

SAME AND OTHER
Negotiating African Identity
in Cultural Production

Edited by
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Introduction

African Identity and the Postcolonial

Maria Eriksson Baaz

I have no desire to be fashionable. Certain Europeans, seeking exotic thrills, expect me to serve them folklore. I refuse to do it—otherwise, I would exist only as a function of their segregationist ideas of the African artist.¹

This statement comes from the Senegalese artist Iba N'Diaye and it is quoted by V.Y. Mudimbe in the book *The Idea of Africa*. In a chapter addressing strategies in contemporary African arts, Mudimbe refers to the exhibition “Contemporary African Artists” at New York’s Studio Museum in 1990. This exhibition was permeated by one question which often appears in relation to cultural production in Africa, namely “How truly African are modern African arts?”. One of the responses to this issue, quoted by Mudimbe, is Williams Fagg’s conclusion that “we are in at the death of all that is best in African art”, a statement which, according to Ulli Beier, “describes the well-known tragic phenomenon in Africa...[t]he rituals that inspired the artists are dying out.”² These attitudes reflect a dominant trend in discourses on African cultural production—the preoccupation with, and predilection for, “tradition” and “authenticity”. Mudimbe’s response to Ulli Beier’s fears starts with the simple statement—“So what?”³

Beier’s and Fagg’s statements and Mudimbe’s response reflect opposing positions in the debates on the meaning and relevance of the signifier “African” in cultural production. This book, which has developed within the framework of the project *Cultural Images in and of Africa* at the Nordic Africa Institute, is a contribution to this debate.⁴ It is concerned with the question of the relevance and meaning of “the African”, “authenticity” and “tradition” in contemporary cultural production in Africa. The articles address the question from the perspective of various fields of cultural production—literature, music, film, popular drama and sculpture.

As Stuart Hall argues, cultural identity is not something that already exists, transcending place, time or history. Identity is about being positioned and investing in a particular (subject) position. This process of positioning cannot be understood outside discourse and power.

¹ Iba N'Diaye, quoted in Mudimbe 1994, p. 163.

² Fagg and Beier quoted in Mudimbe 1994, p. 163.

³ Mudimbe 1994, p. 163.

⁴ All contributions, except for the articles by Johannes Brusila and Mai Palmberg were presented and discussed at “The Nordic Africa Days” in Uppsala in 1999.

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they [identities] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.⁵

Identity is also relational, constructed “through, not outside, difference”. As Hall puts it, “it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term—and thus its ‘identity’—can be constructed.”⁶

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide a brief background to one of the contexts in which the question of African identity must be situated—the postcolonial. The question of African identity and what constitutes “the African”—in philosophy, culture and arts etc.—cannot be understood outside the history of western colonialism. As K.A. Appiah puts it: “a specifically African identity began as the product of a European gaze.”⁷

THE COLONIAL AND THE POSTCOLONIAL

An obvious implication of the term postcolonial is that it refers to the period coming after the demise of the European colonial empires. In contrast to what could be assumed from the prefix “post”, however, the term postcolonialism or postcoloniality does not refer to an achieved state *beyond* colonialism. It does not, as some commentators have argued, reflect a “prematurely celebratory position”.⁸ Identities are not static but change and modify as a result of shifting social configurations and power relations. As such, cultural identities have of course undergone, in some instances, quite radical changes as a result of the gradual shift from the direct rule of the colonial to the postcolonial. But the shift from the colonial to the postcolonial did not entail a “break where the ‘old relations’ disappear for ever and entirely new ones come to replace them.”⁹ In this scenario “‘the colonial’ is not dead, since it lives on in its ‘after-effects’.”¹⁰ Colonial history still shapes contemporary identities, not only in the sense that past ideas and images remain embedded in contemporary discourses and identities but in the sense that the colonial constitutes one of the histories in relation to which people are positioned and position themselves. As Simon Gikandi puts it, postcolonial theory is “one way of recognising how decolonised situations are marked by the trace of the imperial pasts they try to disavow.”¹¹ It can be understood as a “code for the state of undecidability in

⁵ Hall 1990, p. 225.

⁶ Hall 1996a, p. 4.

⁷ Appiah 1992, p. 71.

⁸ McClintock 1995, p. 13.

⁹ Hall 1996b, p. 247.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–48. As Hall points out here, the “post” in the postcolonial is similar to other “posts” like postmodernism and poststructuralism. Rather than just signifying “after” the “post” signifies a “going beyond” but also continuance, like poststructuralism which chronologically follows after but also “achieves its theoretical gains ‘on the back of’ structuralism”.

¹¹ Gikandi 1996, p. 15.

which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation.”¹²

While the term “postcolonial” has for a long time been a concept reserved for the former colonised societies, the more recent postcolonial theorising has come to broaden the concept. Rather than being seen as an issue which concerns only some people, postcolonialism re-reads colonisation as part of an essentially global process which—in different ways—has marked most societies.¹³ The colonial and post-colonial are no longer processes which concern only the former colonised societies, but to the same extent the former colonising societies too. As Stuart Hall argues “one of the principal values of the term ‘post-colonial’ has been to direct our attention to the many ways in which colonisation was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis. It was always inscribed deeply within them—as it became indelibly inscribed in the cultures of the colonised.”¹⁴

Two central representations in the colonial discourses that are also embedded in contemporary discourses on cultural production in Africa are *otherness* and *evolution*. It was within these discourses, which together came to legitimise the “white man’s burden”, that a certain European identity was constituted during colonialism. According to Mudimbe, *deviation* is the best symbol of the idea of Africa in the West.¹⁵ This marking of Africa in terms of absolute difference is, according to him, a process that can be traced to the Enlightenment and the rise of the sciences. In his analysis of representations of Africans in Western art, Mudimbe points at a significant break, which takes place at the end of the seventeenth century. Before this time, differences were integrated within a “normative sameness”. While the pictures articulated distinctions and separations by positing “surface differences as meaningful of human complexity” the virtues of resemblance tended to “erase physical and cultural variations” into the sameness signified by the white norm. The artists painted “blackened whites”. By the end of the seventeenth century, the resemblance had, according to Mudimbe, been pushed out of the paintings. Paintings such as Rembrandt’s *Two Negroes* and Peter Paul Rubens’s *Study of Four Blacks’ Heads*, express another epistemological order operating in the West, an epistemological order characterised by theories of the diversification of beings and efforts to arrange differences into classificatory tables, paradigmatically expressed in the Swedish botanist Carl von Linneaus’s *Systema Naturae*, and later developed in the science of race.¹⁶ By the end of the eighteenth century, the African had, according to Mudimbe, become “not only the Other who is everyone else except me, but rather the key which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the Same.”¹⁷

¹² Ibid., p. 14.

¹³ The colonial history is, in this perspective, not something which only concern the former colonising and colonised societies but also those which formally are situated outside the history of colonialism such as, for example, the Nordic countries and Ethiopia.

¹⁴ Hall 1996b, p. 246.

¹⁵ Mudimbe 1994, p. xii.

¹⁶ Mudimbe 1988, p. 8–9.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

Africans were defined in terms of their difference from the West, as the primitive barbarian origin of man as opposed to civilisation, as body as opposed to mind, as passive as opposed to the active and innovative, as an irresponsible child as opposed to an adult, as nature as opposed to culture etc. The dichotomous system of representations was situated in an evolutionary hierarchy in which different societies in the world were seen to reflect different stages in the same evolutionary process. The colonised peoples functioned as “contemporary ancestors”, reminding “the West” of whom they once were and the African was situated on the lowest step of the evolutionary ladder—as the edge of humanity. As Goldberg writes:

Those [places] of the East were acknowledged to have civilisation, language, and culture. But, generically, the East was a place of violence and lascivious sensuality, the rape of which was thus invited literally as much as metaphorically. Africa to the south, by contrast, was the Old World of prehistory: supposedly lacking language and culture, the Negro was increasingly taken to occupy a rung apart on the ladder of being, a rung that as the eighteenth century progressed was thought to predate humankind.¹⁸

The concept “African art” must be situated in the context of this history and the process in which different objects, regardless of their meaning and function in the local context, were incorporated in a general Western notion of art and classified as belonging to a specific “African art”. Artefacts produced in Africa were situated within the evolutionary scheme and presented as symbols of a primitive, childish art that reflected earlier stages in the evolutionary process.

DISCOURSES OF AFRICAN AUTHENTICITY

N’Diaye’s statement quoted initially, where he expresses his refusal to serve folklore, is articulated in opposition to “certain Europeans seeking exotic thrills”. These “exoticism seekers” constitute a by no means negligible group among European critics and consumers of African cultural production.

The positioning of Africa on the lowest step of the evolutionary ladder has not only been used as an illustration of barbarism and chaos in Western texts. The African Other has, at the same time, also functioned as an object of desire and celebration. The experience of modernity in Europe has always been marked by an ambivalence which has been reflected in representations of the colonised Other. Since the first encounter, Africa and other “non-Western” cultures have functioned as the Other in relation to which debates on the vices and virtues of Western modernity have taken place. Battles between different positions and visions of the future of Europe have been played out on the non-Western Other, producing highly contradictory images of the Other as either noble or ignoble.¹⁹ In the texts of the critics of Western modernity, the African

¹⁸ David Goldberg quoted in Childs and Williams 1997, p. 191.

¹⁹ The “savage debate” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is perhaps the most well known and documented example of how battles between different visions of the future of Europe have been played out on the non-Western Other, resulting in the division of the savage into the noble and the ignoble, existing side by side, reflecting different visions and programmes. On the one hand there was the image of the ignoble brutish savage characterised by a life in anarchy and

Other, leading a simple and innocent life untouched by the vices of modernity, has been used as a sign of positive difference to which the overdeveloped Westerner should turn in search of salvation. Even if the ambivalence of modernity is reflected in representations of the colonised Other throughout the colonial history, the image of Africa as an object of desire advanced in the 1920s with the consolidation of high modernism as the normative literary style. At this time Africa increasingly came to be associated with, as Gikandi puts it, a “redemptive primitivism”. Africa became the object of desire for “cognitive and aesthetic values that transcend the prison house of modernity and civilisation.”²⁰ Following these ideas, several Western artists and critics have turned to Africa in search of “true” and “untouched” cultural expressions. These critics and artists have played a central role in promoting an image of African cultural production as Other and authentic.

The notion of African authenticity has, of course, also played a central role among African viewers and critics. The colonial experience and a(n) (often-homogenised) notion of the West has constituted dominant Other(s) in the negotiation of the meaning of “the African” in cultural production in Africa. This was especially evident in the nationalist discourses of independence. This was the time, not only for political and economic liberation, but also for the decolonising of African philosophy, literature, arts, film etc. To reveal and promote indigenous traditions constituted an important task in the process of nation building. But it was also an important part of the Pan-Africanist project.

At the time of independence, the nationalist discourses in Africa were highly influenced by the black nationalist movements in the African diaspora in North America and the Caribbean. In its broadest sense, Pan-Africanism could be understood as a diverse movement created in response to European imperialism and racism.²¹ As such it has, since the beginning, emphasised the common experience of discrimination among people of African descent in Africa and elsewhere. Pan-Africanism is, however, a very diverse set of ideas and it has been given different meanings in different contexts. While one of the principal meanings of the term in Africa has been the need for political unity among the states on the African continent, the Pan-Africanist ideas of the diaspora have, from the beginning, emphasised racial and (later) cultural unity and solidarity among people of African descent and the need to rediscover the common cultural traditions derived from the shared African origins. The early Pan-Africanism was based on the idea of race, that the people of Africa had a common destiny because they belonged to a specific race.²² This idea has continued to operate even after the idea of race was discarded by several writers and replaced with notions of culture and civilisation.²³ It has continued in the

chaos promoted by writers such as Hobbes. On the other hand, there was the image of the noble savage, unfettered by laws, social divisions and in general the vices of Europe promoted by writers such as Rousseau and Locke. See for example Pieterse 1992 and Hall 1992 and 1997.

²⁰ Gikandi 1996, pp. 178–79.

²¹ For a discussion of Pan-Africanism see for example Ackah 1999; Appiah 1992; Howe 1998 and Masolo 1994.

²² See for example Appiah’s (1992) discussion of the ideas of Alexander Crummell, Edward Blyden and W.E.B. Du Bois.

²³ The notion of race has, however, not disappeared. It still occupies a central role, especially in the Afrocentrist discourses in the US. See for example Howe’s (1998) discussion on Afrocentrism.

shape of what the philosopher Paulin Hountondji has called *unanimism*—the idea that there is some central body of ideas that is shared by black Africans generally.²⁴

The influence of this more culturalist version of Pan-Africanism among African political leaders and cultural elite at the time of independence is evident, for example, in Léopold Sédar Senghor's writings on *négritude* and Kwame Nkrumah's ideas of the African Personality. The ideas of *négritude*, which above all are associated with the writings of Senghor and Aimé Césaire, were developed by African, Afro-American and Caribbean intellectuals in Paris in the 1930s.²⁵ Senghor himself defined *négritude* as “the sum of the cultural values of the black world.”²⁶ Even if there were different ideas on the exact content of this “sum”, the basic idea of the cultural specificity of Africa had great influence on ideas of the role and purpose of cultural production. Cultural production in Africa, whether literature, film or music, shared special traits. It was different and its primary role was to assert this difference. As the authors of the well-known book (of a later date) *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* put it: “African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literature. It has its own tradition, models and norms.”²⁷

The politics and discourses of authenticity have of course always had their critics, in particular in its *négritude* version which, by Senghor, was described in terms of intuitive or tactile spontaneous reason, sensation, sensuousness, instinct, feeling, rhythm, emotions, creativity, imagination and immediacy—ideas manifested in the celebration of “aesthetics of feeling” and “images impregnated with rhythm”.²⁸ The writings about *négritude* were already contested and criticised in their heyday by writers such as Frantz Fanon, and later, Kwasi Wiredu, Marcien Towa and Wole Soyinka who pointed out that “the sum of the cultural values of the black world” were curiously similar to the sum of the non-virtues of African culture in the colonial discourses.²⁹ According to them the assertions of black people's sensualism and intuitive, mystic and spontaneous reason did not challenge racist assertions of blacks as unable to think rationally, as childish, immature and with uninhibited sexuality. Instead they come to support and confirm racist stereotypes and uphold unequal power relations and a racial division of labour. As Appiah argues, the cultural nationalism of Pan-Africanism must, in this way, be seen as “an outgrowth of European racialism”—“the course of cultural nationalism in Africa has been to make real the imaginary identities to which Europe has subjected us.”³⁰

²⁴ Hountondji 1977/1983.

²⁵ The concept *négritude* first appeared in Aimé Césaire's book *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939).

²⁶ See Serequeberhan 1994.

²⁷ Chinweizu, Jemie and Ihechukwu 1980 quoted in Appiah 1992, p. 57.

²⁸ Serequeberhan 1994 and Mudimbe 1988.

²⁹ See for example Towa 1971; Fanon 1952/1986; Soyinka 1976 and Wiredu 1980. See also, for example, Mudimbe 1988; Serequeberhan 1994 and Appiah 1992.

³⁰ Appiah 1992, p. 62.

In the politics of authenticity, the black man is still, to borrow from Fanon, “sealed in his blackness” (and the white in his whiteness).³¹ It is this aspect of the discourses of authenticity which N’Diaye is opposing in the statement quoted at the beginning of this introduction. The discourses of authenticity claim that particular criteria and standards are adopted in relation to cultural production in Africa. These “special criteria” have several dimensions. On a general level this means that African cultural production is consumed, judged and analysed in terms of its “Africanness”. It also means that, while borrowings and adapting are often encouraged and celebrated as a sign of creativity in cultural production in “the West”, the same standards do not apply to cultural production in Africa. On the contrary. In this sense the white man is not “sealed in his whiteness” in the same way that the black man is in his blackness. The “borrowing” of the African artist is instead often, as in the initial statements by Beier, presented as a sign of a “tragic phenomenon in Africa”. The artist is presented as a westernised African and becomes a sign of non-authenticity, implementing—and at the same time being a sign of—the colonisation and westernisation of the mind. The role allocated to the westernised African artist is often that of betrayal. He/she becomes a traitor to the authentic cultural values and traditions. These standards are thus adopted not only—as Iba N’Diaye points out—by “certain Europeans, seeking exotic thrills”, but also among “African” viewers and critics. In this way the identity politics of “Afrocentrism” fits well into the arguments and needs of “certain Europeans seeking exotic thrills”.

The discourses of authenticity have, however, above all, been propagated by a group who have a special experience of European racism and imperialism—the political and intellectual elite in Africa and the diaspora. One important point, which is often downplayed, not only in the discourse of Pan-Africanism itself, but also in postcolonial studies in general, is the heterogeneous character of the experience of European racism and imperialism. Not only was the process of colonial identification in Africa itself different depending on social and economic position, gender, geographical location within the colonies and, of course, the different colonial policies of France, Britain, Belgium and Portugal, but the experience of European imperialism and racism was necessarily different for people in Africa and in the African diaspora and these differences have of course created different responses and concerns. The emphasis on the cultural dimension in the Pan-Africanism of the diaspora must be seen in relation to their particular experience of slavery and of living as a minority in a segregated, racist society. The Pan-Africanism of the diaspora has since the beginning primarily been preoccupied with, as Ackah puts it: “the quest for identity”—a preoccupation which they, to some extent, have shared with the intellectual and political elite in Africa—but which has been less relevant to the vast majority of the population in Africa whose major concern, according to Ackah, is the “quest for a sustainable lifestyle”.³²

³¹ Fanon 1952/1986, p. 11: “The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black in his blackness”.

³² Ackah 1999, p. 61.

One reflection of the homogenising of “black experience” is the tendency to interpret the colonial experience through the same lens of “alienation” and “inferiority complexes”. As Appiah argues, the impact of colonialism has often been overemphasised. According to him “the experience of the vast majority of these citizens of Europe’s African colonies was one of an essentially shallow penetration by the coloniser.” Despite the colonisers’ efforts to stigmatise traditional religious beliefs and practices, people still “experienced the persistent power of our own cognitive and moral traditions.”³³ Alienation is, in this way, as Appiah emphasises, a phenomenon which mainly concerns a small class of well educated people, the ones who have maintained recurrent contacts with the European Other.

In Africa it is above all this well educated elite who have made themselves guardians of authenticity. The people outside this political and intellectual elite seem less afflicted by the agony of non-authenticity. These differences in experiences and concerns are also reflected in cultural production. While authenticity often plays a central role in the cultural politics and discourses of the elite, it seems to play a less important role in popular culture. The elite anxieties of “lost authenticity” have, however, often been projected upon “the ordinary people” who have become symbols of—at the same time—authenticity and non-authenticity. While urban popular culture has often been used as an example of a degenerate westernisation, rural people and village life have often functioned as symbols of a celebratory authenticity.

The politics of segregation and separation is challenged by an increasing number of contemporary artists. At the same time it seems as if the discourses of authenticity and African distinctiveness have gained new strength as a response to the increasing globalisation which, according to some doomsday prophets, will lead to the westernisation of African culture (and in the end a total homogenisation of world cultures). In these discourses of globalisation, a general notion of the West is reinstated in the position of the general opposed Other, from whose corrupting influences cultural production has to be protected. And the focus is again directed at the authentic.

HYBRIDITY AND “REPRENDRE”

One of the problems with the discourses of authenticity is that they overlook the fact that colonisation not “only” was a process of cultural and political domination and oppression but *also* a process of cultural hybridisation. The concept of hybridity is perhaps above all associated with the writings of the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha.³⁴ But similar readings of the colonial encounter have been made in the African context too. In his exploration of Christianity in Central Africa in the book *Tales of Faith*, Mudimbe (under the heading “The practice of misunderstanding”) conceptualises the colonial encounter as an *espace métissé*. The concept *espace métissé* is presented as a form of acculturation which is neither a complete absorption (whereby the dominant

³³ Appiah 1992, p. 7.

³⁴ See Bhabha 1994. According to him, “in the very practice of colonial domination the language of the master becomes hybrid—neither the one thing nor the other” (1994, p. 33).

culture completely absorbs the weaker) nor an adoption or integration by the weaker of elements in the dominant culture but, instead, a transculturation process—the creation of a new mixed cultural order.³⁵ Contrary to the expectations of the missionaries and the colonisers, the mission did not lead to an institution of a perfect “Western” model: “in the socio-economic and cultural refiguration of Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an *espace métissé* imposes itself against the far from peaceful ancient traditions and the newly substituted programme in colonial history.”³⁶

Complete conversion and the institution of a perfect western model was impossible. It was impossible since the colonisation process itself created a spirit of resistance. But a complete conversion was also impossible due to the barrier of languages—the “problem of translation” or “misunderstanding”. Mudimbe here retells the story of the Catholic priests and the Acholi, originally provided by the philosopher Kwasi Wiredu. As this story shows, the problem of translation means that the symbols and meanings of a given culture cannot be translated in a transparent way into the terms and concepts of another culture. Something in the “original” is always lost and something new is created.

In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question ‘Who created you?’; and because the Luo Language does not have an independent concept of create or creation, the question was rendered to mean ‘Who moulded you?’ But this was still meaningless, because human beings are born of their mothers. The elders told the visitors they did not know. But we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets ‘moulded’. So he said, ‘Rubanga is the one who moulds people.’ This is the name of the hostile spirit which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump on the back. And instead of exorcising these hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi.³⁷

Colonisation entailed—at the same time—both the creation and the subversion of cultural boundaries. Both the cultures of the colonised and the colonisers were refigured in the colonial process, a refiguration which is repressed in notions of “the Western” and “the African” circulating and promoted in discourses on African culture both in the West and in Africa. The process of refiguration is of course even more evident today as a result of increasing cultural globalisation and the post-colonial diaspora through which the “Other” as Kevin Robbins puts it “has installed itself within the very heart of the western metropolis’ and through ‘a kind of reverse invasion’ ... has ‘infiltrated the colonial core’.”³⁸

The notion of hybridity and hybridised culture should not, as sometimes is implied in recent criticism, be understood as a condition or sphere different

³⁵ See Mudimbe 1997, pp. 141–54.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

³⁷ Wiredu quoted in Mudimbe 1997, p. 153.

³⁸ Robbins 1991, p. 32.

from or existing in-between pure, original cultures.³⁹ It should instead, as Rosaldo puts it, be understood as “the ongoing condition of all human cultures”, as “hybridity all the way down”:⁴⁰

On the one hand, hybridity can imply a space betwixt and between two zones of purity in a manner that follows biological usage that distinguishes two discrete species and the hybrid pseudo-species that results from their combination. Similarly, the anthropological concept of syncretism asserts, for example, that folk Catholicism occupies a hybrid site midway between the purity of Catholicism and that of indigenous religion. On the other hand, hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two-way borrowing and lending between cultures). Instead of hybridity versus purity, this view suggests that it is hybridity all the way down.⁴¹

The notion of hybridity challenges the ideas of the existence of separate bounded cultures, and the idea of the possibility to retrieve the “real” and “unspoiled” African culture. The notion of hybridity also challenges the prediction of the doomsday prophets regarding the fate of African cultural production in the age of globalisation. The unequal power processes characterising the increased mobility of meanings and meaningful forms in the globalisation processes must of course be acknowledged. However, recognising hegemonic structures and power inequalities does not necessarily imply a rejection of the idea of hybridity.⁴² As the processes of colonial hybridity clearly demonstrate, hybridisation is not a power neutral process. But the unequal power relations did not result in a neat copy. The outcomes of the processes of cultural domination were not predictable.

Lastly, it should be noted that the notion of hybridity and translation has different dimensions. One dimension, evident in Mudimbe’s example above, and especially in Bhabha’s texts, is the unconscious and intransitive conceptualisation of agency and hybridity. The process of translation and misreading, which alters and challenges (the assumed fixity of) the meaning of symbols and narratives, is largely situated within the unconscious and intransitive. It is also

³⁹ One criticism or misreading of hybridity concerns the role of purity in conceptualisations of hybridity and the argument that hybridity itself implies a sort of essentialism. In a critique of Bhabha, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p. 129) argues in the following way: “... while Bhabha claims that he is attempting to ‘provide a form of writing of cultural difference in the midst of modernity that is inimical to binary differences’, the great irony is his conceptualisations of the means to move beyond the binary in fact depend for their effectiveness entirely upon the structures he is trying to undermine. Hybridity, perhaps the key concept throughout his career in this respect, obviously depends upon a presumption of the existence of its opposite for its force. Not only does this involve a new set of binary oppositions, but it runs the danger that the hybrid ... will become essentialised”. In one sense, Moore-Gilbert is of course right. The notion of hybridity does depend “upon a presumption of the existence of its opposite for its force” in the sense that it is meaningful only in relation to discourses asserting the existence of cultural purity. This is, however, a consequence of the relational character of language and meaning (the ways in which concepts are imbued by meaning only by their difference from other concepts) which we can never fully escape.

