).

Independence, on the other hand, offered the opportunity for Africans to define themselves, obviously in contrast to European perceptions, and encouraged the search for new knowledge that was expected to empower Africans to be managers of their own affairs, and to be proud of themselves as equitable shareholders in global history.

In the newly independent countries of Africa, the creation and distribution of such knowledge was the responsibility of the mass media with cinema playing a significant role. Films were produced that dealt with the historical facts of liberation struggles, the ambivalent concepts of identity in post-colonial Africa, the economic struggles that continued to plague the continent, the position of women in society and the general political and cultural controversies that seem to be daily experiences.

In response to the colonial tendencies of erroneous and condescending representations, African cinema emerged as a functional art, replicating the social, cultural and political role that was and is expected of the arts in traditional African societies. African filmmakers, particularly of the early independence period, saw their task as social raconteurs, who should hold up a mirror to reflect the concerns of their contemporary societies,

particularly with regard to the consolidation of political independence and the stability of African cultural institutions in the face of European political and cultural hegemony.

Consequently, African cinema has generally manifested various ideological tendencies, including the search for a renewed African identity, the support for nationalist movements that were influencing the history of bounded nations, and the introspective representations of the multifaceted challenges that faced the newly independent states.

The need for such an agenda for many African filmmakers was arguably in response to the stereotypical colonialist representation of Africans and their traditions as uncivilized, grotesque and exotic. The images that African filmmakers produced were therefore intended to represent what they considered to be African realities. As Akudinobi (1997) has argued, "[The] project of the early African film makers, therefore, was not just to destabilize colonial logic, but to unmask, also, the *constructedness* of a spurious African reality (which is passed off as the norm), and then to instigate a shift in the way Africa is conceived in the Western popular imagination" (Akudinobi, 1997, p. 92, o*riginal emphasis*).

Whether this project was successful or not, is open to debate, but certainly, does the subjective nature of filmmaking not subvert realist claims to a pristine African representation as against European lies? After all, whose truth is the real truth? But this was not a question of concern to African filmmakers as they set about their tasks of historical reconstruction by appropriating local histories, folklore, myths and legends.

In many African countries a vibrant and politically conscious cinema emerged. A filmmaker from Guinea, Mamadou Toure, produced *Mouramani* (1955), an adaptation of a traditional oral folktale from Guinea. That same year, collaboration among four friends in Paris - Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Mamadou Saar, Robert Cristan and Jacques Melo Kane- resulted in *Afrique sur Seine* (1955), a film that is often touted as the first African film. After

this effort, it would take nearly a decade, well into independence, for other films of significance to be produced by Africans, particularly south of the Sahara.

The 1960s were very important for African cinema, not only because of the profusion of films by Africans, but more importantly because of the important themes they treated, and the worldwide attention they brought to African film practice.

In Senegal, for example film production began with Ousmane Sembene, a former dock worker and a French WWII army draftee, who had transformed himself from a literary artist to filmmaker after a year at the Gorki Studio in Moscow in 1962. He produced *Borom Sarret* (1963) one of the most important early films by an Africa. This 20-minute short film follows the experiences of a Donkey-cart driver during a day's work, and in a semi-documentary fashion, reveals the dichotomy between the rich and the poor in an independent Senegal, with particular emphases on the frustrations of the poor and their daily survival instincts, and a strange justice system that the cart driver suffers but is unable to understand.

The film exposes the survival tactics of ordinary Senegalese in order to demonstrate the insensitivity of the government to the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable. In one sequence, the cart driver conveys a man and his dead child to the public cemetery. On arrival, the man is denied access to the grave site to bury his child. The cart driver, who is also impatient to leave, dumps the dead child at the feet of the man and drives away.

Diawara (1996) has argued that *Borom Sarret* questions the unconditional return to African tradition. For example, in one scene, a griot sings the praises of the cart driver, extolling his past nobility, ultimately exploiting and taking away all the money he has earned for the day. At the same time a young boy shines the shoes of a bigger and stronger man who then leaves without paying. Diawara argues that the behaviour of the griot amounted to turning "tradition into a tool of exploitation" (Diawara, 1996, p. 213).

Similarly the attitude of the bigger man who walks away without paying the shoeshine boy is a reflection of the "hierarchy of power not only between people but also between the two sides of the city" (ibid, p. 213). The city is divided according to levels of development. There is the predominantly White area with modern high-rise residential and office buildings and nicely tarred and paved streets, which stands out in stark opposition to the poor African neighbourhood distinguished by its mud houses and rusty roofs, and narrow streets and mostly sandy alleys.

Three years later Sembene produced *La Noire de...* (1966), also known as *Black Girl*, a film that portrays the servitude of a Black girl, detached from her home and family, and has to work for a French family in Paris. The girl, Diouna, is first hired in her own country, in a scene that is reminiscent of a slave auction. When the French family retires to Paris, they take her along, but her life does not improve. In fact, it is worse as she is treated like a slave and subjected to all manner of inhumane abuses, particularly by the Madame. Diouna is only referred to as "the Black girl", thus stripping her of her personality. She is unable to communicate with her people back home, and her isolation, disenchantment, despondency and deprivation lead her to commit suicide.

As a leading filmmaker during the period of early independence, Sembene was not only concerned with colonialism and neo-colonialism. He paid equal attention to internal political and cultural issues in his native Senegal, issues that resonated in other African countries. For example, *Mandabi* (1968) also known as *Le Mandat* or *The Money Order*, is a comedic political film rendered in a simple chronological narrative that follows the frustrations of a central character, Ibrahima Dieng, who tries to cash a money order that has been sent to him by his nephew working in Paris. Dieng, an illiterate is frustrated by a very unfriendly and corrupt government bureaucracy and ultimately is cheated by an official who does not give him the correct value of the money order.

Ukadike (1994) has argued that *Mandabi*'s themes emphasize the abhorrence of ineptitude, inefficiency, and inhumanity. "It is here that Sembene finds the environment for impugning the petit bourgeoisie and the neo-colonial bureaucracy that has stratified African society as an insidious reversion to the hierarchical bias of the French colonial administration" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 86). In other words, Sembene was expressing grave displeasure at the inheritance by African bureaucrats of an anachronistic colonial system that perpetrated the condescension and exploitation of their own people.

In other parts of Africa, films were produced to celebrate the revolutionary struggles for independence and freedom from foreign domination. An example is *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) by Gillo Pontecorvo which focuses on the Algerian war of independence. The film is a haunting cinematic recreation of the guerrilla tactics of the National Liberation Front (FLN) against French colonial occupation. *The Battle of Algiers* is one of the finest political films to have come out of the African continent that deals with popular revolutionary struggles in history, and inscribes a sense of Algerian nationalism in its textuality.

The narrative revoles around the character of Ali La Pointe who develops very radical political sentiments against the French whilst in jail, after witnessing the execution of a fellow Algerian. As the condemned man is being led to the guillotine, he shouts, "Allah is great! Long live Algeria!" This marks a turning point in Ali's perception of colonial Algeria. Once out of prison, Ali joins the FLN to fight for Algerian independence.

*The Battle of Algiers* seeks to present the efforts of the FLN to purge Algerian society of what the political organization saw as decadent Western influences. This philosophical approach was in line with the broad ideological assumptions of African nationalism within which political leaders sought to eradicate the vestiges of colonial culture and other attributes. For the FLN, the French colonial administration was responsible for the misery, brutalities and corruption that had permeated Algerian society. The terrorist/nationalist FLN then

attempted to impose its own laws by banning the sale of all types of drugs, alcohol and outlawing prostitution and pimping. In order to demonstrate their resolve to this so-called cleansing exercise, Ali himself shoots dead a pimp who had previously befriended him.

The French authorities mount a search for Ali, whom they hope will be the last significant leader of the FLN to be captured and therefore bring an end to the nationalist campaign. The indignities that the French visit on native Algerians are revealed in pictorial detail. For example a bunch of French youths trip Ali just for the fun of seeing him tumble. As the struggle intensifies, the Algerians engage in an unorthodox urban warfare in an attempt to push the French out. They place bombs at places frequented by the French, such as bars and the Air France office, and undertake assassinations in a hit and run fashion. At the same time the French, in desperation, begin to attack anyone with an Algerian identity, including children who are trying to sell candy on the streets.

*The Battle of Algiers* is also an example of a revolutionary film that acknowledges the contribution of women to the nationalist struggles. Veiled Algerian women are shown with shopping baskets hovering innocently around the French. They carry guns in the baskets with which they carry out hit and run assassinations of French soldiers. Other women dress and disguise themselves as 'Westerners' and so are able to pass through French checkpoints unnoticed and unsearched. This gives them easy access to various targets of attack, such as the soldiers or police who are usually shot in the back.

In one of the film's most memorable sequences, three Arab women dressed as Frenchwomen manage to sneak bombs into the European quarter. In one of the scenes of this sequence, a group of youthful, carefree French socialize, drink, and gyrate to the Latin music in a bar while one of the women hides her bomb and leaves. What follows is a devastating and horrifying blast. As these attacks multiply, the French authorities resort to very drastic measures including bombings of buildings and the torture of arrested Algerians.

Besides West and North African, in the Lusophone countries, former Portuguese colonies, cinema was most effectively used in the liberation struggles. Films made by the native people of these colonies were politically reflective of the colonial occupation and the marginalisation of the native majority by the settler minority, and also reflective of the resistance that arose against the occupation.

It was in Lusophone Africa where films directly accentuated the need to raise the consciousness of the broad masses of people towards nationalism moves and independence. For example, in Angola, *Viva FRELIMO* (1969) produced by a Dutch Television team celebrated the political imperatives of the guerrillas who were fighting for independence against Portuguese colonial occupation. The film brought to the fore the humanism of the guerrilla fighters and focused on the enormous challenges they faced as they fought against an army with superior weapons and facilities.

Later in 1972, Sarah Maldoror made *Sambizanga* to denounce the oppressive Portuguese colonisation of Angola, and at the same time extol the perseverance and determination of the emerging resistance that led to the formation of an effective guerrilla movement. The film is a faithfull adaptation of the novel *The Real Life of Domingos Xavier* written by José Luandino Vieira. It celebrates the martyrdom of Domingos Xavier, a personification of the anti-colonial resistance, and the journey of discovery undertaken by Maria, Xavier's wife, to find her husband. Before *Sambizanga* Maldoror had made *Monangambee* (1970) a short film about an African political activist who had been jailed by the Portuguese. It was another adaptation from a novel by José Luandino Vieira.

The film makes explicit the Portuguese colonisation of the early 1960s and the subsequent resistance, particularly when there is a shift from the victimisation of peasants by the colonial powers to the empowerment and militancy of the Movimento Popular de Libertação (MPLA), otherwise known as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of

Angola. As Ukadike (1994) has argued "*Sambizanga* ultimately ratifies, with an indelible stamp, African revolutionary agitation. It raises consciousness and awareness of how mass mobilization and collective endeavor can help accomplish the arduous task of revolution" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 234).

In the spirit of militant Third Cinema these revolutionary films sought to create a common consciousness in people of their shared political history and to resist continuous exploitation through the use of neo-colonial bureaucratic structures. The films also created liberated spaces within which people could negotiate and redefine their personalities. Each film offered some decolonised territory for the engagement in nationalist discourses and the display of nationalist sentiments. This was the rallying essence of revolutionary filmmaking in Africa that supported the libratory politics of the period, the kind of cinema that was also experienced in Ghana.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE IN GHANA

Once independence was achieved in 1957, the government of Ghana under Nkrumah set itself the task of rapid socio-economic development. Ghana possessed a relatively strong economy even though the country's exports were still controlled by external forces. Independent African nations, such as Ghana, did not only inherit the colonial institutions left over by empire but also the failures of colonialism, particularly in the area of economic development (Cooper, 2002). Even though the agricultural and mineral production in Africa had increased in the immediate post-war years, "the African farmer and worker had not become the predictable or orderly producer officials dreamed of" (Cooper, 2002, p. 4). In Cooper words:

"New African governments inherited both the narrow, export-oriented infrastructure which developmentalist colonialism had not yet transcended and

the limited market for producers of raw material which the post-war boom in
the global economy had only temporarily improved" (ibid, pp. 4-5).

Cooper argues that the developmental efforts of the colonialists just before independence did not provide the basis for strong national economies. Rather these economies remained externally oriented resulting in Africa's contemporary economic crises, which did not emerge solely out of the incompetence of African governments, beginning from the end of colonialism, but "from a long, convoluted, and still ongoing process" (ibid, p. 6).

For example, when Ghana attained independence, it inherited a one-crop, cash crop economy, reliant mainly on cocoa exports. Even though the British colonialists had built railroads, bridges and other facilities, these had been mainly targeted towards facilitating colonial exploitation of natural resources and not for overall economic growth of the country.

Political independence did not also necessarily include economic independence and therefore, after independence, it became even clearer to the nationalists how myopic colonial development efforts had been. They therefore set about to build more railroads, highways, hospitals and schools. A lake, The Volta Lake, was built and a hydroelectric dam installed to provide power for the planned industrialisation of the country. Amidst this plethora of development needs the modest beginnings of indigenous filmmaking stalled and could not translate into a viable industry.

However, independence offered producers of culture opportunities to express their new found freedom and to re-assert their artistic identities, albeit often within the context of euphoric nationalism. It was this environment that produced some remarkable African literary intellectuals, joined later by their filmmaking counterparts, who sought to use their texts to engage in the celebrations of freedom, the questioning of independence and to speculate for the future.

Ousmane Sembene, a leading writer, added filmmaking to his literary form of expression. He was joined by other filmmakers who, for two decades (1960s-1970s), would attempt to re-tell the African political story from an African point of view and to re-define in more complementary terms what they thought was a demeaned African personality.

These African filmmakers were often motivated by the mentorship of political leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mobutu Sese Seko, Ahmadou Ahidjo and Leopold Sedar Senghor. Their films, like their literary compatriots, engaged the neo-colonial agenda with a particular concern over issues of African acculturation and the threat of assimilation to mainly European values. The issue of identity, as postulated in the Pan-African concept of the 'African Personality', became very important even though problematic because of its homogenising assumptions.

Cinema's appropriation by the colonisers of Africa to achieve political and cultural objectives, which caused the dislocation of some Africans from their traditional cultural roots, also compelled early African filmmakers to look towards appropriating the same medium as a redemptive tool. Redemption, within African centred, or Pan-African, thinking meant the revision of African history, and the revival of African cultures that were alienated from their roots by the colonial imposition of European cultural norms. Cinema was therefore established as a frontline fighter against continuous colonisation, first culturally and then economically.

As Cham (1996) has argued, "African film-making is in a way a child of African political independence. It was born in the era of heady nationalism and nationalist anticolonial and anti neo-colonial struggle" (Cham, in Bakari and Cham (Eds.), 1996, p. 1). The political and economic circumstances, particularly of the late colonial period, informed the socially and politically committed films that emerged here (Harrow, 1999)

The struggles that marked the processes towards the independence of African nations, sometimes involving bloody armed conflicts and fatal repressive actions by the colonisers, pre-empted African filmmakers to follow the example of their literary predecessors and show a commitment to the goals of decolonisation (ibid). One of the ways of achieving this was to have total control of the filmmaking process through the nationalisation of film production and exhibition.

### *Nkrumah and the Nationalisation of Film Production*

After independence, Nkrumah nationalized the production and distribution of films in order to give full access to Africans the means to making and distributing films. Nkrumah built filmmaking infrastructure that were said to be the biggest and the most well equipped in sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the Industrial Development Company (IDC) set up by government to support the processes of industrialisation, took over the assets of West African Pictures, a privately owned film distribution and exhibition company, at the cost of £275,000. By the mid-1960s, when the IDC was liquidated, and Ghana had become a republic, the film exhibition division was joined to the new film production unit and named State Film Industry Corporation (SFIC) (Masters, 2003, unpublished report).

The task of the SFIC was to produce newsreels, documentaries and feature films, and commercial television products, to take charge of distributing and exhibiting films in the country, whether the films were made here or outside, and to carry out any other tasks that would support the growth of the film industry.

The SFIC employed 260 people and was capable of producing its own films and providing services on demand for other organisations, independent companies and producers. There was a department responsible for the production work, a commercial department

responsible for the exhibition and distribution of films, plus the hiring of personnel, and the technical department responsible for the acquisition and maintenance of equipment.

The SFIC possessed and managed eight cinemas, six of which were located in Accra-Rex, Regal, Roxy, Royal, Plaza and Kanda Film Theatre. This last one was located on the premises of the SFIC studios. Then there were Rex in Asamankese and Dam Cinema in Akosombo (Masters, ibid; personal conversations).

Nkrumah intended to set up a national culture industry in which cinema was to play a major role, and through which a national bond will be established amongst the many divergent cultures (Hagan, 1991). And, just as he did for the other mass media in the country, he provided lavish funding for film production in order to mitigate the commercial excesses imposed by the former colonial metropolis and the rapid expansion into the country by foreign films (Ansah, 1991). Filmmakers were therefore tasked to engage in the redefinition of the nation by producing texts and images that united rather than divided the people. This was no mean task, particularly following the many years of British colonial divide and rule tactics that had set people apart through ethnic and cultural differentiations.

The nationalisation of film production, distribution and exhibition was intended to build a national film industry that would serve wider political and nationalist goals. The result of this political, often didactic, uses of cinema was the production of films that focused on the education, or perhaps indoctrination, of Africans, in a pedagogic manner, towards nationalist agenda and socio-cultural transformations. I say, of Africans, because the films produced under the Presidency of Nkrumah were shown in many African countries apart from Ghana in pursuant of his Pan-African goals of unifying the nations on the continent.

Whilst many documentary films were produced that focused on political concerns and issues of citizenship, other subjects of social concern, such as sexuality, gender and the perpetration of old-fashioned traditions, received occasional attention. Filmmaking in Ghana

followed these general propagandist trends as the government sought to use the institutions of culture for national unification. Institutions such as museums, theatre groups, literary associations, cinema and other mass media were made to sustain propagandist and educational roles.

Following the propagandist tendencies of cinema during WWI and WWII, post-colonial official government approach to cinema was therefore unabashedly political and propagandist. The setting up of the SFIC was politically motivated without the economic considerations necessary for a sustainable film industry. The results of this approach were newsreels and documentaries that sought to teach and which did not enjoy commercial exhibition.

Having imbibed the documentary traditions of the British, Ghanaian filmmakers of the time, and often under the watchful eyes of Nkrumah, produced mainly documentaries and newsreels about early independence activities, about Nkrumah's travels, many activities related to Pan-Africanism and the independence of other African nations, and various development projects that were beginning to take place, such as the construction of the Akosombo hydro-electric dam.

For example, *Ablode* (1960) was a 17-minute documentary record of celebrations to mark the independence of the Republic of Togoland on 27th April 1960, whilst *Operation Congo* (1960) chronicled the assistance Ghana offered to the Republic of Congo during the political crises of 1960 in that country. Ghana had sent several contingents of police and military personnel, plus a corps of public service personnel and humanitarian supplies in solidarity with this sister African nation. Chris Hesse (personal conversation, 2004), who was Nkrumah's official cinematographer, was sent along with the troops to the Congo. In an interview, he remembers how he left Ghana as a civilian and arrived in the Congo as an Army Captain in order to record pictures for the documentary. Similarly, *Freedom for Africa*

(1960) was a documentary record of the conference of Independent African States held in Accra in April 1958 whilst *Towards a United Africa* (1964) offered a record of the conference of Heads of States of the Organisation of African Union (OAU) which took place in Cairo, Egypt in July 1964.

Apart from the broad Pan-African concerns, many films also focused on the internal politics and issues of citizenship particular to Ghana. *Answer for Tomorrow* (1960) for example was a documentary about the 1960 Ghana National Population Census. It was made pre-emptively to communicate the reasons for the intended census and to appeal to the public for cooperation. *Your Police* (1962) depicted the work of the Ghana Police Force and was intended to educate Ghanaians on their rights, duties and responsibilities. In a typical pedagogical style the Commissioner of Police appears in the documentary and appeals to the public for their cooperation to enable the force carry out its duties effectively.

There were many films that dealt with matters of citizenship, agricultural development and Health. *Prevention is Better than Cure* (n.d.), *Malaria* (n.d.) and *The Housefly* (n.d.) were films that taught lessons on the prevention of malaria and domestic hygiene. Whilst most of the internationally oriented films were documentaries, many of the didactic films for local consumption were short dramatised fictions on a wide variety of topics.

*Alega's Day* (n.d.) was a 20-minute film about a village boy who is dissatisfied with the local life of the village. Reminiscent of the 1952 film, *The Boy Kumasenu*, this film demonstrates how Alega, the central character, is convinced to migrate to the city after seeing his friends return to display their new clothes. He thus travels to Accra, and desires to get rich quickly. Eventually, as this desire is not fulfilled easily, he takes to thievery and ends up in a police cell.

Many of these films, particularly the political documentaries and newsreels, were released in English, French and Arabic to facilitate a wider African distribution. Once every

fortnight French and Arabic versions of weekly newsreels would be compiled and targeted particularly towards countries that were still under colonial rule, intended to propagate the rise of African nationalism and to demonstrate solidarity for countries still seeking independence.

### *Political Upheaval and a New Course for the SFIC*

In 1966 soldiers overthrew the government of Nkrumah, whilst he was on a state visit to China, and formed a military dictatorship under the name National Liberation Council (NLC). This also marked the beginning of the deterioration of the SFIC, but not before a few significant films were produced. The military was not known for its concern with cultural heritage, particularly those gathered from the Nkrumah years.

Both Adjesu and Hesse (personal communications, 2004) told me that the new military leaders had ordered all the films that had been made under the leadership of Nkrumah to be destroyed because they fed Nkrumah's personality cult. Hesse, who had filmed most of them, said it was a difficult order for the workers of the corporation to obey. So they hid the positive films and some very important negatives, and only burnt a few negatives to demonstrate their obedience of order.

The NLC then appointed Sam Aryetey, a graduate of the 1949 Accra Film School, as the new Director of the SFIC to manage affairs. Unfortunately, the new government could not support the commercial development of the corporation, and Aryetey had to seek funding through various means for film production (Ukadike, 1994; Hesse, personal communication, 2004). There is no record explaining why this government failed to support the commercial growth of the film industry. What is known is that the government used the SFIC for its own political agenda, and to record the individual activities of government officials. Even though the previous Nkrumah government had been accused of similar misuses of the SFIC, the

social and cultural interest of Nkrumah and his government, for which they paid a great deal of attention to the media, particularly cinema, were lacking in this military government.

Apart from short educational films, the SFIC again produced mostly documentaries and newsreels for the benefit of the military government. It took two years from the time of the military take-over for the SFIC to produce a feature film, *No Tears for Ananse* (1968) directed by Sam Aryetey. This film is considered the first truly Ghanaian feature length film. It also marked the beginning of the experiments with traditional narrative forms.

For a pioneering film, *No Tears for Ananse* was very significant because it marked an important departure from colonial styles of filmmaking. For the first time, Ghanaians spectators could relate totally with what they saw. Not only did the film offer a visual inscription of a popular folktale, but the personification of the mythical master of intrigue, trickery and guile, Ananse, must have been fascinating to audiences.

*No Tears for Ananse* opens with on-screen text that tells us about the importance of storytelling among Ghanaians and that the most popular folk character is the mythical Ananse (the spider). Among the Akan, the spider character is called Kweku Ananse, a male. Other ethnic groups possess stories about this character, with culturally specific names him, and is often used as a symbol of shrewdness and cunning.

The films opens in a bushy neighbourhood and a voice over describes Kweku Ananse as sometimes brave and sometimes cowardly. We see Ananse appear and try to climb a tall cotton tree with a big gourd hanging around his neck and in front of him. In Ghanaian mythology, it is believed that the gourd contained all the wisdom of the world. In order that he alone can have access to the wisdom, Ananse tries to hide it high up a tall tree.

Unfortunately, Ananse himself is not any wiser, because no one climbs a tree with a gourd in front. He tries in vain and eventually falls down breaking the gourd. All the wisdom

spills and scatters. The voice-over informs us that, it is for this reason that all human beings now have wisdom.

As we leave the scene of Ananse's folly we are introduced to a traditional evening storytelling session. Apparently, the beginning of the film is the visualisation of the story that is being told about Ananse, his wife Okonor and their son Kweku Tsen, who have the largest farm in the village and how Ananse schemes to enjoy the rich crop all alone.