⁴⁰ As Bhabha (1990, p. 211) puts it: “all forms of cultures are continually in a process of hybridity”.

⁴¹ Rosaldo quoted in Tomlison 1999, p. 143.

⁴² For a discussion on culture and globalisation see for example Appadurai 1997; Hannerz 1996; Tomlison 1999 and Paolini 1997.

the unreflective and unconscious nature of the “borrowings and mimetic appropriations” which facilitates the upholding of “the illusions of boundedness” articulated in nationalist discourses and in notions of “Western” and “African” culture.

But hybridity does, of course, involve more conscious borrowings and translations, what Werbner, in contrast to organic unconscious hybridity, terms “intentional hybridity”—the deliberate and conscious use of cultural forms and signs, “intended to shock, change, challenge, revitalise or disrupt through deliberate intended fusions of unlike social languages and images.”⁴³ This “intentional hybridity” characterises much contemporary cultural production in Africa, as elsewhere.

Mudimbe’s initial comment to Fagg’s and Beier’s statement on the “tragic phenomenon in Africa”—So what?—which at first sight can appear as a rather indifferent and simplified response, must be seen in relation to the conceptualisation of culture and hybridity above. It is based on the idea of the impossibility of retrieving the “real” and “unspoiled” culture. It is also based on the notion of *reprendre* as an image of contemporary activity of African art. The notion *reprendre* is, among other things, used to point at the practice of “taking up an interrupted tradition, not out of a desire for purity, which would testify only to the imaginations of dead ancestors, but in a way that reflects the conditions of today.”⁴⁴ And Mudimbe’s first comment—so what?—is followed by the conclusion: “This discontinuity, despite its violence, doesn’t necessarily mean the end of African art; it seems, rather, that the ancient models are being richly readapted.”⁴⁵

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

The first chapter by Stefan Helgesson—*Black Atlantics*—is of a theoretical nature and develops some of the issues addressed in this introduction. It deals with the relevance and possibility of a transnational and transcultural approach to the study of—in particular—African literature. The article takes its point of departure in one of the most influential postcolonial studies during recent years, Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. In the centre of Gilroy’s analysis of “black” writing and music is the symbol of “ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean.”⁴⁶ The book provides a powerful attack on both the identity politics of Afrocentrism and British cultural nationalism and its exclusionist notions of an authentic Englishness. Gilroy’s analysis of the circulation of ideas and cultural and political artefacts within the Black Atlantic points at the fundamentally hybridised character of a black culture which is neither purely African, as the Afrocentrists would have it, nor separated from the European or Englishness as argued in the exclusionist English nationalism. It is a hybridised

⁴³ Werbner quoted in Tomlison 1999, p. 144.

⁴⁴ Mudimbe 1994, p. 154.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁴⁶ Gilroy 1993, p. 4.

culture, characterised by a double consciousness, which follows from being at the same time both “inside” and “outside” the West and modernity.

Gilroy has, however, been criticised for neglecting the role that Africa and African artists and writers have played in the cultural traffic of the Black Atlantic—a critique which not only has resulted in bitter comments but also in a questioning of the relevance of his approach in relation to cultural production in Africa. Helgesson discusses Gilroy’s approach in relation to African literature, in particular lusophone African literature. By taking as his point of departure the role of the “colonial languages” in Africa’s participation in the transcontinental and transnational dialogue of the Black Atlantic, he invites a perspective in which we—instead of a single black Atlantic (in the sense of Gilroy who focused solely on English-speaking cultural production), instead of a homogenised notion of African culture (as in the discourses of Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism) and instead of a simplified focus on the nation—can imagine “the co-existence of (at least) three black Atlantics, three countercultures of modernity, that each have distinct paths of communication and exchange.”

“Western” observers and critics have, as emphasised earlier, played an important role in creating a particular image of cultural production in Africa. Three contributions in this book focus, in a more direct way, on the role of “Western” images and critics. In the concluding chapter with the title *A Continent without Culture?* Mai Palmberg discusses the marginalised position of African cultural production. The starting point for her discussion is an analysis of Swedish schoolbooks which disclosed a total absence of African cultural production in the teaching materials. In her article she argues that this absence and in general the marginalised position of African cultural production must be understood in relation to the discourses of evolution and racism which have created an image of Africa as “without culture”. She also shows how the dominance of the development (aid) discourses contribute to this image.

The article *Questioning ‘Authenticity’—The Case of Contemporary Zimbabwean Stone Culture* by Elin Skogh addresses the notion of authenticity in relation to contemporary stone sculpture in Zimbabwe. One of the Europeans who turned to Africa in search for untouched, authentic art forms was the British art historian Frank McEwen. As the director of the Rhodes National Gallery in Rhodesia and the founder of the workshop school at the gallery, McEwen not only had an influence on the artistic production itself but has also had a great impact on the interpretation of stone sculpture as authentic with its origin in Shona culture, and with roots back to Great Zimbabwe. In her contribution, Skogh deconstructs the notion of authenticity promoted by McEwen and successive art critics. She also discusses the implications that these discourses have had for this art.

That African artists have often paid a high price for creative borrowings is showed in Johannes Brusila’s chapter *Musical Otherness and the Bhundu Boys—The Construction of the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ in the Discourse of World Music*. Brusila tells the story of how the demands for otherness in Western conceptions of “world music” contributed to the “rise” and “fall” of the Zimbabwean band *Bhundu Boys*. He shows how the musical creativity and ambi-

tions of the musicians collide with the demands for an authentic Other. But the author also highlights the contradictions in the discourses of world music. While the notions of authenticity and otherness occupy a central position in these discourses, it is an *accommodated* otherness that is demanded. The artist must be accessible (not too strange), *and* authentic at the same time and success depends on successful negotiations of these two contradictory expectations.

This demand for an Other who (to paraphrase Bhabha) is “totally Other, but not quite”, in the globalised musical industry, is also addressed in Annette Kirkegaard’s contribution *Tourism Industry and Local Music Culture in Contemporary Zanzibar*.⁴⁷ Just like Brusila, Kirkegaard points at the contradictions in which the musicians have to adjust to the tourists’ longing for an otherness that is not too disturbing, not too strange. This article also points at the complex processes of globalisation—how, in this case, the increased mobility of people through the tourism industry, entails at the same time processes of homogenisation and a strengthening of local musical traditions. While demands for a “homely otherness” contribute to processes of homogenisation, the demands for otherness itself—together with the economic possibilities provided by the tourism industry—contribute to the maintenance of traditional knowledge of instruments and playing techniques.

As elaborated on earlier in this introduction, authenticity has, above all, been a concern of the political and intellectual elite. That the people outside this political and intellectual elite are less preoccupied with authenticity is, in many instances, reflected in popular culture. The uneasy relationship between popular and elite culture is dealt with in two contributions to this book. In *Sankofa and Modern Authenticity in Ghanaian Film and Television*, Anne Mette Jørgensen addresses the dominant narrative at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Accra in Ghana. While Jørgensen highlights the divergent stands of the lectures and the students concerning the meaning and importance of the signifier Africa, she also points at the continuity of the Sankofa ideology of Kwame Nkrumah. She furthermore reveals the ambiguity of the notion of authenticity and “Africanness”. This ambiguity is not only reflected in a contempt for popular culture, but in the ambivalent role that the rural areas play in the narratives (in particular the northern parts of Ghana which, since colonial times, have been presented as backward). The rural areas and rural people are—at the same time—used as symbols of a celebratory authenticity and presented as ignorant targets of educative messages which emphasise the need to do away with outmoded customs and practices.

The “Shame of Money”—Criticism of Modernity in Swahili Popular Drama by Siri Lange also addresses the question of elite and popular culture. But here the focus is on popular culture. The article deals with popular drama in Tanzania, a genre which has developed from the national dance troupes established and promoted in the nationalist cultural policy of independence. Lange provides a brief background to this, as she puts it, “hybrid cultural

⁴⁷ According to Homi Bhabha (1994) the colonial discourses were characterised by the “ironic compromise of mimicry”—the desire for a reformed recognisable Other that is “*almost the same, but not quite*” (1994, p. 86). According to the colonial logic the colonised should become like the coloniser but always remain different.

form” and continues to elaborate on its dominant themes. She shows how popular drama, in contrast to the “African Theatre” developed and promoted by the cultural elite, focuses on the conflicts and dilemmas of everyday urban life, such as changing gender relations, money and social relations and conflicts. While the African Theatre, which has failed to attract large audiences, is concerned with traditional myths and legends, popular drama deals with the conflicts between tradition and modernity, as they are experienced by people in their every-day life.

Both these articles point at the different concerns which have emerged from the diverse experiences of—among many other things—Western imperialism and racism.⁴⁸ The lack of a common, unifying experience is, however, not only related to questions of class or geography, but also gender. Western imperialism did not only alter the organisation of the household and gender relations through the introduction of new laws and a new gendered division of labour, it also introduced ideas on the ideal, preferred, Western family which was contrasted to African family forms. This dichotomy between Western and African family forms and gender relations has continued to influence discourses and research on family and gender. It is not only evident in “Western” feminist research on “the Other woman”.⁴⁹ It is also reflected in discourses and research on gender and family in Africa where the idea of African family forms has sometimes dominated discussions on families and motherhood in a way that has led to an idealisation of extended kinship networks and female headed households. In her contribution ‘*Imagined Families*’ in *South African Women’s Autobiographies* Maria Olaussen reads South African women’s autobiographies and shows how the construction of female selves and motherhood interact with a dominant ideal in the form of a nuclear family. The fact that the household arrangements described build on women as providers and involve relatives and the immediate community as caregivers is presented as a necessity, as a result of hardship and destitution rather than as a “traditional African” way of life.

Another contribution that deals with literature, Carita Backström’s *In Search of Psychological Worlds—On Yvonne Vera’s and Chanjerai Hove’s Portrayal of Women* addresses an issue which is often mentioned as a distinctive feature of African narratives—the absence of character psychology. This alleged absence of character psychology is often presented as a reflection of a specific traditional African collectivist and holistic worldview in which the individual is unimportant. Backström’s article takes its point of departure in a comment made by the Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera in which she concludes that, while she herself in her work focuses on and explores the internal psychological worlds of the characters, this is something which is lacking in African writing in general. According to her, African writing does not take the internal worlds of the characters seriously. This comment is the starting point for a comparative analysis of Chanjerai Hove’s *Bones* and Yvonne Vera’s

⁴⁸ The interjected phrase here is important. See the earlier discussion on the problematic tendency to over-emphasise the impact of colonialism as the “origin of history”.

⁴⁹ See for example Mohanty 1991.

Without a Name with the aim to explore if there is a difference in how Vera and Hove explore the internal, psychological world of their characters.

The issue of character psychology in African narratives is also addressed in Eva Jørholt's contribution *Africa's Modern Cinematic Griots*. This article, which is embedded in a discussion of the problems of "othering", addresses the role of oral tradition and the traditional storyteller—the griot—in francophone West African films. Jørholt argues that the marginalised position of African cinema not only is the result of financial and infrastructure problems but also of different narrating practices and structures that are rooted in oral tradition. She shows how several West African filmmakers have readapted oral tradition, especially during the years after independence which were characterised by a wish to create a true African cinema. But the article also shows that by no means all filmmakers embrace this tradition and that many in the younger generation of filmmakers refuse to be "otherness machines".

The role of oral tradition is also discussed in Anne Mette Jørgensen's article *Sankofa and the modern authenticity in Ghanaian film and television*, mentioned earlier. But here the conclusion is different. Jørgensen argues that the influence of oral tradition is not evident in the narrative structure of the NAFTAI films and that neither the teachers or students there see their productions as indebted to or influenced by oral tradition.

Jørgensen's and Jørholt's articles and their different conclusions regarding the role of oral tradition point at one important condition which needs to be emphasised in a book like this with the highly problematic signifier "Africa" in the title—the heterogeneity of Africa and "African" cultural production. Even if the signifier Africa is here used (and preferably will be read) in its deconstructed form—referring to the major theme in this book namely the *discourses* of authenticity and the negotiation of the *meaning* (and meaninglessness) of the signifier "African" in contemporary cultural production in Africa—the heterogeneity bears being repeated. As Appiah's puts it in the book *In My Father's House*, Africa is a place (as all others) of "genders, ethnicities, and classes, of families, religions and nations."⁵⁰ And as he concludes in the preface while illuminating the title of his book—itsself reflecting the fundamentally hybridised nature of African culture—"there is plenty of room in Africa [...] for all sorts and conditions of men and women; [...] at each level, Africa is various."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Appiah 1992, p. 180.

⁵¹ Appiah 1992, preface (ix). The title of the book—*In My Father's House*—alludes to the words of Christ during the last supper. As Appiah explains: "His Christianity [his father's] (his and my mother's) gave me both the biblical knowledge that means that for me the phrase 'in my father's house ...' must be completed 'there are many mansions' and the biblical understanding that, when Christ utters those words at the Last Supper, he means that there is room enough for all in heaven; his Father's house. Even my father, who loved Ghana as much as anyone, would, of course, have resisted the assimilation of Ghana to heaven [...]. But he would not deny—no one who knows these places could deny—that there is plenty of room in Africa ..." (see continuation of the quotation above).

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Cover of the journal *Paletten* (1/2001). Illustration: Yinka Shonibare "Gay Victorians".
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

Black Atlantics

Stefan Helgesson

After its publication in 1993, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* rapidly became one of the single most influential contributions to the expanding field of post-colonial studies. The reasons for this are many. First, Gilroy's book provided a rich example of how ten or fifteen years of theoretical work on anti-essentialism, post-colonial hybridity, split subjectivity and so on could come to fruition. Instead of just talking about doing, which at times seems to be the penchant of post-colonial theorists, Gilroy *does*. He reads the archives of black culture closely, from Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison, and is just as adamant in his theoretical stringency as in his refusal to get stuck in theory for theory's sake.

Secondly, his book maintains a strong polemical edge throughout, aimed partly at the rigid identity-politics of Afrocentrism, partly at the all too easy postmodern celebration of difference and cultural pluralism. The polemical nature of his study makes it a convenient academic guidebook: while supplying the territory of black studies with a new map, Gilroy also makes it clear where the different camps lie.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the notion of the black Atlantic introduced a shift away from colonial discourse studies. If I were to abbreviate the intellectual history of post-colonial studies, as enclosed within the brackets of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), I would claim that it has been devoted to a deconstructive and discursive critique of western regimes of knowledge, not only in the guise of explicitly colonial texts such as Macaulay's "Minute on education" (which described the ideal colonial subjects as mimic men), but also—and not least—in ostensibly anti-colonial theories, movements and writing. This focus has resulted in a stalemate between those who condemn post-colonial theory on the grounds that it never exceeds the strictures of western thought—and hence fails to subvert metropolitan hegemony—and apologists who say that the very notion of transcending the western episteme is facile and counter-productive.

When reading *The Black Atlantic*, such debates seem sterile and pointless. Rather than begin with colonial discourse and then discuss the bleak prospects of ever moving beyond it, Gilroy starts with a more or less established corpus of black writing and music which he proceeds to view as fundamentally hybridised. The difference between the potentially subversive ambivalence of colonial discourse, as theorised by Bhabha, and the double consciousness of the black Atlantic is significant. In the first case, the resistant subject is already constituted by an unstable discourse, in the second case, Gilroy conveys a sense of double consciousness as not merely fate, but as an active refusal to be pigeonholed, an active-yet-critical embracement of subjective options, no matter where they come from. In Gilroy, the writing or performing subject is

up front, trying to steer a train loaded with mixed cultural freight; in Bhabha, the subject is assigned a seat at the tail end of the Symbolic Order Express.

THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Now, in this paper, I ask if the transnational, translational and transcultural approach to black modernity elaborated in *The Black Atlantic* is also workable in African contexts. Can, in fact, Gilroy's optics release us not only from the conventional focus on national cultures, but equally from the convenient yet empty (or overloaded) signifier "Africa"? Could the notion of the "black Atlantic" facilitate an ethically viable articulation—one that refrains from eliding the historical burden of racism and colonialism—of the position of African intellectuals in the processes of cultural globalisation? Does perhaps Gilroy's conception of "countercultures of modernity" pinpoint the ethos and ambitions of so much African literature and enable a revived discussion of African modernism? And, specifically, what happens if we juxtapose Gilroy's construct with previous lusophone conceptions of transatlanticism?

As the phrasing of these questions indicates (questions that I can barely begin to answer here), I focus on the theoretical consequences of Gilroy's study, rather than on Gilroy's performance. The distinction is important, since both aspects of *The Black Atlantic* have been attacked.¹

Ntongela Masilela has censured Gilroy for expressing "an unremitting disdainfulness for Africa, for things African, and for things that come from our 'Dark Continent'."² He claims that Gilroy's "epistemologically delimited historical zone" distorts his notion even of those American and British intellectuals which are under discussion. By effectively reducing "the black Atlantic" to a dialogue between the US, Britain and the Caribbean, his understanding of what motivated a score of black intellectuals is crippled: "*The Black Atlantic* fails to register that the peregrinations of Richard Wright, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and others *in* Europe were a search for the historical meaning of Africa." Likewise, "the preoccupations of Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, and Alexander Crummell *in* Africa" are consistently sidelined and hence distorted.³

Is this, however, a theoretical shortcoming, as Masilela claims? Or is it a failure on the part of Gilroy to meet the demands of his own theoretical ambitions? At first glance it appears to be the latter. Gilroy does mention Africa in passing, which apparently reveals a guilty awareness of a missing term.⁴ Africa *should* be there, but perhaps because of a lack of interest, or because he is so caught up fighting against the idealised Africa of Afrocentrism, Gilroy has not mustered the energy to place it squarely on his Atlantic map.

This reading is supported by Masilela's article, which supplies an excellent overview of the massive intellectual and cultural traffic between America and

¹ *Research in African Literatures* 27.4 contains a number of essays that discuss *The Black Atlantic*.

² Masilela 1996, p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Particularly telling is a short passage on Mandela which only deals with the general media image of Mandela and a speech in which he mentioned Marvin Gaye—as though the presence of African-American culture in South Africa were a revelation. Gilroy 1993, pp. 95–96.

Africa, notably South Africa. Tiyo Soga, Sol Plaatje, John Dube, Lewis Nkosi and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are just a few of the Africans that have responded to overseas developments within black culture and letters — a number of them visited the US as well. Conversely, the Americans mentioned above, as well as Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Miles Davis etc. have all displayed a strong commitment to Africa. These examples in themselves hardly disable Gilroy's theoretical approach — rather, they can be used in such a way as to make the notion of the black Atlantic more credible.

Nonetheless, there is one aspect of Gilroy's argument, overlooked by Masilela, that *necessarily* leaves Africa behind: slavery. The historical experience of slavery is crucial to Gilroy's theory. Slavery is the one factor that allows us to conceive of the black Atlantic as “ultimately” a single ongoing process. It also constitutes an ethical imperative; it is what prevents Gilroy, despite his stress on heterogeneity, to assume the non-committal posture of postmodernism. The racial terror of slavery makes it possible, moreover, to historicise “race” itself and reject the reified racial identities of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism alike. Slavery, above all, is the root cause of the black counterculture of modernity: it signifies the harrowing release from the innocence of Eurocentric Enlightenment and necessitates the constant revision of the universal and beneficial claims of modernity. In this way, blacks become “the first truly modern people”, dealing with problems of ambivalence, loss of origins etc. that would only become evident much later in Europe.⁵

What, then, becomes of Africa in relation to slavery? The middle passage on which the slave ships sailed—regardless of whether it ended in Brazil, the Caribbean or the US—is the jagged seam that separates the black populations of the Americas from Africa as much as it links them historically to this continent. The singularity of this historical experience in the western hemisphere is insurmountable—which means that the very regions that were bled of their populations during the slave trade era are strangely enough on the “outside” of the history of slavery. Gilroy's open outlook on culture thus retains slavery as an ultimate signifier that privileges the diaspora over mainland Africa; “the black Atlantic” would then refer to *diasporic* consciousness rather than double consciousness in a broader sense. The large number of Africans engaged in an overseas dialogue are reduced to a secondary position as recipients of diasporic culture, or as sources of inspiration, but never as proper agents of the black Atlantic. Empirically, this does not make sense, yet it is a theoretical consequence of Gilroy's argument.

Compared with the depressingly powerful signifier of slavery, African experience can only be incoherent at best. Even if we were to ignore the concrete fact of the middle passage, Africa still lacks a comparable unifying historical experience. Mainland Africans have suffered at least as severely under racial oppression as their compatriots who were sold as slaves, but the history of the continent always breaks into smaller units. The rhetoric of cultural assimilation in French colonies was hardly ever paralleled by British authorities; Portuguese colonisation was a more haphazard affair than either French or British domination; Liberia, with its internal split between slave-descendants and “native”

⁵ Ibid., p. 221.

inhabitants, has a very different history from Mali or Senegal; South Africa is always a “special case” with an extreme history of bureaucratised racism, but also with a unique political and urban culture.⁶ Rather than belabour this point, let us simply state that the effects of colonialism and racism were and are unevenly distributed on a continent which even at the outset displays a radically heterogeneous array of cultures. Anthony Appiah’s position bears repetition: our only hope of thinking of sub-Saharan Africa as a single unit, as Pan-Africanism does, is to take recourse to the fiction of racial community.⁷ Which brings us full circle to the position that Gilroy wants to dismiss.

Hence, we are left with a strong and a weak version of the black Atlantic.⁸ On the one hand, it refers to diasporic culture that originates from and reflects on (however obliquely) the middle passage, and on the other hand, it is a more general notion of black, modern culture as a decentred, dialogic exchange between Africa, America and Europe. It is clearly the weak version that can be of use to the student of African literature, but this also causes a number of theoretical problems. Without the anchorage in slavery, and yet without accepting the notion of race as a genetic or cultural essence, what becomes of the “black” in the black Atlantic? The most convenient answer would be that blackness is the term that has been constructed by and excluded from modernity, and most critically so in the manichean colonial set-up.⁹ It therefore seems that the key notion of a “counterculture” can be salvaged.

Moving away from Gilroy’s particular elaboration of the concept, one may point to Leon de Kock’s *Civilising Barbarians* or David Attwell’s paper “Reprisals of Modernity in Black South African ‘Mission’ Writing”, wherein early black South African writing is read as a series of negotiations between the defeat of the autochthonous ways of life and the spurious promises of modernity, as articulated partly by the mission schools, partly by the Imperial ideology of Britain (Pax Britannica, the equality of the queen’s subjects before the law, etc.).¹⁰ The writing that emerged from this context was fundamentally hybridised, combining elements of African narratives and world-views with a more or less critical appropriation of European notions of nationalism, progress, Christianity etc. Examples are Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*, John Tengo Jabavu’s journalism and Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi*.

The slogan “black Atlantic” is not used by either Attwell or de Kock, but the process of intellectual hybridisation that they discuss is virtually synonymous with Masilela’s understanding of an African transatlanticism: although clearly committed to what later became South Africa, it combines a number of discourses whose origins lack geographical coherence. The internal heterogene-

⁶ A helpful discussion of the diversity of Africa’s colonial experience can be found in Appiah’s *In My Father’s House*, Appiah 1992, pp. 158–72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–46.

⁸ Which comes close to Alasdair Pettinger’s observation that Gilroy is offering different conceptions of the black Atlantic. Pettinger 1998.

⁹ The concept “manichean” was used by Frantz Fanon in his description of the colonial society: “Le monde coloniale est un monde manichéiste” (Fanon 1961, p. 33). [It is derived from the Babylonian religion of manicheism, whose founder Mani posited a radical dualism between light and dark as two opposite and inimical forces. Editors’ note.]