In typical traditional storytelling fashion, the audiences join in the narrative by encouraging the storytelling with comments, prompting him with questions and spicing the exchange with songs. This communal involvement in the story advances the narrative in a dynamic and interesting way as we see Ananse with a group of friends under a tree, drinking palm wine, singing and dancing, whilst his wife and son toil on the farm. The song that they sing, accompanied by a guitar, tells of Ananse's laziness, how he spends all day drinking alcohol whilst his wife and son do all the farm work. Later, when the wife complains about his attitude to farm work, he calls it nagging. What is fascinating here is that, the film appropriates typical traditional storytelling aesthetics by making the music an integral part of the narrative rather than simply background sound.

With the prospect a bountiful harvest, Ananse hatches a plan to feed on the crops alone. He feigns a great illness and instructs his wife and the people of the village not to bury him in a grave when he dies. He should be put on a bed and left on the farm under his favourite tree, and a grass hut built around his body.

His plan works to perfection and every night he comes out of the hut and feeds on the farm. Soon his wife and son notice the missing crops and make a report. However, no one believes them since stealing was alien to their traditions.

At this juncture we are introduced to another storytelling session. This time the story is taking place within the story of Ananse that we are witnessing. This story within the story is

also rich with performance, communal participation and ritual, and offers insights into the character of Ananse. This dynamism of narrative is common in many African stories, and rather than confuse the listeners, it offers new perspectives for audience enjoyment, particularly when the storytellers are able to modify existing tales.

For a while, Ananse enjoys the farm produce without inhibitions until his son sets a trap and catches him. He is disgraced. Then, as is common with folktales, the narrator ends the story with the moral admonishment that greed can lead to disgrace.

*No Tears for Ananse* laid the foundation for latter experiments with local narratives and symbolism. A year after its release Ghana experienced a change in political government. The military junta had, under pressure from civil society lifted the ban on political party activities and elections conducted in August 1969 brought the Progress Party of A. K. Busia to power.

The SFIC continued to be under the direction of Aryetey and he collaborated with his contemporaries to continue with the experimentation with traditional narrative forms. One of such films was *I Told You So* (1970), which has become one of Ghana's local classics. I shall discuss this film in detail in the next chapter as it reflected the introspective social, economic and aesthetic values of the 1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTROSPECTIVE FILMMAKING IN GHANA – (1970-1988)

The 1970s and 1980s could be described as the pinnacle of African filmmaking not only because of their profusion, but also because of the importance and variety of concerns African filmmakers dealt with. Significantly, African films became introspective as the cameras were turned inwards at the continent and on individual nation-states for self examination. But the period also marked the demise of filmmaking proper in some African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, to be replaced by home videos, a new and vibrant, even if contentious, form of cinema.

The early postcolonial era, spanning a period of about two decades, was replete with economic transgressions perpetrated by a newly emerged African political elite, who arrogated powers onto themselves and tended to use state apparatuses for selfish ends. The new nations became arenas where many social controversies and ethno-cultural conflicts were played out and where state systems pandered to the ex-colonial rulers and allowed the continuous plunder of Africa's natural resources, much to the chagrin of many African filmmakers, and indeed writers and political critics.

People started to question the logic of independence since it did not bring immediate economic prosperity, peaceful living among different ethnic groups, and since the much trumpeted African Personality was largely missing. The apparent dual allegiance of Africa's new leaders and their elitist collaborators, to both Africa and Europe, was confusing to those who thought that independence meant a total return to an authentic African world view. But colonialism had altered any thoughts of that African authenticity. Africa and Europe had converged inseparably at a crossroads.

Naturally, African filmmakers of this period were not only concerned with Africa's immediate past, but also with issues of cultural syncretism, cultural conflicts, the ambivalence of postcolonial identities, and most importantly, the corruption of the newly empowered African elite. As I noted in the last chapter, the 1970s marked the beginning of attempts to depart from the narrative legacies of colonial cinema and to experiment with new forms of storytelling, drawing on traditional African popular narratives. For example, in many parts of Africa, the *griot* (storyteller or historian) figure of traditional storytelling and the integral use of music in narrative emerged as fundamental formal elements in African film narration.

Later during the 1980s the overtly critical style of African introspection would be adopted by some filmmakers such as Gaston Kabore, with *Zan Boko* and Kwaw Ansah with *Love Brewed in the African Pot* and *Heritage...Africa*, whilst King Ampaw and Mweze Ngangura adopted comic techniques in their critiques of Africa's neo-colonial socio-cultural challenges.

This chapter examines African introspective filmmaking on a broad plane and then narrows the discussion to the specific case of Ghana.

AFRICAN INTROSPECTION

The years immediately following the demise of colonialism saw African filmmakers condemn the past excesses of the colonial system. In later years they would turn their attention towards the internal politics and culture of their respective independent nations, whose leaders were criticised for perpetuating the obnoxious and oppressive colonial state structures and their accompanying contemptible disregard for local people.

*Xala* (1974) by Sembene Ousmane, for example, is a damning indictment of the political leaders of newly independent African states, whose colonial acquiescence,

corruption, and mismanagement are exposed. *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1981) by Kwaw Ansah pokes fun at the Eurocentric behaviour of the newly empowered African elite, and *Zan Boko* (1988) by Gaston Kabore condemns the indiscriminate urban expansion of new African states in disregard for tradition, and the cultural sensibilities of local people.

Even though some 1960s films undertook similar tasks, such Sembene's *Mandabi*, it was during the 1970s that such themes proliferated and spilled into the 1980s. One of the recurring themes, during this period, centred on the social and cultural complexities imposed by the convergence of European and African cultures. The films demonstrate the difficult choices that people faced when making choices between European and African ways of doing things.

One of the first films to portray this cultural conflict is *Kodou* (1971) by Ababacar Samb-Makharam of Senegal. The film examines the conflict between the individual, posited as European, and the community, seen more as African. In *Kodou* a young girl, called Kodou, decides to partake in the traditional ritual of having her upper lip tattooed. Unfortunately she is unable to stand the pain and runs away. Her retreat is seen as a sign of immaturity and weakness. It also brings shame to her family. Her community, particularly her peers shun her company which results in her mental trauma. She is taken to a European doctor who fails to help her, but later, a traditional African medicine man cures her. The film suggests that not all the traditional ways of Africans must be replaced by European ones.

Similarly, *Abusuan* (1972) by Henri Duparc of La Côte d'Ivoire criticises the dependency syndrome that plagues many African families. In this system, members of a family, often including extended ones, would rely on the success of one or a few for their daily sustenance and other needs. The word 'Abusuan' means 'Uncle' and the Akans have a saying that 'My uncle is alive so I need not work'. Duparc's film exposes the dangerous

consequences of such dependency, suggesting that it produces delinquents and tends to motivate rural to urban migration.

Mambetey's *Touki Bouki* (1973) is an intellectually stimulating film that deplores the urge of African youth to leave their countries for Europe. In this film, Mori and his girlfriend Anta wish to immigrate to France. They fantasize about Paris and will do anything, including a variety of illegal activities, in a bid to gather enough money for the boat tickets.

Arguably, one of the most quintessential introspective films of Africa must be *Xala* (1974) by Sembene. This film has a straight forward narrative, but what makes its message poignant is the continuous juxtaposition of opposites, the same dichotomy that Sembene is criticising. *Xala* portrays a sharp distinction between the nouveux riche of independent Senegal and the poor and exploited common people, a theme that he had dealt with in 1963 with *Mandabi*, discussed in the previous chapter.

Whilst the Eurocentric political leaders loot government treasuries, the poor sit by the roadsides and beg. Unfortunately, the latter cannot even beg in peace as the same political leaders drive them out of town in a so-called beautification project. The man responsible for their ejection, El Hadj, suffers impotence through a curse by one of the beggars, at a time that he, El Hadj, is marrying a new wife. His impotence signifies the vanity of African political independence led by corrupt and inept politicians. In order to get back his potency, El Hadj has to endure a humiliating exorcism in which all the beggars gather and spit on his naked body.

Other films produced in the 1970s that sought to mirror Africa's postcolonial complexities include *Baara* (1978) (also known as *Work*) by Souleymane Cissé, a film about class struggles in Africa, and *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) by Haile Gerima, a critical exposition of the autocracy of feudalism in Ethiopia. In Cameroon, several films were made that criticised the practise of forced marriages, an outrageous dowry system, and the

exploitation of women. Examples are Jean Pierre Dikongue-Pipa's *Muna Moto* (1975) and two films by Daniel Kamwa, *Pouse-Pouse* (1975) and *The Price of Freedom* (1978).

The film that authoritatively presents an almost diagnostic appraisal of African cultural complexities, with regards to the ambiguous co-existence of foreign religions, namely Christianity and Islam, with traditional African beliefs must be *Ceddo* (1976), by Ousmane Sembene. *Ceddo* examines the religious confusion that has gripped Africa in the face of Islamic expansionism, Christianity and a tenacious African religious practice that refuses to be outdone. This film is very pathological in its portrayal of the ravages of hard-line religious indoctrination, particularly on the part of Islam. *Ceddo* reveals the brutality and power usurpation that has characterized the spread of Islam in Africa but also the passivity of Christianity whose missionaries often looked on whilst their prospective converts were slaughtered.

Besides the cultural concerns, many African films of the eighties also mirrored contemporary nationalism by flagging various national images either conspicuously or through subtle intertextuality. Ola Balogun's *Cry Freedom* (1981) was one of the most significant West African nationalist films of the period. Filmed on location in Ghana, with the collaboration of Ghanaian crews, *Cry Freedom* deals with the African liberation struggles for independence. According to Adjesu (*I Told You So*), who collaborated with Balogun on the film, it was inspired by the need to acknowledge the sacrifices that resulted in the political liberation of Africa.

*Cry Freedom* follows the activities of guerrilla fighters, reminiscent of the Mau Mau of colonial Kenya, whose motives for war and their daily struggles against the colonial administration provided the historical setting for an appraisal of Africa's political and social concerns, particularly as they related to matters of nationalism. As Ukadike has observed, the

film deals with "Africa's political problems, touching the continent's sensibility regarding freedom, independence, and the search for political, social, and cultural identity" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 152).

As noted earlier, some films of the 1980s were concerned with the oppression of indigenous populations by their governments. Gaston Kabore's *Zan Boko* (1988) criticised the oppressiveness of rapid urbanisation undertaken by new nations in complete disregard of local cultural sensitivities and the basic economic needs of rural people. The perpetrators, just as in *Mandabi* and *Xala* were the new African elite and aristocrats.

*Zan Boko* is one of Africa's most important films because of its political reflexivity, and its quest to free vulnerable indigenous populations from new forms of colonization. *Zan Boko* focuses on social justice, corruption, and the arbitrary misuse of power, issues of acculturation, and the freedom of the mass media to deal with the problems of modernization in Africa. The film criticizes the excesses of government officials and the tight controls and stifling influences that are brought to bear on the mass media.

The concerns mentioned above were not alien to Ghanaians. Filmmakers here were equally aware of the changing political terrain on the continent as a whole and in the country specifically. These shifts affected film production and exhibition.

INTROSPECTIVE FILMMAKING IN GHANA

The period of the 1970s and 1980s was marked by change in governments, dominated by the military, growing foreign and internal debts, rising inflation and increasing public unrest. Successful governments sought ways to earn the support of the public and sustain their rule, and therefore the development of a viable film industry was of no immediate interest to any. Each succeeding government only exploited what little was left of the

resources of the GFIC to make mainly non-commercial documentary films to justify its stewardship.

The period was also one of cultural transformations as the ambivalence of postcolonialism was confronted by people on a daily basis, as syncretic religious organisations were beginning to appear, and as so-called modern ways of living conflicted with the traditional. Some films of this period were reflexive of this cultural dynamism. Let me examine some of them.

### *I Told You So,* (1970)

In Ghana, perhaps the earliest film to place culture under a postcolonial microscope was Egbert Adjesu's *I Told You So*. This film had a dual role of representing early independence feature film production and also serving as the harbinger of introspective Ghanaian filmmaking. The film is set in the early period of African independence, a period that saw greater enlightenment among many people about their nationality, and their individual and collective responsibilities.

A new nation had been born and people positioned themselves to take advantage of new opportunities, freedoms, privileges and new found tastes. There were also the charlatans, tricksters and conmen who exploited the same opportunities. These were some of the nuances of the new Ghanaian nation that the film juxtaposed in a comic narrative that nonetheless laid bare the generational cultural conflicts.

*I Told You So* opens inside a Ghana Airways aircraft. The passengers look wealthy, and indulge in the hospitality of the airline, thus presenting to us a microcosm of the emerging African elite. The aircraft lands at the Accra international airport, and among the passengers that disembark is Jones, a tall well-dressed man. He is chauffeur driven to a plush hotel where

he displays his ostentation by indulging in a cigar, expensive drink and a lot of food. He is also very generous with his tips.

Whilst at his table, Jones is joined by a less flamboyant man who comically introduces himself as Esua Abor Buo Otsimdee Otsim, the Chief Letter-writer of the city. Esua Abor Buo turns out to be a trickster and an opportunist whose friendship with Jones is driven by greed.

For example, when he learns that Jones has returned from Nigeria where he has been working and has made a lot of money, and now wishes to marry a girl from Ghana, Esua Abor Buo promises to find him a beautiful girl on condition that Jones does not make any other friends apart from him. This behaviour sets the stage for the subsequent exploitation of Jones by almost everyone he comes into contact with, including his prospective wife, Rosina.

With his display of wealth, Jones becomes a centre of attraction and everyone wants a share of Jones' money. Only Rosina's father, Kwesi Twii, played by the versatile comedian Bob Cole, remains sceptical about Jones. For him, rich people cannot be trusted as one never knows the source of their riches. He therefore vows not to allow his daughter to marry any rich man. His hard line position brings him into conflict with his wife, daughter, brother, and the entire community, who see Rosina's marriage to Jones as an opportunity to make money.

Contrary to the admonishments of Kwesi Twii, Rosina follows the counsel of Esua Abor Buo and Araba Stamp, and marries Jones. At the marriage ceremony members of the Secret Police arrest Jones for diamond theft. This revelation shatters Rosina's dreams whilst her collaborators are also disgraced because of their complicity in a fraudulent marriage. In a typical didactic ending to such stories, Kwesi Twii, reminds them of his cautions against the pursuit of easy riches, and tells Esua Abor Buo, "I told you so".

The humorous and witty dialogue, and popular expressions in the film, combined with Esua Abor Buo's comic gesticulations, were appreciated by audiences all over Ghana when it

was first released, and made it a household name. Shot in a local Ghanaian dialect, Fante, the film relies heavily on the actor's improvisation and the mastery of local lore.

At the same time the music, which is comical, forms part of the narrative and offers background information and insights into the characters and their mindset. For example, when Jones is arrested by the Secret Police, Esua Abor Buo tries to intervene and gets into trouble. In order to free himself, he sings a comical plea to be freed, saying that if Jones stole money and has come to marry it has nothing to do with him.

*I Told You So* is not conspicuously political in its approach to dealing with the issues of post-colonialism. It makes subtle allusions to the type of flamboyant modern-style life that people dream of in contrast with the traditional values of humility, honesty and respect for hard work. African traditions themselves are not under scrutiny in this film. Rather, in portraying people's rejection of those traditions in pursuit of affluence, which have disastrous consequences, Adjesu seems to suggest that the assumption of so-called modern identities, tastes and attitudes must be approached with caution.

*I Told You So* resonates with a certain new conception of freedom which often allows the disregard of young people for parental guidance. Secondly, the complicity of two adults in the young girl's wrong choice of spouse reflects the cultural ambivalence in which foreign traditions clash with African ones. Finally though, in typical concert party style, and without been overly didactic, the film ends with a comic revelation of the truth.

The popularity and commercial success of *I Told You So* did not alter the approach of the military government to filmmaking in the country. The government and state officials continued to use the facilities of the corporation to promote various government agenda but failed to develop a self-sustainable commercial unit. In 1971, the State Film Industry Corporation was renamed Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC), but its mandate did not change nor was any money made available for commercial film production. The corporation

therefore had to struggle to raise its own funds to produce films, mostly relying on the rental of facilities to foreign producers, or co-productions.

Through these efforts, the corporation produced *Do Your Own Thing* (1971) by Bernard Odidja, which tells the story of a young Ghanaian girl aspiring to be a soul singer. Unfortunately, this initial impetus of the GFIC could not be sustained and in a desperate bid to save the corporation from insolvency, Aryetey embarked on a series of co-productions with European producers that proved financially disastrous (Ukadike, 1994; Hesse, personal communications, 2004).

The first of such co-operations was between the GFIC and an Italian company, Ital Victoria, represented by Giorgio Bontempi to produce *Contact* (1974), which was directed by Bontempi. For the first time too, since the GFIC faced an acute shortage of funds, it had to borrow ¢1,000,000.00 (one million cedis – Ghanaian currency) from the Ghana Commercial Bank to finance its part of the deal. Unfortunately the film flopped and left the GFIC with a huge debt that prevented other filmmakers from borrowing.

For example, in 1974 independent filmmaker Kwaw Ansah had finished his script for *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, but for many years he could not find a bank willing to lend him the money. A few banks offered him the loan on condition that he could provide collateral security in the form of a house or other property. He had none. Moreover, he was constantly reminded of the GFIC's debt for which banks were reluctant to offer loans to filmmakers.

In spite of the financial challenges, the GFIC persisted, and four years later, produced another important film, *Genesis Chapter X* (1978) directed by Tom Ribeiro. This film was relatively more successful and offered hope that the corporation could turn its dwindling fortunes around.

By the close of the 1970s the GFIC was still not commercially sustainable. It functioned largely as a propaganda unit for the government in power. Filmmakers here could not find money to produce films. Kwaw Ansah, who had been searching for funds to produce his film, *Love Brewed in the African Pot,* was finally assisted by his father-in-law who put forth his house and a cocoa farm as collateral for the bank loan. This film, along with others such as *Kukurantumi, Road to Accra* and *Heritage...Africa*, demonstrate the cultural and political reflexivity of the period.

### *Love Brewed in the African Pot,* (1980)

*Love Brewed in the African Pot*, (sometimes dated 1981), is a close up of Africa's postcolonial cultural ambivalence. The film is an indictment of the African elite in particular who seem to have severed themselves from their ovarian roots. At the same time, it suggests that a re-definition of African identity needs a delicate balance between traditional concepts and practices and those acquired through the assimilatory processes of colonialism.

*Love Brewed in the African Pot* revolves around the Appiah family, a typically aristocratic one, where certain ideological choices are forced on them. Appiah, a retired clerk, seeks to distinguish himself and his family from the commoners in the community and therefore wishes to marry his daughter Aba into a rich and influential family of aristocrats. Aba, a formally educated young woman, on the other hand has fallen in love with Joe Quansah, a semi-literate auto-mechanic. This difference in interests sets the stage for the multi-layered confrontations between various characters that essentially expose the prejudices, mutual suspicions and painful compromises that have to be borne by both adherents of traditional African practices and their Eurocentric counterparts.

Various concepts are at work in this complex but humorous film. Ansah deals with issues of acculturation, the conflicts caused by generational gaps, elitist condescension of

traditional values and the conflicts between traditional African systems (such as shrines) and European ones.

What is interesting within the world of Ansah's film is that whilst Appiah looks forward to a European style wedding for her daughter, complete with flowers, wedding gowns, tuxedos, champagne, a flamboyantly decorated wedding cake and elitist bourgeois speeches, his daughter wishes for a traditional African marriage ceremony.

In a juxtaposition of contrasting scenes, we see that whilst the African marriage ceremony is underway, Appiah stays back home and fantasizes about the European style wedding that he believes would have made him and his family the pride of the town. By contrasting an actual African wedding ceremony with Appiah's Eurocentric fantasy, Ansah suggests the futility and vanity of such perceptions as Appiah's. After all, no matter how hard Africans try to copy European ways they will never really be Europeans.

In one scene, for example, an elder from Appiah's extended family reprimands him for sending money instead of attending a traditional ceremony in person. He is told that his relatives are interested in him and not his money. Appiah is reminded that he has roots in the fishing community, which he shuns, and from which he can never cut himself off. This revealing scene marks the beginning of Appiah's acceptance of Joe as a son-in-law, albeit with some scepticism.

Appiah is portrayed as one who treats everything African with contempt and disgust. He shows arrogance and displeasure when three elderly men visit him on behalf of Joe to ask for the hand of Aba in marriage, but he displays humility, respect and hospitality towards Counsellor Bensah, a fellow aristocrat who visits for the same purpose. Appiah accepts Bensah's imported drink as an offering for the hand of Aba, but he shows utter contempt and disgust for the locally brewed gin "akpeteshie" that Joe's family offers.

The other major dichotomy that Ansah establishes between African and European ways is in the area of medicine. When Aba experiences psychological trauma, after having been accused of infidelity and rejected by Joe, Appiah, her father, wants to take her to the psychiatric hospital but is told Aba's problem cannot be treated in a hospital. She is instead taken to several traditional religious shrines to undergo spiritual exorcism. At one such shrine, Appiah reluctantly assists in the slaughtering of a fowl, turning away in disgust as the bird's throat is slit.

Several complex situations emerge in this film that call to mind the ambiguities and ambivalence of African identity in the post-colonial era. For example, even though Appiah believes in the African tradition of strict gender roles, evident in his definition of a good woman, he cannot be totally committed to that belief. Appiah thinks that a good woman is one who cooks well, listens to her husband and does not talk back unless asked. Appiah's willingness to indulge in this patriarchy, in order to control his daughter, contrasts with his rejection of the various traditional overtures made to him. Apparently Appiah has to walk a tight line between traditional Africa and his European oriented identity.

Similarly, the compromises that some Africans seek to make in their resistance to cultural domination are represented by the resilience of Joe to pursue his love affair against Appiah's Eurocentric opposition, and yet he is willing to accept Appiah and his family. This suggests an ongoing struggle mediate new identities. Ansah tries to achieve some level of equilibrium by suggesting that European and African ways can co-exist.

For example, in spite of his Christian faith, for which he rejects his traditional links, Appiah acquiesces to take his daughter to the traditional shrine. Not only does he consent to the demands of the shrine but he actually participates in the ceremonies and reveals his hypocrisy when he shows revulsion for the sacrifice of the bird. Later he takes Aba to a

psychiatric hospital. Appiah's consent to the two methods of curative and religious practices demonstrates both cultural ambivalence and compatibility.

The popularity and success of this film in Ghana particularly, lies not so much in its political discourse, but rather, like *I Told You So*, in the use of popular cultural expressive forms and symbols. Children who watched this film were thrilled to see reflections of themselves in the scene in which a little boy runs away from his bath.

Similarly Joe's guitar music is a reflection of the profusion of music and its various uses in African societies. His Romeo and Juliet style romance, in which he whistles and sneaks to his lover out of earshot of authoritative parents will resonate with many young people who must avoid the attention of their parents in pursuit of their romances.

One of the most culturally interesting scenes is the public wrestling competition that takes place on the beach. Outside Africa, because of anthropological films and other similar studies, many people associate wrestling with the Nuba tribe of Southern Sudan, or the Yoruba of Nigeria, but in fact wrestling is a popular sport, past-time and entertainment in many societies across Africa.

### *Kukurantumi…Road to Accra,* (1983)

After *Loved Brewed in the African Pot*, the next film of cultural importance is *Kukurantumi…Road to Accra* by King Ampaw. Ampaw is one of the filmmakers in Black Africa who have thrived on co-productions, unlike Ansah who rejected foreign funding because he thought it would alter the authenticity of his story. For Ampaw, co-productions and the use of foreign money did not influence his themes or his narrative choices. His two major films *Kukurantumi…Road to Accra* and *Juju* (1986) were both produced by his company Afromovies in cooperation with Reinery Film Produktion and NDR television, both of West Germany.

*Kukurantumi…Road to Accra* is a story about the misfortunes of a truck driver, Addey, and his family. The truck itself serves interesting anthropological purposes, because during this time the mammy truck, an adaptation of cargo vehicles to serve as passenger lorries, were being phased out in Ghana. Addey shuttles between his village, Kukurantumi and Accra, the capital, but he is plagued by a series of unfortunate incidents, including an accident, which plunge him into big debt. In an attempt to raise money to pay his creditors, Addey decides that one of his daughters, Abena, should get married to Mensah, a prosperous businessman from Accra.

Abena rejects her father's choice of spouse and in order to prevent a confrontation with him over the matter she leaves home and heads for the city to seek her own fortunes. To her shock and dismay, the city is not quite the glossy and fantastic place she had heard of and dreamed about. She rather finds herself in the heart of innumerable horrors including the lack of employment, corruption and prostitution. Without any education or particular skills Abena is unable to find a job and has to join her friend Mary in prostituting.

Ampaw does not engage in the direct discourse of culture in the way that Ansah does with *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, but rather paints a picture of post-colonial urban Africa that is marred by rural-urban migrations, social inequities and moral decadence. Ampaw uses various cultural settings to represent the exploitative post-colonial environment, such as the exploitation of women, and in doing so Ampaw calls attention to the processes that compromise traditional values. Unlike Ansah, Ampaw does not subject audiences to the dichotomies of foreign and indigenous traditions. Rather he is concerned with the internal vicissitudes within emerging modern cities in Africa.

Ampaw's concern for Africa's culture is often rendered in self-reflexive forms. As with *Kukurantumi…Road to Accra* his next film *Juju* examines the changing nature of African

traditions and posits that traditional leaders, elders and people need to be aware of a wider world around them and be able to change along with it.

The story is about the intended development of a village. The chief of the village sends his son to college, who returns and proposes a village communal project to construct a bore-hole in order to supply potable water to the people. Unfortunately this clashes with his father's ambitions to build a new palace through the same communal efforts. In this film, Ampaw uses satire and humour to critique the perennial problem of misplaced priorities in contemporary African politics. This indirect approach to socio-political critique contrasts sharply with Kwaw Ansah's more aggressive style, such as in *Heritage...Africa*.

### *Heritage…Africa,* (1988)

*Heritage…Africa* is Kwaw Ansah's second major feature film which continues his questioning of African elitist assimilation to European ways as against African interests. The film was not only phenomenal in its visual approach to the subject of colonialism, but it also brought memories of the period to many people who had lived through the colonial experience, and therefore were able to question their own complicity with the system.

*Heritage Africa* was completed in 1988 after a period of six years in waiting for a bank loan to mature. The film was later funded by a conglomeration of three banks– Social Security Bank, Ghana Commercial Bank, and National Investment Bank– which together raised over two hundred million cedis (about half a million US dollars at the 1988 exchange rate). This was a colossal amount by Ghanaian standards. No other indigenous Ghanaian film project has since cost so much money.

In this film Ansah tackles some of the issues that he had dealt with in *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, such as the clash of cultures, but more importantly he condemns the alienation that colonialism brings to bear on African people as they coerced into rejecting

their cultural identities in favour of European ones. Ansah also amplifies some of Ampaw's themes, such as the misplaced priorities of political leaders in dealing with issues of education, health and national development.

For its political and cultural significance the film has been described as "one of the most powerful and innovative African films to have come out of anglophone Africa" (Ukadike, 1994, p.141). Perhaps in recognition of this importance to African, the film was awarded the Grande Prix (the Etalon de Yennega) at the Pan African Film and Television Festival in 1989. In the 1991 edition of the festival it was again honoured with the Institute of Black Peoples Award.

*Heritage…Africa* is not based on a specific political encounter, but derives its ideological focus and narrative form from the complex and antagonistic relationship between the British colonial authorities and their African collaborators on one side, and on the other, the traditionalists who rejected the colonial manipulation of African culture.

As Diawara (1992) has noted, "*Heritage Africa* puts into play the psychological history of encounters between Africa and Europe… Kwaw Ansah is interested in the history of the repressed identity and the ways in which the repressed returns with a vengeance" (Diawara, 1992, p. 159). Ansah's film could be seen as an analogy of the philosophical and thematic approaches to African cinema, which emerged from an oppressive environment to resist further colonization and to struggle for freedom of conscience.

*Heritage…Africa* is about the emerging African elite during the years preceding independence and at a time when popular nationalist movements were agitating for independence. The story centres on the rise and fall of a central character, Kwesi Atta Bosomefi (aka, Quincy Arthur Bosomfield) a faithful and dutiful colonial servant. His European education and steady rise within the colonial administrative system eradicated the connections to his cultural roots thus causing a dramatic change in his identity. He changed

his traditional Fante name to one that sounded English- Quincy Arthur Bosomfield. His traditional name had meaning relevant to his African historical roots. Kwesi means he was born on a Sunday, Atta indicates that he is a twin and Bosomefi signifies the rebirth of an illustrious ancestor. Through the indoctrination of colonial education Bosomefi grows to despise his name and therefore changes it to suit his new Eurocentric personality.

Upon his elevation to District Commissioner, he moves to live in the European Quarter as a colonial incentive and appreciation for his obedience and dedicated services to the colonial government. He has become so 'British' that he even feels ashamed to introduce his mother to his friends when she comes to visit.

Bosomfield experiences a series of humiliating incidents and revealing confrontations with his estranged wife, the incarcerated political activist Akroma, and his mother who questions the value of his education if he cannot keep faith with his own traditions. His mother is particularly disappointed that he had given away a 500-year old heirloom that he was supposed to guard. Later he has a revealing dream that complements the lessons of his mother on the cultural importance of the family heirloom. These incidents culminate to set Bosomfield on the road to self discovery albeit through the tragic sacrifice of his life.

In a typical polemical style, as he used in *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, Ansah opens *Heritage…Africa* by pitching African traditions against European ways. The very first scene in which a group of boys try to harvest mangoes from the compound of a European, immediately establishes a confrontation between African environmental liberties against the European enclosures that keep the fruits of nature away from the people. In African societies such fruit trees had communal ownership and people were free to take as many fruits as they wished. This contrasted sharply with the fences that the Europeans used in their Quarters to enclose the trees.

This opening scene is followed by another, more graphic, exposure of the hypocrisy of European Christian practices. During a church service which starts with the singing of Handel's *Alleluia Chorus*, a White priest preaches about compassion and the need to support the less fortunate in society, particularly the mentally ill and the destitute. At that moment a woman, looking dishevelled and perhaps mentally ill, walks into the church house and finds a sitting place in a pew. Several people shift away from her and the priest stops preaching. The woman is dragged out of the Church building amidst protests that she too has come to pray. Only then does the service resume.

Whilst this hypocrisy is manifested in the priest's inability to practice what he is preaching, his closing prayer confirms the purpose of the earlier colonial deployment of Christian Missionaries. The priest prays thus:

> Great and manifold for the blessings which almighty God the
>
> Father of all mercies has bestowed upon the people of England
>
> when first he sent his Majesty's Royal persons to rule and reign
>
> over his subjects. Amen.

The congregation, either out of ignorance of the import of the prayer or out of expectant obedience, answer with a thunderous "Amen".

Immediately following the church scene is a traditional one that Bosomfield's son Archibold attends. He is later flogged because, as his father makes him recite, "A Christian child does not watch a fetish dance" a rule of thumb that his entire school memorizes. Archibold would later die from his injuries resulting from the flogging, partly because his father does not take him to the hospital but is preoccupied with admiring the photographs of British royalty and being the obedient colonial servant.

Ansah uses the sequence of the 'fetish dance' to call attention to the negative European missionary interpretations of African traditions. Africans were told that their ways, such as dancing, were heathen, and in the words of the school children at parade, anyone who engaged in such activities "will go to hell". The film reflects the overwhelming indoctrination that Africans underwent under colonialism and the humiliation they endured in the process.

In *Heritage…Africa* the most important concern for Ansah is the loss of heritage, which is not simply in the change of names or even the rejection of one's culture, but more importantly the intentional complicity of Africans with the European disregard of African culture, the demeaning appraisal of African religious and cultural symbols as mere art and the condescending appraisal of African worldviews. This is represented by Bosomfield presenting the invaluable family heirloom to the Governor who in turn admires it as a unique piece of art.

Bosomfield's mother visits him because she needs to congratulate him in person for his achievements. She appreciates his steep rise in both education and profession. At the same time she shows greater concern for the cultural development of her son and therefore entrusts the 500-year old heirloom into his care. The heirloom had been passed down from generation to generation as the guiding spirit that protects members of the family. Contrary to the admonitions of his mother, Bosomfield gives the casket to the Governor "as a humble token of my high esteem," he says. The Governor examines the casket in admiration and rather than enquire about its cultural, historical or religious significance, he comments on its "exquisite craftsmanship and an interesting piece of art."

By giving away the heirloom Bosomfield relinquishes his heritage, betrays his people, and in fact betrays the whole of Africa. As Barlet (2000) puts it, Bosomfield's behaviour is "a treason against the Africa of tradition as much as against the Africa of nations – the fatherland" (Barlet, 2000, p. 52). Ansah's film is a political film that uses culture as the arena to engage in the discourse of both culture and nationalism. Culture offers tremendous

opportunities to employ images and texts that are reflexive and allow audiences to see their own mirror images, so that they too may reflect on their current identities in relation to their roots and nationalisms.

This is the strength of *Heritage...Africa* which Anyidoho (2000) observed in 1988 when the film premiered to a select audience in Ghana. According to Anyidoho, many of those who saw the film that night would have found most of the scenes in the film too uncomfortably familiar. The film brought back memories of harsh discipline and the forcible rejection of one's own people and culture. It reminded people of a period when they could not be called by their traditional names and when they could not speak their own languages freely in schools and were compelled to go to church every Sunday. Anyidoho describes the mood of the first audiences to see the film thus:

> "There was laughter; there was quiet weeping; but above all, there was silence, silence of the kind trapped between the desire to scream for joy and the desperate need to sit tight on one's fear of self-exposure. As the screen received the unfolding images and threw them back at us, too many of us must have found many scenes too close to large segments of our lives, scenes from lives we had hoped to have left far behind us" (Anyidoho, in Anyidoho & Gibbs (Eds.), 2000, p. 315).

*Heritage...Africa*, according to Ansah, was shunned by many theatres even in Ghana, (most of them were owned by foreigners) because of the same political reasons for which foreign studios and financial institutions had declined to be associated with it. In an interview with Kofi Anyidoho (2000) Ansah compares the massive patronage of *Love Brewed in the African Pot* to the relatively low turnout for *Heritage...Africa*. And even when the film

started to attract commercial attention, it was massively pirated and caused the box-office earnings to slump (ibid).

*Heritage…Africa* is also about nationalism. Whilst it has a focus on the loss of cultural identity under colonialism it also shows clearly that people will often be united in pursuing common objectives such as freedom of conscience and political rights. For example, when the workers meet to discuss their protest strategies, the slogans they use and the responses to their leaders are reminiscent of protest actions in Ghana.

As Anyidoho suggests, the struggle for liberation is not yet won and *Heritage...Africa* is Africa's continuing fight for liberation and selfhood (Anyidoho, 2000). Citing Mohammed ben Abdallah, then Minister of State, who delivered a speech at the premiere, Anyidoho concludes that "the final battle for the liberation of Africa from her colonial legacy is to be staged on the cinema and video screen. *Heritage Africa* is clearly part of that battle" (ibid, p. 318). Unfortunately such exuberant rhetoric has remained just that. *Heritage… Africa* was the last major film of considerable political importance in Ghana. *Heritage...Africa* effectively ended film production in Ghana as a conscious political weapon.

Following the lack of productions, the facilities of the GFIC were rented for foreign film productions such as *African Timber*, *Cobra Verde*, *Deadly Voyage* and *Sankofa*. Apart from these, the 1980s witnessed the rise of a new phenomenon that would transform cinema in Ghana. The absence of domestic film production left a vacuum that was quickly filled by amateur producers who adapted video technology to cinema. Their products came to be known as video-films. Even though these videos pandered to the consumerist tastes of a mass audience hungry for local entertainment, they were often criticised for failing to engage with the liberation discourse. The next chapter examines the emergence of video-films.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EMERGENCE OF VIDEO-FILMS

The third major shift in cinema after colonialism in Ghana must be the emergence of video-films. Video-films are products of cinema that are produced and distributed on video and digital formats. It will be recalled that the first phase involved the production of anti-colonial and nationalist oriented films, which mostly appeared between 1957 and 1970. The second phase was one of introspection during the 1970s and 1980s. The third phase followed a drought in film production during the 1980s.

It was during the late 1980s, a period of mixed fortunes for filmmaking in Ghana, that video-films emerged with new forms of social representation. Whilst this initiative was criticised for its lack of a critical engagement with society and culture, and for undermining the initial political impetus of African filmmaking, video-films were (and still are) very popular with frequent allusions to their introspection (see Meyer, 1999, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c & 2004; Haynes, 2006; Garritano, 2008).

In this chapter I am interested in how video-films emerged and the themes and concepts that they dealt with. First of all, I will offer a brief overview of how the traditional celluloid-based cinema collapsed in the country.

THE COLLAPSE OF CINEMA IN GHANA

The global economic down-turn of the 1980s caused a deep economic recession to Ghana too. The nation was compelled to re-evaluation development priorities through the adoption of stringent austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These conditions negatively affected, among other things, the

production of culture and leisure. Local film production ground to a halt and supplemented the domineering presence of foreign films.

By the close of the 1980s Ghana's economy had left an indelible imprint on the country's social and political structures. There was massive unemployment, poor supply of essential utilities, and consequently low productivity, especially by industries. The situation was exacerbated by the declining prices of gold and cocoa on the world market, the destruction of food crops by bushfires, and long periods of drought.

In the midst of competing national priorities, filmmaking was relegated. An exception is made of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage...Africa*, which enjoyed government's intervention in acquiring local bank credit more because of the socialist leadings of the military government in power at the time, rather than economic pragmatism.

Therefore, whilst filmmaking proliferated in some African countries during the 1980s, particularly in the Francophone zone, Ghana, which still boasted of its film infrastructure at the GFIC, could produce only six. These were *Loved Brewed in the African Pot* (1981), *The Visitor* (1981), *His Majesty's Sergeant* (1984), *Kukurantumi- Road to Accra* (1984), *Juju* (1986), and *Heritage...Africa* (1988). Even though *The Visitor*, *Kukurantumi- Road to Accra* and *Juju* were co-productions with, and owned by foreign concerns, they are still usually listed as Ghanaian films.

THE RISE OF VIDEO-FILMS IN GHANA

Video-films emerged as commercial products during the late 1980s when some individual entrepreneurs discovered the commercial uses of home-video systems. During the early 1980s, many Ghanaians returning from their sojourns abroad brought with them VCRs and Home Video Cameras. Soon it became fashionable for people to record their social occasions, such as weddings, picnics, funerals and birthday parties, on video. Various local

theatre groups also recorded their performances on video which they sold in the open market. One such group was the Osofo Dadzie theatre group, whose very popular television drama programme, *Osofo Dadzie,* on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation- Television (GBC-TV) was recorded weekly and sold on VHS cassettes.

At the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Accra the video technology had also been in use for short fiction and documentary student productions in place of the prohibitive celluloid. Due to the high cost of film stock and processing, NAFTI introduced the use of Electronic News Gathering (ENG) equipment for training in 1981, and this marked the beginning of training in video. NAFTI's short student features, produced on video since the mid-eighties, were shown regularly on national television on a programme titled "*Time With NAFTI*".

These precursors uncovered the commercial potentials of video, and in spite of deepening economic crises, early experiments at producing video-films were successful, because of video's relative low cost and ease of use, and kick-started their commercial pursuit. As Ogunleye has noted, "[The] success of these experiments, which generated a lot of interest from the public provided great impetus for the video industry in Ghana" (Ogunleye, 2003, p. 2).

Arguably, the first individual to consciously use video commercially was Allen Gyimah who, in the early 1980s, recorded football marches involving a popular Ghanaian football team, Asante Kotoko, which he then duplicated on VHS cassettes for sale. Later he signed an agreement with the Osofo Dadzie theatre group to record a skit in filmic style, which was then distributed commercially under his production label, Video City. That video-film was *Abbyssinia* (1986), a story about the vicissitudes of city life, and which was massively distributed on VHS cassettes. (This video is inaccessible.)

*Abbyssinia* set the stage for other productions that were to usher in the video phenomenon. One of the earliest known producers was William Akuffo of Worldwide Motion Pictures who is often credited for being the first to successfully pursue the commercial advantages of video-films. The son of a film exhibitor, Akuffo was always fascinated by moving pictures and wanted to discover how they were made.

When he was of age, he sought various means of producing his own moving pictures by playing with his father's 16mm camera. Later in life, he discovered the commercial possibilities of video and motivated by the urge to produce his own movies he abandoned the business of film projection, which he had inherited from his father, and produced *Zinabu* (1987).

In spite of this novelty, showing the video posed a big challenge. Audiences were not used to watching video projections in cinemas, and Akuffo was afraid of rejection (Meyer, 2001; Garritano, 2008). Exhibiting *Zinabu* this way was therefore a risky venture, because the size of the picture on screen was smaller than what people were used to, and the picture quality not so good either.

However, in spite of these deficiencies, the audience enjoyed *Zinabu* as the first commercially screened video-film, and "were not too particular about the technical quality of the film at this stage... [They] were just happy to have something presented to them in their own idiom" (Ogunleye, ibid, p. 4).

*Zinabu* tells the story of a beautiful and wealthy woman, Zinabu, who meets Kofi, a poor auto-mechanic, and offers him an irresistible deal. In exchange for a life of wealth and comfort Kofi agrees not to make love to any woman, not even Zinabu herself. Kofi thinks the deal is a condemnation to a life of impotence, but the promise of an ostentatious life style is too attractive to reject. Unfortunately, he is not able to keep his part of the deal as he succumbs to his sexual desires, and consequently pays with his life.

Though this film was technically flawed it was nonetheless very successful at the box-office and paved the way for video-films to replace celluloid in the cinemas. The success of *Zinabu* encouraged Akuffo to produce four sequels to the first one in collaboration with another Ghanaian, Richard Quartey. For example, the *Diablo* (1987-1988) series of films told the story of a 'snake-man' on a path of vengeance against all prostitutes whom he blames for his dual identity, which he obviously loathes. With *Zinabu* and *Diablo*, Akuffo also started the visual representations of invisible spiritual forces which will become very common during the 1990s. Before the close of the 1980s, Akuffo had made two more video-films, *Mobor* (1989) and *Cult of Alata* (1989). Other producers soon joined the video trend, such as Socrates Safo, who made *Unconditional Love* (1988) and Sidiku Buari produced *Aayalolo* (1988).

Meanwhile the GFIC was not completely left out of these developments. Some of the early video-film producers did approach the GFIC for collaborations but were turned away because the idea of cinema on video was difficult to appreciate. For the GFIC, video was simply too inferior and did not allow for cinematic artistry. Akuffo for example was turned away by the GFIC when he tried to show his video at the Kanda Film Theatre on the premises of the corporation, or for that matter any of the other 18 theatres in the country. He therefore turned to other privately owned cinemas most of whom offered him the 'four walling' deal, which required the exhibitor alone to bear the cost of hiring the theatre and exhibition equipment, and to be the sole bearer of any liabilities.

After successfully exhibiting *Zinabu*, Akuffo, like other video-film producers, sought other means to maximise profits. With the popularity and proliferation of small video parlours across the length and breadth of the country and the profusion of home video entertainment systems, it was only logical to find marketers and distributors with whom he worked out

agreements based on commissions, and allowed the films to be exhibited nation-wide and for copies of the videos to be sold on VHS cassettes.

Video-films created a new kind of public sphere, new social relations and new viewing experiences. The producers soon discovered new configurations of audiences, particularly among the Pentecostals, and therefore found it necessary to demystify the dominant cinematic conventions instituted by traditional celluloid filmmaking, and to make their videos acceptable to the popular audience whose patronage sustained their enterprise (Ukadike, 2000). The tastes and desires of these audiences therefore drove the styles and themes of the producers, and also allowed them to develop new networks of distribution, and techniques of sales and exhibition (Larkin, 2001).

THEMATIC CONCERNS OF GHANAIAN VIDEO-FILMS

Early video producers dwelt primarily on issues of survival and prosperity, which were predominant in public discourses. Not only were these issues headlines in the popular press, they also found expression in other spheres of public life. It was common to find various popular tabloid newspapers, such as the *People and Places* newspaper, (aka *P&P*), report on mysterious births and deaths, rituals, and other strange occurrences.

The videos also sought to reflect the daily struggles of ordinary Ghanaians rather than pursue the grand narratives of independence, nationalism and postcolonialism. In a way, they challenged the dominant ideologies and practices championed by the formally trained filmmakers. Their simplistic and often predictable narratives and poor technical quality notwithstanding, the videos appealed to audiences whom the producers did not want to risk alienating through some technical virtuosity (Safo, personal communication, 2003).

The technological accessibility and flexibility of video allowed Video filmmakers to transcend the multifaceted limitations of celluloid and to generate new forms of mediation

within what Ukadike calls 'the hybrid space of the popular imagination' (Ukadike, 2000, p. 244). Ukadike argues that video producers have been using hybrid forms to create hybrid film/video cultures necessitated by the need to survive rather than "instigated by aesthetic considerations or a quest for cultural and national authenticity' (Ukadike, ibid, p. 245).

The shift from grand themes of cultural and national authenticity to popular ones produced a variety of themes which later development into local genres. Most of the themes and narratives explored the social polemics of humility and social values as against the anti-social attitudes of greed and the unscrupulous pursuit of wealth. This dichotomy had already existed in various television programmes and public theatre (concert party) performances and had been very popular with Ghanaian audiences especially as there was already a rich store of these oppositional forces in traditional folklore.

Sutherland-Addy (2000) has suggested that, thematically, Ghanaian video-films may be grouped with other art forms such as theatre and song which manifest "the fickleness of human nature, domestic crises, and the stresses involved in the modernization process" (Sutherland-Addy, in Anyidoho & Gibbs, (Eds.), 2000, p. 267). She argues that video-films often concern themselves with the correction of social evils. They "represent to society the nature and effect of certain forms of behaviour or particular practices, especially as they relate to the domestic context and to the workplace" (ibid, p. 267).

The themes and concerns of Ghanaian video-films can be placed in many categories. What I offer below is less than exhaustive, but I have tried to discuss the most salient and broad-based themes.

### *The World of Riches*

Many video-films produced in Ghana, particularly during the 1990s, were set within the world of the middle to upper class societies and within urban environments, even though

some of them were produced with rural traditional African settings. Many themes in video-films were informed by the life-styles of the rich and famous, even though most of such life-styles were depicted as corrupt and evil.

Writing about video-films on the website of the African Film Festival of New York, Larkin (2001) observes that transgression dominates the themes of video-films, in which characters flout everyday moral behaviour. Men are seen to betray their wives, women offer sex for money, the young have no respect for the old and the old become corrupt and evil. At the end evil is punished and good wins out.

Many video-films have depicted the acquisition of wealth through dubious and evil means. They often suggest that almost everyone is willing to use some form of witchcraft, 'juju', or enter into some agreement with an occult force in order to amass wealth. In doing so, the videos develop a capacity to shock and outrage audiences, as they render in vivid visual detail the otherwise invisible and evil world of the occult.

In the face of extreme poverty by the majority of people, which is in stark contrast to the massive wealth of a minority elite, sorcery, witchcraft and the belief in supernatural powers have provided the means for people to explain those inequalities.

Furthermore, as Ogunleye (2003) has argued, in the face of economic difficulties, "escapist art would definitely blossom" and because many filmgoers often crave this escapist fare. "The citizens would appreciate 'getting away from it all' for an hour or so, while the film lasts, before getting back to the grimness of reality" (Ogunleye, 2003, p. 8).

### *Traditional Africa against Euro-Christianity*

Many videos-films highlighted the conflict between the evil occult and witchcraft on one side, often presented as traditionally African, and then goodness or virtue on the other,

presented as Christian/Pentecostal. *Expectations I & II* (1998 & 1999) by Ezekiel Dugbartey Nanor, is one of the best examples of videos with this theme.

In *Expectations I*, Nana is married to Gifty and they are expecting their first child who will be heir to the stool in Nana's village. Their Pastor (religious mentor and guide) admonishes them to be faithful to their prayers. They live in the city, and one day Gifty decides to pay a visit to her mother and sister in the village. At the village a group of witches, among which is Gifty's sister Dufie, seek to destroy Gifty's child, and Dufie chosen to carry out the deed.