¹⁰ Attwell 1999a. Attwell does in fact discuss *The Black Atlantic* in a later essay on Es’kia Mphahlele, which adds to my argument. Attwell 1999b.

ity of such black writing is also striking — just as it is in Gilroy’s black Atlantic. The only uniting factor and ethical imperative of such an academic perspective is the fact that blackness has been excluded from the narrative of modernity — an exclusion which requires precisely the construction of a counterculture of modernity, which functions as a localised critique of this historical process, while yet being part of it.

It would, in other words, appear that the black Atlantic perspective is already, *mutatis mutandis*, functional in current studies of African literature. The South African case could feasibly be transposed onto literatures in Kenya, Ghana, Senegal etc.—which is just a small step away from saying that this is how written literature in Africa has always been studied, as examples of cultural creolisation. If so, the whole notion of the black Atlantic would be so trivial that it becomes meaningless. I stop short of such a conclusion, but I do claim that the concept has theoretical purchase only at those junctures where it causes friction, where it grinds against established frames of reference such as “Africa” or “the nation”, and thus not only makes it possible to clarify these terms but also enables an alternative theoretical approach to African literatures.

Most important is, arguably, the destabilisation of the term “Africa”. This is demonstrated if we consider how colonial languages travel. Although an ethically troubling historical feature, it is clearly the imposition of the English, French and Portuguese languages that has enabled broad African participation in transcontinental intellectual dialogues. (Yoruba is one of few exceptions to this rule.)¹¹ The communicative importance of these languages can hardly be underestimated, and this is because of rather than despite their African history of epistemic violence. In the heyday of Empire—and after—the communicative potential of these languages could, within their history, be turned against their history. I suggest therefore that any “transatlantic” perspective must take *language* into account—a claim, which is underwritten by Gilroy’s untheorised, exclusive choice of English-speaking proponents of the black Atlantic. The language issue also makes it clear that we should refrain from talking of a single “black Atlantic”, but rather imagine the co-existence of (at least) three black Atlantics, three countercultures of modernity, that each have distinct paths of communication and exchange. These black Atlantics overlap in numerous ways—consider for example the influence of Harlem Renaissance writing on Angolan literature—but it should be observed that their circuits of communication, as well as their overlaps, are hierarchically ordered in concert with the symbolic power of each language. Hence, it is—almost axiomatically—more likely for a speaker of Portuguese in Mozambique to be acquainted with francophone and anglophone cultures, than it is for an English-speaking Kenyan to know anything about Brazilian literature or West African francophone cinema.

This does not assume a notion of linguistic purity: all three languages vary widely across the continent, they are creolised and broken into mutually in-

¹¹ Certain Angolan and Ghanaian languages are probably contenders as well. It would seem, however, that linguistic and cultural elements that are recognisably “Yoruba” are particularly common in the Americas. See for instance Gates 1988, pp. 3–43. It is nonetheless “European” and not “African” languages that have been most widely disseminated and have enjoyed institutional backing and prestige.

comprehensible varieties. Even so, for cultural translation and exchange to occur, there must be a point of contact, and this is generally provided by more or less standard versions of the formerly colonial languages. In Cape Verde, for instance, the national language is Creole, while Portuguese is seen as a bookish language—yet it is by way of lusophone literature from Brazil that Cape Verdean literature renewed itself in the 1930s.¹²

To substantiate, I shall focus on the least discussed of these countercultures, namely the lusophone Atlantic.

LUSOTROPICALISM

Within the schematic triangle of Africa-Brazil-Portugal, a different dynamic—with reference to modernity and its discontents—opens up in comparison to Africa-America-Britain. I could enumerate several differences, but let me begin by pointing out one striking “anomaly”: the assimilation of non-black writers in Angola and Mozambique. To my knowledge, there is no parallel in any formerly French or British colony to writers such as Luandino Vieira, Pepetela or Mia Couto. Born in Europe, or born of European parents, they are not only appreciated in Portugal but also identified in their countries of residence as national, African writers—not out of any explicit ideological desire, but because of the way they write, because of their ability to fuse their textual performance with local concerns, local cosmologies and local speech habits. This may not sound very remarkable. However, even a passing comparison with a high-profile South African writer such as Nadine Gordimer shows how exceptional it in fact is. Despite Gordimer’s long-standing commitment to the cause of a non-racial South Africa, she belongs to a specific, English speaking, white segment of South African literature—which is something quite different from the lusophone writers that I mention above. It would be equally — if not more — striking to compare the lusophone context with the colonial literature of, say, Nigeria, where Joyce Cary certainly cannot count as a Nigerian writer. There appears therefore (and I am offering this as a suggestion) to have been a greater readiness to absorb persons and cultural elements from overseas in formerly Portuguese colonies than in other African countries, which in turn tells us something of the distinct character of what would be a lusophone counterculture of modernity.

Two problems arise immediately, however: firstly, is it credible to discard the qualifiers “black” and “white” with respect to lusophone writing? And secondly, is the entire notion of lusophone transatlanticism not heavily compromised as a *colonial* ideology? The first question connects to the latter, since the colonial concept of lusotropicalism was a more or less deliberate attempt to elide the issue of racial oppression in the Portuguese colonies. The term was coined by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who in a spate of studies from *Casa-grande & Senzala* (1933) to *O luso e o trópico* (1961) developed the idea that Portuguese colonial rule was unique in that it created a hybrid, cre-

¹² Chabal 1996. I should also mention that the notion of Portuguese as a transcontinental channel of communication has previously been theorised, in slightly different terms, by Benjamin Abdala Júnior. See his remarks on the “system” of Portuguese, Júnior 1989, pp. 447–56.

lised culture wherever it was entrenched.¹³ As opposed to the rigid ethnical divisions in British colonies, the Portuguese created syncretic harmony, Freyre claimed, and was applauded for this by the Portuguese government in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, Freyre's later work formed the basis of official ideology in the *Estado Novo* (the Salazar dictatorship), and served as a rhetorical camouflage for the extreme conflicts that wracked the "transmarine provinces" in Africa.¹⁴

Returning to *The Portuguese and the Tropics* (*O luso e o trópico*) today is a bewildering experience. Freyre comes across as a colonial apologist, and yet his analysis is not merely Eurocentric, but also critical of European claims to superiority. Enamoured of Portuguese culture, he projects it as the antithesis of other European cultures, notably Protestant cultures. He claims that the Portuguese have typically rejected notions of ethnic purity and have adapted to the requirements of the territories where they have ended up. The "authentic" Lusitanian culture that he locates across the tropical belt is hence, paradoxically, most authentic in its lack of fixed content. In fact, lusotropicality is perceived as Christocentric, not ethnocentric, and the Catholic ethos propagated by Freyre is ideally seen as culturally decentred—although it somehow always manages to be "Portuguese".

What does one make of this contradictory construct? First of all, the claims that Freyre makes for Brazil must be distinguished from his statements on Africa. His identification of an African heritage in Brazilian culture was radical at the time. When writing about Africa, however, his perspective becomes not only Eurocentric but culturalist in the bad sense of eliding social and racial conflict. Furthermore, Freyre seems to be propelled by resentment. He writes as if from a disadvantaged position and is critical towards the "more technically advanced"¹⁵ northern European cultures that have hijacked the former glory of Iberian imperialism. Writing as a Brazilian, he utilises the lusotropical cultural network as an ethical lever to overturn the hubris of the Protestant world. Hence, Freyre is involved in a countercultural project of his own. In terms of the current paper, he places lusophone transatlanticism in opposition to the Dutch and anglophone Atlantic, as well as opposing "nobler" (Catholic and feudal) Portuguese values to the crude *realpolitik* of the bourgeois era. He is not oblivious of the fact of racial oppression in Angola and Mozambique, but—in response to a Jesuit's anti-racist stance—he typically labels racism an "alien" intrusion on the colonial scene:

Father A.S.P.'s position in relation to racialism is both scientifically sociological and courageously Christian. "The great scandal of Africa"—he writes— "has been the revolting racialism of the Europeans". And he is quite rightly concerned, as a social critic, at the eruptions of racialism of this kind in

¹³ Freyre 1961.

¹⁴ Chabal 1996, p. 20. Of late, the reception of lusotropicalism in the *Estado Novo* has been studied by the historian Cláudia Castelo. In her account, it was not until the 1950s that the term evolved as a part of official ideology, Castelo 1998. Also, José Carlos Venâncio has rehabilitated the term as a feasible description of cultural creolisation in Brazil, Luanda and Cape Verde. His outlook is, however, empirical and pragmatic, and fails to address the discursive horizon of the term (i.e. Eurocentrism). See Venâncio 1996.

¹⁵ Freyre 1961, p. 214.

Mozambique and Angola itself, as a result of the pressures felt by the Portuguese in these areas from the South Africans and from the English, who are perhaps more technically advanced than the Portuguese, but their inferiors in the nobler values which define a Christian civilisation in the eyes of non-Christians; English colonials of the worst type of bourgeois Englishman, called philistines even by the more enlightened English critics. This racialism—as the critic stresses—“is purely a foreign importation. But this does not prevent it being a fact.” He tells us that in some circles in Mozambique [sic], due to South African and English influence, it is now considered a disgrace for Whites to even marry Indians who are “so refined and so religious, and were civilised many centuries before we were.” He protests at Negro and Mulatto girls being excluded from Luso-African schools attended by White girls: White girls capable of introducing African girls to a genuinely Portuguese feminine mentality.

It is strange that the Portuguese in the African provinces are becoming bourgeois in the bad sense and repudiating the best Portuguese traditions—best from the Christian and lusotropical point of view—which are those of the days of the colonisation of the tropics, largely carried out by gentry and countrymen who were still pre-bourgeois, and are now imitating the English and South African colonists who are lamentably sub-European and sub-bourgeois in their attitudes and prejudices, at a time when the English at home as well as other Northern Europeans and the Americans of the Southern States of the U.S.A. are trying [in] their relations with coloured peoples to follow the more expressively Portuguese examples of confraternisation with these peoples and of assimilation of instrumental values from their cultures.¹⁶

Freyre may claim to be involved in a descriptive project, but his performance tells another story. Here we have an advocate of “old” Portugal, ever ready to censure any deviation from the “authentic” Portuguese penchant for *métissage*. One way of reading this is, I believe, as a mode of discursive mimicry. Freyre, the Brazilian, appropriates the *status* of not only Eurocentric but more specifically Euro-Christian discourse. Notwithstanding the cutting-edge critiques of Eurocentrism by Sartre, Lévi-Strauss and others in the 1950s, it was still viable at the time to appeal to established notions of Empire and Christianity. In doing so, however, Freyre aggravates a split in the very idea of “Europe” by opposing Catholicism to Protestantism and projecting Portugal as Other to the rest of Europe. Hence, an ambivalent double manoeuvre is achieved: by assembling a different version of Eurocentric imperialism—a fantasy in some respects, in others an illumination of less known aspects of Portuguese colonialism—Freyre attacks key tenets of the *dominant* European imperialism (French and British) that underwent a major crisis at the time, even as it continued to dominate the world discursively through notions of progress, modernity, nationalism and a “universal” human subject.

The ambivalence of Freyre’s writings is brought out clearly if we juxtapose them with a lecture held by Léopold Senghor in Lisbon in 1975, shortly after the democratic revolution in Portugal, entitled *Lusitanidade e Negritude* (“Portugueseness and Negritude”). It is a short piece, more stringent than Freyre’s writing, yet—surprisingly perhaps—quite compatible with *The Portuguese and the Tropics*.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 214–15.

Senghor opens his lecture by declaring that out of the 130 million people living in the Portuguese-speaking world, 90 million are black. This calls for reflection on how “the Portuguese civilisation” and “the black civilisation” may jointly form the basis of a “luso-afro-Brazilian cultural community”.¹⁷ Senghor’s approach is remarkably conciliatory, given the recent wars in the Portuguese colonies. His most explicit political statement is the following:

Of course, I wouldn’t have attended this conference during the rule of Salazar, or of Caetano, who was the former’s “proxy”. It was in vogue then to describe the Portuguese people not as “Aryans”, but as essentially European. Luckily, the new Portugal does not suffer from any such hangups, as is demonstrated by the UN-speech by general Francisco da Costa Gomes, president of the republic, where he said: “I greet all of the Third World, confident of its understanding, particularly when it comes to our African brothers—not forgetting the Arabs—who are quite present in *the blood* and spirit of the people to whom I belong.”¹⁸ [My translation; emphasis in the original.]

The rhetoric of creolisation, applauded by Senghor, was however used even in the *Estado Novo*. Compare the passage above with Freyre’s description of the Portuguese arrival in the tropics: “For the Portuguese restless within the confines of metropolitan Portugal, the tropics were mother lands, native lands.”¹⁹ Once there, they supposedly had the rights “of a tropical expatriate who has wandered in Europe, absorbing her qualities in his blood.”²⁰ The assumption of “rights” is imperialistic, but it does in no way promote an “essentially European” view of the Portuguese. The tropes of miscegenation and transatlanticism are ever at hand as a way of positively distinguishing the Portuguese from a Europe whose industrial modernity until then had not quite made its mark on Portugal. The difference between Freyre and the quote from Francisco da Costa Gomes’ speech is one of emphasis, not kind: Gomes, speaking after the revolution, is keen to establish a sense of equality between Portugal and Africa (“brothers”), rather than merely affirm the uniqueness of Portugal.

Senghor affirms this rhetorical strategy by listing three attributes which he claims are typically Portuguese, and which he subsequently links to black civilisation. The attributes are 1) a rough-and-ready spirit of adventure, 2) delicateness (*delicadeza*) and 3) seriousness or melancholy. As is already indicated by such a list of rather vague human traits, Senghor’s argument does not hold water. He is happy to deal in essences and allows specific quotes or observations to escalate to generally applicable knowledge. Poetry supposedly offers the purest expression of a national essence, and therefore a single quote from the modernist poet Fernando Pessoa serves to illustrate what Senghor describes as the Portuguese infatuation with difference and diversity²¹ (which is ironic given the split poetic personality of Pessoa). Senghor’s mode of argument is, in other words, suggestive rather than thorough. Also, one should not forget that

¹⁷ Senghor 1975, p. 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

¹⁹ Freyre 1961, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

he was at the time Senegal's president, a fact which no doubt contributed to the diplomatic, formal character of his lecture.

Nonetheless, seen as a symbolic and ideological intervention Senghor's paper is most intriguing. As we have seen, he draws on an already functional discourse on Portuguese hybridity and Portugal's emotional proximity to Africa. As a key proponent of *négritude*—the aestheticising reappraisal of black culture—Senghor insists on its affinity with *lusitanidade* and regards Brazil as the ideal example of how two proximate “civilisations” may meld. The notion of affinity is significant, since *négritude* was once defined by Senghor in terms of its *contrast* with French/European civilisation. Portugal is in this sense cut off from the European mainland and gently nudged southwards. This is, incidentally, not unlike the break that literally occurs in José Saramago's novel *A jangada de pedra*.²²

At the conceptual level, then, the francophone intellectual Senghor offers us an image of a lusophone “black Atlantic” that is distinct from the other linguistically coded cultural communities. The image is idealistic rather than concrete, yet it leads us onto the trail of what I spoke of earlier: the creolised quality of literary and intellectual discourse in Angola and Mozambique. The point of speaking in terms of transatlanticism should also emerge clearly now as the possibility of articulating an underemphasised *aspect* of the intellectual and cultural history of these countries.

COUNTERMODERN WRITING IN ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE

Discussions of “African” literature conventionally ossify the concept of “the nation”. This is to be expected, since it is in the strict sense a powerful discursive marker. It organises the terms of discussion according to specific criteria, and is generally not destabilised by disclaimers that insist on the heterogeneity of “Mozambique”, for instance. This specific disclaimer can be found in the survey *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*, an excellent work by any standards, which demonstrates the enduring force of the nationalist paradigm by dividing its subject matter into the compartments “Angola”, “Mozambique”, “Cape Verde” etc.²³

Granted, the history of twentieth century Africa is largely a history of nationalisms, and writers have often conceptualised these nationalisms, but is it viable to always follow the trail of this *ideological* construct, rather than go against the grain and discuss how the texts of lusophone writers such as Couto, Craveirinha, Pepetela or Vieira are something more and something other than “realisations” or “embodiments” of the nation? How they *also* are specific, singular instances of cultural globalisation within a “lusotropical” history of colonisation, deprivation, epistemic violence and cultural exchange? I should underscore that such a lusophone focus does *not* privilege Portuguese colonisation as a necessary Origin and Cause of history, nor is it a rehabilitation of Freyre. Rather, the rationale behind such a concept is purely linguistic. “Portuguese” is in this sense the name of a communicative network, a multilat-

²² Published in 1986 [*The Stone Raft*].

²³ Chabal 1996.

eral channel of communication. As such it has no centre in either São Paulo or Lisbon. Instead, each node in the network offers a different perspective. Hence Craveirinha, Vieira and others latch on to the historically compromised network of Portuguese, but change it at the same time by localising it in various ways.

These brief comments indicate a crucial departure from Freyre/Senghor's conciliatory conceptions of lusotropicalism. The crudeness of colonial policies in Angola and Mozambique, and the brute violence of the crackdowns on Frelimo and the Angolan resistance movements, prohibit the *harmonious* coupling of African and Portuguese histories. The notion of a counterculture, of writing that moves against whilst still "within" the circle of Portuguese, must be retained. Even so, I believe that the juxtaposition of Freyre and Senghor (speaking in colonial and post-colonial times, respectively) reveals a constructed sense of Portuguese *difference* from the rest of imperial Europe which also affects the conditions of the lusophone Atlantic. The relative lack of racial distinctions in this counterculture might in part be explained by this sense of difference.

Also, if Portugal is perceived as less modern than other parts of western Europe (which indeed was the case), the inversion of the narrative of modernity which is underway in post-colonial studies might be even easier to sustain in the case of Portugal's colonies. With reference to the Caribbean, Joan Dayan writes that as the "best testing ground for the claims and coercions of capital, the colonies could be argued to be more Western than what we deem to be West."²⁴ In the lusophone context this is demonstrated, I believe, not only by the former colony Brazil's strong sense of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which outstripped contemporary Portugal — consider, for instance, the massive modernist experiment of Brasília, built in the 1950s — but also by the African colonies under the *Estado Novo*. While it is often observed that Portugal up until the 1960s accomplished little by way of infrastructural development in Angola and Mozambique, but dealt mostly in crude exploitation of the land and the people (mainly through forced labour and cash crops), it is nonetheless true that the colonies were imagined as lands of opportunity for the white Portuguese citizen when mass settlement started in the 1940s. It meant opportunity for individual betterment, and for the emergence of an autonomous modern subject, which was scarcely to be found at the time in Portugal. Also, with the aid of South African capital, Lourenço Marques became in the 1960s and 1970s a site of highly modernist, "international style" developments which were to dominate the skyline of that city. The modern architectural notion of a fresh start, a clean slate etc. was imposed upon the manichean colonial cityscape of Lourenço Marques.

In a patchy and extremely partial fashion, modernity was in other words enacted in and projected onto Portugal's colonial theatre in ways that did not occur in Portugal itself. I am not suggesting that our understanding of Portuguese colonial oppression should be revised because of this; on the contrary, it merely confirms what Gilroy and others designate as the fraught ambivalence of modernity. However, the observation might help to clarify the position of

²⁴ Dayan 1996, p. 8

countermodern writing in Angola and Mozambique as situated not merely against “Portugal” but against transnational versions of modernity located and enacted in Africa.

Luandino Vieira’s *Luuanda* (1965), for example, is an exclusively urban text whose characters traverse if not all then certainly most of Luanda’s social spaces. But *Luuanda* is countermodern in that it relocates the “centre” of urbanity to the *musseque*—the shantytown—instead of the relatively affluent city of brick and concrete. This relocation is simultaneously enacted at a linguistic level by a reconstructed literary Portuguese, which combines colloquial Angolan Portuguese and Kimbundu. Vieira’s style is routinely celebrated as a literary innovation, but it should also be read as a socially significant challenge to the authority of European Portuguese in Africa.²⁵ One could say that Vieira appropriates both modernity and modernism on behalf of the repressed subject in colonial Luanda. His measure of success is possibly linked to some degree to his own ambivalent position as an erstwhile immigrant with access to the hegemonical channels of literacy and Portuguese, an immigrant opposed to the colonial structures that facilitated his own arrival in Angola. Rather than striving to be “European and black” his narratives trace an authorial subject striving to construct a viable combination of “African and white”.

This is not identical with the “black Atlantic” project described by Gilroy, but both projects are in a certain sense *symmetrical* and evince a comparable countermodern thrust, which leads onto the trail of what Neil ten Kortenaar has generously dubbed “the Greater Atlantic”.²⁶ Obviously, the positions of a white settler and an excluded black (an *indigena* in Portuguese) are incommensurable, insofar as the binary divisions of colonial society are concerned. However, as both Kortenaar and Gilroy have shown in their references to Zygmunt Bauman, the experience of being both within and outside of modernity is not an exclusively black experience (nor exclusively a Jewish one).²⁷ Vieira’s position could in other words be described as revelatory. Placed in Angola, he inhabited a painfully ambivalent sliver of modernity in the colonial context and strove to explore that ambivalence rather than close it off or gloss it over as the colonial discourse of the *Estado Novo* required. His historical position enables him to elaborate an ethically viable double consciousness within the textual space of Portuguese. Although one should always remember that Vieira’s writing is tied to the highly place-specific experience of a non-racial childhood in Luanda, this does not dismiss the fact that it enters, with great authority, a textual universe whose only enduring boundaries are of a linguistic rather than geographic nature.

A similar argument could be built around Craveirinha’s poetry, in which the writing subject, from the position of the “other” in colonial society, inscribes itself onto the various spaces, particularly urban spaces, that make up “modern” Mozambique. More than anything else, Craveirinha is the poet of Maputo/Lourenço Marques. In his poems, the drama of the disjunctive spaces

²⁵ For critical appraisals of Vieira’s innovative work, see: *José Luandino Vieira e a sua obra* (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1980).

²⁶ Kortenaar 1996, p. 15.

²⁷ Kortenaar 1996, p. 16a and Gilroy 1996, pp. 213–14.

of sand and concrete is played out again and again. The actual building of Lourenço Marques is thematised a number of times, as in “Ninguém” (“Nobody”), a poem which condenses modernity to two cardinal directions: upwards and downwards.²⁸ The fifteen-story “modern edifice” is surrounded by scaffolding that reaches higher and higher. But then there is “a curious passer-by / who asks: /—Has anyone fallen off from the scaffolding?” To which the foreman replies: “—Nobody. Just two blacks.”

The preferred narrative of modernity is one of rising, of a continued emergence into the light; the silenced narrative, especially of colonial modernity, is one of falling—not just falling off from the scaffolding, but falling out of language, of becoming “nobody”. Craveirinha’s poetry is poised between these extremes. Frequently his poems highlight the violence and loss that modernity has entailed, yet, almost as frequently, they constitute a utopian appropriation of the promises of modernity and hence transform the manichean exclusions of colonialism. In this transformative project, elements of a “black Atlantic” tend to emerge, precisely as an alternative to the version of modernity that has been forced upon African societies.

An obvious example is “Joe Louis Nosso Campeão” (“Joe Louis, Our Champion”), written in 1952, which expresses absolute euphoria at the victory of the black boxer Joe Louis over Max Schmeling.²⁹ By beating nazi-Germany’s best boxer in the 1930s, Joe Louis symbolically avenges the entire “black” world. He does so not by withdrawing from “white” modernity but by prevailing in its limelight—the limelight of the media, not least. Apart from the match itself, the poem thematises the reporting of it in the Lourenço Marques news media, i.e. what these media do and do not include. Only the *Brado Africano* (“The African Cry”, a predominantly mestiço weekly) told the whole story. “So keep this Cry well-guarded / and see that you train / your boxing!” As in “Ninguém”, the dilemmas of colonial modernity are as much about discourse as material conflicts. Dilemmas, one might say, familiar to the vast communicative counter-movement of the black Atlantics. Craveirinha’s immensely rich poetry cannot be reduced to this aspect only, but I contend that it is a crucial point of entry if we want to read him in the broad context of cultural globalisation. It is, basically, a reworking of Ana Mafalda Leite’s authoritative statement that Craveirinha’s writing deals with the dilemmas and possibilities of a dual cultural heritage.

My argument so far has deliberately focused on certain theoretical underpinnings in the study of modern African literature culture. It forms part of an ongoing and emergent discussion, but I will close provisionally on this note: in the context of lusophone African literature Gilroy’s basic concept of modernity’s double consciousness remains useful, but it is necessary to adapt or depart from many of his articulations of “the black Atlantic”. The theoretical sweep of the term risks being too broad and too totalising

²⁸ Craveirinha 1999, p. 79.

²⁹ Quoted in Leite 1988, pp. 146–48.

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The cover of the album *True Jit* by Bhundu Boys.

Musical Otherness and the Bhundu Boys

The Construction of the 'West' and the 'Rest' in the Discourse of 'World Music'

Johannes Brusila

In the mid-1980s the Zimbabwean band the Bhundu Boys managed to break through on the British music market with its long tours and independent record releases *Shabini* and *Tsvimbodzemoto*. At this time both the band itself and the music industry had large hopes for the future of African music on the international market. The commercial achievements of third world artists and European folk music ensembles had paved the way for what was to become the establishment of the marketing category "world music" and the popularity of the Bhundu Boys contributed to the general optimism. Thus, in 1987 the Bhundu Boys signed a lucrative contract with one of the major transnational companies, WEA (Warner), for which the band made two records. However, the band's career at WEA lasted only two and a half years and became a disappointment as it proved to be hard to reconcile the expectations of the audience, the record company and the musicians.

In my paper I intend to analyse the European interest for the Bhundu Boys, the band's career in the transnational record company and the reasons for the unsuccessful outcome of the "crossover" attempts. I want to bring out how identity and self-conception are combined with the creative work and professional career of the band, and how these aspects are influenced by the relationship between the band and its overseas fans.

This article is based on my dissertation project, in which I study "world music" as an industrial and cultural phenomenon.¹ In my work I have chosen to discuss world music as a discourse, following the approaches of Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, and Edward Said.² Thus, I am interested in the series of conceptual and practical operations through which world music has been constituted as an object of certain forms of knowledge and institutional practices. A key feature of this discourse is that it recreates the separation of the "West" from the "Rest" by categorising certain musical styles. This does not imply that there would be any essential correspondence between a geographical place and a specific music. Instead, it means that the music, be it from the so-called third world or based on folk music from Europe, signifies an "Other" for a person who positions himself or herself in the more modern "West". This is manifested in three bipolarisations, or "fields of tension", to use the concept of the

¹ My dissertation project is based on material that I have gathered during four trips to Zimbabwe in the 1990s, recently working mainly with my three cases: the Bhundu Boys, Virginia Mukweshu and Sunduza. I have also done numerous interviews with people in the world music industry in Europe and analysed world music magazines and press material.

² See Foucault 1969/1972, 1976/1990; Hall 1982, 1988, 1992 and Said 1978/1995.

Swedish project Music-Media-Multiculture, namely traditional—modern, local—global and anti-hegemonic—hegemonic.³

In this paper I will focus on the Bhundu Boys' career at WEA and particularly how the band has negotiated the tension between tradition and modernisation of the world music discourse and how this process can be connected with the playing with identities in world music.

FROM THE BUSH TO THE BIG BIZ

The international career of the Bhundu Boys (Rise Kagona guitar and vocals, Biggie Tembo guitar and vocals, Shakespear Kangwena bass and Kenny Chitsvatsva drums) was preceded by the band's club engagements in Harare and releases of an album and some single records on the Zimbabwean market. The Bhundu Boys had been relatively successful in Zimbabwe, but with the exception of a few hit singles it was not among the top selling bands in its home country. However, as the group entered the British market it managed to get a lot of publicity in the music press and to reach the British independent charts. The band seemed to fit the British idea of so-called "roots" music, which for example the editor of the magazine *Folk Roots*, Ian Anderson has defined as "any modern music with its feet in some tradition" and "something which does at least bear DNA traces of tradition."⁴ In other words, the Bhundu Boys were largely seen as a band whose music was based on a tradition, although the music would have been "modernised" to some degree as a result of structural and contextual changes. The band was explained to be authentic, but not in the sense that it would be "pure" or truthful to some older, "original" form of music making. Instead these former ideas of "authentic" as "unchanged", "original" or "relic" (in contrast to something that is "fake" or "forgery") were combined with ideas from the rock discourse, where "authentic" is used in connection with expressions such as "real", "credible in current context", "community", "creativity", "honesty" and being "un-commercial", "local", "independent" and "natural".⁵

The Bhundu Boys seem to have fit the authenticity expectations of the media in two ways. Firstly, the band's way of working was congruent with the independent rock ideology, in which "paying your dues" by hard work before larger success was highly appreciated. The Bhundu Boys' first European records were released by an independent record company that basically consisted of a suitcase and a couple of enthusiastic persons without any business experience. The group had to build its success by long tours in ascetic circumstances. This promoted the idea of the Bhundu Boys as an "authentic" band who made it without hype, or as Paul Montgomery in *Africa Beat* summarised his explanation of the group's success: "A combination of simple raw talent and hard work."⁶

³ Malm et al. 1996.

⁴ Anderson 1986 and 1998.

⁵ See e.g. Middleton 1990, p. 140; Frith 1981a, pp. 48–52, 1981b, 1986 and 1991, pp. 282–83; Michelsen 1993 and Peterson 1997 about the notion of authenticity in popular music.

⁶ Montgomery 1986–87.

A second factor contributing to the explanations of the Bhundu Boys' authenticity was that many of the elements in the band's music and the general approach to music-making were congruent with the guitar band aesthetics common among *indie* and *roots* enthusiasts. The recordings that had been licensed by the British company had been made in Zimbabwe according to the standard formula of the Zimbabwean music industry, that is, by recording several songs per day, with only few overdubs or experiments in the studio. The band had to stick to borrowed, very simple instruments on its first UK tours, but this didn't harm the *indie* and *roots* fans, who disliked excessive technical accessories and preferred the guitar band instrumentation (two electric guitars, electric bass, drum kit and only occasionally minor keyboard parts).

The music of this early period in the group's career was a mixture of elements from Congolese *rhumba* (or the Zimbabwean derivation *sungura*), Zimbabwean *jiti* and *mbira*, and a wide range of Western popular musics (mainstream pop, but also country and gospel). A general feature of the music is the aesthetic ideal, which the musicians summarise in the concept "museve". According to Rise Kagona of the Bhundu Boys, the term "museve", which literally means arrow in Shona, refers to how the music "just goes straight in one direction from start to end, there's no intro or breaks or changes in rhythm."⁷ The music is based on constant repetition and variation of a short cycle of for example four bars, and on melodic and rhythmic layering which creates structural oppositions between the instrumental parts.⁸

Using an allegory that refers to the Western notation, it might be said that the musical happenings occurring simultaneously "on the vertical axis" are emphasised more than successive action "on the horizontal axis". Songs are not composed at first hand using thematic development or changes in tempo or key with clearly different A, B and C sections, "bridges", freely improvised solo parts etc, that would create successive oppositional structures. Instead, the same harmonic cycle is repeated over and over again and although minor variation is created by adding and leaving out instruments at times, or by letting the lead guitar play a variation of the main melody, the same cycle is still at the basis of the whole song. The musical tensions are created by layering different continually repeated and varied shorter melodic lines and metres on top of each other. The drum kit plays the steady rhythmic pulse of the song and occasionally fills in accents. The guitars and bass play rhythmically and melodically separate, opposing layers on top of the basic beat. The lead singer creates one more layer by either singing shorter phrases or "floating" on top of the instrumental parts. As a rule the guitar players do not strike whole chords, but play melodic lines in which the rhythmic structure is particularly important throughout the song.

The variety of stylistic features in the Bhundu Boys' music makes it hard to give it an unambiguous label. However, when the band started to perform in Britain it was over and over again asked by the media to name their musical style and the band had to come up with a simple solution: "so we wouldn't say

⁷ Interview with Kagona 6.10.1997.

⁸ Cf. e.g. Rycroft 1967; Tracey 1995, p. 58; Nowotny 1993, p. 105; Kubik 1981, p. 94; Kubik 1979, p. 103 and Coplan 1985, p. 258 about the structure of Southern African music.

‘sometimes we play rhumba and sometimes we play whatever’, we actually gave it just one name, and we thought of putting it ‘jit’ because to us it’s like [saying] ‘pop music’—‘African pop’.”⁹ Thus, the Bhundu Boys became known as a ‘jit band”, or “jit jive band” when working in England.

For the European media the music of the Bhundu Boys was something new, which had to be classified in order to be more accessible and marketable. The novelty of the deep structure of the music, which is based on repetition and variation according to African aesthetics, and the incomprehensible language required some explanation, but the music also contained many influences that were familiar and fitted the authenticity ideals of the audience, as well as the whole approach, working methods and image of the band. Tim Jarvis’ article in *New Musical Express* describes some of the reasons for how “jit dived right into the indie-rocker’s simple heart and stuck” by referring to both the novelty and the familiarity of the band:

The Bhundus, with their Beatley guitar sound, short songs, and an easily assimilated roots image, probably won through on a similar 60s nostalgia as much as anything that was new about them.¹⁰

Thus the Bhundu Boys fitted the authenticity expectations of the roots scene and hit the indie-charts, despite the new elements, and basically all the major transnational record companies became interested in a recording contract.

HOW TRUE JIT?

In the spring of 1987 the Bhundu Boys managed to get a promising recording contract with the transnational record company WEA. The contract was economically profitable for the band and included one record and an option for four more records, a substantial royalty advance and other benefits. At the same time the band also signed an equally profitable publishing contract with Blue Company, which belonged to Island Records.¹¹

The group immediately started to plan a new album, and aimed at recording it in Europe with an English or American producer. WEA suggested several producers from different fields of Anglo-American pop music for the project and the band finally chose the American rock musician Elvis Costello. However, after a few disappointing recording experiments with Costello the cooperation ended abruptly and the band had to start looking for a new producer in London. The Bhundu Boys finally chose Robin Millar, who was a very sought after producer in Britain after he had produced Sade’s hit album *Diamond Life*. The band did not know Millar from before, but some of the members knew Sade’s record, which contributed to their interest in him.¹² Millar was mainly known for his productions of successful British pop acts, but when the band learnt to know him, they found out that he in fact had a multi-cul-

⁹ Interview with Kagona 9.9.1997.

¹⁰ Tim Jarvis 1987.

¹¹ Interview with Muir 20.2.1997.

¹² Interview with Kagona 9.9.1997.

tural personal and professional background. Millar was born in Guyana in a family of Irish, Portuguese and Native American ancestry and had listened and played African-American, classical and West Indian music. He had also produced African music, the first time as early as in 1979, when he recorded Orchestra Makassy and Super Mazembe in East Africa.¹³

When Millar began working with the Bhundu Boys he tried to take into consideration the band's hopes and asked initially what kind of a record the musicians wanted to make. The members were inspired by British pop stars of the 1980s, such as Duran Duran and the Thompson Twins, and replied: "We wanna make a pop record."¹⁴ Thus, the key note of the record was much closer to British pop than the Zimbabwean recordings had been. However, Millar did not want to work with the Bhundu Boys in the studio in the same way as he usually did with British pop bands, that is by using sequencers and electronic metronome synchronisation, and recording the instruments one part at a time. According to Millar, a slavish use of sequencers and an even rhythm created by a drum machine could have destroyed the natural pulse and structure of the music as it is normally played by Zimbabwean musicians, who "punch the second and third note up and then they hang back and wait for the fourth beat of the bar on time."¹⁵ In addition to this constitutive aspect of the groove (or "participatory discrepancies", to use the wording of Keil) Millar also wanted to preserve the basic structure of the music and a spontaneous feeling and therefore preferred to record the Bhundu Boys' band instruments at the same time instead of using several overdub sessions.¹⁶ Millar's largest influence on the sound formation was in the mixing process, in which he created a much clearer sound and added more echo, reverb and sound effects to the music than the band had on their Zimbabwean recordings. The MIDI digital interface technology also made it possible for him to change the drum and synthesiser sounds during the mixing according to the wishes of the musicians.

The result of Millar's and the band's co-operation was the record *True Jit*, which is based on many of the same musical elements as the previous records, but also contains strong influences of British pop. The introductory song *Jit Jive*, which was planned to be the hit of the record and was also released as a single, gives a general picture of how the different elements are combined on the record. The song is based on the two bar harmonic cycle |A///E/D/I, which is repeated throughout the song. However, the older "museve" aesthetic, which is based on the continuous repetition and variation of interlocking basic patterns, is modified to some extent so that the differences between the separate sections of the song are emphasised more than on the earlier records. The introduction, verse and refrain are separated from each other with unison breaks and changes in both the instrumental arrangement and the mixing. The music is still based on the interlocking guitar and bass lines rolling on top of the pulse given by the drums, but after the beginning the second guitar is mixed

¹³ Interview with Millar 24.2.1997.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview with Millar 24.2.1997. For the concept "participatory discrepancies" see e.g. Keil 1994.

in the background and instead the synthesiser, which plays chords and not melodic lines, is brought more to the front. In contrast with the general Zimbabwean jit rhythmic, the second and fourth beat of the bar are at times sharply emphasised by the synthesiser (in the second section of the verse) and towards the end of the song by the snare drum, thereby creating a stronger rock feeling. The vocal harmonies are based on the chord notes, as is common in Zimbabwean jit-sungura. A completely new element in the music is the horn section (consisting of two trumpets, a trombone and a saxophone), which fills in short syncopated riffs and phrases.

The pop format of the song, in which the separate sections are contrasted and especially the chorus is emphasised, is not only evident in the musical structure and form, but also in the lyrics. In fact, probably the most obvious difference between *True Jit* and the Bhundu Boys' earlier records is the use of English in the lyrics, especially in catchy refrains. The record company, the band's Scottish manager Gordon Muir and the musicians were all interested in trying to use English lines in the lyrics in order to make the music more accessible to a larger audience.¹⁷ English was the second language of the musicians, but Muir helped them write the English phrases and on *Jit Jive* his input was so big that he was even credited as co-author of the song.

The lyrics of *Jit Jive* were born from an inside joke, which the band had been fooling around with. According to Kagona and Muir, the band used the expression "jigajig" or "jigijig" when referring to sexual intercourse and originally the song's refrain consisted of only "Let's jigajig."¹⁸ However, when it was decided that the song would be released as a single, the band decided to change the line to something less equivocal. The resulting "hook" line "Let's jit jive" emphasises further the catchy pop character of the refrain.¹⁹ It was also useful when launching the name of the band's musical style to a larger audience. "Jit jive" becomes, to use the terminology of Hennion, a "key word" in the song, freeing the lyrics from familiar textual connotations to a more imaginative and captivating sphere.²⁰ The wording refers vaguely to the *pungwes* of the liberation war in Zimbabwe, during which the guerrilla fighters used to raise the moral of the rural population with the help of jiti songs and dances, but it also functions as a general party call for the Western listener who does not know the history of jiti. The lines "Don't take a chance, stay with the dance, keep moving all night" and the characterisation of the song on the album cover: "Everyone dance—forget your troubles to the sound of the jit music", further strengthen the party character of the song. Thus, the lyrics become a mixture of ambiguous references to the war, short Shona phrases about traditional dancing and playing, and Western pop party lyricism (the unexpected phrase "Dr. Livingstone, I presume" at the end of the song makes the general impression even more ambiguous and absurd).

Jit Jive has the largest proportion of English in the lyrics of all the songs on *True Jit*. At times the interplay between the lyrics and the music of the song

¹⁷ Interviews with Muir 20.2.1997 and Kagona 9.9.1997.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Cf. Burns 1987.

²⁰ Hennion 1983.

is rather forced, as in the unnatural pronouncing of “bhundu” and “pungwe”, where the emphasis is on the end of the word because of the music and not on the first syllable. On most songs English is used only in short hook phrases in the chorus in order to give the audience, who do not know Shona or Ndebele, a chance to get a grip of the song. Often it is used in typical pop interjections, which are meant to raise the atmosphere, as for example in the choruses “Get up everybody, stand up, let me see you” and “Come on join hands and let’s see where you stand” in the concluding song *Jekesa*. However, in *My Foolish Heart* the English passages are included as whole verses in between the Shona verses. The song, which is rhythmically and harmonically based on *mbira*, was originally composed by Shakie Kangwena as a lament to his brother who died in the liberation war. Kangwena happened to see the poem “Wheesht, Wheesht” by Hugh MacDiarmid on the wall in Muir’s house and decided to incorporate it in the song.²¹

In general terms *True Jit* can be said to display several ways of combining the Bhundu Boys’ earlier style with influences from British pop. Some songs are quite similar to the ones recorded in Zimbabwe, although their sound is different, and some are in fact reworked versions of the band’s old songs (for example *African Woman*, which is a new arrangement of *Nhai Mukoma* from *Tzvimbodzemoto*). On other songs the new influences are stronger and the general approach is closer to British pop. Particularly the pop format with strong refrains, emphasised by for example unison breaks, is descriptive of the change.²²

The horn section also contributes in shaping the songs into a Western pop format. Wind instruments are seldom used in Zimbabwean pop, but when they occur for instance in the music of Thomas Mapfumo, they often play a response part to the lead vocal, imitating a vocal call-response pattern. However, the horn section on *True Jit* consisted of session musicians who had mainly played soca and when they arranged their parts for the album the Caribbean influence became stronger. The horn section underlines the breaks, refrains and harmonic progressions by filling in short syncopated riffs and phrases, which are based on the chord notes (and sometimes in passing even display chromaticism, as could already be seen at the end of the refrain of *True Jit*).²³

²¹ Muir 1997, and interview with Kagona 13.10.1997.

²² The band had already used keyboards occasionally in Zimbabwe, but the key position of the synthesiser on some of the songs on *True Jit* and the way it is used to play chords give the harmonic developments a new importance in the musical structure. This is probably most evident in a song like ‘Susan’, where the interplay of melodic lines has given way to harmonic progressions as a central element of the song. The verse is based on the basic chord progression A-D-E-D and the refrain on a stepwise descending bass movement: A-E with G# in bass - F#minor - E.

²³ An example of the diverse character of the horn section in comparison with the rest of the instruments can be found in the song *Chemedzevana*, on which the horn section occasionally plays a melody line. The song follows the structure of *mbira* with a hi-hat pulse and bass drum beat that give the music a general 12/8 *mbira* feeling. The bass and guitars pluck short, dampened *mbira*-like phrases. However, the horn line starts with short riff-like syncopated melodies that accentuate the suspensions of the notes of the C major chord. Thereafter follows a melody line, which consists of repeated short phrases ending on C and G. Even a chromatic move from E flat to E is included, giving the melody a ‘blue note’ character. In other words, the music carries many features that are common for Zimbabwean *mbira* pop, but the horn section comes closer to the Caribbean influenced popular music played in England.

True Jit was released in the autumn of 1997 and the expectations of both the fans and the musicians were high. During the summer the band had played as Madonna's support act at Wembley stadium, which gave even more media publicity to the record project, and the members had bought themselves a house in London in order to make it easier for them to develop their international career.²⁴ However, when the record was finally released the reception was not as warm as those involved in the project had expected. The media's response was either confused or outright negative. Some writers did accept the record as the product that the band wanted to make. The band members' appreciation of the record was also brought up in some interviews, as for example when Biggy Tembo explained how the band's music "is about exchanging ideas and not being told what to do" and when Rise Kagona praised the co-operation with Robin Millar, which was based on "mutual agreement" on the artistic choices.²⁵ However, particularly the British "roots" media wanted to distance itself totally from the band's new style. Stella Washburn's review of the single *Jit Jive* in *Folk Roots* summarises the conflict:

Some prat in 'City Limits' was suggesting recently that if the Bhundu Boys, being real Zimbabweans, were happy with their new corporate-pop sound, who were we middle-class whiteys to disagree? Well, I'll eat my Filofax if their new sound isn't bland Euro-dross with hardly an iota of the energy which made them famous, and betcha the public isn't as easily hoodwinked as the band. Disappointment of the year so far.²⁶

The whole album *True Jit* was also crushed in *Folk Roots*. The reviewer Sarah Coxson ironically argues that "the crucial feel of the band" has been "obliterated" in an attempt to reach the mainstream:

... here the pre-packaged Bhundus have been watered down, westernised, given a couple of beach-balls to bounce and, hey presto! they're instant contenders for daytime Radio 1 airplay.²⁷

Coxson also calls the English lyrics "cringe-worthily absurd" and accuses the group of "gimmickry", as on *Chemedzevana*, which according to her "initially sounds like an authentic Zimbabwean melody, but—is then totally destroyed by the use of a Bad Manners brass section."²⁸

The Bhundu Boys' attempt to move from the smaller niche market of African pop music to a larger pop market proved to be very complicated. The critics did not only predict a poor outcome for the project, but they rejected the whole project as "selling out". For instance BBC's world music DJ Andy Kershaw accused the record company for the whole idea of trying to alter the band's sound and brought out the choice of producer as a crucial mistake: "the dick-head who sat down at WEA Records and said: 'Hey! I've got an ideeeaaa! It's going to be Robin Millar!' should be taken out and publicly put to

²⁴ Muir 1997, pp. 23–24.

²⁵ Beevers 1997 and Koivio 1988, p. 121.

²⁶ Washburn 1987.

²⁷ Coxson 1987.

²⁸ Ibid.

death.”²⁹ The interests and motives of the musicians were often brushed aside in the press and the transnational record company and the producer were blamed for the stylistic changes. This contrasts sharply with the way the Bhundu Boys and the personnel working with the band saw things. According to Kagona, there were very few disagreements about working methods because everybody shared the same goal: “we were open to anything which could put us into the world market”, and drummer Chitsvatsva characterises the whole project as “a good experience”.³⁰ Robin Millar’s standpoint could be characterised as liberal and approving, and he emphasises how he wanted to do his best to implement the wishes of the band without patronising them:

Having gone there [to Africa], having talked to them [the African musicians], having seen it from beginning, having been friends, having lived with African people on and off since 1979, I knew perfectly well that just like anyone, just like a kid from a band in Helsinki or in Manchester, they basically just want to wear groovy clothes, make groovy music, write groovy songs, have some hits, make some money, smoke some dope, have a good time, women.... The reality is these are kids forming pop groups to do the same things that all people in pop groups want to do: be original, make songs that people will like, make songs that will make people like them, and get ahead, do some business, do some commerce.³¹

The band had initially thought of breaking through on the international pop market, but this became very difficult after they had ended up in a specialist market with a strong authenticity code. The release of *True Jit* in the autumn of 1987 largely coincided with the launch of the marketing category world music and often the success of the Bhundu Boys’ independent records *Shabini* and *Tzvimbodzemoto* was described as a reason for the general interest in the world music phenomenon.³² However, the group itself did not like being classified in the margin together with artists from the third world or commercially less successful folk music styles. Instead they wanted to be equal with the biggest pop stars, or as the band’s manager Gordon Muir put it in his blunt way:

The Bhundu Boys only ever wanted to be between the Beatles and the Beastie Boys in the record racks, not together with some Madagascar nose flute specialist or some Highland pigmy, you know, twanking his foreskin.³³

The contract with the major record company, the musical changes, the new sounds and instruments and the use of English were intended to give the band a larger audience, but in this respect *True Jit* failed completely (according to Muir’s rough estimate, the total sales had reached approximately 30,000 copies in 1997).³⁴ Unfortunately the changes also meant that the group lost much of its older audience.³⁵ In the world music media the Bhundu Boys soon became a

²⁹ Anderson 1988, p. 37.

³⁰ Interview with Kagona 9.9.1997 and Chitsvatsva 12.11.1997.

³¹ Interview with Millar 24.2.1997.

³² See e.g. Jarvis 1987.

³³ Interview with Muir 20.2.1997.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See e.g. readers’ letters in *Folk Roots* No. 74 and No. 76, 1989.

warning example of what “modern pop”, “technology” and “westernisation” can lead to. The article on Zimbabwean music in *World Music: The Rough Guide* summarises the general response that the Bhundu Boys faced: “their music suffered dangerously from over-exposure to western pop, culminating in the disastrous release of the unfortunately named *True Jit* in 1987.”³⁶ The band was seen as neither accessible by the larger audience, nor authentic by the world music fans.