Dufie poisons Gifty's food which causes her to lose her baby and for a long time is unable to get pregnant again. We are shown that the poison is effective only because Gifty fails to pray over the food before eating. As a result of Gifty's barrenness, there is pressure on Nana to marry another woman who can produce a child. Whilst Nana is out, his mother throws Gifty out of her matrimonial home and brings in a new wife for him.

In *Expectations II,* Nana marries the new wife, Lucy. She is able to produce a baby boy who is then destined to be the next chief of the village. The Pastor, who had travelled overseas (to Europe) returns and convinces Nana to take back Gifty. He obliges but is unable to let go off Lucy, the mother of his only son. What he does not know is that Lucy is one of the witches. She plans to kill Gifty and get rid of her once and for all. But this time, due to Gifty's prayers, she is not affected by the poison that Lucy has put in her food. Rather it is the boy who eats part of the food, gets sick and dies.

Gifty is blamed for the death of the boy, found guilty of murder by a court and jailed. Again, prayers from the Pastor and a spiritual confrontation with the witches expose them as the evildoers. Gifty is freed from jail and re-unites with Nana. She subsequently gets pregnant and a child is expected who will be the heir to the stool in the village.

Clearly, this video-film sought to associate the destructive powers of witchcraft to traditional Africa, which was then pitched against the more powerful and reconciliatory Eurocentric Christianity. The video was criticised for suggesting that only the intersession of an alien practice could solve a very traditional African problem.

### *The Occult*

All popular and commercial films/video-films are, in a way, escapist, but the most popular escapist themes in Ghanaian video-films are certainly those that deal with the occult, witchcraft and Pentecostalism. Video-films under this thematic category emphasize the visual revelation of otherwise invisible forces. The narratives are usually framed by the dualism of God and the Devil, represented by good and evil people respectively, whose spiritual conflicts and battles are demonstrated in vivid visual and aural presentations. The rise of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches offered the impetus for video-films of this category to be produced and to have a ready audience.

In these video-films, people indulge in, or consult occult deities in order to succeed in one enterprise or the other. Often, these occultist practices come into conflict with Christian religious ones. Video-films of this category, produced mostly in the 1990s, generally show a marked narrative departure from their counterparts in the eighties. The earlier 1980s videos, dominated by the productions of William Akuffo, did not represent religious conflicts but rather sought to expose the secrets of the underworld and allowed audiences to point opprobrious fingers at those who were considered to have violated the normal social order. Even though the dualism of good and evil was usually the driving force of the narrative, there was no jostling for religious spaces as was portrayed by many videos of the 1990s. Often this contestation for public space pitted Pentecostalism against others, particularly traditional African belief systems.

This style of representation was often in connection with people's acquisition of wealth. There is a tendency for people to distinguish between wealth acquired through socially acceptable means and wealth acquired through evil means. Many video-films represented this distinction, but often presented the socially acceptable acquisition of wealth to be the result of Pentecostal Christian prayers, whilst the evil means were depicted otherwise, such as in traditional African representations.

For example, in *Namisha* (1999) by Ashangbor Akwetey-Kanyi, Slobo is a jobless man who losses his wife to a rich man. His two daughters also die, one through an abortion and the other child birth. Each daughter had been impregnated by a married man who had declined to marry her as a second wife. In desperation Slobo approaches his friend Owusu for financial assistance. Owusu, who has earned his wealth through the occult deity Obadzen, introduces Slobo to the deity.

Slobo is offered one of the spirits under the Obadzen, called Namisha, to be his gene and to offer him all the earthly things he may need. Slobo becomes very rich, but beyond that he uses Namisha to visit vengeance on the men who had affected his life negatively. Meanwhile, as a result of Charismatic prayers by Owusu's wife and her Pastor, Owusu denounces the Obadzen and becomes a staunch "born-again" Christian. He in turn tries to convert Slobo into Christianity but the latter is now deeply rooted in his occultist ways. Later, the Obadzen withdraws Namisha from assisting Slobo and strips him of all powers, because he has used the powers to kill against the Obadzen's instructions.

### *Greed and Power*

In some cases, evil and greedy characters try to take over the properties or social positions of others through fraud, corruption or murder. In such video-films we see a view of humanity that is disfigured and distorted by its fickleness and excessive greed, such as Nana

Addai in *Nkrabea- My Destiny* (1992) who is willing to sacrifice human beings to stay wealthy, powerful, lecherous and influential, whilst Dona in *Schemers* (1992) uses his ill-gotten wealth to corrupt some elders of a village in order to ascend the throne illegally.

In *Schemers* the elders receive huge monetary bribes from Dona which they squander on alcohol and plot against the rightful heir to the throne. In spite of the money they get, the elders are unable to repair a hand-dug well, the only source of water in the village, which is in a deplorable condition. At the same time the only vehicle and grinding mill that serve the villagers, and which belong to Dona, are withdrawn in order to put pressure on the villagers to make him the chief.

Such social ugliness can also be seen in the insatiable sexual appetites of philandering characters like Dauda in *Dede* (1992) by Tom Ribeiro. Dede, a young school teacher, declines to perform the puberty rites of her people that would usher her into womanhood because, according to her, she is an educated girl and cannot indulge in such old-fashioned customs. She chooses to go to the big city, Accra, where her vulnerabilities are exploited by the womanizing Dauda. She loses her virginity, which she was so religiously guarding, and as result takes to heavy drinking. To make matters worse, she is thrown out by her jealous friend in whose apartment she has been living. It takes the intervention of an elderly man for Dede to find the forgiveness of her people in the village and to undergo ritual cleansing in order to get her life back together.

*Mataa- Our Missing Children* (1992) by Wallace Bampoe-Addo also centres on the theme of greed for wealth and power. Kwabena is a police detective who is on the trail of a drug baron, Jones. Jones has held a village hostage for use as a transit point for illicit drugs shipments. The village is also a source for the children that he sacrifices to an occult deity in order to acquire wealth and power. When Kwabena closes in on Jones, the drug baron attempts to use the supernatural powers that he believes he has acquired from the occult to

outwit the detective. Unfortunately the powers fail and Jones dies from self-inflicted knife wounds.

In Ghana during the early 1990s, media reports and popular rumours were rife with stories of ritual killings, and therefore the rendition of these stories in visual form was popular with audiences. Unfortunately *Mataa- Our Missing Children* did not do too well at the market place. It was a very professionally produced video, beautifully photographed and sophisticated in its narrative construction. It was one of the few video-films, such as *Harvest at 17* (1992) that set a high standard for video productions even though it did not appeal to mass audiences the same way the Pentecostal and other occult videos did.

### *Family Life*

Apart from video-films that peeped into the secret world of the rich and the occult, there were those that examined contemporary family life and the challenges that married couples and their children faced either economically or as a result of generational differences. These video-films were largely concerned with issues of love, relationships, betrayal and the sexual impropriety of spouses. The families were often shown to be in crises as a result of the lust for wealth or covetousness. Often there was a triangular love-lust relationship in which a mistress, who desired and in fact succeeded in infiltrating a matrimonial home to take the place of the wife/mother in the family, was exposed and punished for her mischief. In line with the social advocacy of video-films, virtue was always rewarded and vice punished.

For example, in *A Heart of Gold* (1993) by Kofi Yirenkyi, Julie makes it appear as if her friend Alice is having an illicit extra-marital affair. Alice is therefore thrown out of her matrimonial home only for her best friend Julie to move in and take her place. Julie soon begins to maltreat the entire family, disrespects the man, and tries to consolidate her position

through the use of supernatural charms. Her evil deeds are ultimately exposed and the family

that she has tried to destroy eventually reunites.

In *Tears of Joy* (1996) by Veronica Quarshie, some members of a family connive and

murder their wealthy relative Asamoah, in order to drive away his wife and take possession of

his properties. Their plans do not succeed and, in desperation, they attempt to kill Asamoah's

wife, who they consider to be the obstacle to achieving their malevolent desires. The law soon

catches up with them.

*Triple Echo* (1997) by Seth Ashong-Katai, tells the story of Musa, the houseboy of

Alhaji Bello, who connives with a gang to kidnap his master's daughter for a huge ransom. A

truck-pusher, Idikoko, who is searching for his missing truck, chances upon the hideout of the

gang. Later, with the help of his fellow truck-pushers he rescues the girl, leads the police to

arrest members of the gang, and receives a handsome reward. In both *Tears of Joy* and *Triple*

*Echo* vice is punished and virtue is rewarded in line with the moral aesthetics of video-films.

The family, usually a heterosexual one involving a man and his wife, and a child or

children, is a popular location for various themes that deal with challenges facing families.

The family presents sub-themes such as romance, love, infidelity, rape, incest, teenage

pregnancy and what Sutherland-Addy (2000) refers to as "Fear Woman" or "the other

woman" (Ogunleye, 2003).


### Femme Fatale

The femme fatale theme in Ghanaian video-films, or "Fear Woman", involves the

portrayal of women as being "involved in highly devious activities and as being the most likely

to betray their partners through female wiles" (Sutherland-Addy, in Anyidoho & Gibbs

(Eds.), 2000, p. 271). For example, in *The Police Officer* (1993) by Godwin Kortey, a rich

man falls in love with a lady he least suspects to be part of a gang of armed criminals who planted her there to give them a fool-proof raid of his house.

These other women, who must be feared, are often shown to nefariously start a triangle of adultery that ends in disaster. In *Double Cross* (1992) Gifty influences her married lover, Fred Acquah, to neglect his matrimonial home and become amorously involved with her. Through her persistent nagging he cowers into a submissive husband at her beck and call. Similarly, in *Meba* (1993), by Sidiku Buari, a woman frames the wife of her lover, driving the latter to her death. She then moves into the house of the man, Danny, and pretends to be the perfect wife and to take good care of Danny's son (with her diseased wife). Her good-natured behaviour in the presence of Danny conceals her maltreatment of the boy and her plans to kill him.

### *Romance and Love*

Romance and love are probably the most popular themes among the audiences of video-films. Of particular importance is the theme of tragic love, in which a love affair, often a secret one, gets out of hand and either causes the deaths of some characters or causes them to lose their sanity. Some of the video-films mentioned previously- *A Heart of Gold*; *Meba,* and *Double Cross* - are examples in which these themes feature.

One of the earliest, and probably the most popular of its time, to deal with the theme of tragic love, was *Ghost Tears* (1994), written and directed by Socrates Safo and mentioned in the previous chapter. In this film, a family lives happily until an illicit affair with a housemaid triggers a chain of incidents that lead to tragic deaths. Kwesi lives with his very rich wife Dina and their little daughter Yaawa in a city mansion. Esi, a relative of Dina comes from the village to live with them and helps with the housework. In time a secret love affair develops between Kwesi and Esi. Soon enough Esi thinks she is not getting the attention she

deserves and that she cannot continue to play hide-and-seek. She therefore pretends to be pregnant and in an attempt to deal with it their nefarious affair is exposed.

When Dina discovers the affair she scolds them. One night, Esi confronts Dina in her bathroom and drowns her in the bathtub. Kwesi then lives with Esi as his wife and Yaawa grows up knowing nothing about her real mother. Esi maltreats Yaawa and even though Kwesi notices, he is so henpecked he is unable to do anything about it. Meanwhile Dina's ghost keeps appearing and weeps over the misfortunes of her daughter. Kwesi only begins to take better care of Yaawa when she returns from the market one day to report about a woman she has met, and Kwesi suspects it must be the ghost of her diseased wife.

Later, the ghost of Dina begins to appear to Kwesi in his dreams and in other manifestations. Kwesi's reports about the ghostly occurrences begin to frighten Esi too. One night the ghost appears to Yaawa and reveals her true identity and the circumstances of her death. She wakes up and cries in bed. Her father hears her and comes to take her downstairs. There Yaawa asks about her real mother. Kwesi tells her, but Esi has overheard the conversation and hits him with a bottle, killing him immediately. Out of rage, Yaawa also strangles Esi until she dies. At that moment we see the ghost of Dina exit Yaawa's body and the latter sits in the living room all alone and cries.

Other films that deal with this triangle of love and lust offer audiences the humorous side of such tragedy. *Abrantee* (1992) by Wallace Bampoe-Addo, "Ghana's first hip-hop film" (Ukadike, 2000, p. 252) is about a comic web of love that goes sour. It is also about the practice of 'Sugar-mama', a practice in which a young man befriends a much older woman in order to enjoy her riches whilst the woman in turn receives sexual and emotional favours. This is the reverse of the more popular practice of 'Sugar-daddy'. *Abrantee* does not indulge in the exposition of ghosts, witches or the occult, but rather dwells on some aspects of

dysfunctional families that are made worse by the pursuit of certain emotional desires and youthful exuberance, which then trigger tragic consequences.

In *Abrantee* Mrs. Tagoe does not get much attention from her husband who is too busy with his medical job. Her loneliness makes her vulnerable and she is easily charmed by Michael, her daughter's handsome boyfriend. When Eva, Mrs. Tagoe's niece comes to stay, Michael, in his youthful exuberance, falls in love with her and starts avoiding Mrs. Tagoe. Angered by this turn of events, Mrs. Tagoe sends Eva away, much to the chagrin of Michael. He decides to retaliate by framing and embarrassing her. He sets up a meeting in a hotel room, where she is supposed to be waiting for him. He then arranges for Dr. Tagoe to visit the hotel room and find his wife in a compromising situation. But Michael also loses his relationships with the ladies he loves. This leads him into heavy drinking, and, whilst driving drunk, he crashes his car.

### Crime and Drugs

There were other broader social issues that formed themes for many video-films. Crime and detection, drug-trafficking and armed robberies, for example, were recurrent themes in Ghanaian video-films of the 1990s.

During the 1980s, there was a dramatic increase in crime. Armed robberies, which were rare in the country, started to occur frequently. At the same time, the rush to get rich quickly opened up the country as a major transit point for the illegal narcotic trade as there was a ready pool of people to act as intermediaries for the international drug gangs, and an equally exuberant pool of young men and women who were willing to be the mules. Ghana soon became a major transit hub for Latin American cocaine headed for Europe (Transparency International, 2003). These developments attracted the attention of video-filmmakers who found the subject matter very interesting and marketable.

For example, *The Other Side of the Rich* (1992) by Ernest Abbeyquaye for the GFIC examines the desperate quest for wealth, especially by urban dwellers, who would go to great lengths to acquire opulence, and in this case, the trade in illicit narcotic drugs. Similarly, *Dark Sands* (1999) by Lambert Hama, a Gama Film Company (GFC) production, is about the international trade in cocaine and Ghana's role both as collaborator and law enforcer. 'Dark Sands' is the code name used by the police in an operation to arrest an international cocaine dealer, who goes by the name Hankins, and expose his Ghanaian network. But Hankins is well connected with powerful people in government, customs and immigration officials, and the top hierarchy of the police administration.

Hankins is therefore able to evade arrest on many occasions. He has millionaire associates and is protected by the top-most officer of the Ghana Police Force, the Inspector General of Police (IGP), who ironically is personally overseeing 'Operation Dark Sands'. However, through determination, and being able to live above reproach, the police uncover a plan to smuggle a large quantity of cocaine out of Ghana, concealed in tubers of yam. Later they are able to arrest Hankins, the IGP and one of his millionaire associates.

Another of these films, *Set on Edge* (1999) by Tom Ribeiro for the GFC dealt with the international drug trade and Ghana as a transit hub. It reveals the complicity of the Ghana Police in this trade. The video shows a corrupt policeman who receives monetary bribes in order to protect a gang of drug dealers who are terrorising his neighbourhood. Later he is found out by his superiors and punished. However, this video-film was never released because the Censorship Board, which included a police officer, voted that it presented the police in a bad light to the public (Mark Coleman, Personal communication, June 2004).

### *Vengeance*

The theme of vengeance was also popular in Ghanaian video-films. Human beings, ghosts, spirits and occult deities visited various kinds of vengeance on those that were perceived to have done wrong. The most popular was the revenge of the ghosts of murdered persons. In *Ghost Tears*, mentioned earlier, the ghost of Dina influences the deaths of Kwesi and Esi in revenge for her dastardly murder. In *Step-Dad* (1993) also by Socrate Safo, a man, known only as E.B., takes advantage of the absence of his wife, who has gone on a long trip, to rape his step-daughter, impregnating her in the process. When the girl refuses to have an abortion he murders her in an attempt to cover-up his crime. But he is not able to find peace as the ghost of the girl torments him until he confesses his nefarious deed.

Similarly in *The Agony* (1996) by Roger Harold Quartey, a woman commits murder and frames her husband's niece with the crime. It is only when the ghost of the murdered person harasses her that she confesses her crime and the innocent prisoner is freed. Similarly, *Avengers* (1994) by Abeiku Sagoe, is about a couple who are murdered by a gang of thieves. Their ghosts combine forces to haunt and kill the offenders.

There are many other minor themes that video-films dealt with during the nineties. However, whilst they proliferated during the nineties, they also sparked off arguments, debates and conflicts about their production techniques and social values. The next chapter delves into these debates and arguments, not necessarily to take up a position, but more importantly to offer a perspective on questions related to the place of video-films in the construction of Ghana's national cinema.

CHAPTER NINE

VIDEO-FILMS – CRITICISMS AND DEBATES

The beginning of the 1990s marked the liberalisation and proliferation of privately owned mass media in Ghana, after eleven years of military dictatorship, which now operated commercially and outside state control. Cultural and political representations became varied and commercialised as various media competed for audiences. As Meyer (2003c) has argued, the past use of mass media to support governmental policies of protecting "our African heritage" was contested by mainly Pentecostals who promoted a "complete break with the past" and tended to "demonize local cultural and religious traditions" (Meyer, 2003c, p. 6). Video-films emerging during this period reflected this social dichotomy and set the stage for debates about their social and cultural significance as well as their aesthetic qualities.

Pentecostal views were often characterised by an uncompromising and condescending attitude towards local religions and cultural traditions, in an effort to assert a presumed necessity for Ghana to be a Christian nation. This in turn meant the need to discard traditional religious practices, such as the pouring of libation at state functions (Meyer, ibid). Another popular example was the refusal of some Pentecostal Churches in the Ga traditional areas in and around Accra, to observe several weeks of 'silence' before the most important religious festival of the people, the Homowo festival. During this period there is a ban on drumming, loud music and noisy celebrations. Many Churches, particularly the Pentecostals, whose mode of worship involves very loud music, often cited the 1992 Constitution to back their claim to worship the way they chose.

Towards the mid-nineties these Churches transcended the narrow confines of their congregations and ventured into discussions about the affairs of state. They soon became a force that politicians could not ignore because of their outspokenness and their numbers.

Before the 1996 general elections, Rawlings' NDC party had started to court the friendship of these Churches. For example, many political meetings and rallies were opened by Christian prayers offered by some of the most popular Pastors of Pentecostal churches, such as Duncan Williams.

At the same time, the dualism between good, portrayed as Christian, and evil, portrayed as 'other', became predominant in the utterances of Pentecostal Church leaders who wished for a 'God-fearing' Christian leader. Combined with the prosperity gospel, the teachings and activities of these Churches provided the themes and concepts that later informed many video-films of the 1990s.

Whilst many private video-film producers, mostly amateurs, took advantage of the liberal media environment solely for the pursuit of profits, others saw themselves as social and political commentators and sought to rebuke the propensity to pursue materialism and consumerism without regard to their social consequences. The latter category of video producers, particularly those at the GFIC, sought to express disenchantment at certain aspects of governance and acts of disrepute by people in public service, such as the police.

It was within the context of this political, economic and religious environment of the 1990s that video-films proliferated and exhibited a wide variety of themes, whether "as a means of projection of a belief system, as a means of escapism, or as a form of social criticism" (Ogunleye, 2003, p. 7) and also attracted critical interest, both complementary and negative.

CRITICISMS OF VIDEO-FILMS

Video-films, particularly of the 1990s, produced as many themes as they sparked off conflicts and debates. These debates at first concerned mainly the technical and narrative quality of the videos. Later, there was a shift to mainly ideological concerns, particularly as

the initial euphoria that greeted early video-films was replaced by careful introspection on the part of the audience. Self-trained producers/directors were often pitted against formally trained ones. Occasionally, trained filmmakers would face-off with each other.

Unfortunately most of these arguments, debates and discussions are not published. This is partly due to the fact that African film scholars, argues Dovey (2010), have been slow in recognising and acknowledging the video phenomenon and to incorporate video-films in their research and teaching. These scholars did not consider video-films a part of the purview of critical African filmmaking, and were often dismissed in derogatory terms. This chapter examines some of the debatable issues.

### *Video-films as Subverting the African Cultural Renaissance*

As I have argued previously, African cinema emerged as a critical, purposeful and a socially relevant art form with which many filmmakers sought to influence their compatriots into redefining their identities from African perspectives. An often cited example is Ousmane Sembene's idea of 'night school cinema' (Ukadike 1994; Barlet 2000).

Whilst Ghana's new democracy of the 1990s saw the emergence of many politically and socially critical media, the same could not be said about video-films. The argument was that video-films failed to emulate the critical and socially conscious role of African cinema, but rather appeared to subvert the 'African cultural renaissance' by invoking regressive and insidious forms of representation (Med Hondo, 1996).

Contrary to the ideals of most pioneering African films, video-films were mostly criticised for their complicity in the Eurocentric degradation of African culture, and their disregard for, and contempt towards African traditional concepts of life, a tendency that Nigerian author Chinua Achebe described as "a tendency to pious materialistic wooliness and self-centred pedestrianism" (cited in Ukadike 1994, p. 93).

Ghana's Kwaw Ansah, for example, has often lamented the wasted opportunities by video-film producers to use the medium to liberate the minds of people. At *ANIWA-Africa 2003,* a film and television festival for African students of film held regularly in Accra several speakers including Ansah expressed concern at the growing exhibition of concepts that, they thought, did not contribute meaningfully to social development but rather tended to perpetuate old colonial stereotypes about Ghanaian society.

These critics believed that many video-films only served to enslave Africans in the same social processes that had contributed to Africa's slow pace of development. Ansah, for example, suggested that video producers and directors should use their talents and resources to support efforts at eradicating ignorance and needless superstitions. Ansah himself made a video-film, *Harvest At 17* (1992), which interrogates concerns about adolescent sexuality, abortion, modern youth culture, and the breakdown of traditional family values. For Ansah, and others, video-films should complement public discourses in other media about the many challenges that confront children, women, and the youth of the continent.

Six years later, as a guest speaker during the Second Ife International Film Festival (January 2009), Ansah again lamented the portrayal of Nigerians by video-films as fickle, excessively corrupt, spiritually malevolent and not to be trusted. He regretted that Nigerian video-films generally suggested that in order to be rich one had to indulge in some evil occult, in fraud, corrupt deals or dirty business. Yet, according to him, there were many genuine Nigerian businessmen and women who had succeeded in their businesses by dint of hard work.

Another prominent criticism of video-films concerned their alleged validation of Euro-American values whilst African ones were denounced. Often it was argued that such representations by Ghanaian video-film producers were reminiscent of the gloomy era that Frantz Fanon (1963) described as the phase of assimilation, where the African sees himself

more as a European and maintains loyalty to the doctrines and philosophies of Europeans to the detriment of African identity. What is worst is that the African identity was not simply ignored but rather ridiculed, despised and rejected by Africans as if they really needed to do that in order to promote their Eurocentric ideologies.

### *Video-films Casting African Traditions as "Other"*

Charismatic-Pentecostals often saw themselves as representing an identity apart from 'others'. Besides economic pursuits, it was the need to establish and legitimatize this difference which drove the Pentecostal form of cinematic representation. In trying to establish differences the local artist was often criticised for a tendency to subvert his/her own ovarian roots by the negative representation of his/her own culture and traditions.

From this perspective, many video-films have served as conduits for the denunciation of indigenous cultures in order to promote others, mainly Euro-Christian. As noted earlier the videos provided evidence of the confrontational relationship between traditional African beliefs and mainly Charismatic-Pentecostal spirituality which provides new spaces for identity formation. Sutherland-Addy (2000) argues that the cultural dichotomy established in many video-films leads to African traditional belief systems and practices being given an unfair representation. According to her,

"…the uneasy coexistence of influences such as Christianity and Islam with traditional African world-views, casting the latter in a negative light, could not have been more vividly depicted (*in video-films*). In this framework, *unexamined popular beliefs* provide a convenient arena for the battle of good against evil. Villains are easily identified with indulgence in a negative spirituality which is, in the vast majority of cases, depicted as the practice of

traditional African spirituality" (in Anyidoho and Gibbs (eds.), 2000, p. 271)

(*Emphasis added*).


Sutherland-Addy's argument is supported by Agorde (2007), who has observed that these video-films, which he refers to as the "Hallelujah video films", often portrayed life as a continuous struggle between the divine powers of God, represented as light and good, and demonic powers which manifest through "witchcraft, juju, ancestral spirits, water spirits and local gods" and are usually represented as dark and evil (Agorde, 2007, p. 52)

The debates over the representation of cultural and national identity by video-films presents what Hall (1997) refers to as "the tensions around the notions of the struggle for *cultural identity* and cultural *diversity*" (Hall, in Teer-Tomaselli and Roome (Eds.), 1997, p. 4, *Original emphasis*). Nowadays people talk about culture as if it were the 'other' practice observed by people who do not have Christian, Muslim or other modern religious affiliations. Culture seems to refer to those practices that are mostly rural based and opposed to so-called modern urban life styles replete with Euro-Christian or popular consumerist tendencies. Culture is frequently misconceived as those practices that are seen by many modern religious devotees as outdated, primitive, superstitious and even evil.

This assessment of culture often creates tensions between African traditional advocates and the so-called modern 'born-again' Charismatic believers. An example of such tensions was experienced during the late 1990s when a Pentecostal Church sought to stop the traditional practice of 'Trokosi' among the Ewes of Ghana. Trokosi is a traditional practice in which young girls are offered in marriage (and servitude) to a religious shrine as atonement for the crimes of other, usually older, family members. Whilst the traditional advocates argued that the practice was fair and based on accepted religious doctrine and did not deserve secular

judgements, the Pentecostals described the practice as old-fashioned, heathen and an infringement on the human rights of the young girls.

Similar tensions were also demonstrated during the mid-1980s when local political authorities sought to change the appearance of the girls who performed the 'Dipo' initiation rites among the Krobo of Ghana. Usually the girls wore chains of locally-made beads around their waists and necks and exposed most parts of their bodies, including the buttocks and breasts. A similar performance can be observed in the *Reed Festival* among the people of Swaziland, a festival which attracts global attention annually. The Dipo rite of passage formed the ideological basis of Dede's spiritual fall and rise in the first GFIC video-film, *Dede* (1992).

In this particular case, the politicians thought it was time the girls covered their bodies in more 'decent' ways. Whilst the traditionalists thought the action of the politicians was an unnecessary political and secular intrusion into a religious rite which was imbued with spiritual relevance and moral essence, the advocates for change argued on the basis of human rights and public decency. These calls for change were usually championed by the Pentecostal Churches. These were some of the frictions that were often depicted in Ghanaian video-films, albeit couched in fantastic narratives, and given a favourable tilt in favour of the Pentecostals.

To further draw on Hall (1997), these arguments can also be appreciated as the "tension between the *roots* and *routes*" of cultural identity, that is, between what gets people rooted in the ground, embedded in a place or in a context of recognition, as against the "*different staging posts*" that comprise our experiences in life as individuals or collectively (in Teer-Tomaselli and Roome (Eds.), 1997, pp. 1-16, *Original emphasis*).

Apparently there is confusion between the roots and routes of cultural identity as represented in many video-films. The question 'who am I?' is often answered from religious perspectives rather than ethnic or national contexts. Charismatic-Pentecostal believers would

identify themselves primarily as "born-again Christians". The 'routes' of identity formation therefore appear to be replacing the 'roots' within both the individual and the collective consciousness of people. This ambivalence is very much evident in many video-films, and critics often find the representation of this new form of identity formation quite disturbing.

For example, in *Expectations* (1998/1999)*,* the complications over the successor to the traditional village stool (traditional leader) is not solved through the time-tested cultural traditions of the people but by the intervention of a Pastor, charismatic prayers, and a God, who by inference, is unknown to the traditional people. Apparently, from the point of view of this video, the traditional processes (route) of finding a chief for the village are not relevant. Only a Charismatic Christian route is suitable.

Another controversy is the suggestion by some video-films that Western Christian principles and African notions of the divine are incompatible. Whilst some denominations of Christianity are incorporating African traditions into their systems of worship, many videos of the Pentecostal orientation seem to suggest the contrary. Such videos often suggest that purity and positive divine intervention in human life can only come from a strict adherence to Christian worship. Any other form of worship is considered detrimental to the spiritual, physical and economic wellbeing of man.

This is demonstrated in the video-film *Namisha*, also noted in the previous chapter. In this video, Owusu Ansah believes that the Church activities of his wife are causing harm to his occultist divination, even though whatever harm he refers to is not shown. On the other hand, Ansah's wife is not happy about her husband's style of worship and seeks the intervention of her Pastor to convert him to Christianity. At the same time she enjoys the riches that Ansah has amassed through his faithfulness to the occult deity called Obadzen. The two are not shown to have any major troubles in their marriage as a result of their religious differences.

The Obadzen is actually portrayed as a generous and compassionate deity who abhors bloodshed and human sacrifices. The blessings of good fortune that the Obadzen offers to her faithful are similar to those that Charismatic faithful often pray for within the context of the prosperity Gospel. In spite of the deity's generosity, she is referred to as evil and demonic. The religious conflict in this video is therefore, as in many other videos, a reflection of the contempt that charismatic-Pentecostals have for other forms of worship and part of the reason why such video-films often attract criticisms.

Often, in Pentecostal video-films, little credit is accorded traditional priests and priestesses, witchdoctors and other spiritually powerful individuals or cults, whose social duty within the traditional environment has been to offer spiritual guidance to their respective societies, bring healing to people and protect their communities against the influences of evil forces (see Cyprian Fisiy and Peter Geschiere, in Werbner and Ranger eds., 1996).

Fisiy and Geschiere argue that in Africa there are positive uses of traditional spiritual powers, which are often rejected by Christianity and other mainstream religions. In an attempt to establish their identity, the Charismatic-Pentecostals have sought to demonstrate their difference as positive and desirable as opposed to others, which are seen as negative and dispensable.

### *Video-films as Populist*

Many video-filmmakers were often thought to rely on the populist Pentecostal ideologies in order to access a ready and eager audience made up of the large numbers of Pentecostal followers. This focus often neglected the need for a balanced socio-cultural representation and good story-writing.

Following the collapse of nearly all eleven film theatres in Accra by the middle of the 1990s, (and many more in other major towns in Ghana), and with most of them converted

into Churches, there was an intensification of the prosperity gospel accompanied by the castigation of traditional spirituality.

Video-films often reflected the sharp disagreements between orthodox Churches and the emerging Charismatic-Pentecostal ones. In fact the iconography of these videos, often motivated or sponsored by Pentecostal Churches, encouraged spectators to see the stories as factual representations of life and to engage in serious moral discourses. Audiences who were faithful to Charismatic-Pentecostalism tended to assume positions of moral superiority over others. As Meyer (2000) has observed about audiences in Ghana, watching these video-films often triggered moral engagement, and audiences derived satisfaction by their temporal feeling of moral superiority and of being on the good side, while being enabled to peep voyeuristically at the powers of darkness.

The video representation of the flamboyant styles of worship by Pentecostals, which includes the physical conceptions of the devil who has to be punched and kicked, was often a conscious attempt to appeal to the religious sentiments of Pentecostals to achieve economic success.

IN FAVOUR OF VIDEO-FILMS

Usually the first arguments in favour of video-films have centred on their ability to fill the vacuum created by the absence of celluloid filmmaking. Larkin (2001) has argued that African films have been strangers in their own home-countries, existing outside the marketplace and away from a popular audience. On the contrary, video-films command a huge following in Africa and their financing and production depend on how well they perform in their popular home markets.

Video-filmmakers in both Ghana and Nigeria have generally thrived on mixing horror and magic with melodrama in order to expose the sexual, financial and spiritual corruption of culpable people in society. In so doing they produce a counter-hegemonic practice that dwells on popular rumours and beliefs, and reject the ideologies and narrative traditions of the older celluloid practice. Therefore, whilst African cinema of the first three decades of independence was seldom 'popular' and successful in Africa, video-films have matured within the African marketplace, relying on the popular imaginaries, tastes, beliefs and expectations of ordinary people.

Ukadike (2000) believes that African cinema is moving in a new direction and that there is the need for a broader spectrum of analyses of the changes and shifts taking place in the cultural, economic and historical sectors. For Ukadike, the phenomenon of video-films constitutes a unique cultural art form that also remains faithful to its major objective of commercial viability.

Ukadike has observed that video-films have been successful in transcending the technological and financial limitations imposed by the conventions of celluloid film making. The profusion of video-films, according to him, "has created thriving local industries and market-oriented economies within the media sectors and has rapidly expanded the parameters for defining national film and video cultures and audience tastes" (Ukadike, 2000, p. 243).

Ukadike argues that, like the older form of cinema, video-films too have both been able to function as the 'voice of the people' and shown relentless efforts at experimentations geared towards achieving indigenous film cultures. The problem of the intellectual academy with video-films has been that, since factors such as education and cultural background influence the interpretive processes, scholars were likely to bring their intellectualism or elitism to bear on video-film texts and therefore come away with inappropriate readings.

The fact that the need for video-films' survivability often emphasised entertainment over education, did not preclude their serious engagement with political and cultural issues. The argument that the practice of video-filmmakers was "not necessarily instigated by aesthetic considerations or a quest for cultural and national authenticity" (Ukadike, 2000, p. 245) was not, according to Dovey (2010), totally true since African films have always demonstrated a dialectical relationship between politics and pleasure.

The new forms of video-film practice challenged dominant film practices and cinematic cultures, and intellectual or elitist audiences must therefore deconstruct the dominant cinematic conventions they were used to in order to understand the texts and contexts of video-films and appreciate their unique thematic concerns and narrative forms.

Video-films have generally resisted the totalitarian tendencies and liberationist aesthetics of earlier Ghanaian filmmaking in favour of popular representations informed by a variety of consumerist assumptions in a new phase of commodity fetishism, and incredulity towards metanarratives.

Ukadike (2000) admits that most of the video-films were replete with technical and structural problems, whilst their frequent narrative ambiguities made them prone to aberrant interpretations. These false readings might stem from the association of certain generic codes to video texts, but, as Ukadike (ibid) has observed, the hybrid nature of these videos, characterised by the eclectic combination of several generic traditions (horror, melodrama, thriller, crime, etc) may render their cultural signs and significations either authentic or inauthentic. Depending on the educational or cultural orientation of the viewer, cross-cultural or cross-disciplinary readings of video-films may present very challenging interpretations.

As I observed earlier, the description of staunch critics of video-films as intellectuals or elitists (Meyer, 2003a), or purists (Ogunleye, 2003) implies a class distinction between audiences and also between trained filmmakers and the mostly amateur video-film producers.

Meyer has often referred to critics of video-films as elites who toed the statist cultural policies and rejected the demonization of local deities in video-films (Meyer, 2003a). Similarly Ogunleye (2003) has called the critics of video-films "film purists" who she claims uphold the political imperatives of Nkrumah to project Ghanaian traditions and culture in more positive light, which the video-films, on the contrary, were disregarding. In response to these criticisms, as Ogunleye reports, Akuffo (*Zinabu*; *Diabolo*) argued that "painting the correct pictures of priests and rituals was not the moving spirit of the video film industry" (in Ogunleye, (Ed.), 2003, p. 5).

Akuffo believed that the creative impulse, informed by the desires and expectations of the audiences, must be allowed to manifest itself in the productions. For Akuffo "[A] world of make-belief is sometimes what the audience needs to make sense of what goes on around them, which they do not have a rational explanation for" (Ogunleye, ibid, p. 5). Moreover, Akuffo argued, "film was meant to invent imaginary spaces and should not be subject to a regime of truthful representation" (ibid, p. 98).

Interestingly, as Meyer (2003a) has observed, the preferences of many video makers to dwell on the visual revelations of invisible forces are not necessarily informed by their individual convictions but rather by the ideas and concerns of audiences, particularly in the urban centres. These concerns are then transposed into the imaginary spaces that often reflect the dreams and popular religious beliefs of people, particularly the Pentecostals.

Meyer argues that the portrayal of magic in colonial cinema was used in reference to so-called backward primitives, who were seen as the "Other", and who were purported to have threatened European rationality. She argues that, this is the background against which professional filmmakers and other intellectual critics have been unhappy about local video-films which associate Africans with magic, and therefore prefer that video-films should rather reveal how European attitudes subvert African dignity. For Meyer, the attempt by these

critics to 'decolonize' cinema is ironic because in that process they produce the same paternalistic attitudes towards film as a means of education reminiscent of colonial cinema.

Meyer argues that the practice of video-film producers to appeal to popular audience tastes has transcended the paternalism of cinema associated with Africa since its introduction on the continent. According to her, the presence of magic in video-films has a greater capacity to transpose audiences into the "interspaces" of the "spiritual" and "physical" in order to reveal everyday life in an African city rather than "realistic" and educative representations about the dichotomy of magic versus modernity (Meyer, 2003a).

In contemporary popular discourse, whilst many educated people struggle to foster a relationship with their past, from which they have felt alienated, many others are not concerned about such 'African heritage'. Charismatic-Pentecostals particularly do not allow room for the integration of the African past into their present because they believe those African roots are the sources of the problems encountered in the present. "In their experience, tradition is not something lost, but disturbingly alive, through witchcraft and a host of other 'evil spirits,' and is to be rejected on religious grounds" (Meyer, 1999, p. 102).

These views are often extended to, and find expression in, video-films which appear to the critics as unpalatable. This is because spectators often take films/videos very seriously. As Meyer has observed, citing Haynes (1995), "films and videos are approached as representations of Africa which may give a wrong impression of what African life is all about to outsiders and alienate or misguide their African spectators" (Meyer, 1999, p. 111).

However, Meyer believes that video-films should not merely be considered as expressions of alienation or false consciousness. On the contrary, she argues, video-films should be appreciated as "sites for reflection about modernity's attraction and malcontents" and also viewed from perspectives that take into account the contexts within which they are produced and consumed. For Meyer, "the appeal of the films lies in the fact that they are part

and parcel of the popular imagination and engage people in attempts to reveal what is otherwise hidden to the naked eye and to construct morality in the postcolonial city" (ibid, p. 111).

Meyer is of the opinion that "it is high time to pay more attention to the inventiveness of this new form of cultural expression, which testifies to African people's ability to appropriate video technology and create new images through which they can reflect on their struggles in everyday life and fantasize about (im)possible dreams" (ibid, pp. 111-112).

It has also been argued that contemporary video-films in Ghana and Nigeria offer a means by which people can undertake a critical re-examination of their consciences through popular culture (Ukadike, 2000). "It has [...] become a medium that compels people to accept criticism of their traditions, and to laugh at themselves while at the same time being entertained" (Ukadike, 2000, p. 257). Moreover, in spite of their often poor technical quality, narrative ambiguities and sloppy acting, video-films have been able to carve out a mass audience and have sustained this audience by satisfying its desires and expectations. By doing this, video-films encompass the most comprehensive attempt yet to develop a sustainable commercial cinema in Africa by Africans (ibid).

Regardless of, or rather because of these conflicts, debates, arguments and discussions several festivals and conferences are now held focussing on video-films. This reluctant but well deserved recognition of video-films in Ghana and Nigeria has made them a model for other Africa countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Liberia. The next chapter examines the practice of video-films in Ghana from 2000 to 2009.

CHAPTER TEN

VIDEO-FILM PRACTICE IN GHANA – 2000-2009

This chapter examines video-film productions from 2000 to 2009. Certainly, I am unable to cover all video-films and their producers during this period. However, a representative sample of significant video-films and their producers will be noted. What is of interest in this chapter is not the profusion of video-films, but rather the variation in thematic concerns, the considerable improvement in film narration, acting and technical production, and the new methods of marketing and distribution that relied on the mass accessibility of video and digital home entertainment systems.

As I have previously noted, by the close of the 1990s, Nigerian video-films had inundated the Ghanaian market, pushing Ghanaian video-films to the periphery. Between 2000 and 2008 about ninety per cent of video-films displayed by vendors in Accra were Nigerian. The rest were often pirated American and other foreign films. Only a few distributors and retailers sold any Ghanaian videos.

This hegemonic presence of Nigerian video-films was replicated in television. All television networks in Ghana, without exception, regularly showed Nigerian videos. In fact, at times, all the television networks showed Nigerian videos simultaneously. So intrusive were Nigerian videos that several commercial companies advertised their services or products by associating with them. For this reason, between 2000 and 2005 three main things happened: firstly, the previously prolific Ghanaian producers were put out of business; secondly, a few of them embarked on co-productions with Nigerian producers; and thirdly, others simply became distributors of Nigerian videos. An example was Hacky Films which stopped productions and became a distributor of mainly Nigerian videos.

In 2001 the new government of the New Patriotic Party declared Ghana a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC). This was to pave way for the cancellation of the country's external debts and to receive special assistance from the World Bank. As a result, the economy of the country received a slight boost. This offered a favourable economic climate for filmmakers to return to video-film productions. However, productions within the first five years of the decade were few and far between. It was towards the middle of the decade that the number and quality of productions began to rise and to challenge the Nigerian presence.

By 2006 a modest number of independent producers and new production companies that had emerged, sought to develop a 'serious' practice that advanced more sophisticated narrative and aesthetic principles of cinema and to appeal to a wider range of audiences. These latest breed of producers applied greater professionalism in their movie-making, such as taking time to develop good scripts, and to ensure relatively high levels of quality in the productions. The crews were mostly composed of trained technicians. For example, one noticed vast improvements in lighting and cinematographic techniques. The settings were more elaborately designed and decorated, and costumes were more purposefully selected. There were marked improvements in post-production, whilst the use of music transcended the former psychedelic uses to include more purposeful narrative uses.

WHO WAS PRODUCING VIDEO-FILMS?

By the close of the 1990s, influenced mainly by the increasing presence of Nigerian video-films, Ghanaian producers who had not given up in the face of competition, started to imitate the latter's use of extravagant sets and extreme visualisation of spiritual forces, violence and crime. Some Ghanaian producers also collaborated with Nigerians to produce video-films. The first of this kind was *Time* (2000), produced by Ezekiel Dugbartey Nanor, a Ghanaian, and directed by Ifeanyi Onyeabor, a Nigerian, for Miracle Films, D'Joh Mediacraft

(both Ghanaian) and Igbo Films (Nigerian). This film takes up a well-known theme in Ghanaian and Nigerian video-films of the late 1990s – the sacrifice of loved ones for wealth.

In the film, a man kills his wife and keeps the corpse in a closet which then vomits money. This film has a faster pace than other Ghanaian videos of the same genre, and contains graphic depictions of violence, horrific murders portrayed in gory visuals. For example, in one scene, a pregnant woman is captured and her stomach cut open in order to retrieve the unborn baby which is to be used for money-making rituals. The producers sought to explore the aesthetics of the horror genre because audiences had shown a growing appetite for this type of movies.

The same theme is the basis for *The Stolen Bible I and II* (2001/2002) by Augustine Abbey (aka Idikoko) of Idikoko Ventures. The story centres on the struggle between a secret society, made up of people who acquire their wealth by sacrificing their loved ones to a spirit, and the powers of Christianity which is depicted in a Pentecostal style.

In *The Stolen Bible*, Ken is jobless. He and his beautiful wife, Nora, are in dire straits. Ken meets an old friend Ato, who is fabulously rich. Ato decides to introduce him to a secret society, Jaguda Buja, whose members get their wealth by sacrificing the person they love most. However, Ken is unable to sacrifice Nora, and instead tries to sacrifice Dora, a prostitute. This deceit fails when Dora calls out the name of Jesus in time to save her life. Ken is ultimately compelled to sacrifice Nora, whose death now makes him very rich. He now earns a high position in his church because of his generous financial contributions.

One day, just as the Pastor of the church is about to honour him for his contributions, Nora's ghost appears and tells him "you cannot go to Heaven with a stolen Bible". Ken becomes mad and loses his wealth. One day Dora, who has repented from prostitution and now works as a Christian missionary, finds Ken roaming the streets. She takes him to a deliverance session where a Pastor, played by Rev. Edmund Ossei Akoto, exorcises him of

the evil spirit. This session also benefits the rest of the members of the secret society who are all rid of the evil spirits in them.

There were several other films with this theme, such as *Turning Point* (2002), about a woman who becomes a born-again Christian and thus saves herself from her occultist boyfriend who had planned to sacrifice her for riches. Ghanaian audiences at that time appeared to enjoy the extreme stylization of violence and the portrayal of extravagance, not necessarily because they hoped to achieve similar wealthy lives as depicted in the videos, but more importantly because the video-films offered a voyeuristic view of the evil side of the rich and famous. Audiences could therefore position themselves on the good side and pronounce moral judgements.

Meanwhile at GAMA, after the initial attempts to produce video-films did not achieve the desired results, many of the trained staff became disillusioned with what they thought was a half-hearted approach to cinema by the Malaysian managers of the company, and therefore left to pursue private practices (personal interviews with former GAMA staff). Gradually, by the middle of the decade, GAMA virtually ceased video-film productions and became involved in entertainment television productions, such as the reality shows *Music Music*, *Ghana's Most Beautiful*, and *Band's Alive.* The only other activity that GAMA undertook in the area of cinema was the occasional screening of mainly Nigerian video-films at its only remaining cinema theatre, The Executive. Patronage was often very poor and the company resorted to renting out the cinema theatre for other events that were not cinema related.

One of these former GAMA employees, Seth Ashong Katai, who became an independent producer, made *See You Amsterdam* (2004), a story about a young Ghanaian nurse who tries to smuggle cocaine to the USA via Amsterdam, by swallowing it wrapped in plastic. She is detained at Schipol Airport because of an irregularity with her passport. Due to the delay, the cocaine bursts inside her. She is rushed to the hospital from where she escapes

into the city. She wanders around until she meets a kind hearted fellow Ghanaian, who turns out to be exploitative. Without a passport, and being sought after by the police, the nurse is unable to find regular work and has to earn her money by using the work permit of her hostess. Life becomes unbearable and yet she can no longer return home. One day, whilst walking through town she saves the life of a highly placed man by administering emergency First Aid. The man later helps her to regularise her stay in Holland.

When this video was shown at the NAFTI studios in 2005, several lecturers and students praised its technical quality but expressed disappointment with the director's narrative style. For example, one student questioned why a drug offender, who is on the run is not punished but rewarded. In spite of the faults, and even though I submit that this video does not measure up to Katai's previous works, *See You Amsterdam* is still a good movie compared to many video-films of the same period.

Since 2001, independent producers have not fared well in video-film productions. The main reason has been the lack of funds. Therefore only a few production companies have championed Ghanaian video-film production. One of such companies is Revele Films, established by Emmanuel Appea, who also writes, directs and produces.

Appea started his career as an independent television producer. His television series *Home Sweet Home* was popular among young people in Ghana, because it explored popular themes of youth such as the challenges of growing up and issues about sexuality. Then he ventured into video-film production. *Run Baby Run* (2006), Appea's most popular production to date, has won several awards abroad.

Another producer worthy of note is Abdul Salam Mumuni of Venus Film Productions. Mumuni is easily the most prolific Ghanaian video-film producer as the decade draws to a close. He has quite a long list of productions to his credit, but his most popular of the period

are *Mummy's Daughter* (2006), *Princess Tyra* (2007), *Agony of the Christ* (2008), *Beyonce I & II* (2008), and *The King is Mine* (2009).

These video-films, except *Agony of the Christ*, explore the themes that are common in Ghanaian and Nigerian video-films, such as families in crises, triangular love affairs that result in tragedies, and betrayals of love and faith. In these videos various motifs are appropriated from old Hollywood movies and their repeated use in video after video makes their visual representations monotonous and predictable. For example there are often exotically dressed girls who sprinkle flowers for members of royal families to walk on.

This, and other similar visual motifs, are picked from the eighties American movie *Coming to America* which starred Eddie Murphy. The costumes are often exotic and sometimes quaint. In *Princess Tyra*, one notices an attempt to copy the royal treatment that is given to the prince by a group of maids in *Coming to America*.