PAMBERI—FORWARD AND BACKWARD

The Bhundu Boys’ evident failure in trying to work out the field of tension between “tradition” and modernisation”, of being both “authentic” and “accessible” forced the band to re-assess its working methods. The musicians felt that they needed to take their listeners’ response seriously and try to adjust their music accordingly.³⁷

The solution was to return to Zimbabwe for a new recording session and try to regain some of the initial sounds that had made the group popular. The result was *Pamberi!* (Shona for “forward”), an album that was recorded in Harare but mixed in London.³⁸ The band engaged Philip Roberts, a British expatriate resident in Zimbabwe, to produce the record. Local engineers, *mbira* players, horn players and musicians from the Kudzanai Marimba School Band and singers from the Zanu (P.F.) Magagao District Choir also participated in the session. The glossy visual image of *True Jit*’s album cover was also abandoned on the new record. Instead *Pamberi!* was illustrated with two old, wrinkled black and white photographs that associate the project with “roots”, one with a group of African boys playing football and the other of Rise Kagona and Biggie Tembo at the beginning of their career.

In some respect *Pamberi!* comes closer to the Bhundu Boys’ earlier Zimbabwean recordings than *True Jit*. The general sound is slightly “rougher” than on the English recording and reverbs and sound effects have been used less. The English lyrics are absent (with the exception of Biggie Tembo’s introductory monologue on *Viva Chinhoy*) and the party interjections which were common on *True Jit* have been left out. Some songs, for example *Nyarara* and *Hondo Haiperi*, also sound very much like the band’s earlier up tempo jit style with repeated short forms and a steady drum pulse combined with different rhythmic and metric lines played on guitars and bass. The arrangements reflect a wish to strengthen the Zimbabwean connection on *Pamberi!* *Mbira* are included on *Chitima Kwe* and the latest trends found in Zimbabwean popular music are included, such as South African dance beat on *Bye Bye Stembi*. However, the sound, which was created on 24-track equipment that the band bought in London and brought over to Harare, is still very different from the standard Zimbabwean pop records because of the many over-dubs and large instrumentation included in the mix. The instrumentation also only partially connects the music to Zimbabwe. The *mbira* parts on *Chitima Kwe* follow the

³⁶ Kendall 1994, p. 403.

³⁷ Interview with Kagona 9.9.1997 and Chitsvatsva 12.11.1997.

³⁸ Mango CCD 9858, originally WEA 246 279–72.

basic interlocking structure of *mbira*, but otherwise the song's melody and harmonic cycle IV-I-V-I resemble more *jiti* or South African popular music styles than *mbira*. It is in other words possible to talk about an inclusion of many musical elements that signify "roots" for the Western listeners, but at the same time the record is clearly a step forward in the band's experimental direction.

On *Pamberi!* the Bhundu Boys continue to break down the earlier "museve" aesthetics by both adding influences from a variety of styles to the songs and by changing the musical structure so that the continuously repeated harmonic cycles and short interlocking phrases no longer form a foundation of the music. Thus, most of the songs on *Pamberi!* have clearly separated introductions, verses and refrains that often also have different characters because of changes in rhythm or key, or because of the stylistic elements included.³⁹

Rise Kagona explains the change in the music as an attempt to please the Western listeners for whom African music can sound monotonous.⁴⁰ For the Western listener the music's structure, which is based on variation within the repeated short forms and beat, is foreign and can, according to him, therefore become boring. Kagona often jokingly compares the way the Europeans hear African music with the way they feel that "all Africans look the same". This is particularly crucial when the listeners do not understand the lyrics and feel that all songs are very similar. A second reason for the new approach was the musicians' wish to find new means of artistic expression that would also give them a chance to show their creativity and talent. According to Kagona, the former repetitive style "doesn't really portray professionalism" because "a song just starts and ends, there is nothing in the middle, there is nothing, you know, to show that we musicians can also do other tricks."⁴¹ Thus, the band wanted to create variation by including more elements in its music and arranging the sections of the songs differently.

On *Pamberi!* the "portrayal of professionalism" in practice often means the incorporation of stylistic features from progressive pop, such as changes in rhythm and key or experiments with larger forms. An example of this development is the song *Chimbira*, where both elements of *mbira* and *jiti* have been included, but in an exceptional arrangement. The earlier *museve*-ideal has been abandoned and instead the dramaturgy of the song, the creation of tension and release, is based on the succession of related, but still clearly differing sections that are arranged so that they form contrasts with each other. A significant element that contributes in the move away from the earlier *museve*-ideal is the vocal part, which is not based on choruses, but consists of spoken sentences, lamenting outcries, longer recitative phrases and more irregular interjections. *Chimbira* is in its entirety not through-composed, in other words it is not a

³⁹ An example of the harmonic changes can be found in *Magumede*, which has an introduction and interlude with the chord sequence F-C-Gm-Bb and a verse with the standard sequence F-C-Bb-C, but a modulated refrain with the minor chords Dm-Am-Gm. In some songs the harmonic development is combined with a strongly divergent unison rhythmic break, which creates a strong contrast with the otherwise even flow of the song. For instance *Kutambura* displays such a break when the song's ordinary chord sequence F-Bb-F-C and 4/4 rhythm is cut by the jerky interlude.

⁴⁰ Interview with Kagona 9.9.1997.

⁴¹ Ibid.

composition with an uninterrupted continuity of invention and transformation. However, it is neither based on the constant repetition of a short-form or a clear verse-refrain structure. It could be called an experiment with a complex overarching form and variation within the limits of the larger pre-arranged sectional structure.⁴²

The general development of the Bhundu Boys' music can be explained as a move from typical Southern African popular music, which is based on the repetition and variation of short cycles, to experiments with more strictly arranged, larger forms that are based on sectional opposition. Richard Middleton has noticed similar structural and formal changes when comparing the development of American and European popular music styles, although Western popular music in general seems to have moved historically in a reverse direction compared to the music of the Bhundu Boys.⁴³ Following the terminology of Charles Keil and Andrew Chester, Middleton speaks of on one side "processual", "engendered", "intentional" music, which is based on a framework, such as a chord sequence or rhythm, and then extends itself by repeating the framework with perpetually varied inflections.⁴⁴ The other musical approach that Middleton finds is "syntactic", "embodied", "extensional" music, which starts with a small component, such as a melodic motif, and then develops the component through techniques of modification and combination to an extended, sectionally articulated or through-composed structure. According to Middleton, popular music in the USA and Europe has historically moved from an approach nearer the second category to one closer to the first, that is in a direction which is closer to African-American music.⁴⁵

Middleton's broad historical outline can, of course, be criticised for vague generalisations, and in fact Middleton himself also points out that many variants, diversions and hybrids exist and have existed, but it still summarises some of the key structural differences in much popular music. Hence, it is interesting to see how the Bhundu Boys' deliberately chose to move from a "processual" towards a more "syntactic" approach, in other words in a reverse direction compared to the common European and American development. The Bhundu Boys did this partly as a result of the band's anxiety about the European audience's dislike for African music, for whom the music might sound repetitive and boring, but also because the band members wanted to show their skills.

⁴² The song 'Chimbira' starts with an intro with bass and electric guitars playing in octaves above a synthesiser legato chord background. The rhythm resembles to some extent the 12/8 feel of *mbira*, but already in this short section variation is created by the ascending parallel melodic line, which is accompanied by a rhythmically unison drum line. The introduction is followed by a section that is based on the repetition of the one bar chord sequence Am-Am-Am-G, which is played in unison, accentuating the staccato chords. The same harmonic scheme is also repeated in the next section, although in a more mellow style with synthesisers and guitars playing legato and arpeggio chords. A major shift occurs halfway through the song when the accentuated section is followed by a sudden interlude with only a low synthesiser melody, after which the rhythm changes into a double-speed *jiti*-like feel. Despite the *jiti*-like character of the fast section the music is not based on a short chord cycle, or call and response structure, but on contrasting and interlocking phrases. After the faster section again the slower sections follow, which are based on the one bar chord sequence Am-Am-Am-G played at times in staccato and legato style.

⁴³ Middleton 1990, pp. 115–16; 1999, pp. 142–43 and 2000, pp. 5–6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* For terminology of Keil and Chester see Keil 1994 and Chester 1970/1990.

⁴⁵ Middleton 1999, pp. 142–43.

The fact that the musicians had grown up listening to American and English popular music, including for example Deep Purple, Jethro Tull, Whishbone Ash and the Beatles, explains why the stylistic features of the more “progressive” pop were chosen. The members wanted to modernise their music and create something new, and for them the syntactic, carefully arranged structure seemed to both signify skill and offer variation in a way that would please the Western audience.

The new combination of Zimbabwean musical “roots” and “progressivity” displayed on *Pamberi!*, got a much more positive response in the media than *True Jit*. Rick Glanvill summarises the band’s new coming in a review in *City Limits* by explaining how “the Bhundu Boys recover from fifteen rounds with the critics and a disastrous, immemorable debut for WEA.”⁴⁶ Glanvill also expresses his liking for the record, although he criticises some of its “progressivity”: “If Gentle Giant had been born in Harare, ‘Chimbira’ would’ve been their anthem—other tracks suffer from a similar cavalier attitude to dog-leg rhythm changes.”⁴⁷ In 1989 when the record was released progressive pop was not necessarily in fashion in Europe and this can be seen in the critique, but otherwise the record got a favourable response. Particularly the fact that Zimbabwean musicians had been incorporated is brought up in an appreciative manner in many reviews. It is of course paradoxical when reviewers mention that the record contains “traditional *mbira*” when the *mbira* in fact play only on one track, *Chitima Kwe*, which, due to its roots progression H-E-H-Fiss and swinging rhythm is stylistically closer to the South African popular music style *marabi* than Zimbabwean *mbira*. However, on *Pamberi!* the Bhundu Boys seem to have combined the different elements in a way that made the record appear as a successful hybrid of modern and traditional music for the Western critics.⁴⁸ Or as Ian Anderson of *Folk Roots* describes what he sees as *Pamberi!*’s largest merit: “it undoubtedly has broad appeal to many who might otherwise find Zimbabwean music harder to come to grips with.”⁴⁹ In other words, the record was explained to be accessible in a way that did not create a conflict with the authenticity norms of the world music discourse.

The favourable response that *Pamberi!* received in the world music media came too late to help the Bhundu Boys. WEA’s interest in promoting the band had diminished after the failure of *True Jit* and many of the Artists & Repertoire-persons and other executives who had been active when the band was signed to the company had changed jobs. The record company was no longer interested in investing in the promotion of *Pamberi!* and the co-operation between the Bhundu Boys and WEA ended at the beginning of January 1990 when the band received a one line letter from a lawyer they had never heard of stating: “Your services are no longer required.”⁵⁰

After the Bhundu Boys’ and WEA’s ways had parted the band ran into a number of serious problems. Bass player David Mankaba was taken ill and

⁴⁶ Glanvill 1989.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ E.g. Anderson 1990; Dalton 1989 and Spencer 1992, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Anderson 1990.

⁵⁰ Interview with Muir 20.2.1997 and Muir 1997, p. 57.

died of AIDS in 1991. Shepherd Munyama, who had already played with the musicians in the beginning of their career in Harare, took Mankaba's place, but only one year later he also died of AIDS. In 1993 their fate was shared by Shakie Kangwena. Lead singer Biggie Tembo left the band and later committed suicide. Drummer Kenny Chitsvatsva also split with the band.

The Bhundu Boys have, however, continued with new musicians, led by the only original member left, Rise Kagona. The band has run into what might be called a world music offside position. The musicians were never interested in returning to the exploitative club work and recording contracts in Zimbabwe, but they also had problems in finding work on the international world music market. In Zimbabwe the band is still said to be based in the UK, but when releasing records in the West the press material emphasises their Zimbabwean locality as an attempt to fulfil the authenticity ideals. The band has continued to negotiate the tensions between being "roots" and "modern". It seldom performs material from *True Jit* or *Pamberi!* when performing for European, American or Australian audiences (except by, for example, playing instrumental versions of the songs of *True Jit*). On the latest recordings the band has tried to find a balance between being "authentic" and "accessible" by for example using English lyrics only when the music is assumed to sound African to the world music audience and African lyrics when the music is assumed to sound like international mainstream pop to the listeners .

CONCLUSIONS

The Bhundu Boys' career at WEA shows some of the ways in which identity can be articulated with musical creativity in the professional, international career of African musicians. The discourse of world music, anchored in the self-definition of the "West", tends to portray the musicians as "Others", that is, as representing the "Rest". Thus, the musicians and their music come to signify something that has been lost in the more "modern" West. The key to an artist's success in the world music market seems to be a successful negotiation of the tensions that these expectations create. In order to please the Western audience, the artist must be *both accessible and "authentic"* at the same time.

In the musical signification process aspects such as the choice of language, the musical structure, the arrangements and the choice of sounds seem to be important. The use of English pop lyrics is, in the case of the Bhundu Boys, a clear violation of the authenticity norms, whereas the experiments with musical structure are a more complex question. What is most important is not how truthfully the musical structure follows some "traditional" style, which would be explained to be "pure". Instead, the crucial issue is to what extent the music fits the Western listeners' ideas of what makes the music genuine instead of corrupt and this valuation depends largely on the listeners' own cultural background.

Especially the debate about sounds shows how the artists, the record companies and producers look at the questions of tradition and modernisation from different angles. The contradictions also show how the concept technology in all its ambiguity also can be seen as a construction, which is tied to a range of

popular desires and institutional practices and connected to the juxtaposition tradition-modernisation.⁵¹ All musicians and music media use some kind of technology but only certain aspects of this use are debated. In world music the debate about technology is usually not tied to, for example, the use of European instruments or electric amplification as such, but more often to the incorporation of synthesisers. Authenticity thus becomes tied to a distinction between “electric” and “electronic sound” (electric guitar versus synthesiser), which was common for the rock discourse at the end of the 1980s.⁵²

The authenticity norms of the world music discourse are not fixed or universal. They are usually based on the aesthetic interpretations of the media and audience, which apply their ideas of “roots” to the different “world music” styles. The world music discourse has constructed an idea of authenticity which is based on a certain historical stage of development during which the “traditional” music had become “modernised” to a certain extent, incorporating some new (for example “electric” but not “electronic”) sounds, and the music which signifies a later stage of “modernisation” is considered less authentic. This phenomenon of authenticating music retroactively is not necessarily new. According to Krister Malm, the turn of the twentieth century for example became the norm for European folk music enthusiasts and the 1980s seem to have become the dividing line for much of world music.⁵³ This process is not so much tied to how the music is created by the musicians, but the creators usually become aware of the expectations when facing their new audiences and react to them in their own ways.⁵⁴

The mixing of musical influences from a large variety of sources is an issue often brought up in the authenticity discussions of the world music discourse. During the 1980s and the 1990s the significance of the concept authenticity was discussed particularly by scholars who argued from a postmodernist position that the older bipolarities, such as tradition-modernisation, local-global, or sellout-honesty, on which the authenticity ideals were based have become blurred as a consequence of the new stage of development that the industrial consumer culture has entered.⁵⁵ The postmodern key words parody, playfulness and Jameson’s concept pastiche have also been adapted to world music, particularly by Veit Erlmann, who sees pastiche “as the key principal of world music.”⁵⁶ In Erlmann’s vision “the reconfigured time-space relationship in world music does away with time and place altogether” to the extent that “in world music the play of differences is turned into a new kind of identity” and “difference itself becomes the signified.”⁵⁷

Although many of the findings of the postmodern theorists are highly relevant, I find that the reception of artists such as the Bhundu Boys suggest that we have not done away with all the earlier differences or authenticity ideals.

⁵¹ Cf. Théberge 1997, p. 213.

⁵² Cf. Jones 1992, p. 72.

⁵³ Personal communication 30.1.1997.

⁵⁴ Cf. Kirkegaard 1996, pp. 337–39 on the career of Remmy Ongala.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Grossberg 1993.

⁵⁶ Jameson 1991; Erlmann 1996b, p. 482, see also Erlmann 1993.

⁵⁷ Erlmann 1996b, pp. 482–83.

The eclectic mixes of elements from a wide variety of music cultures are not necessarily “blank”. They can celebrate and promote the texts that they borrow from and even in less ambitious projects the meanings of the musical quotations are anchored in a highly romantic, modernist tradition of old binaries, of which the West versus the Rest is the most prominent.⁵⁸ In fact polystylistic techniques of music making can be just as typical for very old musical styles from outside the realm of Western mass consumer culture and which might therefore just as well be called “modern” or “pre-modern”.⁵⁹ Hence, I find Johan Fornäs’ way of modifying postmodern theories more plausible when he concludes that “late modernity has problematized earlier, naïve and romantic views on authenticity, but not obliterated the relevance of this concept itself.”⁶⁰ Instead of abandoning the concept authenticity it is more fruitful to study how it is reinterpreted differently in the process of reflexive identity-construction.

The musicians who use different elements are not necessarily blurring the former cultural polarisations but rather investigating their own position through musical means and constructing or solidifying their identity in a changing world. As the case study of the Bhundu Boys’ career shows, the musicians, just as their fans and critics, are concerned with the meanings of the music and the concepts of tradition and modernisation. In fact they are very concerned with the values and identifications that are attached to their professional choices and how these are interpreted along the lines of the polarisation of the “West” and the “Rest”.

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⁵⁸Cf. Goodwin 1991, p. 175 and 1988/1990, p. 271 on popular music and Hesmondhalgh 1998, p.137–38 on ‘world dance fusion’.

⁵⁹ Cf. Manuel 1995, p. 232.

⁶⁰ Fornäs 1995, p. 277.

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A *taarab*-singer on stage. (Photo: Annemette Kirkegaard)

Tourism Industry and Local Music Culture in Contemporary Zanzibar

Annetette Kirkegaard

This paper relates the specific role of Zanzibari music to reflections on tourism and culture. The notion of authenticity is very relevant for this discussion, as also the concepts of revival and heritage. These are concepts that have been used both in the Tanzanian cultural policy from 1974 and in the political writings and strategies of Unesco.

The musical culture of the Isles of Zanzibar has for more than a hundred years been dominated by the Muslim style known as *taarab*. From the beginning of this century its milieu was exclusive and restricted to men, and it was furthermore closely related to the affluent court of the Sultan. During the 1920s women were gradually accepted onto the scene and after the revolution in 1964 *taarab* was co-opted into the new political establishment. Within the last fifteen years or so, *taarab* has made its way into the world music environment and it is by now—in spite of its very local point of departure—a surprisingly well known style globally. *Taarab* music has been recorded and released by a number of Western record companies, and concert tours abroad are often made by the better known groups.

I have been studying *taarab* for a number of years and revisited Zanzibar on a short field trip in October 1998.¹ During that stay a new trend in the development of the creative culture made itself very clear. The musicians in the orchestra Twinkling Stars, whom I have known for some time, have been heavily influenced by the emerging and increasing presence of tourism in the islands, like nearly all the other people in Zanzibar Town. When I first met Seif Salim Saleh in 1994, music was an amateur pastime for him. Later he gave up his job as an administrator and teacher and has become—in his own words—a professional musician. Together with Mr. Mohammed Ilyas and Twinkling Stars, Seif Salim's main source of income now comes from weekly appearances in Zanzibar's number one luxury hotel, the Serena Inn. He also performs shows on and off in the renowned hotels of Mr. Emerson Skeens. The group plays a mixture of so-called pure or authentic Zanzibari *taarab* and international evergreens like "Guantanamo" and movie themes from "Doctor Zhivago" and the like.

In present day Tanzania, which includes the islands of Zanzibar—or rather the islands of Unguja and Pemba—tourism has become a feature of growing importance. When I first visited Zanzibar in 1981, tourism was non-existent as the inflow of tourists from mainland Tanganyika to the Islands was in fact prohibited.² Today the agenda has changed dramatically and the

¹ The trip was made possible by funding from the Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark's fund, for which I am truly grateful.

² Border conflicts even forced tourists to exchange money only in Zanzibar, notwithstanding the fact that the currency was identical. The conflict can still be experienced in that a visa is required

beaches, the coral reefs, the pleasant and warm tropical climate and the few but remarkable wild animals like giant tortoises, colobus monkeys and dolphins answer the tourists' longing for exotic experiences. An equally attractive feature, however, is the conspicuous presence in Zanzibar of traces of a glorious history. The tourist is reminded of the old, wealthy and famous history of the Islands in the old city of Zanzibar with its narrow and picturesque streets, its Arab—Indian architecture, its courts and houses of the sultans. These were also the residences of passing travellers of the 19th century like Livingstone, Stanley and Burton. History, the culture and the *heritage*, as it is increasingly known in Western discourse, have all become elements in the marketing of Zanzibar as a tourist attraction.

THE CULTURAL POLICIES, AND THE NGOMA AS INVENTED TRADITION

The *taarab* of today must be understood in relation to the Tanzanian cultural policy. The cultural policy formulated at independence aimed at a decolonisation of Tanzanian culture. The intention of the policy in this area was quite clear. It revolved around avoiding foreign predominantly Western "cultural invasion and domination". Mbughuni argues that it can be summarised in the following major points:³

1. A selective revival of our traditions and customs.
2. Promotion and preservation of our cultural heritage.
3. Our culture as an instrument of national development and unity.
4. The development of our tribal cultures into one national culture.
5. The contribution of our culture towards the development of mankind and the contribution of other cultures to our own development.
6. The necessity of overhauling the educational systems inherited from the former colonial powers and the need for all Tanzanians to remove the influence of the colonial mentality from our minds. (Mbughuni 1974:18)

The six points above are all highly relevant to the present discussion on tourism. Even if they do not address the subject directly, the ideology they express has governed the political arena and hence influenced the agenda of how culture was presented both to the local people and to the visiting foreigners. This means that even if a distinction between cultural policies and strategies for tourism can be drawn, it is important to view the two as highly interconnected fields of study.

The early independence policy was a direct response to the colonial situation. In the pre-independence times the schools were to a large extent dominated by the Christian missions. The children had been taught European songs and hymns, and in many places it had been strictly forbidden to participate in the traditional dances and musical events, which were regarded as pagan and as

when you arrive by the catamaran ferries from Dar es Salaam. It is today, however, mostly a formality.

³ Mbughuni 1974, pp. 18–19.

signs of sorcery and witchcraft. The Europeans — not being able to distinguish between religious and other songs—had prohibited the pupils from performing the simplest dances and songs connected with community life in the villages, and in this way alienated them from important social events and contexts.

The independence movements began to use the “traditional culture” in the belief that some part of precolonial culture had survived the massive oppression. Music and dance were used at political rallies, at meetings and at demonstrations. In some ways the use of traditional music can be seen as a means of resistance.

With the coming of national independence for the majority of the African countries in the 1960s a new cultural problem arose, that of uniting the peoples of different ethnic groups, within borders which had been drawn by European imperialism with only profit and imperial pride in mind. The political leaders continued the emphasis on cultural inheritance and traditional roots. After independence Tanzania faced a situation similar to that of many other African countries. On the one hand traditional culture—or traditional trends in culture—had been used successfully by the independence movement and Julius Nyerere—on the other hand the elite, who had been trained and educated in missionary schools and sometimes also in European universities, had been alienated towards the indigenous customs.

When a Ministry of Culture and Youth was formed in Tanzania in 1962, President Julius Nyerere explained the need for a specific ministry:

I have done this [set up the ministry] because I believe that culture is the essence and spirit of any nation. A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit which makes them a nation. ... So I have set up this ministry to help us regain our pride in OUR culture. (Ministry no date, p. 2)

It was now the task of the new ministry to change this and to make the indigenous culture known not only to the elite but also to the growing number of people living in the cities in mixed ethnic groups. Nyerere wanted the ministry to seek out the best in the different cultures and customs and make it a part of a new national culture for all Tanzanians, who were now to feel themselves first and foremost as Tanzanians and only secondly—if at all as Sukuma, Maasai, etc.

Even if Nyerere was from the start aware that this emphasis on indigenous culture should not close the nation’s ears and eyes to cultural trends from the outside, as the country was and should be a part of the international cultural community, the state prohibited both soul music and miniskirts, which were seen as Western decadence. And in Zanzibar a harsh attitude grew against Arabness after the violent coup of 1964, which was seen as the ending of Arab rule.