Even the titles of the videos suggest an attempt to borrow from the popularity of certain North American fashion and entertainment icons. *Princess Tyra*, for example reminds one of the famous American super-model Tyra Banks, whose popular television reality show (America's Next Top Model) was replicated in Ghana, albeit unsuccessfully. *Beyonce* is certainly drawing on the popularity of the American pop star Beyonce Knowles, for marketing purposes.

In fact, there were other video-films on the market with titles such as *Beyonce and Rihana* (the second being another popular music artist based in the USA), and *Love is Wicked*, which reminds one of the song and video, of the same title, by the female duo called Brick and Lace. In the last example, the video of the song is used to start the video-film whilst the song itself serves as the main sound-track. The title of the Revele video-film *Run Baby Run* appears to be an appropriation of another previously popular foreign film, *Run*

*Lola Run* (1998) by Tom Tykwer, whilst the video-film *Agony of the Christ* reflects that of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) which was very popular in Ghana.

In *Agony of the Christ*, a man escapes his village after resisting the practice of human sacrifice. He returns later as a Christian missionary to try and save his people from their 'barbarity'. Instead he endures the suffering and pain similar to what Jesus Christ is said to have endured in his passion. Several people I talked to, who had seen this video, applauded its technical quality and visualisation, but were disappointed at the old-fashioned stereotypical portrayal of Africans as barbaric people who practiced human sacrifices. The casting of a fair complexioned man with a pointed nose and a European accent to play 'Jesus' was also criticised for not representing Africans. Even though these criticisms appeared far-fetched, they still brought into doubt the video-film's intended African contextualisation of the story of Christ's passion, as was intended by the producers.

The common feature in all these video-films, and indeed videos by several other producers, is their elaborate sets and costumes. Mumuni, particularly, uses Nigerian writers, directors and several technicians who thrive on extravagant decor, costumes, and extreme visualisation. However, as is very common with these types of video-films, story quality and narrative are often sacrificed for extravagant setting, exotic costumes and special effects.

For example, *The King is Mine* is shot entirely on some of the plushest estates in Accra, the capital. According to Samuel Nai, a film editor and former associate of Mumuni, the latter does not spare any expense in acquiring the most expensive locations for his video-films (personal communication, 2009). The buildings are usually large ultra-modern edifices and the decor in each scene is fantastic. This is because the king, who is at the centre of the story, is said to be extremely rich, and also wise.

The period is the present, because the buildings are of 21$^{st}$ century designs, the furniture is contemporary and the vehicles are recent models of luxury saloon cars and SUVs.

There is also talk of aeroplane travel to London and back and the use of digital technologies. Yet, in the midst of all the modernity, wisdom and wealth, the King's wife, who is in labour at the beginning of the film, is not taken to a hospital to deliver the heir to the throne. She is kept in her bedroom where she endures a series of complications during the delivery, and in the absence of a qualified medical attendant, she gives birth to a still-born baby.

The king, who is desperate to have a son to inherit him, does not take advantage of modern medical means to achieving this desire, but relies on the old-fashioned method of trial and error. He also fails to offer his Queen the medical attention necessary for childbirth and rather blames her for the still birth. Rather than find a wise medical solution, he instead takes a mistress, whom he does not marry, but who bears him a son.

When the girl's former boyfriend appears and claims the child, the king does not ask for medical proof, but drives away his mistress and the child. He then takes another mistress, the sister of the one he has just dismissed. Against the counsel of the elders, the king revokes the title of the queen and sends her into exile. Then he marries his new mistress and makes her queen. Unfortunately her first pregnancy with the king is miscarried and in desperation she tries to get her brother to impregnate her. Her attempts at incest, which are not successful, are observed by one of the maids in the palace and reported to the King. The queen and his brother are then found guilty of incest and sentenced to death by beheading.

Simply put, the story lacks depth and logic. Certainly any modern day wise king must know that miscarriages do happen and that proper medical attention can avert such incidences. Throughout the video, even though the king is frequently praised for his wisdom, he does not demonstrate any in the face of several challenges.

There are a few other producers whose works are not as popular and acclaimed as Mumuni but who deserve mention. Samuel Ruffy Quansah of Young Father Film Production, is becoming popular, not only as a producer but also as an actor. Quansah took over the

assets of Hacky Films, and renamed it. He has continued to distribute films made in both Ghana and Nigeria, but more importantly he has been producing video-films such as *True Colours I & II* (2008) and *Dead End I & II* (2009).

Another production company, Gupado Films, is becoming well known. Its most popular production, *Royal Battle* (2006), was very successful in Ghana. Arguably, the popularity of this video can be attributed, not only to the fact that it paraded many of the best known actors and actresses in Ghana at the time, such as Nadia Buari and Van Vicker, but also, as usual, employed the visual appeal of elaborate sets, costumes, and expensive cars including a limousine, a rarity on the streets of Ghana and in Ghanaian video-films.

A. A. Productions is a little known company, but whose video-film, *In the Eyes of My Husband* (2007) takes on the themes of drug smuggling, illicit wealth, marital deceit and homicide. At the same time the story is about love and sacrifice. In this video-film, a top-ranking army officer is arrested for drug smuggling, but his wife pleads guilty and accepts the punishment meant for her husband. When later she uncovers the truth, she is killed by her husband. Even though this video-film was well-made, it did not achieve much popularity. Yet, in 2007 one of the major issues of national concern was the trafficking of illicit drugs, in which the security forces, such as the police, were often found to be complicit.

By 2009, the company that was creating waves on the Ghanaian video-film scene was Sparrow Production Ltd., established and run by a graduate of NAFTI, Shirley Frimpong-Manso. A former organiser and producer of Ghana's biggest annual beauty pageant, *Miss Ghana*, for many years, Frimpong-Manso relinquished the franchise of the pageant to another company, Media Wizkids, in order to pursue her interest in film production.

She started with *Life and Living It* (2007), a story about four middle-aged men living out their fantasies and trying to find some meaning in their respective lives. This video-film explores the contradictions between the idealism and exuberance of youth, on the one hand,

and the harsh realities of adult responsibility. A part of the synopsis on the jacket of the DVD reads that *Life and Living It* "touches on life, sex, instant attractions, tough decisions, imperfections and insecurities, and the consequences of sometimes taking the easy road in life." Whilst some of the men are hoping to settle down to sustainable marriages or relationships and pursue their professional dreams, others simply want to have as much fun as possible and do not wish to be committed.

In the video-film, Kente is a bar-owner who also has musical ambitions. He is by far the most ambitious of the four friends. He is divorced and wants to spend time with his son, but his estranged wife, who has custody of the boy, will have none of it. It takes the intervention of a lady lawyer, with whom he falls in love, to fight and win the custody case.

Jerry is a medical doctor who cannot keep a relationship. His mother is anxious about him getting a female partner. They enjoy a moment of humorous conflict, but afterwards, Jerry entertains hopes of getting back his old love, who unfortunately is already married to his friend Ato.

Ato is happily married but his extra-marital office romance is getting in the way. When his wife gets employed as a nurse in the department where Jerry works, it sparks suspicions, mistrust and conflict. However the truth is revealed and both marriage and friendship are kept intact.

Ray is the most unstable of the four friends. He hops around and engages in sexual escapades with married women. He argues that he cannot be committed. When he meets Fiona they quickly develop a sexual relationship. Whilst Ray just wants to have fun for the time being until he finds another married woman, Fiona is thinking of a long term relationship. She offers Ray all the fun he can have and in return she will keep him to herself only. She wants to take him away to live in California, in the USA. She tells him, "You love the high life, and in California I can give you that a lot". But the bait does not work and Ray turns

down the offer of a life-time commitment even after Fiona has divorced her husband for his sake. But Ray soon learns his lesson when he realises that he is, in fact, in love with Fiona, but she will have none of it, and throws him out of her life.

With *Life and Living It*, which premiered at the National Theatre in Accra to large audiences, and also sold relatively well, Frimpong-Manso announced her arrival on the Ghanaian video-film scene.

By 2007 Ghana was drawing to the close of another stable political era, characterised by a long period of relative peace and economic growth. For the first time in the history of the nation, one constitutional government had handed over to another and for the second time a political party was enjoying two consecutive terms in office. The economy was enjoying relative stability and the rampant murders and muggings that happened in the 1980s had drastically reduced. These were replaced by an increase in armed robberies, petty theft and mob justice. People were now more concerned about being robbed at home than what the next meal would be. In spite of the crime, it was much safer now to go out at night than two decades previously. A lot more people could also afford some leisure.

By this time too it was very clear that women were beginning to be more assertive in their political roles within the nation. Many women had been elected to public offices or had assumed responsibility of some key political roles in government. For example, the first woman to be the Chief Justice of Ghana was in office.

Other significant political and economic events took place in 2007. Ghanaians celebrated 50 years of independence. It was a celebration that was marked by political controversy particularly over the amount of money that was expected to be spent and the fact that parliament was not involved in the monetary accounts of the celebrations. During the last quarter of the year, Ghana's currency, the cedi, was redenominated such that in numerical

terms it became stronger than the US dollar thus giving a false impression of the strength of the cedi.

At the same time the search for quick riches by young people through various dubious means was increasing. What started somewhere as cyber fraud, particularly in Nigeria, known as 419, became common practice among Ghanaian youth and now involved the use of supernatural spiritual means, known locally as 'sakawa'. The life styles of many young people became characterised by excessive alcohol consumption and the use of narcotic drugs.

However, this was not the Ghana that was reflected in *Life and Living It.* In this video-film we observe a stable and wealthy society in which everyone appears to be successful at their various endeavours and dream of brighter futures. At the same time the women are portrayed as strong independent characters who no longer have to rely on men for anything. For example, the women in Kente's life are shown to be intelligent, independent minded, and are not afraid to make tough decisions. In a way this represented the bigger roles that women had assumed within the nation.

Yet, in spite of the stability of the economy and the successful careers, many of the characters have emotional needs that they are unable to satisfy, and the narrative therefore takes audiences on four different journeys of discovery representing the attempts by the four male friends to find romantic and emotional satisfaction. This focus of the video-film does not have any direct bearing on national concerns or even broader social issues. However, the ideal world of successful people portrayed in the video-film offers an escape from the tedium of work and family responsibilities, which is the reality of everyday life in Ghana.

In a way, *Life and Living It* is a fictionalised addition to the many radio and television programmes and newspaper columns in which self-styled pastors, counsellors, visionaries and prophets paint ideal, beautiful, and problem-free worlds and make promises to get Ghanaians there.

But what this video-film lacked in political correctitude it compensated for in narrative depth. Unlike other previous Ghanaian video-films of the 'families in crises' genre, which were often focused families with predictable traits, this video did not offer immediate answers or give clues as to what would happen next. Again, as was usual with many video-films, audiences expected a 'part-two' of the video, but Frimpong-Manso announced that the video had no second part. She was preparing to produce *Scorned*.

*Scorned* (2008), is about three families that fate brought together in a triangular mesh of love, deceit, double-crossing, abuse and murder. Orlando is the only son of Reverend Thompson, a famous senior minister of the biggest Church in the country. He has been married to Dea for two years, but theirs is not a happy marriage. He had got her pregnant and, in order to avoid embarrassment and not bring the name of the church into disrepute, particularly as Dea had rejected an abortion, he was forced to marry her. Dea's mother consented to the marriage because, for her, Dea would be marrying into a rich family, which she thought was a more important reason to marry, than love.

Orlando has been an abusive husband and so Dea's life has been a lonely and miserable one. He, on the other hand, is in love with Violet and has been enjoying sex with her. He has promised to marry her as soon as he can get rid of Dea. This does not happen soon enough and Violet gets impatient and befriends a different man.

Meanwhile Hammond, a teacher, is married to army Captain Soraya. Theirs is a fairytale marriage. Unfortunately their fairytale is viciously truncated when she tries to stop a bank robbery and gets shot. She is taken to a hospital where she lies in a coma.

After Violet has rejected Orlando, he takes to drinking heavily and patronises prostitutes. He comes home one night and tries to strangle Dea, but she hits him with a bottle rendering him unconscious. He is taken to the same hospital as Captain Soraya, where he too

lies in a coma. Hammond and Dea meet at the hospital, become friends, and soon a love affair develops between them.

As his son lies in coma, with the possibility that he would never wake up, Reverend Thompson is very disturbed. His late wife had set up a trust fund in their son's name worth two million and five hundred thousand US dollars (US$2,500,000.00). The only conditions under which Orlando can get the money are if he turns 35 and is married. However, in the event of his death, the money will go to his spouse. Reverend Thompson, who has borrowed heavily from church coffers, is hoping to gain access to the money to pay his debts. He therefore hires an investigator to establish a case of foul play in his son's accident in order to deny Dea of the money.

In several twists of fate, Soraya wakes up from her coma and Hammond returns to his happily married life. Dea, who has fallen in love, decides she will not give up Hammond that easily. She schemes to get into the house of the Hammonds in order to be close to him.

She also schemes with the detective, who has become greedy and wants a share of the money, to murder Orlando in the hospital. They succeed and Dea becomes a widow at 28 and 2.5 million dollars rich. She gives generously to her mother and sister and the three women do a victory dance, victory over exploitation by men. At this point one would think that the story is over, but Reverend Thompson is not done yet. He connives with Violet to gather information that will implicate Dea in the death of his son so that he can retrieve the money.

These schemes fail and Reverend Thompson is arrested. The detective is found to be an impersonator and is also arrested. Hammond is exonerated of wrong-doing and he goes home to his lovely wife. Dea and Violet meet, share the rest of the money and the happiness of having succeeded in their grand scheme against the reverend and his son.

*Scorned* was an improvement over *Life and Living It* in many respects. The story was better structured and the characters better developed. With this video-film Frimpong-Manso

was asserting herself and showing a bravery that had not been seen in Ghanaian productions for a long time. The dialogue was more explicit and the sex scenes a lot more risqué. Several years back no one would have thought that a Ghanaian production would demonstrate acts of sex the way *Scorned* did.

During 2008 Ghana was engulfed in political activities as various political parties campaigned towards the December 2008 Parliamentary and Presidential elections. At the same time the concerns over Ghana being a major transit point for illicit drugs from Latin America on route to Europe, contract killings of politicians or their associates and fears of civil unrest during and after the elections, became major topics for public discussions.

However, *Scorned* did not reflect any of these concerns. Rather, the video-film picked up the issue of failed social relationships with a swipe at greedy and unscrupulous religious ministers. Where the video-film is most assertive is the feminist stance against male exploitation and abuse. The fact that the men lose out in this story and the women celebrate victory seems to be a wake-up call to women not to accept their oppressive conditions. Moreover, the video-film suggest that a woman's sexuality is entirely in her control. This is a departure from many other video-films in which the stereotypical traditional male hegemony over women is often emphasised.

In terms of assertiveness, the video-film that really put Frimpong-Manso on a high pedestal in Ghanaian video-film production was *The Perfect Picture* (2009). Reminiscent of her first film, *Life and Living It,* Frimpong-Manso uses the framework of *The Perfect Picture* to delve into the lives of three middle-aged women, Asseye, Akese and Dede, who are going through various forms of mid-life crises and each trying to make some meaning out of her experience. The dreams, difficult choices, frustrations, successes as well as the failures of the three women are presented in a witty and humorous narrative.

As Frimpong-Manso stated in an interview on a local radio station, Joy FM, in April 2009, "*The Perfect Picture* treats lightly, serious life issues that are probably only talked about in the bedrooms… we have dared to go places where a lot of Ghanaians have not dared to go." Frimpong-Manso has certainly taken Ghanaian video-films where others have not dared. The sexual nuances, adult language, and prolonged attempts at sexual intercourse by a newly married couple that fail, are visual representations that have been taboo in Ghanaian society for a long time. In the past, sex had to be rendered in subtle, almost inconspicuous, representations. In this video-film Frimpong-Manso goes even further in her exploration of the sexual fantasies, desires and frustrations of people, especially women, than in the earlier two video-films.

Asseye has just married Larry, but on their first night together as man and wife Larry cannot have an erection. Thinking that it may be caused by the pressure and excitement of the wedding, they try again later, but, even a visit to the hospital does not help. In desperation Asseye suggests to her friend Dede to slip into bed with her husband and try to arouse him. She does and reports that he still could not get it up.

Later, when Larry thinks that Asseye is about to leave him, he goes to Dede to try and find some answers. Dede inadvertently discloses that it was her in bed with him the previous night. Asseye, who also realises the truth, goes to confront Dede for having lied about the previous night. Dede had done in eleven minutes what she could not do in more than seven months. Asseye finds her husband in Dede's bedroom and concludes that there must be an affair between them. This leads to the separation of man and wife. However, eighteen months later, through a chance encounter on a dating internet site, Asseye and Larry meet and this time they find their sexual chemistry and become man and wife again.

Akese is a busy corporate executive who does not get any attention from her equally busy and extremely rich boyfriend, Taylor. Taylor pampers her with expensive gifts but Akese

keeps telling him that she needs love and attention rather than gifts. In the absence of Taylor, Akese falls for a lowly repairer of air-conditioners who actually turns out to be a rich lawyer. By the end of the story they were married.

Dede is a free-wheeling lady who will sleep with any man so long as he is good-looking. She picks on married men and sometimes gets punished for it by their wives. In one of the early scenes of the video, a woman pours water on her and declares that she had to make do with water because she could not find the acid she really wanted to use. She tells Dede, "Stay away from my husband or next time you will not be so lucky." Dede simply calls another man, finds some dry clothes and goes out.

Meanwhile her boss, Appiah, has been pursuing her for a romantic relationship. He claims to be divorced and wants Dede in a way that he had never wanted any other woman. After playing hard to get, Dede concedes and the two of them strike a romantic and sexual relationship that only lasts until Appiah's much travelled wife returns. She soon finds out about her husband's affair but is not surprised. She tells Dede that she is not the first but she certainly will be the last. Having known the truth, Dede tricks Appiah and takes him to a secluded part of town where she forces him at gun point to take off his clothes, and then abandons him there.

Later the three women meet and share their experiences, laugh at each other and celebrate Asseye's pregnancy. They also celebrate Dede's adoption of a child, whom she claims is the only thing that she really loves in the world. Finally they ask when Akese would be getting married. The final scene of the video is Akese's marriage, and the three friends come together again to sing and celebrate their lives.

Like the first two video-films, *The Perfect Picture* does not only transcend the mundane representations of unfaithful husbands or mischievous wives, as seen in many video-movies of the same period, but the unexpected twists in the tale, rendered in humorous

dialogue and emotive visuals appealed to audiences. For many people, who spoke to television news crews after the video's premiere, the emotions that they had held inside and dared not express because of societal stigma and taboo, were exposed by the video and therefore opened up a space for people to release those pent-up emotions.

The spectators who patronised this video, particularly during the premiere, were mixed. There were both ordinary low income earners looking for popular cultural entertainment, and people of higher economic and educational status, who later watched the video at the only purpose built and functional cinema theatre in the country, the Silverbird Cinema. This cinema hall is housed within the largest shopping mall in the country, an achievement largely credited to Ghana's stable economy and political environment.

The year 2009 marked the fifth consecutive transfer of political power from one government to another, and for the third from one political party to another. Ghana was becoming a democratic beacon for many other nations in Africa in terms of sustainable democratic governance. After the transfer of political power, Ghanaians mostly settled back into their various economic activities, leaving the politicians to do battle on the radio and television stations, and newspapers. Most people were concerned about their daily survival.

But issues of survival were not of concern to video-filmmakers such as Frimpong-Manso. Her subject matter was about individual emotions, fantasies and desires. These are the aspects of human life that are mostly neglected in the face of economic hardships and the itinerary of daily struggles. Yet, like Akese in the story, and indeed her other friends, success in life is not only about advancements in ones career, or the acquisition of enormous wealth, but also in the satisfaction of the heart's desires. This was what appealed to most people.

WHO ARE THE AUDIENCES?

During the 1990s, as I observed previously, Ghanaian video-films did not attract large audiences, and producers made little profits. Some of them could barely break even. There were no movie theatres to show videos and most producers duplicated their finished products on VHS cassettes or digital disks for sale on the streets. The patrons of these videos were mostly low income earners whose educational levels were often not beyond high school. No extensive research has been conducted on contemporary Ghanaian audiences, but my preliminary investigations indicate that not many university graduates or people of higher educational standing patronised these videos.

However, as the quality of video-films rose, particularly from 2006, more middle class working Ghanaians started to get attracted to them. These included many Ghanaians living overseas who wanted to maintain links to home. By 2008 sales of video-films were reaching a modest 50,000 copies for a single release as compared to 24,000 in 2003 (Video Producers Association). From 2007, particularly following the release of *Life and Living It*, many people within higher income earning brackets started to show interests in Ghanaian video-films.

This was demonstrated in April 2009 when the Vice President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, attended the premiere of *The King is Mine* and in a speech observed the increasing quality of productions. Similarly, in recognition of the efforts of Ghanaians to improve upon the industry, the Minister for Information, Ms. Zeta Okai-Koi accompanied Frimpong-Manso of Sparrow Productions to Nigeria in May 2009 to support her in promoting *The Perfect Picture* in that country.

The transformation of audiences for local videos was also observed when *The Perfect Picture* was shown at the Silverbird cinema. The large crowds that thronged the cinema for several days to see the movie were mostly middle to upper class citizens. Apart from speaking to a few people, judging by the types of vehicles that people arrived in and their styles of

dressing, it was obvious that the video-film was attracting not only ordinary people, but lawyers, medical doctors, entrepreneurs, academics and other discerning consumers of entertainment. Many of these people had been attracted to see the video-film because word had gone out about its reception during the premiere at Ghana's National Theatre. Rather than the normal one-time screening, *The Perfect Picture* had to be shown three times the same night during the premiere, because of the large crowd of people that had gathered outside, waiting to see it.

HOW ARE THE VIDEO-FILMS EXHIBITED, DISTRIBUTED AND MARKETED?

Apart from The Executive film theatre at GAMA, the Silverbird cinema was the only other facility in Ghana by 2009 which was purposely designed and fitted for commercial screening of films. The Silverbird cinema was set up in Ghana with the main objective of showing foreign films. It largely ignored Ghanaian or Nigerian video-films until the *The Perfect Picture*.

At the time that *The Perfect Picture* was shown at this cinema, several new major film releases from other parts of the world had been lined-up. These were *Slum Dog Millionaire*, *Dragonball*, *12 Rounds*, *The International* and *Marley and Me*. However, the demand for *The Perfect Picture* was so overwhelming that managers of the cinema stopped showing the foreign films to make way for the Ghanaian video-film.

Speaking on *The Breakfast Show* on Joy FM, a local radio station based in Accra, on April 14, 2009, the General Manager of Silverbird Cinemas- Ghana, Albert Mensah, said that over 1,500 people had already seen the video at the cinema over a period of three days during the Easter holidays. According to him, this was unprecedented since the cinema started

operations for over a year. He said the cinema would continue to show the movie until the middle of May 2009 due to the overwhelming demand.

Mensah said that the performance of the video showed that there was a "locked up demand for good Ghanaian and African movies, which Silverbird Cinema and Global Media Alliance intend to unlock with the help of quality producers like Shirley Frimpong-Manso".

Silverbird Cinema belongs to the Silverbird Group, a subsidiary of Global Media Alliance, which has interests in media, (radio and television), entertainment (cinemas), retail malls and real estate. The success of *The Perfect Picture,* according to Mensah, has encouraged the Silverbird Group to collaborate with another subsidiary, Pan-African Entertainment and Distribution Company (PAEDC), to produce and distribute high quality video-films.

*The Perfect Picture* was also shown in several towns in Ghana – Kumasi, Tamale and Sekondi-Takoradi – via the use of Silverbird's mobile screens. According to the General Manager, his company was making plans to show the video-film in theatres in Kenya and Nigeria, and to distribute it in other African countries through the PAEDC.

Since 2005, most Ghanaian video-film producers premiered their new releases in various halls, such as the National Theatre, and the Accra Conference Centre, which were often temporarily converted to cinema halls for such events. However, a majority of producers did not show their video-films in any theatres for fear of audience rejection. The other reason was piracy, which was so rampant that small theatre owners could not be trusted.

As a result productions were usually distributed en masse as soon as the picture was ready. A few distribution companies have emerged that often seek to buy the rights of videos and then distribute them in North America, Europe and many parts of Africa. Often, the target audiences are Africans in the diaspora. Other distributors would purchase copies of a

finished video and then sublet to street vendors. This method, unfortunately, creates opportunities for pirating.

The accessibility of video has transformed the market for cinema. Filmmakers, in Ghana, Nigeria and a few other African countries, as noted in previous chapters, have not only turned to video in order to tell their stories but also to take advantage of the profusion of video home systems to effectively distribute and market their products.

As I noted above, in Ghana many video-film producers do not even bother to organise theatrical releases of their products. They simply make copies of the video for sale. Usually they would mount loudspeakers on the back of an open truck and play very loud music as the truck moves very slowly along some major streets. A commentator runs commentary about the film and urges people to buy copies. Several young men follow the truck and try to sell copies to bystanders and motorists.

Unlike during the 1980s, when severe economic hardships denied many people home entertainment systems and therefore patronised small video parlours, by 2009, with relative improvements in people's incomes, many more people could afford home entertainment systems. This relatively improved economy offered a huge market for selling video-films in formats that could be viewed at home.

Conservative estimates indicate that during 2008 some producers were able to sell up to 50,000 copies of a single video-film, up from about 24,000 in 2003, within a national population of about 20 million (Data provided by the Video Producers Association). Similarly, in Nigeria, as I learnt during a panel discussion at the *2nd Ife International Film Festival*, the best selling Nigerian video-film, by the end of 2008, had sold 600,000 copies in a population of over 150 million people.

Television also provides an avenue for the exhibition of African films and video-films. Unfortunately this is still not an economical option because television in African does not pay

much for films. In Ghana there is a daily dose of Nigerian video-films on all the free-to-air TV networks. Besides the local channels, there are others such as *Africa Magic* and *Movie Africa* which broadcasts mainly Nigerian videos, and a few from other countries, via satellite to many parts of Africa and some parts of Europe.

Digital technologies are changing the face of cinema again. With the advancements in digital technology, satellite and the internet, it is likely, for example, that in the near future full length movies will be e-mailed or beamed via encoded satellite channels directly to cinemas (assuming cinemas still exist in the future). In countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, to mention just two, it is now more likely for one to watch a movie on DVD, VCD, TV, or downloaded (legally or illegally) via the Internet, rather than go to a cinema house.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

QUESTIONS OF NATIONAL CINEMA IN GHANA

In this final chapter I pick up the major concern of the thesis which is, to appropriate Hayward's (1993) question, to ask again, when is cinema in Ghana 'national'? To do this, I draw on the concepts and theories discussed earlier, particularly in chapter three.

As a point of departure, I recall Crofts' (1993) suggestion that national cinemas are national when they perform various functions relevant to particular states under a variety of historical circumstances and in a variety of ways. For example, as Tomaselli (1988) has pointed out, in some states films perform certain functions of national importance and therefore often receive the backing of the state. I suggest that it is this relationship between cinema and nation that allows for the easy identification of a national cinema.

According to Tomaselli, for such states "films are necessary cultural and social institutions like museums, theatres, or hospitals. Films perform an explicit ideological function by embodying the values and attitudes of the ruling government" (Tomaselli, 1988, p. 30). In Ghana, as I have noted previously, the ability of locally produced films to embody the essence of the nation and perform certain nationalist functions was only visible during the first two decades of post-colonial history.

Moreover, for cinema to be national it must possess a functional industrial set-up. It must demonstrate adequate economics of production and consumption, and possess particular classificatory methodologies that are recognised by producers and a critical press. The processes of film production and distribution must be clearly defined. A system of subsidies and other state/institutional support such as legal frameworks for the effective operation of the industry need to be in place. A national cinema must possess a national audience who need to exhibit popular sympathetic reception of the films produced by indigenous

filmmakers. The films must also exist as national symbols and pride for the citizens through their use of various visual and aural motifs that offer nationalist ideological representations. Therefore, did cinema in Ghana ever demonstrate these national qualities? If so, when is cinema in Ghana national?

WHEN IS CINEMA IN GHANA NATIONAL?

The question may be more appropriately asked in the past tense; when was cinema in Ghana national? The reason is that, using the literature and theories reviewed earlier as a framework, evidence in Ghana's cinema history supports a national cinema mainly during the first two decades of political independence- 1960s to 1970s. I have argued in the last three chapters that from the late 1980s to the 2000s there were hardly any productions that performed overt nationalist functions. A few exceptions, such as *Heritage...Africa* (1988) can be made here. In what ways, therefore, could Ghana's cinema be national? I present various scenarios to answer this question, drawing mainly on Tomaselli, Crofts and Higson's conceptions of national cinema.

### *Physical and Industrial Structures*

Higson (1995) suggests that national cinemas can be identified by looking at particular features such as the industrial and business aspects of cinema, patterns of exhibition and consumption and how these impact on national culture. In African countries such as Burkina Faso, Senegal, Egypt, Morocco and South Africa, structures for the production, distribution and consumptions of films are discernible, even if these are only slightly developed. In Ghana, on the other hand, apart from the defunct GFIC, there have not been any other structures for the production and distribution of films of national significance.

It will be recalled that shortly after Ghana gained political independence Nkrumah oversaw the building of an impressive film production facility, the GFIC, which was not only intended to serve Ghana's national interests but was part of a broader emergent Third World cinema. According to Barlet (1996), this development was aimed at decolonizing thought "in order to promote radical change in society... (*and*) to advance the liberation struggle in contemporary Africa" (Barlet, 1996, p. 34). It was for these same reasons that other existing facilities, such as film theatres, marketing outlets and distribution rights, which were formally owned by private expatriate businesses, were taken over by the government and nationalised in order to integrate cinema into the overall cultural policy of the nation.

In spite of these developments, Ukadike (1994) has argued that "the industrial foundation of the African film industry, seen in its entirety, is still a mirage" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 59). Nearly two decades later, this argument is still largely true, particularly for Ghana, even though video has made filmmaking a lot more accessible to individual entrepreneurs. Apparently the industrial structures required for a national cinema no longer exist in Ghana, following the demise of the GFIC. There is now a plethora of satellite video production companies who have largely failed to capture the essence of an imagined nation community.

### *Nationalisation of Production, distribution and exhibition facilities*

Both Diawara (1992) and Ukadike (1994) have commented on the nationalisation of film production, distribution and exhibition in Ghana. According to Diawara, this move marked a new era in Ghanaian cinema as the new structures were used to produce many documentaries and newsreels for nationalist purposes. He argues that among the West African states, only Ghana and Nigeria attempted to integrate film into their cultural policies.

The new set-up rejected the aesthetic of the colonial film unit and adopted "current narrative styles of fiction films and documentaries" (Diawara, 1992, p. 5). As noted

previously, these new approaches to filmmaking during the early period of independence, involved experimentations with local narrative techniques such as the formal structure of folktales, and the adoption of local myths, stories and culturally specific symbols and motifs. Most of these films were short fictional narratives intended for public education or political propaganda, or documentaries intended for both internal national politics and Pan-African purposes. Nkrumah therefore ensured that adequate funds were available for such nationally specific production and distribution of films.

However, the collapse of cinema in the 1980s, including the abandonment of film theatres and other distribution channels, meant the end of national cinema in Ghana, at least temporarily. During this period, only a few film theatres that remained in operation, particularly in Accra, occasionally re-ran old Chinese, Indian and American films. Since then, not effective production facilities have been put in place for film production and distribution that is of national significance.

### *Subsidies for film production*

One of the ways of identifying national cinema is by observing the state's provision of subsidies for the development of film production and distribution. In the early years of independence in Ghana cinema played an overt role in the processes of national integration. Following the nationalization of film theatres and distribution channels, most of the activities of the GFIC and the Information Services Department focused on issues about nation building.

To achieve this, Nkrumah's government provided lavish funding for film production during the late 1950s to mid 1960s because films formed a necessary cultural and social institution, just like the museums, theatres, universities and hospitals (Ansah, 1991; Hagan, 1991). Films were expected to perform explicit ideological functions by embodying the

values, attitudes and aspirations of the new post-colonial government and by reflecting the euphoric expectations of the people. What was lacking, at that time, was the self-sustainable commercial approach to the business of film production.

For this reason, commercial productions emerged only after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, when the military government appointed Sam Aryetey as the new Director of the GFIC and who immediately entered into co-productions with foreign film production interests. Unfortunately, these co-productions, according to both Diawara and Ukadike, were financial disasters and "set back the progress of film production in Ghana to where it had been when the Colonial Film Unit left" (Diawara, 1992, p. 6).

Since 1966, very few films have been funded by governments, and these have usually been projects intended to promote the image of the ruling government and not necessarily intended for nationalist purposes. Nationally specific films have been produced by individual filmmakers working outside the state system. Occasionally the state would offer some intervention, such as the case of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage..Africa*, but subsidies for film production has been largely non-existent.

### *Documentaries and Features for national education/propaganda*

As I have already stated above, during the first decade of independence hundreds of documentaries, newsreels and short feature films about government policies and projects were produced, intended for the education of people in various sectors of national life, such as national politics, health, agriculture and the economy.

Akudinobi has noted that "[often], the specific concern of most African governments is how the 'arts' frame the 'nation' in a global representational gallery. This concern relies narcissistically on the (re)production of an idealized nation and national subjects" (Akudinobi, 1997, p. 102). The creation and representation of national symbols, local cultural motifs and

signifying images were often intended to generate such idealised nationalist feelings. By employing local myth, legends and folklore, these films served as mirror images of an imagined national community.

However, Nkrumah mainly focused on educational documentaries and newsreels, with both national and Pan-African objectives which did not take into account the need for a commercially self-sustaining industry. Unfortunately, the reliance on foreign directors by Aryetey, whose approach to filmmaking was of no nationalist significance to Ghana, meant that nationally specific commercial cinema was largely reliant on a few independent producers such as Ato Yarney, Kwaw Ansah, King Ampaw and later Nee Kwate Owoo.

### *National Audience*

In countries such as Burkina Faso, Senegal, Egypt, Morocco and South Africa there exist faithful national audiences and critics/reviewers writing in popular newspapers, magazines and on the internet, so that it is possible for one to speak of cultures of cinema in these countries. In Ghana, the emergence of films such as *I Told You So*, *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, *Kukurantumi- Road To Accra* and *Heritage...Africa* witnessed positive and enthusiastic audience responses on a national scale. Ghanaians were generally proud to be associated with these films, particularly when *Love Brewed in the African Pot* and *Heritage...Africa* won many international awards.

Ideologically, Ghanaians felt a sense of national belonging through a process of mediation with the textual motifs of the films. All the examples offered above are rich in the use of local myths, symbolisms, banal aboutness, oral traditions, costumes, music, rituals, performances, and mannerisms, which are typically Ghanaian, and audiences here can easily

identify with and relate to them. It can be argued that this was national cinema since it performed certain functions within the national space, such as national mobilisation.

### *The Function of Cinema in National Mobilisation*

Historians often think of film industries in terms of national categories, as elements of "larger national histories and as expressions of national cultures" (Musser, 1999, p. 151). Musser argues that films provide ways of looking at nationhood and for unifying people with the same national allegiances, particularly through the collective viewing experience. This is national cinema.

The role of cinema in nationalist mobilisation is what has placed many African filmmakers in very special positions within the political and cultural contexts of their respective nations, which by inference means that their cinematic products are of national importance. Akudinobi suggests that "African filmmakers ...are crucial to the formulation, nurturing, and orientation of *specific* nationalist discourses" (Akudinobi, 2001, p. 124, original emphasis). Citing Guibernau (1999) Akudinobi argues that African filmmakers "occupy a unique position that 'may lead to a modernist, traditionalist or revivalist discourse, or to a combination or succession of discourses'" (ibid, p. 124).

This nationalist role of African filmmakers was most obvious during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly as they sought to use their films to consolidate political independence, and to direct the energies of their peoples towards the new state structures and governing machinery. African filmmakers have sought to revive traditional aesthetics and at the same time integrate these into a modernist vision of Africa. In Ghana many documentaries and newsreels promoted the principles of nationalism, unity and togetherness within both traditional African and modernist settings. During the first two decades of independence, most films produced in Ghana espoused various elements of cultural heritage and national

identity, and sought to communicate a certain political and cultural cohesion within the nation. As I observed in chapter six, going to the cinema during the early period of independence was usually an exercise in nationalism.

### *National Cinema and the Coherence of the Nation*

Higson (1995) suggests that national cinemas can be identified by looking at issues of cultural policy and critical enquiries, and the questions of representation. These values offer systems by which people can collectively identify national affiliations and therefore appreciate cinematic content with the same expectations and interests. Collective identity and expectations of the arts and media provide a sense of national coherence which, according to Schlesinger (2000), is dependent on the sharing of the memories, habits and values of people through existing facilities of social communications. Cinema is certainly one of such facilities and, as Schlesinger has argued, the concerns about the role of cinema in a nation are of internal national significance, because the production, circulation and consumption of films are constituted within the collective national consciousness.

In Ghana, a significant number of films attempted to represent this collective national consciousness. This is usually not easy, taking into consideration the cross-cultural forces and social upheavals wrought by colonialism, and political instability brought on my military dictatorships? Often concerns over national cinema involve questions of identity, belonging and complex issues of representation. Most of the short propaganda films produced between 1957 and 1980, and feature films like *No Tears for Ananse* and *I Told You So*, often attempted to address these concerns about national cohesion. Later, other privately produced films, like *Kukurantumi, Road to Accra* and *Heritage...Africa*, overtly brought the concerns of national integration and cultural cohesion to the fore.

On the other hand, video-films from the mid 1980s have mostly failed to deal with issues from a nationalist perspective. The approaches to video production have been more parochial and focalised, such as the occult and Pentecostal genres of video-films which are mostly concerned about Christian evangelism.

Moreover, video-film production is not nationally integrated, for several reasons. For example, Ghana does not have a policy and other legal framework to regulate the production and distribution of movies. Production and distribution is left solely in the hands of individuals, whose activities are quite chaotic as they struggle to make quick profits. The result of this situation is a plethora of video-films that are aesthetically sub-standard and whose content increasingly become adult and risqué. Occasionally one video-film may be produced that attempts to address a nationally specific concern.

### *Cinema's Use of the Symbols of National Identity*

Identifying the symbols of national identity is probably the most useful exercise for appreciating national cinemas. Many state symbols which are representative of national identity, have been appropriated from particular cultures and traditions to serve nationalist causes. They are then popularised by the mass media, including cinema.

Boyd-Barrett has observed that one of the four major benefits claimed on behalf of mass media was that they helped to "promote the attainment of an autonomous and integrated national identity" (Boyd-Barrett, 1998, p. 185). According to this argument, Boyd-Barrett points out, media are said to have the ability to establish a popular sense of national identity, and this quality has been observed more in developing Third World nations.

In spite of some shortcomings in this theoretical assumption, Boyd-Barrett argues, the search for national integration and identity often involves "a focus on inherently conservative

national symbols: the presidency, the state religion, an urban and élitist version of 'national news', a particular language or group of favoured languages, etc" (ibid, p. 189).

As Barker (1999) has noted, national identity revolves around these symbolic expressions within nation-states. According to him, nation-states are "particular contingent historical-cultural formations" (ibid, p. 64) which are acted upon and understood differently by various social groups such as governments, ethnic groups, classes and gender groups. National identity is therefore created and built upon, "always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival" (ibid, p. 3). Barker therefore asks at which level national culture should be identified.

"Consequently, any representation of a national culture is a snapshot of symbols and practices which have been fore grounded at specific historical conjunctures for particular purposes by distinctive groups of people. In effect, national identity is a way of unifying cultural diversity" (ibid, p. 68).

Citing Bhabha (1990), Barker argues that the unity of the nation is constructed in narrative form through stories, images, symbols and rituals which lend themselves to "shared" meanings of nationhood. "National identity is a constitutive representation of shared experiences and history told through stories, literature, popular culture and of course, television" (Barker, 1999, p. 68). Cinema in Ghana, at least during the first three decades of independence, has been an excellent medium for the circulation of these stories which contain symbols, myths and feelings of national belonging.

As Martin-Barbero (1993) has also argued, using Latin America as a context, national identity is constructed through the circulation of symbols, myths and feelings of solidarity in ways that are appreciated as national. He argues that television developed in Latin America

partly playing the role of conveying popular sentiments pertaining to nationalism and therefore bringing people together as a nation.

Nkrumah's use of the mass media, including cinema for public education was in tune with the needs of a modern nation-state intended to create and communicate shared ideas and meanings towards achieving common national objectives. Nkrumah's search for a national and Pan-African identity (the African personality) through the production of a national culture was intended to neutralise the ethno-nationalism that had become common in many independent African nations.

As Solofo Randrianja (1996) has observed, during colonialism African nationalisms of the 1950s were successful in the mobilisation of the concept of national unity, but after independence this same concept "proved increasingly incapable of containing its ethno-nationalisms. There was a multiplication of ethno-nationalist demands which attempted to mobilize groups of cultural origin" (Randrianja, 1996, p. 21).

An example in Ghana was the move by the Ashantis, and later the Northern Peoples, to achieve autonomous states by agitating for a federal state rather than a unitary one. The appropriation of certain cultural symbols, by political governments and filmmakers, was meant to create a national consciousness among people who possessed fragmentary cultural alliances and traditional loyalties with the aim of achieving similar meanings in such symbolism among diverse peoples.

Kath Woodward has argued that complex and fragmentary societies (such as Ghana), require shared ideas and meanings to link the people together into a common national project. "All of this requires the mass education of the population" (Woodward, 2000, p. 126). Woodward observes that the meanings we make of national identity "are produced through symbolic systems." These include "images, stories, flags, styles of dress, uniforms, all the different components of a community's culture and its traditions" (ibid, p. 134). I submit that

film is the medium par excellence to undertake this education through the production and reproduction of symbolic and signifying systems in order to give meaning to the imagined national community.

Randrianja (1996) has argued that the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of African nation-states is actually what makes the concept of a nation as an "imagined community" operate. The colonisation of territories in Africa did not take into consideration the cultural and linguistic diversity of the continent, and the emergent new nation-states adopted and defended the colonial borders with the same disregard for the cultural heterogeneity of the peoples of the continent. In order then to establish a sense of nationhood, each individual member of the nation has to feel an affinity "which generates a sense of belonging even if this individual will never be able to know the other members of the community" (Randrianja, 1996, p. 24).

He argues that,

"Most of the time this affinity is associated with the symbols which make the nation something visible, even if only partially (clothing, language, etc.). These symbols are usually cultural. The sense of belonging is often in the domain of pathos or emotion. Nationalism has built the ethos, the administrative framework capable of providing the individual with a universe which is familiar and which provides a sense of security" (Randrianja, ibid, pp. 24-25).

Shohat and Stam contend that the conception of nations is located within narratives pertaining to nationhood. "The nation of course is not a desiring person but a fictive unity imposed on an aggregate of individuals" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 100).

They suggest that,

"The cinema, as the world's storyteller *par excellence* was ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires. National self-consciousness, generally seen as a precondition for nationhood – that is, the shared belief of disparate individuals that they share common origins, status, location, and aspirations – became broadly linked to cinematic fictions" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 101).

Shohat and Stam argue that cinema is capable of mobilising the common desires of people within a nationalist context and to draw people together in the way that audiences gather to share a common narrative, which is reminiscent of the symbolic gathering of the nation. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) concept of the nation as "horizontal comradeship" Shohat and Stam argue that the gathering of movie audiences evokes a provisional sense of nation that is forged by spectatorship. They argue that "film is enjoyed in a gregarious space, where the ephemeral communitas of spectatorship can take on a national or imperial thrust. Thus the cinema can play a more assertive role in fostering group identities" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 103).

Besides these contexts for the determination of national cinema, Graeme Turner (1998) has argued that national cinemas need to be located within broader discursive fields and contexts.

He writes that,

"To deal with 'national cinema' today is to interrogate closely discourses of nationality, the enclosure of small film industries within the imperatives of international competition, and the rationale and effect of local systems of subsidy, protection, and regulation, and then to place the film texts produced

by national cinemas within this complex discursive, economic, and cultural framework" (Turner, in Hill & Gibson (Eds.), 1998, p. 199).

It is remotely conceivable, considering the pros and cons of the arguments, to talk of a national cinema in Ghana, in the sense that films produced by most Ghanaians which attract a considerably large number of audiences and provide significant themes for popular discourse do often address nationally specific issues and use nationally specific materials for both text and narrative. Such a perception of national cinema engages the dual perceptions of a homogeneous national identity and a unique and unchanging national culture. Such films often assume the capability of dealing with social divisions and differences (Hill, 1992).

The ability of film to assume a common identity for the people of a multi-cultural nation may also be reflected in the manner in which films tend to mirror the nation as a homogenous unit. One of the qualities of African films of the 1970s and 1980s was their capability at introspection, the ability of filmmakers to turn their camera lenses on themselves, their nations and their people. Whether this quality can be seen in the video-films of later decades remains debateable.

From the ongoing arguments, national cinema in Ghana certainly needs to be carefully contextualised in both ideological and temporal terms. At a point in time in Ghana's history, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, one could confidently speak of national cinema because Ghana possessed the physical structures, the political will, and the appropriate ideological orientation to develop a cinema of national significance. Moreover, one could speak of a national audience and a viewing experience that was often characterised by the expressions of nationhood, both on screen and among spectators.

However, apart from a few films of the 1980s which espoused nationalist sentiments and have earned the status of national icons, video-film productions have been mostly

parochial and limited in their approach to issues of nation. The structures that determine a national cinema have also been largely non-existence, and as I argued earlier, one is at difficulties in speaking of cinema audiences, in the traditional sense, but more appropriately about community spectatorships, which then, following the arguments of Stam and Shohat, lose that sense of nationhood among spectators. Moreover, the industrial and/or critical artistic and avant-garde film practices that have characterised national cinemas elsewhere are largely absent in Ghana, at least since the 1990s.

### *Cinema's Representation of Cultural Heritage*

One of the ways in which African filmmakers have engaged the issues of nation has been "the regeneration of African cultural heritage, the incorporation of indigenous legends, aesthetics, and philosophical precepts in their works" (Akudinobi, 2001, 124). These works then mirrored the concerns of individual nations as they related to socio-cultural and national identities, concerns over personal responsibility or obligation to the nation and the role of the citizens, particularly the elite, in nation building or national development. Most importantly these films showed a yearning to identify with notions of nationhood (ibid).

Akudinobi argues that;

"The filmmakers invoke an implicit sense of shared destiny as they contemplate the social relations through which 'nation' is constituted. At the films' narrative cores are questions of exploring and narrating the transformations brought about by colonization, 'sovereignty,' and nationhood" (ibid, 139).

The appropriation of cultural symbols and national heritage has been the modus operandi of filmmakers who expected nationalist readings of their films. More importantly early independent leaders, Nkrumah in the case of Ghana, sought this potential of cultural

production, such as cinema, in social mobilisation, at a time that nation-building was the biggest priority (Hagan, 1991).

For example, as discussed in chapter seven, after independence in 1957, Nkrumah's use of the mass media, including cinema for public education was in tune with the needs of modern nation-states to create shared ideas and meanings towards achieving common national objectives (Ansah, 1991). I submit that the appropriation of cultural symbols must have been intended for the creation of national consciousness among the citizenry. However, the question of what is national culture needs to be resolved.

In 2001, during a panel discussion at the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC), proponents of national culture alluded to a unitary or common cultural identity within the nation. They pointed to certain social and cultural attributes that appear to be common among all the peoples within the nation. Examples given included such values as hospitality, familial relations, care and respect for the elderly and various common culinary delights, which they claim bind all the peoples of Ghana together as a nation.

As Woodward has argued, "complex and fragmentary societies require shared ideas and meanings that link people together into a common project" (Woodward, 2000, p. 126). Woodward suggests that the meanings we make of national identity "are produced through symbolic systems" which include "images, stories, flags, styles of dress, uniforms, all the different components of a community's culture and its traditions" (ibid, p. 134). These together form the representational images of the nation and bring to the fore issues of national cultural policy and related discourses of national importance.

Unfortunately, I argue, in most Ghanaian video-films today, national cultural identity is simply not an issue. Unlike in some cinemas of the world, the USA in particular, where issues of nationhood often resolve themselves within subtexts and narrative undercurrents, Ghanaian video-filmmakers are simply not interested in such discourses. In the face of

difficult economic conditions where the risk of failure with one video-film could mean the end of the road for a producer, concerns over issues of nation are often not considered marketable. Therefore most producers continue to indulge in popular subject matters such as adolescent sexuality, petty crimes, gang culture, families in crises characterised by adulterous husbands and flirtatious wives, crime and police stories, and the conflict between good and evil supernatural forces.