There were two major outcomes of the cultural policy of Tanzania: *firstly*, the reintroduction of indigenous culture, dance and music in the school system, and *secondly* the creation of national cultural troupes. In this way the cultural policies concerning arts and music focussed on traditional customs and the concern was almost totally concentrated around the “real” roots, hereby seek-

ing out the authentic, traditional African identity. This was partly due to an overstating of the African values and customs, partly a result of the Western tradition of ethnomusicology, which focussed on originality and exoticism. While some parts of indigenous culture might have survived as it had been left alone by the colonisers, it proved, however, false to assume that the culture in the villages and among the ethnic groups had not been deeply influenced by the presence of colonialism, and the ongoing contact with the outer world.

In Bantu languages the phenomena of music, dance, singing and drumming are put together in the word *ngoma*. As a result of the cultural policy of self-reliance the school system was now introducing *ngoma* as a compulsory discipline on the curriculum. The school children were being taught partly to perform the old *ngomas* of the area but increasingly during the seventies they were taught to sing and dance new *ngomas* whose words and contents reflected the ideology of African socialism, which Tanzania adopted in 1967 with the Arusha declaration. These neotraditional *ngomas* were developed by the national troupes of Tanzania. The making of the neotraditional *ngoma* had two aims. *Firstly*, the state wanted to do away with the largely British-invented tribal system, while keeping the borders, which the British had also established. Because music and dance were regarded as important in relation to group identity, the ethnic and cultural characteristics in them had to be broken down and replaced by a new common idiom. *Secondly*, the government had a strong commitment to reinvoke those African cultural roots, which were regarded as having survived colonialism.

By melding different types of *ngomas* or by spreading and popularising certain dances among the entire population the state wanted to create a new *ngoma* tradition. In this way they avoided the politically unwanted term “tribal music”. The neotraditional *ngomas* were often created from a text of a newly composed song of a political or even agitating character, encouraging the population to support the goals of the party⁴. Other common themes for the neotraditional *ngomas* were praises to Nyerere and the party, informative songs about farming or health, or moralising advice on how to live a decent life. The songs and the texts were matched to movements, traditional clothing and so on. In this way the dance and the music became a means of communication and a mouthpiece for the party to reach a population, which consisted mainly of illiterates. It was in a way a continuation of the oral transmission of knowledge, which in the old days had transmitted messages of vital importance through music and dance.

The neotraditional *ngoma* has developed into a stylised form of dance and music in which strict positions are very often used and there is little space for improvisation. As the dancers are more often than not dressed completely alike, the whole setting creates a growing distance between the actors and performers and the audience. Normally the audience only participates in the *ngoma* by means of hand-clapping and ululation and their participation, contrary to what is the case in traditional music and dance, in no way determines the form or

⁴ The ruling party TANU (Tanganyika National Union) on the mainland merged with the Zanzibari party, the Afro-Shirazi Party in 1977 to form Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). CCM was the only legal party in Tanzania until 1992.

appearance of the dance. Occasionally, however, well-known tunes and texts are sung by the audiences—and this adds to the political importance of the *ngoma*.

The stylised neotraditional *ngoma* normally consists of short, planned and fixed sequences, which focus on the change in the music and song. The duration of the total *ngoma* therefore also differs considerably from the older dances, as they usually last only a quarter of an hour. The old dances could go on for the whole day. Many of the characteristics of the neotraditional *ngomas* are by now being transmitted to the traditional dances, which have been chosen by the leadership as part of the new national culture. In this way the stylised forms of the neotraditional *ngoma* affect other music and dance forms.

The creation of the national, cultural groups is closely related to the development of the neotraditional *ngoma*. The troupes were officially inaugurated by Nyerere in 1964. The first troupe to perform was the dance troupe, which later on became almost identical with the Muungano Dance Troupe, which often performed at weekly shows at the Village Museum in Dar es Salaam.⁵ These shows also catered for tourists. But they were the exceptions. Other groups which were very popular in the 1970s and 1980s played almost exclusively for the local people in order to promote and convey national unity through a common culture. The troupes were intended to form part of the nation-building project. By collecting the most popular or appropriate dances and musical pieces around the country and stylising them, the troupes would participate in creating a new national type of *ngoma*, which would then be spread further to the whole population via concert tours.

Nketia describes how the forming of national troupes with their double aim of actively collecting old material for preservation and performing mixed shows have an important function in cultural education. To be successful the musicians require training both as performers and as folklorists.⁶

As the years have passed the effort to preserve the cultural heritage has in Tanzania as in so many other countries been downgraded⁷, and today the focus is mostly on the performative aspects. One should mention, however, that the establishment of the Bagamoyo School of the Arts has contributed very positively to the conservation and performance of older instruments, songs and dances.

Prior to the 1960s in ethnomusicological research “tradition” as a concept was related to the idea that culture was static, that it could be exceedingly old, and that it had not changed. This made a clear distinction between modernity and tradition possible and it gave to the so-called “traditional musics” the notion of authenticity or even originality. The attitude was also clearly related to the history of ethnomusicological theory and method, where foreign or at least exotic musics in general were thought of as cultural expressions of socie-

⁵ By the 1980s Tanzania had three national troupes, which were directly employed by the Ministry of Culture and Youth. The troupes formed a sort of trilogy supporting each other in co-productions, but were officially divided into a dance, a drama and an acrobat troupe. In performance the differences between the groups were not great primarily due to the interdisciplinarity of the African tradition.

⁶ Nketia 1991, pp. 84–85.

⁷ Sarkissian 1998, p. 90.

ties on lower steps on an evolutionist ladder. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, it became increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that the music was not always old, that it was put into new forms and that it had not survived colonialism unaffected and unchanged. As a result, the concept *invention of tradition* was introduced. This implies that tradition to a certain extent is an imagined construct and that people can and have over time changed the culture in order to meet the needs and demands of the present.⁸

Terence Ranger in his book on Beni dance shows how the setting and forming of the stylised dance forms on the East African Coast go back to the turn of the century, and how they were initiated by the confrontation with the military culture of the colonial powers.⁹ Likewise many customs and cultural forms in Africa—while at first appearing to be ancient—often turn out to be modern constructs.¹⁰

The cultural revival, which swept the Third World after decolonisation, also increased the role of many “invented traditions”. The musicologist Tamara Livingston discusses the term *revival* which is very prominent in cultural policies as shown above in the quotation from the official cultural policy of Tanzania. According to Livingston:

Through the re-creation of a past music “system”, ... revivalists position themselves in *opposition* to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream, align themselves with a particular historical lineage, and offer a cultural alternative in which legitimacy is grounded in reference to authenticity and historical fidelity.¹¹

Livingston finds that in her material—which deals mainly with the Brazilian *choro*—the oppositional character of “revival” is conspicuous.¹² In Africa the opposition of revival movements has until very recently not often been directed at the present administrations, as they are generally initiators of the cultural development. Instead, the opposition is clearly directed towards the cultures of the former colonial powers.

It is only within the past fifteen years that ethnomusicologists have begun to see revival cultures as interesting in their own right, and not as an imitation of more “authentic” events.¹³ Livingston defines cultural revival as a social movement

... with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past. The purpose of the movement is twofold: (1) to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture, and (2) to improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by revivalists.¹⁴

⁸ The concept was introduced by Terence Ranger, see Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983.

⁹ Ranger 1975.

¹⁰ For instance the Kpanlogo, which seems ancient but has by John Collins been diagnosed to have been started in the 1970s (Collins 1992).

¹¹ Livingston 1999, p. 66.

¹² Ibid., p.67.

¹³ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

Livingston also notes that an interesting result of the production of both heritage and revivalist cultural events, is that it very quickly establishes a partnership with the commercial culture industry, and thereby "... transforms the revival into a popular culture phenomenon."¹⁵ In this partnership revival also touches the tourism discussion. Its element of commercialism is conspicuous in the production of shows for an audience which includes tourists and occasionally the marketing of different products like recordings, or other merchandise. In specific relation to music, Malm and Wallis point out how tourists also want to bring home some authentic music from the distant lands they have visited.¹⁶ They want to buy recordings of indigenous sounds and they might also want to buy a tape of the band playing by the pool, in the lounge or dining rooms. This gives room for making more money. Sometimes the making of culture into commodities clashes with the wants and aesthetic considerations of the performers.

THE TAARAB AND ITS SETTING

Zanzibari music and culture are deeply rooted in a Muslim identity and in what people have called a common Swahiliness. This is primarily due to the long-lasting contact with the Arab world, which started around the year 1000 and which culminated when the Omani Sultan Seyyid Said settled in Zanzibar in the 1840s. Here he built a successful empire based on trade and huge plantations growing spices and fruit.

At the same time an African identity is also present in Zanzibar. One reason for this is that there has always been a rural population of African descent. Another and perhaps more important reason is that there was a great influx of slaves, and after the abolishment of slavery in the last decades of the 19th century, of migrant workers from mainland Tanganyika and Kenya to work on the plantations. However, more than 95 per cent of the Zanzibar population are Muslims. Accordingly Arab and Middle Eastern musics play an important role in the cultural environment.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Swahili-based island culture is an openness and willingness to embrace the latest fashion. In music this has paved the way for a synthesis of a great many influences and idioms. First of all the music in and around the Sultan's court was close to the ideals and fashions of the Muslim world, and relied heavily on contacts in Oman and Egypt. Secondly, other cultural centres of the Indian Ocean area, in particular Bombay in India, have played important roles, primarily via mediated cultural products like 78rpm records appearing in the 1920s, and soon after that the emergence of Indian music films.¹⁷ From around the turn of the century Egyptian ensembles like the popular *Firquah* and the *Thakt*¹⁸ ensembles became models for the *taarab* music, giving the sound the specific notion of the Middle

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 80

¹⁶ Malm and Wallis 1988, p. 180.

¹⁷ The Indian music films, which are still very prominent in most of the cinemas in East Africa have influenced the singing style of *taarab* profoundly (Kirkegaard 1996).

¹⁸ Types of orchestras developed in Egyptian popular music during the 20th century.

East African and Swahili folklore and customs also had an impact. The migrating newcomers from the mainland brought with them alternative musical ideas, and gradually some of these were accepted into the culture. Over time the two trends have lived in a fragile balance—sometimes about to break—and today both are present.

Due to this situation, the culture of Zanzibar is special, because in reality it encompasses two different—but at some points related—authentic musical cultures.¹⁹ Zanzibar has a *ngoma* tradition which is very closely related to the ongoing on the mainland, to the cultural policy, and to the production of performances—whether or not for tourists. The *ngoma* culture is in the eyes of the African performers and audiences very much a traditional and even authentic culture. While *ngoma* carries the idea of originality and tradition, *taarab*, however, is in fact highly creolised. It is syncretic in its very nature and it blends African, Asian, and European or Western musical elements into a particular sound, which is highly esteemed by most Zanzibari.

While *taarab* is rooted in Arab or Kiswahili poetry, *ngoma* takes the cultural manifestations of traditional life and rituals as its point of departure. The “African” part of Zanzibari musical culture is most prominent in the rural dances and *ngomas* but has also made its own kind of *taarab*—the *Kidumbak*.²⁰ This style is in many ways a result of the merger of local musics into the idealised *taarab*, and to many it is not fully understood as *taarab*. Where *ngoma* has in some ways stopped its development and has become stylised through the strategy of revival and reconstruction of traditional dances, *taarab* is still today open to renewal from all corners of the cultural sphere. The internal struggle over the ideal kind of *taarab* is still going on.

The acceptance of women singers into *taarab* and hereby the introduction of women’s ritual dances and songs like *vugo* and *unyago* has changed the music profoundly. Janet Topp Fargion actually calls some of the consequences of the activities of the women’s groups a *Ngoma*-isation, hereby indicating that the dichotomy between *taarab* and *ngoma* has been transcended or crossed.²¹

So like in many other African contemporary kinds of music, there seems to be a double process going on: one directed towards a root-based ideology—very much in line with the demands for authenticity and exoticism in the world music market—and one directed towards a modernisation of the culture.

The specific musical culture of *taarab*, is still viewed as an authentic Zanzibari music by most people. It has until very recently not been open to tourists, but ever since the revolution in 1964 and the political union with mainland Tanganyika, both *taarab* and *ngoma* have been used by the establishment—both kinds of music are performed at state functions and national holidays.²²

¹⁹ This is not my interpretation of authenticity, but rather that of the performers and cultural workers in Zanzibar, who refer to both styles as truly Zanzibari.

²⁰ *Kidumbak* sounds rather “African” or *ngoma*-like to the outside ear. However, I do not have space here for a complete description of the culture—instead I refer to my Ph.D. thesis (Kirkegaard 1996).

²¹ Fargion 1993, p. 124.

²² There have been ups and downs according to the political order of the day, see Kirkegaard 1996 or Topp-Fargion 1993.

It is interesting to examine how the notion of otherness and/or authenticity is present in all the discourses on the development of a musical culture like *taarab*—and Zanzibari *ngoma* as well for that matter. For the musicians the bottom line is of course survival—both musically and economically. In the present and increasingly hard times of the Zanzibari social life the musicians are looking out for a possible profitable income. At the same time the very proud culture of Zanzibar is continuously debated and reacted upon. And in accordance with the tradition of competition, concerts, recording conditions and terms are constantly being negotiated amongst the actors and entrepreneurs. Respect for the music is weighed high. Some of the discussions revolve around the suitability of conforming to the preferences of the tourists, who want entertainment during their stay. It must be remembered that the strategy of the tourist corporations is to promote Zanzibar as much as a paradise for divers and eco-tourists as for people attracted to the beautiful and fascinating culture of the old town with its dormant Arabness and fading reminiscences of European travellers.

It is my belief that the *taarab* culture has only recently become interesting to the tourism industry in Zanzibar (as opposed to the presentation of the traditional *ngoma*). In my view it took the “world music” debate and the sudden interest of outsiders to make the music open to tourist audiences. This is so because the *taarab* music—to a much higher degree than the invented *ngoma*—has been directly associated with Zanzibari everyday life, and has been a major identity marker for quite a number of people in Zanzibar. Accordingly it has not been estimated as “something” to show to tourists, which is interesting because it provides an expression of how the Zanzibaris view the relation between what they think the tourist wants to see and what not.

THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE MUSICAL LANDSCAPE OF ZANZIBAR

Nyerere was quite aware of the economic possibilities of tourism. In a charming book from the early 1960s by the German wildlife pioneer Bernhard Grzimek, the president is quoted as stating that he himself does not care much for elephants and savannahs, but if the foreigners are willing to pay for these experiences, he will provide them:

I would not spend my vacation watching crocodiles. But I know that Europeans and Americans do; that they like watching elephants and giraffes. Tanganyika is the African country, which still holds most wildlife. I shall see to it that tourists will be able to see it. It is my belief that after sisal and diamonds, wildlife will become the biggest source of revenue.²³

Despite this awareness few efforts were devoted to serving tourists in sharp contrast to neighbouring Kenya, where safari resorts, beach paradises and “cultural” activities like Bomas of Kenya and trips to Maasai homelands were

²³ My translation from Grzimek 1963, p. 185.

already common from the 1960s onwards.²⁴ This picture has now changed, and the prophecy of Nyerere proved to be right. The economic importance of tourists has increased dramatically, and accordingly the ministries of culture in both mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar have for many years also included “tourism” in their title, and the interest in serving the guests has increased due to the overall liberalisation of the economy.

Today tourism is changing. According to Cunningham staged performances can now be used for both local and domestic purposes and for foreign guests, who can pay for the experience.

All of these tourisms [both foreign and domestic] take various forms, such as emphasis upon ‘traditional’ court art of old cities (what has been termed ‘heritage tourism’), the tribal ‘primitive and exotic’, and ‘nature’ or ‘eco-tourism’ that emphasises wildlife, plant and animal.²⁵

Cunningham notes

that cultural performances which aim to lure Western tourists and present a picture of the nation to them can also make statements to people of the same nation who may attend the performances or see them on television.²⁶

It is important to realise that history, identity and tradition all play a part, and that the local people can feel that also the tourist show represents authentic identities. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that tourism today represents such devices which move people from a “now” and “here” to a “there”. She writes:

Tourism and heritage are collaborative industries, heritage converting locations into destinations and tourism making them economically viable as exhibits of themselves [...] once sites, buildings, objects, technologies, or ways of life can no longer sustain themselves as they once did, they ‘survive’—they are made economically viable—as representations of themselves.²⁷

This is very close to the discourse on simulacra which is prominent in many postmodern theories. The virtuality of the experience can be seen in the fact that today we often travel to see things which exist no longer. We gather at signs and plates telling us that “here was once a house in which Mozart lived”, and the like. Accordingly the production of “hereness” becomes increasingly dependent on virtuality. Increasingly, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it, “we travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places.”²⁸

For the tourists the interest in the heritage culture is of a more imprecise nature and it is also double sided. First of all the tourism industry makes it possible for the tourists to be eclectic in their choices. It is not the intention of the tourists to experience the culture as it is really lived, as Lane points out in

²⁴ The economic situation was a major factor here as the currency problems, the difficult political situation after *ujamaa* and the relatively poor infrastructure, all hindered the smooth inflow of charter tourism.

²⁵ Cunningham 1998, p. 81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, p. 371.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

his description of the effects of tourism on Dogon dance and culture. What is going on in the tourist performances is called a “social construction of unreality”.²⁹

One of the problems with these representational cultural events is that they involve a risk of a cultural grey-out as a result of the processes in world marketing. As an international model for tourist experiences seems to exist, cultural events tend to take similar forms in most regions of the world. In this way one of the great threats—i.e. “sameness” occurs, because standardisation is a conspicuous result of the need to make sure that customers are satisfied.

A contradictory position appears. At the same time as tourists long for otherness and travel to reach it, they increasingly experience the opposite, formulated by Mel Ziegler as: “Now that it’s easier to go anywhere, it’s harder to really get away.”³⁰ These thoughts are in line with the observations of other researchers. The social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz agrees in stating that today one can become a cosmopolitan without going away³¹ and Paul Virillo says: “Now everything arrives without there being a necessity of departure.”³²

Due to the fact that hotels, transportation and bathing resorts try to match international demands and standards, which are often but not always met, it can sometimes be quite difficult to see the difference between resorts in the Caribbean and those in South East Asia. This is a problem in an industry which markets “difference”, and it has implications for all cultural spheres. The way that a new Zanzibar film festival markets itself is a case in point:

Festival-goers will step out of the magic of the movies into the wonders of Zanzibar. Its rich past is embroidered in the unique narrow lanes of Stone Town, the grand peeling palaces of the Sultan’s era and the remains of slave history. Its cultural diversity is expressed in crafts, dance, music, and Swahili cuisine. Breathtaking palm-fringed beaches, exotic coral reefs, atmospheric spice plantations and rain forests frame the scene.³³

The quote is from an advertisement for the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), which is an event the organisers hope to make annual. It was begun in 1998, and in 1999 a second ZIFF took place from 2–10 July. Also the year 2000 saw the arrival of a splendid festival. As can be seen the charms of the location Zanzibar are prominent, and even if the ultimate aim of the festival is to display films and culture, it is also a question of attracting visitors and money to the islands. The founding member of ZIFF is the American hotel owner and cultural entrepreneur Emerson Skeens, whose double role cannot be ignored. He—a true connoisseur of Zanzibar culture and life—is on the one hand a great friend and supporter of the local musical setting, and on the other

²⁹ Lane 1988, p. 66. As I interpret this, Lane is referring to the fact that the existence of a popular, global model for tourist shows sets the agenda for an experience which refers to a kind of imagined “otherness”. This is not totally separated from the culture in question, but nevertheless foreign to the context as quoted above.

³⁰ Ziegler quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, p. 372.

³¹ Hannerz 1992, p. 247.

³² Quoted from Erlmann 1994, p. 8.

³³ <http://www.timegate.demon.co.uk/ziff.htm>, 27 April 1999.

he is also very much part and parcel of the struggle for survival and money making.

In connection to the theme of this paper the quote is almost a model for the way culture, heritage and tourism are drawn together, and it truly fits Cunningham's description.

When I visited Zanzibar in October 1998 I found many cultural phenomena which related to the issues I have described above. Generally, the awareness of the presence of the tourists had risen since my last visit, and many bars, restaurants, and hotels were determined to exhibit both Zanzibar and its culture. I stayed in Emerson's small but very exquisite hotel, where *taarab* music and *ngoma* had made their way into the daily routines.

Emerson serves a very high-class dinner on the top floor restaurant of one of his hotels—the Emerson and Green's. Here the guests are seated on the floor—cushioned in a comfortable way—while they are being served by kneeling servants. The building is five stories high and the guests have a most wonderful view of the entire Zanzibar town.

While the sun is setting and the muezzins are chanting their call for evening prayers, the exclusive group at the top prepare for a delicious meal based on Zanzibari cuisine but created by a French chef. Into this atmosphere of ease and exoticism, Emerson has brought local entertainment in the form of *ngoma*. Between courses a small but very good group of drummers and dancers perform so-called traditional music, while Emerson himself—always taking part in the meal—comments from the side table on the hints and secrets related by the dancers and singers.³⁴ The mood is joyful and pleasant and at the end of the show the female dancers invite the guests to do their best in hip gyrating. There is no real line up amongst the dancers, but the movements are much the same as in other *ngomas*. The female dancers are dressed up in kangas and T-shirts and have bare feet for the show, but as soon as it is over they change back into full dress, shoes and veils, which is the proper attire when being outdoors in the Swahili community.

Another performance is the twice-a-week show at the old fort near the harbour and the picturesque food market in Forohdani. This show is also part of a dinner arrangement, but here the dance comes first. While the performers at Emerson's—also due to limited space I presume—are only a small group, the old fort show is based on a genuine dance troupe with many dancers in typically choreographed and stylised *ngoma* formation. The show is put together in a sequence of dances and for each one the dancers change their—moreover identical—clothes to vary the spectacle and to indicate the different geographical and regional origins of the dances. At the performances I saw the group was accompanied by a drum orchestra, which in some numbers was augmented by a Zanzibari *surnai*—a kind of indigenous oboe. The set up was very close to what I would call a mainstream *ngoma* show and it was well attended by lots of tourists, who took pictures and like at Emerson's they also joined in the dances at the request of the dancers towards the end of the show.

Ngoma performances along these lines are directly connected to the new traditions all over Tanzania. The presence of *taarab* in the representative and

³⁴ The hints are very often of an erotic and sensual character.

commercial tourist performances, has only emerged recently. The well-known *taarab* musicians Seif Salim Saleh, Mohammed Ilyas and Ally Mussa have in the late 1990s taken up a new practice. They have in their own words become professionals, and this means that they have given up their jobs—except Mohammed Ilyas, who as far as I know, has been a singer all his life. When I did an interview with Mr. Seif Salim he told me that the idea had come up since my last visit in 1994. He had left the renowned orchestra “Malindi”,³⁵ mostly because nothing was happening and the orchestra was languishing. Afterwards together with Mohammed Ilyas he came up with the idea of establishing a smaller group.³⁶ This is an interesting statement, because when I talked to Mohammed in 1994 he already had a group—also known by the name of Twinkling Stars, and at that time he wanted the good musicians from Malindi to become more outgoing in their music.

Seif and Mohammed wanted to make a smaller band in order to be able to play for the tourists, and the reason why they wanted this, he said, was for *taarab* to be known by more people. At the same time they would be able to make more money, which until then had been very difficult in the big Malindi Orchestra.³⁷ According to Seif, Emerson had been the initiator of this move: “Our Group started with him. He brought us to play for the tourists.”³⁸ Some misunderstandings and personal disagreements broke up the engagement, and in October 1998 Twinkling Stars were instead engaged at the Serena Inn, which is the newest and most fashionable hotel in Zanzibar Town.³⁹ It is part of the Aga Khan corporation and it has branches in many other exotic resorts around the world. In relation to culture it is interesting that the Serena hotels apparently have a policy of promoting the local culture of the surrounding society.⁴⁰ It is a very typical tourist construction directed towards the heritage ideal.

At the Serena Inn the Twinkling Stars appear as a group of four musicians, which is very unlike *taarab*. The instruments are *kidumbak* (a small drum), the *qanun* (a plucked box zither), a *ney* (a flute in this case made from a plastic tube for electric wires), two violins, and a harmonica which however only works on the right hand register which means that no basses or chords are heard. Seif and Mohammed change the set-up of the band by going from one instrument to another, while the *qanun* and drum player do not change. All

³⁵ Also known as Ikhwani or Akhwan Safaa. The name changes but all Zanzibaris know both names so it does not matter. However, the Ikhwani Safaa name relates to the Arab identity—meaning brothers of unity—while Malindi is the name forced upon the group after the revolution and the prohibition of all things Arab. See Kirkegaard 1996. In 1999 the group calls itself Malindi Akhwan Safaa (ZIFF homepage).