For the same economic reasons, video-film producers often attempt to appropriate some Hollywood genres, such as the horror or romantic comedy, or Indian musical melodrama. I argue that these attempts to copy concepts and narrative techniques from elsewhere often cause the narratives to stray away from relevant and nationally specific concerns. For these reasons, in terms of representing the nation, it is highly unlikely that one can talk about national cinema in Ghana.

### Cinema's flagging of the Nation

Unlike films of other national cinemas, which are not shy of flagging the images of their respective nations, literally, the conscious display of national images with the intent to communicate ideas of nationhood are largely lacking in Ghanaian cinema. One does not see images and representations of Ghanaian nationhood the way nationhood is displayed in films of other nations such as the USA or Britain. Examples that readily come to mind are the *James Bond* series of films, and American films about the Vietnam War or the American Presidency in which there are strong rhetorical displays of British or American national symbols.

Again, it was in the high profile films of Ghana, *Heritage...Africa*, *I Told You So*, etc, that one could see the symbolic representation of Ghanaian nationhood in images as diverse as symbolic state buildings, vehicles, aeroplanes and costumes, which are national icons easily

recognised by citizens with a collective belongingness. The daily rituals, practices, and narratives that people indulge in, with a sense of nationalism, are often not captured in video-film narratives and representations. To appropriate Billig's (1995) concepts, the banal nationalism of everyday life in which people flag the images of nation, consciously or not, are hardly represented in video-films.

Rather, there is a tendency to downgrade the national in preference for the foreign. For example, in many video-films people of low social standards, who get the chance to travel overseas, are shown to patronise the non-prestigious Ghana Airways, but after a successful sojourn, when they are supposed to be better people by virtue of their overseas training or business ventures, they make the return journey by Swissair, British Airways, Delta or North American Airlines, or Lufthansa.

Until 2006, when Ghana took part in the FIFA Football World Cup, which generated a tremendous amount of nationalist feelings, many Ghanaians were often seen with British, America, French and Canadian flags prominently displayed in their cars and at home, whilst the Ghanaian one was conspicuously missing. Many people here wear shirts with images of popular political, sports and artistic icons from North America and Europe rather than local Ghanaian heroes. In 2009, for example, I noticed many people wearing shirts with the image of Barack Obama, the US President, than John Atta Mills, the Ghanaian President particularly during the former's official visit to Ghana.

### *Cinema's Function in Nationalism and Historical Representation*

One of the most important means of nationalist expression in African cinema has been the reproduction of history which is often intended to legitimatize the roots and collective sentiments of nationalist ideologies, as I suggested in chapter three. This is what Diawara (1992) describes as a "return to the source." African filmmakers such as Idrissa Ouedraogo,

Suleiman Cisse, Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo and Kwaw Ansah, either adopted actual historical incidents or wrote their stories based on the historical, social, political and cultural developments of their respective nations.

What is common among them is their appropriation of pre-colonial African artistry, traditional values, legends and myths, and colonial incidents, in an attempt to redirect an African worldview towards more nationalist considerations. By appropriating history, enriched with myth, legends and local wisdom, these filmmakers attempt to offer nationalist interpretations of the political and cultural phenomena that led to the creation of modern nations in Africa.

According to Bakari (2000), "[the] production of the first films which ... established this (*African*) cinema coincided almost precisely with that epoch when African nation-states were born, and sought to establish themselves within the arena of global politics" (Bakari, in June Givanni (ed.) 2000, p. 3). Therefore, African filmmaking "is in a way a child of African political independence" (Bakari, ibid, p. 3) and, I will add, African nationalism, whose birth was pre-marked with the role of catalyzing Africans towards similar political nationalists orientations.

I believe that nationalist films in Africa are those that are put in the service of collective political consciousness. They are united by their resistance to the cultural assimilation of Africans to dominant foreign traditions. At the same time each displays a specificity of "'articulating national cultural patterns, national ideological conflicts and national class confrontations' and, we might also add, national economic patterns" (Ukadike, 1994, p. 250).

Filmmakers who are conscious of nationalist imperatives usually attempt to use the medium of filmmaking and their own unique narrative talents as a voice for the people of their respective nations. For example in *Zan Boko*, Kabore's main focus is on "social justice,

corruption, arbitrary misuse of power, acculturation, and freedom of the media to deal with the problems of modernisation and urbanisation" (Ukadike, ibid, p. 263). These issues are relevant to a nationalist discourse and influence people's perceptions of their nations and their individual identities.

They also deal with the social and economic power relations within nation-states, especially in emerging African democracies where the elite tend to alienate the rest (majority) of the people. The tendency for the elite to ignore the majority of less privileged citizens is revealed with critical sincerity in *Zan Boko*, *Heritage…Africa*, and *Xala*, to mention just a few examples. However, the people in these films are not shown to be passive receivers of social injustices, but rather, in the spirit of nationalism are able to defend justice, the truth and the nation.

In spite of these identifiable traits of national cinema Ghana, and indeed many African nations, faces serious challenges to establishing national cinemas. I now examine a few of those challenges in Ghana

### *Foreign Products and National Cinema*

The massive dominance of Hollywood over the rest of the world's film industries has left the latter facing a choice between emulating Hollywood in order to compete directly or instead to produce films that are different and highlight the unique qualities of the producing nation's cinema. For example, Germany, France, and Italy, to mention just these three, took the latter option in the course of developing their national cinemas and achieved considerable successes.

In Ghana, as noted, the penchant for video-filmmakers to pursue profits largely precludes their engagement with contemporary political, social and cultural issues of national

significance. The dominance of Hollywood in world cinema perpetrates this ambivalence regarding the construction of national cinemas. With a growing internationalisation of the media and cultural production, particularly the globalisation of youth culture, there seems to be little scope for national cinemas, especially in economically weak nations like Ghana. The relentless pursuit for profits creates movies that are supposed to be Ghanaian but which do not reflect what is generally accepted here as Ghanaian national identity.

However, Philip Schlesinger (2000) sees the hegemony of Hollywood as the very reason for which national cinema can thrive. He argues that "it is precisely the extra-territorial cultural pressure of Hollywood's production, imported into the national space, that sets up the contemporary issue of national cinema" (Schlesinger, in Hjort and MacKenzie eds., 2000, p. 24). The 'deconstructivist' notion of African cinema (see Ukadike, 1994) is intended as an opposition to the dominance of Hollywood and other major cinemas. Unfortunately, rather than counter the hegemonic dominance of Hollywood, Chinese, Indian and Nigerian videos, Ghanaian producers appear to be aping those aesthetics. At the same time, audiences have mostly been attracted to foreign movies, television series and soap operas, such as the Latin American Telenovelas which have inundated Ghanaian television screens.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of this thesis has been that national cinema in Ghana is only conceivable when it is contextualised within specific historical periods in the country's political history in addition to considering the specific political and cultural ideologies that have been inscribed in certain nationally significant films.

In the first three chapters I attempted to lay out the theoretical and methodological challenges that have confronted the study of national cinemas, particularly how political

histories have impacted the formation and sustainability of national cinemas. Africa is observed as a peculiar case in which the heterogeneity of nations, their individual multiplicity of cultures, political histories and economics of production, present very complex challenges in determining national cinemas.

It was this cultural complexity and lack of political coherence that informed the location of national cinema in Ghana within certain specific periods of its political history, by looking at the role of the state in the production of those films and their nationalist representations.

The strongest challenge to national cinema in Ghana, however, occurred after the emergence of the video-film phenomenon. Whilst the transformation of filmmaking technology from celluloid to video allowed for the profusion of local stories, the aesthetics and ideological representations, often seemed parochial and trite. This tendency was mostly informed by commercial interests rather than high levels of cinematic narration and broad-based nationalist representations.

In spite of these short-comings, the technological transformation of filmmaking may actually offer Ghana the chance to preconceive national cinema because the use of video and other digital formats has also dramatically transformed the economics and modes of production, distribution and consumption.

With developments in digital technologies, which allow almost anybody with access to a digital camera or a cell phone to make a film, and which have also changed exhibition and distribution techniques, such as through the internet and ipods, I argue that traditional industrial set-ups for film production should no longer be the major consideration for speaking about national cinemas. Rather the stories that people tell, how they tell them, the ideological perceptions they espouse and represent, and how audiences appreciate these narratives within specific nationalist contexts, should form the basis for thinking about

national cinemas. It is necessary for new contexts and approaches to be found for national cinema.

Ukadike (2000) has observed that "African cinemas are moving in new directions and demonstrating the need for a broader spectrum of analyses of the changes and shifts in the cultural, economic and historical sectors, as well as in audience expectations" (Ukadike, 2000, p. 243). His argument is in relation to the emergence and popularity of video-films, which are changing the nature of cinema, particularly in West Africa, because of their modes of production, methods of distribution and exhibition, audience expectations, and popular consumption patterns, as I have discussed previously.

This new trend, which has demystified the conventions of celluloid film production, distribution and exhibition, requires the formulation of new ways of approaching cinema, new methods of analysis based on specific texts and contexts, and therefore new ways of conceptualizing national cinemas. Video-films, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria, have caused a major historical shift in the ways in which cinema is now conceived, produced and consumed. Whilst African cinema, in its broadest ideological formulations, has been committed to representing the "voice of the people", video-films have rather remained true to their objective of "commercial viability" (ibid, p. 234). However, commercial viability alone is inadequate for determining national cinema. As I observed in earlier chapters, there is also the need for a certain ideological basis for national cinema.

The need to put cinema, and the other arts, at the service of the nation has been largely ideological, as was witnessed during the early years of independence in Ghana, and indeed in several other African countries, such as Senegal, Mali, Egypt and South Africa. The challenge, particularly in Ghana, has been video-films' failure to narrate the story of nation. This is what Akudinobi (1997) is concerned about when he argues that the problem with African cinema "is how to deal with the largely shoddy trove of videos which, arguably,

presage its(sic) commercial emancipation. This is especially so where they are presented in self-justifying logic as a 'yardstick' and 'what the people want'" (Akudinobi, 1997, p. 114).

Drawing on Akudinobi's argument, I submit that the commercial viability of video-films so far portend a sustainability of productions in the future, and even large audiences across many countries. The problem has been their often poor technical and narrative qualities, and inconsiderate religious and cultural representations, even though their producers often claim to be pacesetters.

However, national cinemas could also be studied from the point of view of the contradictions of nationhood rather than its coherence, from the heterogeneity of culture rather than a search for unity or homogeneity and from the intelligibility of social relations within the nation that allow people to appreciate better their own existence. Certainly such an approach cannot take the nation and therefore national cinema for granted but must attempt to overhaul the concepts and re-contextualise them within historically specific political and cultural spaces. The transnational reach of African films and indeed video-films, is an area that needs focused study.

### African Films and Video-films – A Borderless Cinema

The African Diaspora has often maintained links with the home continent in such a way that this relationship "underscores the existence of transnational as well as continental articulations of Africa" (Petty, 1999, p. 74). The implication for this relationship is that African cinema is a "borderless cinema", to appropriate John Akomfrah's description, cited in Petty (ibid). Thus, according to Petty, "histories and cultures intercross freely, creating transnational layers of identity and, indeed, of origin" (ibid, p. 74).

In reference to African diasporic filmmaking, Petty argues that a cinema is borderless when it appropriates universal themes, globalised narrative schemas, and develops new audiences that transcend national borders. Moreover, with African filmmakers increasingly emerging from the diaspora, or locating their films in North American and European cities, they are able to bring on board the narratives and experiences of diaspora living. In this way African cinema, including video-films attain the character and status of a "borderless cinema."

This status is beneficial to African cinema particularly with the transformations that video is bringing to bear on cinema on the continent, and because of the enormous diaspora markets. As I indicated above, in Ghana several videos have been located or partially located overseas in order to explore the living styles of Africans there. For example, the narrative in *Run Baby Run* shuttles between Ghana and the UK and explores the tensions of mixed race relations, the involvement of Africans in drug trafficking and the cultural challenges that African immigrants face when they return home.

The problems with illegal migration to Europe and the trade in illicit drugs is also the subject of *See You Amsterdam*, mentioned earlier. Like several others of its kind, this video-film depicts the way of life of Ghanaian immigrants in Europe, characterised by their close-nit communities, yet one in which the new and uninformed arrival, whose papers are often not in order, is susceptible to exploitation by his/her compatriots.

As film festivals in North America and Europe, such as the New York African Film Festival, opens up to video-films, and as cinema in Africa looks more and more beyond its previous essentialist narcissism, a global (or globalised) market awaits. This certainly is one of the ways in which African cinema can resolve the perennial crises of production, distribution and marketing, and also get out of the strait-jacket pigeon-holes of art houses, museums and university auditoriums.

*Concluding Remarks*

That African cinema, including video-films, has attained a transnational and borderless status is not only economically advantageous, but also puts a strain on the concept of national cinema. This is because, as the living styles of Ghanaians overseas increasingly inform many video-film narratives, the social-cultural concerns and expressive representations that could easily be identified as specific to a pristine Ghanaianess, even if presumed, are now largely absent. Contemporary video-films that continue to offer local representations are mainly those made by producers in Kumasi, who employ the local dialect and deal with everyday family challenges in humorous narratives.

Whilst the Kumasi-based producers, who have nicknamed their collective industry as "Kumawood", are churning out several video-films per week, none is able to be screened to a large collective audience. The videos are watched individually or in small groups. With video having replaced celluloid, and only a handful of theatres in operation, one can no longer speak about cinema in its broad traditional sense. More people watch movies on their home entertainment systems or through "community spectatorships". I suggest community spectatorship because of the practice of one viewing system serving several families in some communities. The hundreds of low-grade video viewing parlours in the country cannot pass for cinema theatres, but will more appropriately be referred to as centres for community spectatorship. The traditional mass experience of cinema with its shared euphoria has been lost to individual and small group spectatorships.

The area of film spectatorship is not adequately studied in Ghana, as in many other African countries. In order to understand how people relate to contemporary video-films at home or in small video parlours, one needs more focused attention on the subject. If the new modes of distribution, exhibition, marketing and consumption of movies should be considered

as national cinema, this will require closer investigation, a definition of new contexts and the setting of new values for assessing them.

The proliferation of video-films has also brought to the fore concerns over generic codes, how these influence productions, and their classifications. I have previously suggested thematic identifications of video-films, but greater research is certainly needed for the study of local genres in Ghanaian video-film practice, and indeed that of Nigeria and other African countries.

Such study of cinemas in Africa could chart a new course and offer new areas of academic interest particularly in the area of national cinemas. It is hoped that this thesis has provided a first contextualisation of the history of Ghanaian film and video practices and will generate further research and debate on the question of national cinema in Ghana.

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# List of Films Cited

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *A Heart of Gold* (1993) | - | Kofi Yirenkyi |
| *Aayalolo* (1988) | - | Sidiku Buari |
| *Ablode* (1960) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Abrantee* (1992) | - | Wallace Bampoe-Addo |
| *Abusuan* (1972) | - | Henri Duparc |
| *Agony of the Christ* (2008) | - | Frank Rajah Arase |
| *Ali Barbouyou* (1903) | - | George Méliès |
| *Ali Bouffe à l'Huile* (1903) | - | George Méliès |
| *Afrique sur Seine* (1955) | - | Paulin Soumanou Vieyra & Co. |
| *Air Force One* (1997) | - | Wolfgang Pertersen |
| *Alega's Day* (n.d.) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Ama* (1991) | - | Kwate Nee Owoo and Kwesi Owusu |
| *Amistad* (1997) | - | Steven Spielberg |
| *Answer for Tomorrow* (1960) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Avengers* (1994) | - | Abeiku Sagoe |
| *Baara* (1978) | - | Souleymane Cissé, |
| *Bal Poussière* (1988) | - | Henri Duparc |
| *Bands Alive* | - | TV3 Live Band Reality Show |
| *Beyonce I & II* (2006) | - | Frank Rajah Arase |
| *Black Hawk Down* (2001) | - | Ridley Scott |

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|---|---|---|
| *Borom Sarret* (1963) | - | Ousmane Sembene |
| *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) | - | Ousmane Sembene and Thierno Sow |
| *Ceddo* (1976) | - | Ousmane Sembene |
| *Chroniques des Années de braise* (1975) | - | Mohamed Lakhdar-Hamina |
| *Citizen Kane* (1941) | - | Orson Welles |
| *Cobra Verde* (1987) | - | Werner Herzog |
| *Congorolla* (1929 -1932) | - | Martin Johnson. |
| *Contact* (1974) | - | Giorgio Bontempi |
| *Cry Freedom* (1981) | - | Ola Balogun |
| *Cult of Alata* (1989) | - | William Akuffo |
| *Dark Sands* (1999) | - | Lambert Hama |
| *Dead End I & II* (2009) | - | Rufy Quansah |
| *Dede* (1992) | - | Tom Ribeiro |
| *Do Your Own Thing* (1971) | - | Bernard Odidja |
| *Dragonball* (2009) | - | James Wong |
| *Expectations I* (1998) | - | Ezekiel Dugbartey Nanor |
| *Expectations II* (1999) | - | Ezekiel Dugbartey Nanor |
| *Finye* (1982) | - | Souleymane Cissé, |
| *Flame* (1996) | - | Ingrid Sinclair |
| *Freedom for Africa* (1960) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Genesis Chapter X* (1978) | - | Tom Ribeiro |

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|---|---|---|
| *Ghana's Most Beautiful* | - | TV3 Beauty Pageant Reality Show |
| *Ghost Tears* (1994) | - | Socrates Safo |
| *Gone With the Wind* (1939) | - | Victor Fleming |
| *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) | - | Haile Gerima |
| *Harvest at 17* (1992) | - | Kwaw Ansah |
| *Heritage... Africa* (1988) | - | Kwaw Ansah |
| *His Majesty's Sergeant* (1984) | - | Tom Ribeiro |
| *Home Sweet Home* (2006) | - | Emmanuel Appea |
| *I Told You So* (1970) | - | Egbert Adjesu |
| *In the Eyes of My Husband* (2007) | - | Daniel Ademinakor |
| *James Bond films* (various) | - | (Various) |
| *Juju* (1986) | - | King Ampaw |
| *Keita…The Heritage of the Griot* (1996) | - | Dani Kouyaté, |
| *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) | - | Robert Stevenson |
| *Kini and Adams* (1997) | - | Idrissa Ouedraogo |
| *Kodou* (1971) | - | Ababacar Samb-Makharam |
| *Kukurantumi- Road to Accra* (1983) | - | King Ampaw |
| *L'Opium et le Baton* (1970) | - | Ahmed Rachedi |
| *La Noire de...* (aka *Black Girl*) (1966) | - | Ousmane Sembene |
| *La vie est belle* (1986) | - | Mweze Ngangura and Benoit Lamy, |
| *Le Musulman Rigolo* (1897) | - | George Méliès |

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|---|---|---|
| *Life and Living It* (2007) | - | Shirley Frimpong Manso |
| *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1981) | - | Kwaw Ansah |
| Love is Wicked (2009) | - | Willie A. Alenge |
| *Malaria* (n.d.) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Mandabi* (*The Money Order*) (1968) | - | Ousmane Sembene |
| *Marley and Me* (2008) | - | David Frankel |
| *Mataa- Our Missing Children* (1992) | - | Wallace Bampoe-Addo |
| *Meba* (1993) | - | Sidiku Buari |
| *Message of the Drum* (1930) | - | Cadbury |
| *Mobor* (1989) | - | William Akuffo |
| *Mouramani* (1955) | - | Mamadou Toure |
| *Mr. Mensah Builds a House* (1956) | - | Sean Graham |
| *Mummy's Daughter* (2006) | - | Frank Rajah Arase |
| *Muna Moto* (1975) | - | Jean Pierre Dikongue-Pipa |
| *Music Music* | - | TV3 Weekly Entertainment Programme |
| *Namisha* (1999) | - | Ashangbor Akwetey-Kanyi |
| *Nkrabea- My Destiny* (1992) | - | Kwasi Sainti Baffoe-Bonnie |
| *No Tears for Ananse* (1968) | - | Sam Aryetey |
| *No Time To Die* (2006) | - | King Ampaw |
| *Nyamanton* (1986) | - | Cheick Oumar Sissoko |
| *On the Borderland of Civilization* (1920)- | | Martin Johnson. |

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|---|---|---|
| *Operation Congo* (1960) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Pouse-Pouse* (1975) | - | Daniel Kamwa |
| *Prevention is Better than Cure* (n.d.) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Princess Tyra* (2007) | - | Frank Rajah Arase |
| *Quartier Mozart* (1992) | - | Jean-Pierre Bekolo |
| *Rambo films* (various) | - | Sylvester Stallone / Ted Kotcheff |
| *Run Baby Run* (2006) | - | Emmanuel Appea |
| *Run Lola Run* (1998) | - | Tom Tykwer |
| *Sambizanga* (1972) | - | Sarah Maldoror |
| *Sanders of the River* (1933) | - | Alexander Korda |
| *Sankofa* (1993) | - | Haile Gerima |
| *Sarraounia* (1987) | - | Med Hondo, |
| *Schemers* (1992) | - | Nick Teye |
| *Scorned* (2008) | - | Shirley Frimpong Manso |
| *See You Amsterdam* (2004) | - | Seth Ashong Katai |
| *Set on Edge* (1999) | - | Tom Ribeiro |
| *Sia…The Myth of the Python* (2001) | - | Dani Kouyaté |
| *Simba* (1924-1928) | - | Martin Johnson |
| *Slum Dog Millionaire* (2008) | - | Danny Boyle |
| *Step-Dad* (1993) | - | Socrates Safo |
| *SWAT* (2003) | - | Clark Johnson |

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|---|---|---|
| *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) | - | Elmo Lincoln |
| *Tears of Joy* (1996) | - | Veronica Quarshie |
| *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986) | - | Ali A. Mazrui |
| *The Agony* (1996) | - | Roger Harold Quartey |
| *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) | - | Gillo Pontecorvo |
| *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) | - | D. W. Griffiths |
| *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) | - | Jamie Uys |
| *The Housefly* (n.d.) | - | (No credits available) |
| *The International* (2009) | - | Tom Tykwer |
| *The King is Mine* (2009) | - | Frank Rajah Arase |
| *The Other Side of the Rich* (1992) | - | Ernest Abbeyquaye |
| *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) | - | Mel Gibson |
| *The Perfect Picture* (2009) | - | Shirley Frimpong Manso |
| *The Police Officer* (1993) | - | Godwin Kortey |
| *The Price of Freedom* (1978) | - | Daniel Kamwa |
| *Tongo Hamile* (1965) | - | Terry Bishop |
| *Touki Bouki* (1973) | - | Djibril Diop Mambety |
| *Towards a United Africa* (1964) | - | (No credits available) |
| *Triple Echo* (1997) | - | Seth Ashong-Katai |
| *True Colours I & II* (2008) | - | Rufy Quansah |
| *Unconditional Love* (1988) | - | Socrates Safo |

*Viva FRELIMO* (1969)            -       (Dutch Television)

*Wend Kuuni* (1988)              -       Gaston Kabore

*West Africa Calling* (1928)     -       (No credits available)

*White Goddess of the Wangora* (1913)   -    Hans Schomburgk

*Xala* (1974)                    -       Ousmane Sembene

*Yeelen* (1987)                  -       Souleymane Cisse

*Your Police* (1962)             -       (No credits available)

*Zan Boko* (1988)                -       Gaston Kabore

*Zinabu* (1987)                  -       William Akuffo

# List of People Interviewed

1- King Ampaw – Interviewed June 2006, Accra, Ghana

2- Karin Amor – Interviewed March 2003, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

3- Nubia Kai – Interviewed March 2003, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

4- Ivanga Imunga – Interviewed March 2003, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

5- Socrates Sarfo – Conversation held in March 2003.

6- Chris Tsui Hesse – Interviewed July 2004, Accra, Ghana

7- Egbert Adjesu – Interviewed June 2004, Accra, Ghana

8- Mark Coleman – Conversation held at GAMA in June 2004

9- Samuel Nai – Conversation held at NAFTI-Accra, in February 2009