³⁶ Interview with Seif Salim Saleh in Zanzibar Town October 6th 1998.

³⁷ Seif told me that he still receives a little royalty money from the “Music of Zanzibar” recordings (after they have been transferred to CD). This is the only economic outcome of the big groups, who at that time were losing the lucrative official jobs to the competing “Culture Musical Club”.

³⁸ Interview with Seif Salim Saleh, Zanzibar Town, October 6th 1998.

³⁹ At the time of my stay in Zanzibar Seif and Emerson, however, were conducting negotiations regarding a readmittance of *taarab* into Emerson’s hotels. I became a messenger for some while, but it seemed as if they reached an agreement to have a regular show every Saturday.

⁴⁰ This is information from Seif Salim Saleh. I have not been able to trace any direct confirmation of this statement, but the hotels are through their advertising highly committed to introducing and making use of local elements such as architecture and style.

members occasionally sing but most tunes are given instrumentally, which again is a rather clear deviance from the norms of *taarab*, where due to the style's origin in Arab and Swahili poetry singing is normally in the focus of the event.

The group of Twinkling Stars, however, is in reality much bigger, and when they rehearse their songs and compositions, which happens regularly twice a week, they are normally up to twelve musicians. At the Serena Inn the number is limited due to the requirements of the hotel, and therefore only the “core” musicians take part. As these are also the oldest and most trained musicians, the most “classical” elements of *taarab* are boosted. The old instruments especially the *qanun* and also the *oud* require a knowledge which in practice is limited to a few people, while the younger persons primarily play the electric instruments like guitar and electric bass. This is clearly intended by the Serena Inn manager, who has hired the group and it goes along with their physical appearance in the long white Muslim kanzu and embroidered scullcaps. The appearance of the group is scheduled to take place at around six o'clock. The musicians are seated facing the small coffee tables, but with their backs to the sun, which during the performance sets into the ocean just outside the premises of the hotel. It is a truly beautiful and exotic view.

The repertoire of the group is mainly instrumental and consists of what in *taarab* talk would be called *taksims* or instrumental versions of old and well known songs. Only a few are with vocals. Also a few newly composed songs are on the playing list. Most of them are composed by either Seif Salim or Mariam Hamdani, and they are rehearsed by the whole group in Mariam's home a little outside Zanzibar Town.⁴¹ To this old repertoire the group has added what Seif Salim calls “international tunes”. These are mainly world famous songs like Guantanamera (the Cuban song popularised in the 1950s by Pete Seeger's Weavers) and movie themes from “Dr. Zhivago” (Maurice Jarre) and “Never on a Sunday” (Mahos Hadjidaikis). These appear in the second half of the show and they get a lot of attention among the hotel guests. It is also the time for “sundowners” and it is a little ironical that these musicians—who are Muslims and at least in principle do not drink alcohol—entertain at this particular tradition which often involves a considerable amount of drinking.

There are a lot of discrepancies between the presentation and the actual—or normal—context of the music, which as I have described is highly modernised and creolised. The image Serena Inn wants to present, however, is that of heritage, ancient ways and overstated exoticism in the form of dressing and an exaggerated “Arabness” also present in the preference for the older Arab—Egyptian instruments at the expense of the otherwise normal use of modern and electrified instruments. The tendency, however, is seemingly supported by the ministry, which in the statements of Mariam Hamdani also favours this development.

⁴¹ Mariam's role in this is a bit ambiguous. Mohammed told me that being a high-ranked official Mariam is not able to pose as a musician herself. It could dishonour her reputation. However, she can support and compose without any problem. Interview with Mohammed Ilyas, Zanzibar Town, October 15th 1998.

As Lau argues the changing of clothes is decisive and can be seen as one of the reasons for the apparent lack of authenticity in performances.⁴² Today *taarab*—as *ngoma* has done for many years now—has also taken up this procedure. The musicians of Twinkling Stars all appear in normal clothes at rehearsals, and even more importantly, they would never dress in white kanzu for a truly classical *taarab* event: here formal dressing—which consists of dark suits, white shirts and ties, and huge Western/Eastern dresses with no veils for women—would be the proper attire.⁴³

Another aspect on this issue is offered by Cunningham, who states that there is a discrepancy between traditional culture and what can be used in a tourist performance. This relates for instance to sacrifices and to elements which are generally regarded as unpleasant to the tourists. In *ngoma* both for local and foreign audiences actual sacrifice has for a very long time been left out of the performances. Traditional music can also be too boring a music or too loud to be palatable to tourists.

In Twinkling Stars the conspicuous absence of vocals is due to a wish to make the music pleasant and not too pressing. Swahili vocals would stress the foreignness too much and spoil the fragile balance between exoticism and homeliness—represented by the secure surroundings in the international hotel and the general presence of the English language. Likewise the use of electric instruments would turn the pendulum the other way around and spoil the imagined historical pastness.

All these phenomena point to the fact that the tourism industry creates what it imagines the tourists want to see. Sometimes events, objects, and musics have to be twisted or as Lane states they will be turned into new versions of old motives in order to meet these demands. Lane writes:

As with other aspects of the local tourism industry, the favoured representational forms help to reinforce images of the Dogon that are already held in the Western World.⁴⁴

In Zanzibar we are brought back to the time of the Sultans, which is connected to heritage both in music and in the buildings, which the local cultural entrepreneurs would like to have nominated as “World Heritage Sites”.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What then is the effect of this flood of demands, wishes, and interests on the music and the musicians? It is very easy to be condemning and wise, but it does not do away with the problems. Musicians have at all times needed to be dexterous, and in musical terms a style like *taarab* has through its entire history been subject to influences and dominances. They have kept the music alive.

⁴² Lau 1998, p. 122.

⁴³ Twinkling Stars still play at other occasions: both at private weddings—a traditional *taarab* scene if any—even if it is on a very irregular basis and also for official parties and government functions. They have, however, not joined the new trend for rough and dirty lyrics favoured by the young and increasingly popular groups.

⁴⁴ Lane 1988, p. 67.

There is a large span of views on tourism. At one extreme we find a very negative attitude which regards tourism as a threat to cultural life and institutions. With Frederik Lau I find that this attitude is based on a very static view of cultures.⁴⁵ At the other end of the continuum, tourism is viewed as primarily positive: as Philip McKean argues, tourism “goes hand in hand with the conservation of the traditional culture ... and may in fact strengthen the process of conserving, reforming, and recreating certain traditions.”⁴⁶

Seen from a negative point of view the presence of the tourism industry in Zanzibar is pushing and emphasising the difference between *taarab* and *ngoma* to a point which goes directly against the tendency to re-africanise the *taarab* and *taarab-ise* elements of the *ngoma*. On the more positive side, however, it gives the musicians the ability and the time to practise, it gives more income than civil service jobs and it also promotes their music beyond local society’s normal function.

Tourism is both a feature which affects society in a negative way and one which has important positive results. One such positive feature is the maintaining of knowledge of instruments and playing techniques. When the Serena Inn demands acoustic instruments it forces the musicians to learn or keep up their knowledge on yielding instruments. In this way the demands based on economic reasons can become an important preserver of instrumental knowledge. For example, the tourists want to see somebody play the *qanun*, younger musicians will have to learn the routines in order to meet with the demand and thereby make themselves a living. This kind of preservation is very different from what ethnomusicologists have been able to achieve, and it is more often than not put into motion by the entrepreneurs who work either within the tourism industry as such or as agents and initiators of a cultural revival.

The musicians I met were very dependent on these entrepreneurs and very grateful for their actions in the field. Seif Salim put it in this way: “He [Emerson] is a fine person, he respects our music.”⁴⁷ He was also very grateful towards the manager at Serena Inn—even if some of the conditions Twinkling Stars faced were somewhat odd. The members of the orchestra come and go by the kitchen door and in addition to their wages each gets a “doggy bag” of food from the hotel menu.

However, the role of the private entrepreneurs—who are almost always from outside Zanzibar—stands out in clear contrast to the support that can be granted from the official Zanzibari side. The private entrepreneurs are typically more free to operate within both the ideological and the economic spheres, while the official cultural policy makers are subject to overall political goals and not in possession of the same kind of risk-willing capital. According to Mariam Hamdani the ministry also favours the more old-fashioned form of *taarab* to the new and electric one. The interference of the outsiders can be seen as unwanted, artificial or even forced. However, direction of policies is nothing new. Musicians are schooled and trained in cultural issues and many African

⁴⁵ Lau 1998, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Interview with Seif Salim Saleh, Zanzibar Town, October 6th 1998.

countries try to control the education of so-called traditional or neotraditional musicians and dancers. Many are staggered over this but in most other walks of life it is preferred that development is controlled or “guided”. Why not in cultural affairs? I believe it is because we—and I am thinking primarily of the Western ethnomusicologists (or intellectuals)—still dream of the authentic and “natural”. It is very easy to spot ethnocentrism in the matter and the profound paradoxes in the attitudes from a distance. It is much harder to do away with it in actual work in progress. I am reminded of my own disappointment when Mohammed Ilyas told me that for a long time now he has had Julio Iglesias as his idol, as his own soft and tender voice for all we know might be a strict copy of a lush European tenor. And as Lau notes in regard to tourists:

Without these foreign tourists, he [an elderly musician] believed that this music would have been replaced by the popular songs, karaoke, and dance music imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁴⁸

In conclusion I think that no universal theory on tourism and its cultural effects is possible. I hope this article has demonstrated that even within a very small geographical area like Zanzibar extremely diverse factors are at play, which all in one way or another influence, sometimes profoundly, the conditions of the music and the musicians. Nketia was right in insisting on dialogue: the times in which Western researchers could determine and decide which music is authentic or inauthentic or even good or bad is definitively over.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, however, we also know that the neocolonialism to which Nketia is addressing himself is still present in the economic world order in which the music market acts, and increasingly judges what is good or bad.

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⁴⁸ Lau 1998, p. 129.

⁴⁹ Nketia 1991, p. 93.

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Yvonne Vera, *Under the Tongue*. Cover design Mary Clare Foa, Baobab Books, Harare , 1996.

In Search of Psychological Worlds On Yvonne Vera's and Chenjerai Hove's Portrayal of Women

Carita Backström

Three women, Mazvita, Marita and Janifa, are the heroines of this study. They are the creation of two Zimbabwean novelists; Chenjerai Hove, a celebrator of peasant fortitude, and Yvonne Vera, a fearless exposé of things hidden and taboo. The incentive to compare them was an interview in Uppsala in 1998, when Yvonne Vera commented on her writing in the following manner, beginning with her first novel *Nehanda*:

... Nehanda is a historical character who led the first rebellion against the British through a certain spiritual, mythical imagination, which she used to embrace the people and to make them resist that initial violence that had visited them. And my interest was: how did her mind work and what made it possible in the consciousness of this precolonial African people to accept what she had to say under the terms that she proposed it, which was very mythical, very spiritual, very religious, very imaginative, just pure imagination. That book *Nehanda* allowed me to make a break from the very physical, and after that you will find that the books I write are very much explorations of internal, psychological worlds and intimate portrayals of these characters. And this is something which I always thought was lacking in African writing, that we are not taking the internal worlds of our characters seriously, that we are not exploring that, and I have not read a book that really took seriously the psychological profile of an African character.¹

This provoked me, and names of other African writers instantly crossed my mind; Nuruddin Farah, Bessie Head, Chenjerai Hove. "But what about Hove and the women in *Bones*?" I asked, (I mentioned women as Yvonne Vera's protagonists are all women) and Yvonne Vera answered:

He does do that in the sense that he explores the spirit of the land. But certainly the main thrust of the book is more socially spread to a wider social world, whereas to focus on one individual and finding the complete world in his/her psychology is something, which I have not found to sustain a complete narrative. I never have more than four characters in my novels and we see the entire world through the usually violent experience one character has endured and then we try to understand how the character got to that moment.²

Time was short so I dropped the subject, which will now be the theme of my reflections. My intention is not to enter into a dispute with Vera, but to take her opinion as a starting point for a comparison between the two writers.

¹ Interview with Yvonne Vera 12.2.1998.

² Ibid.

Maybe there is a difference which I have not noticed? And if so, does it originate in a difference between how they relate to the individual versus the collective, or the modern versus the traditional and to what Vera here calls “the spirit of the land”?

My focus will be on the main character in Vera’s *Without a Name* and the two main characters in Hove’s *Bones*, and I will read the texts with the help of Milan Kundera’s ideas about the art of the novel.³ It so happens that Kundera is one of Vera’s favourite writers, “because he also gets quite philosophical, almost essayistic, within the novel, and I like that, and do pause in my own writing and think about something.”⁴ Vera talks about Kundera’s fiction, not his theoretical comments on it, and I should add that I use his concepts as independent tools, separated from his writing. Kundera does call his comments a practitioner’s confession, not a theoretical statement. The question thus reads: how do these two writers, Yvonne Vera and Chenjerai Hove, explore the internal, psychological worlds of their characters?

THE STORY

The story of Mazvita, the protagonist in Vera’s *Without a Name*, is shocking and heartrending. A girl from the village comes to town, she has been raped, she is fear stricken by the war and she is leaving a good and caring man behind. She is picked up by a careless young chap, Joel, and lives with him until it becomes evident that she is pregnant and bears a child (the identity of the father is not clear). Joel tells her to leave, and in desperation she strangles the baby and leaves the city in order to bury the dead child in her native village.

Chenjerai Hove in *Bones* tells the story of a woman, Marita, who goes to the city to find out what has become of her son who has disappeared with the freedom fighters. She is killed in the city, how and why we don’t know, but it is implied that she is murdered by some state agencies. Janifa, her prospective daughter-in-law, mourns her. When Marita has disappeared Janifa is raped by a man who originally lusted for Marita, and as a consequence Janifa goes insane. In the end Marita’s son, who all through the novel has been present only in the minds of the women, returns but Janifa refuses to go with him.

THE STAGE

The two novels are set at the same time, the time of the liberation wars in the 1970s, and in the same place, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe between village and town. They are of the same chronotope to use Bachtin’s term.⁵ The chronotope unites space and time into a compressed whole, like a stage set for a performance. Kundera uses the stage as a metaphor to illustrate his relationship as a writer to historical reality. He works as a stage designer building an abstract set with a few elements that are necessary for the action. “Of the historical circumstances, I keep only those that create a revelatory existential situation for my charac-

³ Kundera 1988.

⁴ Interview with Yvonne Vera 12.2.1998.

⁵ Bachtin 1988.

ters.”⁶ This is very close to the way Vera and Hove work. There is a distinct social and historical setting, but no reconstruction of historical events.

In *Without a Name* the year is mentioned, 1977. “Freedom was skin deep but joyous and tantalising.”⁷ Freedom is an important word for Mazvita. But it is also—naturally—part of the liberation war. In a few evocative pictures Vera takes the reader into this year of hopes: “The war was articulated in masks of dream and escape. It found expression in terror and courtship, in an excited sensuality, in figures speechless and dead. Guns soared the sky with black smoke.”⁸ Because of the war Mazvita has left her native village and come to the city. In the village people are scared, they feel the war everywhere, but it is rumoured that freedom has already reached the city. In addition Mazvita has a secret. She has been raped, possibly by a freedom fighter, and she tries to suppress the memory by keeping silent, by keeping it “under the tongue” like Zhizha in Vera’s third novel who hides her shameful secret, that of being the victim of incest. Mazvita connects the rape with the war and the village: “He had never been inside her. She connected him only to the land.”⁹

The action in *Bones* takes place at about the same time, maybe some years earlier, but the only thing we are told about the war is that there are “flying machines” and freedom fighters who on the one hand talk and sing a lot, on the other are rumoured to do very bad things like eating their own parents, and that in the city there is a list with the names of those who died fighting in Mozambique. In both novels the chronotope is characterised by a duality: village-city, tradition-modernity, but in *Without a Name* the city is front stage, in *Bones* it is backstage.

For Mazvita the city is predominately the symbol of freedom and modernity. The city is unapologetic, on time, busy and purposeful. Men and women wear trousers, old people have no place in the city. “Perhaps no one ever lived here long enough to be toothless. If you had no teeth here, you had no life. That much was clear.”¹⁰ There is an adventurous and jazzy tone to Vera’s description, Mazvita embraces the city, but in the end, after her terrible deed, she returns to her village to bury her child. The village is burnt down but Mazvita hears the voices she wanted to leave and forget, she “walks in gentle footsteps that lead her to the place of her beginning.”¹¹

In *Bones* Marita travels to the city to find out whether her son is dead or alive. She goes alone although it is well known that the city is a dangerous and sinful place where people lose their identity, and she is eventually killed in the city. “The city is like the throat of a crocodile; it swallows both the dirty and the clean.”¹² The village, by contrast, is pictured with great love and sensuality, despite the hard work Marita and the others have to do on the farm of the white man.

⁶ Kundera 1988, p. 36.

⁷ Vera 1996, p. 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹² Hove 1990, p. 11.

... soon I had to go to the forest to herd cattle and goats, running after the warm traces of cowdung smoking in the plains or mixed up in the water that I used to wash. Marita, the growling of the bull's stomach was something to me. I used to watch the cattle chewing lazily under the shade of the musuma trees, chewing as if to show me that I was not able to enjoy what they enjoyed.¹³

In both novels the village embodies the collective and the tradition while the city embodies freedom, individuality and anonymity.

BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

The main task of the novel, according to Kundera, is to grasp the self and make it come alive. The self lives not in a void but in the world. "Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell" says Kundera, referring to Heidegger's formula *in-der-Welt-sein*.¹⁴ "The world is part of man, it is his dimension, and as the world changes existence *in-der-Welt-sein* changes as well."¹⁵ In Kundera's novels history is very much present. But it is important to keep in mind, says Kundera, that there are two kinds of novels and they should not be confused: "there is on the one hand the novel that examines *the historical dimension of human existence*, and on the other the novel that is *the illustration of a historical situation*, the description of a society at a given moment, a novelised historiography."¹⁶ Kundera does not give much for the second category, which in his opinion does not focus on the central task of the novel; to explore the self. Historians write the history of society, not of human individuals, which is the task of the novel writer. Interestingly enough Vera seems to hold exactly the same view. In *Nehanda* she talks about "the calabash, which holds memories of the future" and elaborating on how we experience time and ruptures in history in my interview she said:

So *Nehanda* becomes the medium through which we are able to understand more about that conceptualisation of both history and time. The colonisation itself was a historical moment, but I wanted to say that the historical moment was not 1896–97, the historical moment was the transformation of the knowledge of experiencing time, history, the landscape.¹⁷

According to Kundera: "To apprehend the self in my novels means to grasp the essence of its existential problem. To grasp its *existential code*."¹⁸ This is the central thesis in Kundera's aesthetics. The fictional character is an experimental self, the theme of the novel a research into existence. The novel has at all times focused on the enigmatic self. A writer creates a fictional character and has to answer the question "what is the self?" how can it be made tangible, made flesh and blood? Writing *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Kundera realised that the code of every character consisted of a few key words such as (for

¹³ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴ Kundera 1988, p. 35.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷ Interview with Yvonne Vera 12.2.1998.

¹⁸ Kundera 1988, p. 29.

Tereza) body, soul, vertigo, weakness, idyll, Paradise. “This existential code is not *examined in abstracto*; it reveals itself progressively in the action, in situations.”¹⁹

This is Kundera’s strategy to surmount the heavy burden of psychological realism which dictates that the reader should be given as many facts as possible about the characters including their background because that is allegedly where you find the causes of their present behaviour.

MAZVITA

What would Mazvita’s key words be? I suggest freedom, loneliness, body and fragility as the main ones.

When we first meet Mazvita she stands in glaring heat by a fiercely red bus. She stands near but outside the bus shelter, she stands *alone*. We are not given any facts about her person, her age, looks etc. Instead we get a gripping description of her inner state of mind, through some almost surrealist physical details: there is a lump growing on the side of her neck, her body leans to the left, her saliva has settled to a huge lump in her throat. Her skin is peeling off, parting pitilessly from her body, the lump is growing, and she hears a faint dying cry from it.

This scene which opens the story is actually the end of it; Mazvita on her way back to the village, the dead child on her back. We don’t know what the lump and the peeling skin are supposed to mean, but we are thrown right into the existential anguish of Mazvita. This is the technique Vera uses all through the novel; picturing mental conditions through the body, through drastic physical images; a broken back, splintered bones, blindness. She is not describing Mazvita’s physical appearance in any naturalistic manner, but she makes her body, the way it is used, the central metaphor for her tragedy.

Gradually we get some glimpses of her life. She has left her native village, fleeing from the unspeakable, the rape, fearing the war. She has lived with a man, Nyenedzi, who works on a tobacco farm and belongs to the land.

Land is birth and death. If we agree that the land has forgotten us, then we agree to be dead. (...) He called upon the land to give to him this woman that he cared for. He could not leave the land and be a man.(...) The woman rose above the land and scorned its slow promises, its intermittent loyalties. She had such a will, and he knew that he could not equal her passion for beginnings.²⁰

Mazvita is ambitious, she wants to discover new things, she must move on. “Mazvita had no fear of departures”—that is the starting point for her, which later turns into disappointment and lost illusions: “Mazvita knew about departures because she had mistaken them for beginnings.”²¹ She goes to the city full of hope, completely open to its possibilities. She is immediately picked up by an urban guy, Joel, who offers her a ride on his bicycle. This bicycle ride is again a vivid and metaphorical image of modernity and *freedom*:

¹⁹ Kundera 1988, p. 30.

²⁰ Vera 1996, pp. 33 and 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

The whole exercise was free, pleasurable, careless and uncaring. A public display. She was so involved with her particular version of freedom she did not see that no one noticed her. Ornate yellow blooms kept her memory hopeful. Then she turned a corner and met another woman sitting just like her, and she wanted to wave at their mutual freedom. But she needed both hands to hold onto the seat if she was to remain stable, so she hesitated, and in any case, when she looked at the woman, there was no sign of recognition or sharing.²²

In the village Mazvita would have been seen, in the city she is anonymous, *without a name*. This is the great existential promise as well as danger.

Mazvita's final surrender comes when she bears a child, Joel throws her out and she decides to murder the child. The stage is now set for a Greek tragedy: Mazvita has broken the laws of tradition and of the ancestral gods, she is acting not of her own will, she fulfils her tragic destiny. Vera explicitly states this: "she was not sure that the decision had been entirely her own."²³ But unlike the Greek tragedians Vera compels the audience to witness the deed, how she strangles the baby with Joel's tie, an almost unbearable description, which I will come back to. Equally moving is the scene where Mazvita buys an apron to carry the dead baby on her back, and hides in a shabby alley to wrap the child in it:

She dipped a sole finger into her mouth then passed it gently over the child. She rested the finger shakingly on the child and remembered. The past came to her in rapid waves that made her heave the child forward, away from her, in a deep and uncontrollable motion of rejection. Her arms shook and she held the child still, like flame. She returned the baby slowly to her stomach and touched again the child's head with a wet finger. She pressed gently the top of the child's head, murmured softly, cooingly. She whispered to the child to close its eyes, whispered in elegant dying lullaby, then she crumbled suddenly to the unwelcoming ground. Mazvita fell hard on the ground. Knees collapsed but she held tightly to the baby, pulling it close to her breast. She fell backward into the mounds of filth and decay and stale water. The moment filled her arms and she held tightly. Pigeons clamoured out of their enclaves. Mazvita clutched the baby, cried steadily, silently, curled her legs inward. ... The child's body curved inward, as though its back was broken. Mazvita opened the apron wide. She carefully spread the apron over the crook of her right leg. She performed the task deliberately, lingering over each motion, smoothing the cloth into a shiny evenness.²⁴

At this point in the story we do not actually know that the child is dead, but again, through a concrete act, a physical *gestus*, we plunge deep into Mazvita's emotional state of mind, into the *fragility* of her existence. The chapter ends with the words: "Milk poured from her breasts. It fell in soured lumps."²⁵

²² Ibid., p. 49.

²³ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

MARITA

The central character in Hove's *Bones* is Marita, "mother with a terrorist for a son". Her key words could be sacrifice, longing and independence. This is how Marita is introduced:

She asked me to read the letter for her again today, Marita, every day she comes to me, all pleading 'Janifa, read the letter again for me, please read it, read it all the time for me if you have the strength'.²⁶

This pleading, this *longing*, is repeated all through the book, to the very last sentence. Marita is the longing mother. In a sense she *sacrifices* her life for her son. First she is tortured almost to death by security forces that want information about her son, then she is killed when looking for him in the city.

Marita belongs to the land, like Nyenedzi, she is a farm labourer, her back broken by the hard work, "the cloth on her head is torn and soiled with mud. She has carried the water-pot from the well for a long time. The cloth helps her head not to crack."²⁷ But inside that head she objects to the way the world around her is going. She tells Janifa that she should be in school in order not to end up "in the same grave that will swallow your mother and me",²⁸ and she warns her of masculine arrogance:

Did your mother not say that your grandfather died fighting a war started by a man called Hikila who wanted to rule the whole earth? Think of that, a man who does not even know how to cook for himself wants to rule the whole earth. That is what men are like. They look at their things erect in front of them and they think they are kings. They do not know that it is just desire shooting out of them, nothing else. So child, you do what you can with the weaknesses of men, but do not let them play around with your body. It is your last property, you will die with it.²⁹

In contrast to the general understanding of the traditional woman, she has a wisdom which transcends notions like tradition and modernity, and an individual and *independent* mind even though she belongs to the sphere of collectivity.

When interrogated by the freedom fighters about the white *baas* she refuses to denounce him because he also has a mother who will mourn him. She labours for the white man, but he is not an authority to be afraid of: "one day we will also learn that the white man is like us, if you prick him with a thorn in his buttocks, he will cry for his mother like anybody else."³⁰

JANIFA

Janifa's key words could be abandonment and revolt. She is *abandoned* first by her lover, Marita's son, who goes off to fight, then by Marita, who goes off to find out about the son. The loss is great:

²⁶ Hove 1990, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 27–28.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

Now that you are dead, Marita, who will tell me stories of lizards courting the girl in the next village, and tortoises going hunting for elephant and buffalo? The whole forest was full of things talking to each other when you were alive, Marita. But all I have to do now is stare at the sky with your wounded face in my heart. Yes, I feel the warmth of the cowdung on my feet, but can that remove wells of tears that come out of my eyes every day?³¹

Janifa is alone, and she has nobody to share her stories with, she must (I again use Vera's expression) keep them under the tongue and talk about them only in inner monologues and memories. She is also abandoned—and perhaps betrayed—by her own mother who does not understand her sorrow. The mother wants her to marry to bring cattle to the home, and when Janifa retires into madness, after she has been raped, possibly with the mother's tacit consent, the mother is remote and pathetic.

But Janifa is not only a victim and a prisoner in “the house where people with bad heads are kept”; she is also a *rebel*. She insists on her own free will and refuses to follow the will of her mother, whom she despises:

Marita, it is sunset now, I hear the bones inside me creaking with the spirit of walking which is in me. They creak like the ribs of an old scotch-cart without grease. But I have to walk on until I can see my mother. I want to see her so that I can spit in her face before I leave her.³²

She also refuses to follow the son, her teenage lover, when he returns, she insists on freeing herself:

Then the keepers of this place will come and say. ... We will remove the chains soon when we know you are well. ... But I will take the broken chains with my own hands and say. ... Do not worry yourselves, I have already removed them myself. I have been removing them from my heart for many years, now my legs and hands are free because the mountains and the rivers I saw with my own eyes could not fail to remove all the chains of this place. ... Then I will go without waiting for them to say go.³³

GREEK HEROINES

In an essay called “Re-Possessions. Inheritance and Independence in Chenjeraj Hove's *Bones* and Tsitsi Dangarambga's *Nervous Conditions*” Caroline Rooney analyses Marita and Janifa (and a third person called the Unknown Woman who tries to save Marita's body from an anonymous grave in the city) as Antigone figures “compelled to repeat a defiant demand and sacrificial destiny”, or “compelled to take up an unintentionally self-destructive role in an on-going drama.”³⁴

Briefly: Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, insists on burying her brother, who died in battle against his native Thebes, a burial which Creon, the King of

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² Ibid., pp. 96–97.

³³ Ibid., p. 113.

³⁴ Rooney 1995, p. 121.

Thebes, forbids, the penalty for anybody trying to do so being stoning to death in the public square. Antigone defies him:

I will bury him myself.
And even if I die in the act, that death will be a glory.
I will lie with the one I loved and loved by him –
an outrage sacred to the gods! I have longer
to please the dead than please the living here:
in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever.³⁵

In *Bones* the forces of power are more diffuse—we live in a different chronotope than that of the Greek tragedies, or, the historical dimension of the human existence is different. But Marita and the Unknown Woman defy those forces just as bravely as did Antigone in order to do the right thing in the face of death.

Rooney writes about the three women in *Bones* that they are “regarded as social pariahs, associated with what is dangerous and taboo. Marita and Janifa are treated as witches, or contaminated women, in their inability or refusal to conceive children and in their avoidance or rejection of the desires or demands of men.”³⁶ In a similar way Mazvita acts counter to the way a woman should act.

Rooney also refers to a historical person, Nehanda, the spirit medium and agitator in the first uprising against the colonisers in Rhodesia in 1897 (and the heroine in Vera’s novel *Nehanda*, whom Rooney strangely enough does not mention), and asks if Marita and Janifa can be seen as “discarded mediums who continue to preserve the now civilly-suppressed fighting spirit and ‘unwritten sacred laws’ of the ancestors.”³⁷

Marita acts consciously, and—like Antigone—appears to know just what she is doing, whereas with Janifa it is different, she does not know what possesses her, what precisely makes her so rebellious and restless. Caroline Rooney comes up with different interpretations of Janifa’s behaviour. By referring to psychoanalytic theory, (Marie Cardinale and Hélène Cixous among others) Rooney concludes that Janifa is possessed by Marita’s spirit or by evil spirits, she is a sorceress, and a “newly born woman”.³⁸

This broad and interesting discussion could probably also be applied to Mazvita, although I find it difficult to regard her as a medium. What is obvious is the similarity between the two novels as regards the conflict between the law of the men in power and the law of ancient tradition, the theme of revolt.

Having read Rooney I thought: what about *Without a Name*, is there a Greek Mazvita? The answer is obvious: *Medea*, the first text written on the theme of infanticide. Briefly, Medea was the wife of Jason, whom she helps to power by hideous acts, whereupon Jason deserts her for another woman, the daughter of Creon. In rage and desperation she kills their two children (as well as the intruding woman).

³⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 128.

³⁶ Rooney 1995, p. 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

Now, Medea's reasons differ from Mazvita's, they have more to do with power and revenge, but the innermost feelings and how they are expressed—the existential dimension—are very similar. Both women are strangers; Medea a Barbarian, and *alone* in the Greek Corinth, Mazvita a country girl who has left *her* native village and come to the city. In the face of abandonment they resort to this most unnatural of deeds. Medea:

Why, children, do you look upon me with your eyes?
Why do you smile so sweetly that last smile of all?
Oh, Oh, what can I do? My spirit has gone from me,
(...)
Oh, arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back
From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.
Oh, come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the sword,
Take it, step forward, to this bitter starting point,
And do not be a coward, do not think of them,
How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just for
This one short day be forgetful of your children,
Afterward weep; for even though you killed them,
They were very dear—Oh, I am an unhappy woman!³⁹

And Mazvita:

She paused as though to comfort the child, touched it with one smooth gaze, as though to protect it. The child had deep bottomless eyes. She longed to close the eyes of her child, slowly and gently. ... Her determination was amazing. She stood outside her desire, outside herself. She stood with her head turned away from this ceremony of her freedom, from this ritual of separation. ... She took a black tie from a rack in a corner of the room and dropped it over the child's neck. She did not pause. She claimed her dream and her freedom. She was winged and passionate. She drew the bottom end of the tie across the baby's neck. She pulled at the cloth while the baby remained blinded and trusting. She strained hard and confidently though this pulling choked her and blinded her and broke her back. ... She was responsible for some horrible and irreversible truth concerning her actions. She held her breath tight, within her chest. There was a burning on her tongue. ... She did not want to think of her child. She thought of the child.⁴⁰

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAND

According to Vera, Hove “explores the spirit of the land”. This is obviously true. His stage is the village, his characters toil on the white man's land:

Yes, this is Manyepo's soil. Marita will be here all the time. She is part of Manyepo's soil. She works it. She eats it. She breathes it. She feels it in her inside.⁴¹

This does not only mean that Marita is a villein to the white man, Manyepo, but also that the soil is the very basis of existence. We find the same basic attitude in Nyenyedzi in *Without a Name*:

³⁹ Euripides, *Medea*, pp. 94–95 and 101.

⁴⁰ Vera 1996, pp. 95–97.

⁴¹ Hove 1990, p. 10.

Have you seen them (the white people) working on the land as we do? They are strangers to the land. Our feet own the land much more than the claims of their mouths, much more than the claims of their fingers. The land recognises only those who work upon it. It knows our breath and our sweat. (...) Without the land there is no day or night, there is no dream. The land defines our unities. There is no prayer that reaches our ancestors without blessing from the land.⁴²

Mazvita puts this loyalty to the land, as a given fact without a possibility of change, into question:

What you say about the land is true, but does this truth belong equally to all of us? (...) She had loved the land, saw it through passionate and intense moments of freedom which it delivered to her wholly and specially. If it yielded crop, then it could also free her.⁴³

When Mazvita goes off to town it is with this consciously emancipatory intention whereas Marita does it driven by maternal love. This, together with the stage settings of the two novels, seems to place them on the axis rural-urban, placing *Bones* at the rural and implied traditional, *Without a Name* at the urban, implied modern end.

It seems to me that this is a slightly artificial opposition. By discussing an article by Flora Veit-Wild I hope to modify the dichotomy. The article bears the ironic title '*Dances with Bones*'. *Hove's Romanticised Africa*. Veit-Wild argues that *Bones* became a cult book in Europe because it cultivates an exotic and romanticised image of Africa, a fashion reminiscent of Kevin Kostner's very successful film *Dances with Wolves*. The argument provoked me as I could not exclude the possibility that my liking for the book had to do with such suspect qualities, that I was one of those "who like to indulge in the simple, 'authentic' life of the natives in order to escape from their own world of hyper-civilisation."⁴⁴

I recalled my first, unanalytical reading of the novel many years ago, where the predominant feeling was one of surprise: how could these farm labourers from an African village feel so close and so interesting? My reaction was similar to how I felt when reading the novels of the Swedish writer Sara Lidman, situated in the Nordic woods, and similar to how Sara Lidman felt reading the Icelandic writer Haldor Laxness: "He touches upon a grey reality—and instantly it gleams heavenly and screams demonically. Constantly he shows us how full of meaning life is, even in its most meagre and crooked forms, how the wittiness of the peasant is as funny as the joke of the king."⁴⁵ Having now reread *Bones* I still think that the characters are vivid, interesting and far from romanticised.

Veit-Wild also writes that: "his (Hove's) concepts not only mystify African tradition, culture and history but also distract attention from specific social

⁴² Vera 1996, pp. 32–33.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 33–34.

⁴⁴ Veit-Wild 1993, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Interview with Sara Lidman in Holm, 1998, p. 140.

issues in postcolonial Africa.”⁴⁶ Which social issues Hove neglects are not mentioned. She also argues that Hove is likewise mystifying and simplifying the liberation war. She puts forward other writers like Alexander Kanengoni and Charles Samupindi who question the guerrilla’s infallibility and explain the frictions inside the liberation movement, Samupindi even making the events of the war “very real by including well-known political and military leaders.”⁴⁷

It seems to me that Veit-Wild simply demands a different kind of novel, namely *the illustration of a historical situation* and *not the historical dimension of human existence*, to use Kundera’s categories. In my opinion names of leaders or faction conflicts are completely irrelevant to the theme of *Bones*, but the rumours about the freedom fighters, good *and* bad are relevant (Veit-Wild quotes only the good, trying through this to prove that Hove is mythologising the guerrillas). This is a story about how Marita and Janifa are influenced by the war, not a story about the war.

Even more difficult to understand is the conclusion Veit-Wild draws from the comparison between Charles Mungoshi and Hove. Mungoshi, she states, depicts the village community as sick: “individual family members are unable to communicate with each other, their physical distortion reflect their psychological dilemma.” Hove ignores the fundamental feelings of rupture, Veit-Wild writes.⁴⁸ One wonders whether she has noticed at all the fundamental rupture between Janifa and her mother, where Janifa scorns her mother who “crawls away like an injured cockroach”, and how she does not even want to know where her mother’s place of death will be. As far as I can understand an extremely radical position to be taken by a daughter.

Veit-Wild’s next point has to do with language and is more complicated:

... Hove uses the notion of collective memory to fuse the fragmented, narrative voices into one collective, communal voice. The linguistic and stylistic basis for this fusion is the communal idiom that holds everything together. Hove’s internationally acclaimed “Africanised” English is a fairly literal translation of Shona sentence structure, proverbs, terminology, and imagery. All voices share this idiom: an idiom which carries the tradition and perceptions of their people, creating out of many apparently separate mouths one communal and collective voice.⁴⁹

The “Africanisation” does not seem problematic to me; this is what many writers with colonised languages do: Nuruddin Farah, Derek Walcott, Partick Chamoiseau. This is how Hove himself explains his language: “Shona is actually a language which is mainly oral; to write it is to kill it, if you can put it that way.”⁵⁰ He goes on to talk about his mother who was a great storyteller and then adds:

Shona is a language of performance, as opposed to the English language which over the years has been dulled to a certain death. Shona is also a language,

⁴⁶ Veit-Wild 1993, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵⁰ Interview with Chenjerai Hove in Helsinki 19.6.1993.

which argues. If you listen to Shona elders they argue in images, they don't argue in abstractions, like you would do in the English language. So I said to myself: let me do this experiment where I have to force the English language to tell a story in imagery, the same way that I find in the mother tongue. ... The interaction between these two languages, that grey area where they merge, and where they interfere with the thought patterns of each other, the system of arranging ideas, that becomes very, very interesting.⁵¹

And Yvonne Vera, when I asked about the modernistic, "difficult" language in *Under the Tongue* said: "People love it. They love it when you talk in images; it is how we traditionally speak. It can seem very modern, but in reality it is traditional."⁵²

This approach to language as a creative possibility, is not only a necessity for any writer with a colonial language. It can also be found in less forced conditions. Sara Lidman for instance creates her "Missenträsk village language"⁵³ so that the dialect her characters speak also gives colour and form to the writer's voice. "The span of the Lidman style—literary and rustic, archaic and modern, prophetic and cheeky—is unthinkable without the combination of homecoming and modernism."⁵⁴

Veit-Wild further argues that Hove's relentless use of "African" idiom propounds an "unquestioning sense of unity with the land and with tradition."⁵⁵ She claims that Hove does not pay tribute to the changes in society, which reflect in urban slang, that his "Africanised" English appears artificial, a pose.⁵⁶ If this is so it can certainly be a problem both for the Zimbabwean reader who finds the text out of touch with reality, and for the foreigner who mistakes it for "authentic". The language has an archaic ring, there is no doubt about that. On the other hand the whole novel reads as a prose-poem (which Veit-Wild does acknowledge),⁵⁷ and the narrative technique is such that one does not expect realistic speech. It is interesting to see what Yvonne Vera has to say about Hove's language:

YV: I like the very African idiom in his writing, which is also an interesting exploration of language.

CB: African idiom, what is that? Is there something like African writing?

YV: Yes I am sure. Any writing that has been born out of an identity must as a consequence carry the characteristics of that identity which it has emerged out of. Most often when people talk about an African form of writing they are referring to particular descriptions, maybe the use of proverbs, or the use of a particular sentence structure—in English, but somehow emerging out of the writing, a certain orality where the language seems spoken more than written.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with Yvonne Vera in Uppsala 12.2.1998.

⁵³ Missenträsk is the small village in northern Sweden where Sara Lidman lives, and which is the place of inspiration behind her fiction.

⁵⁴ Holm 1998, p. 95.

⁵⁵ Veit-Wild 1993, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

Thus certain characteristics begin to emerge as coming from a particular environment and background which we might recognise as African ... but this is not saying that it is a uniform world.⁵⁸

A GRAIN OF SAND

My reading of the two Zimbabwean novels has taken me far in time and space; to ancient Greece and the Swedish woods. I have roamed and associated freely and put more stress on the existential dimension than on the historical one in Kundera's definition. The reason is simple; it has to do with the universalism which is embedded in good literature. Or as Hove puts it:

My understanding of a work of art is that it must be very particular in order to be universal. It must talk about a grain of sand in a village or a street, and when that grain of sand is depicted well it becomes everybody's experience, an experience that makes us understand the universe. I think human experience basically goes through certain similar streams all over the world. When all is said and done, human beings are probably the same in their uniqueness.⁵⁹

I now return to my original question: is there a difference in how Vera and Hove explore the internal, psychological world of their characters? As I read the texts the answer seems to be "no". But I hasten to add a few concluding comments.

The narrative voice of the two writers differs. Vera, who explicitly wants to "break away from the physical" (possibly meaning naturalistic) in order to explore the internal, psychological and intimate, uses sensual, bodily images to reach her goal. In her text the body becomes language and language body. Her focus is on one person and we see the world through her. It is convincing and moving and very 'much at the present'.

Hove's characters are more "articulate", they address each other in original forms of inner monologues. Thus Marita's story is "told" by different persons, and what she herself says about other people reveals her own inner qualities. This structure is both oral and modernistic and potentially many-voiced. However, as we saw in Veit-Wild's critical remarks concerning Hove's Africanised idiom it is in fact a collective, communal voice that we hear. Here I see a significant difference between Hove and Vera. The communal voice, the collective memory, comes close to what Bakhtin calls the "folklore time", a time which grows in the soil and bears fruit, a cyclic time where the individual is part of the collective. This chronotope is undoubtedly present in *Bones* and does locate the novel to the sphere of tradition. But not entirely so. I see Hove's "communal voice" as kin to that of Sara Lidman, a "combination of homecoming and modernism".

It seems to me that our understanding of the opposition tradition-modernity is too categorical and prejudiced. Because Marita is the bearer of traditional knowledge about nature and life in the village, we tend to see her only as a mouthpiece of tradition. But as I have tried to show both her thoughts and

⁵⁸ Interview with Yvonne Vera in Uppsala 12.2.1998.

⁵⁹ Interview with Chenjerai Hove in Helsinki 19.3.1993.

her actions are such that they can be labelled neither as solely traditional nor solely modern, they transcend such categories. In the same way Mazvita could be regarded primarily as a modern woman, breaking away from tradition, but looking closer at her feelings, the way she acts and finally returns to the village—again, she transcends the categories. These women are traditional and modern, they are of the land but they know about departures.

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A scene from the film "Keïta-l'heritage du griot" by Dani Kouyaté.

Africa's Modern Cinematic Griots Oral Tradition and West African Cinema

Eva Jørholt

In 1999, I had the pleasure of attending the 23rd World Film Festival in Montreal as a member of the International Film Critics' (Fipresci) jury. For eleven days, a total of more than four hundred films from all over the world were screened within various sections of the festival, but sub-Saharan Africa was represented with only one film, *La Genèse* by the Malian director Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Our jury was composed of eight film critics from all continents—except Africa. Most of the jury members (who came from Australia, Singapore, India, Russia, Turkey, Argentina, Canada, and Denmark) were regulars at the world's most important film festivals. But with the exception of the Australian critic who had once done an interview for Australian radio with an African filmmaker, the rest of my jury colleagues knew next to nothing about African cinema.

Why this poor representation of African cinema at an international World Film Festival? And why, after almost forty years of existence, do films from sub-Saharan Africa still remain largely *terra incognita* even to otherwise highly qualified film critics familiar with at least all the important films produced in the rest of the world? Do African films fail to live up to some international standard of quality?

On the one hand, it is true that sub-Saharan African cinema is faced with severe financial and infrastructural problems which make it significantly more difficult for an African director than for a filmmaker from, say, Europe or North America to make a technically and aesthetically "flawless" film. But considering both the quite amazing amount of technically and aesthetically poor films which had actually been admitted to the Montreal film festival, and the exquisite technical quality of some African films, this is not an acceptable answer. On the other hand, however, it may be argued that many African films, especially from Francophone West Africa, do in fact fail to meet some more or less unspoken "international" standards for cinematic narration. Their narratives obey "rules" that are different from Western narrational procedures—rules or practices which, as I shall argue in the following pages, are deeply rooted in oral tradition. Not all West African film narratives are of course "other" in this sense, but I find it very important to stress that if many of them do not narrate according to "standard" international dramaturgical procedures, it is not (or at least not necessarily) because they are of inferior quality but rather because they simply evade the common international criteria for discerning good and bad narratives. They speak from another platform.

Whenever an occasional West African film does find its way to European or North American theatrical distribution or, more frequently, to the special-

ised festival circuits outside Africa, it is often met with polite interest by Western critics who welcome the fact that it presents other aspects of Africa than the usual mass-mediated images of a continent under the sway of civil wars, drought, floods, hunger, AIDS, etc. etc. But even though they may also praise the exotic otherness of the imagery, European and American critics usually complain that the African directors do not (yet) master the art of telling a story in moving images and sound.

In this article, I shall concentrate on the cinema of the former French colonies of West Africa, partly because the most important production of fiction films in sub-Saharan Africa is found in this region, but also because the various cultures of Francophone West Africa display certain similarities which will allow me to treat them in somewhat general terms.

West African cinema was born shortly after independence in the 1960s. It is, therefore, relatively young compared to European and North American cinema which celebrated its first 100 years of existence in the mid-1990s. This difference of age, however, does not explain the “otherness” of West African narration in film. Many West African directors have attended European film schools and are therefore quite familiar with the standard international film “grammar”. And even among those filmmakers who have not been educated in Europe, you will find that the majority—in particular the younger, urban generation—have been brought up on an audiovisual diet of American action films and French and American television programmes.

To maintain that West African directors in general do not know how to tell a story in film is therefore quite misleading. It is but an ethnocentric judgement masquerading as a universal truth about the “correct” narrative structure of films. In fact, many West African directors very consciously distance themselves from this international standard for cinematic narration, preferring to base their own film narratives on structures derived from oral tradition. So, if West African cinema is still quite young, its narrational practices go back to a very old storytelling tradition. And, as Walter J. Ong has poignantly demonstrated, the narrational principles of primary oral cultures (i.e. cultures “totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print”¹) differ notably from those governing storytelling in literate cultures.

It would, of course, be highly erroneous to think of the various cultures of modern West Africa as primarily oral in a strict sense. As far as I know, all the directors concerned in this study are literate, but although alphabetisation programmes are being carried out in many rural areas, a large percentage of the inhabitants of West Africa remain unable to read and write. What Ong calls “the mindset of primary orality” is therefore still quite prominent in West Africa. This, of course, does not mean that the films produced in the region will necessarily be indebted to oral tradition, but for various reasons (e.g., more or less unconscious residues of oral culture, the director’s personal background and/or sensibility, his wish to reach an illiterate audience, or a desire to break with non-African story formats), most of them have in fact adopted some of the basic principles of oral narration.

¹ Ong 1982, p. 11.

I am well aware that caution should always be exercised whenever and wherever you try to generalise. As far as the cinema is concerned, it must therefore immediately be stated that there are West African directors—especially within the younger generation—who are more interested in joining the international mainstream “club” than in embracing some African otherness.

Nevertheless, it is precisely the “otherness” aspect of West African cinema which will be at the centre of this article. Not because the films based on structures and principles derived from the oral storytelling tradition are any better or more dignified than those which are not. But to a Western film scholar like myself, they are infinitely more interesting exactly because of this otherness which questions the alleged “naturalness” of the international standard for cinematic narration. In fact, I would argue that a study of the “otherness” of (most) West African films will put the rules and theories relating to Western canonical film narratives into perspective and help us to a better understanding of their foundations.

My approach will thus be quite ethnocentric but hopefully not in the same prejudiced way as the one taken by those Western film critics who maintain that most African directors do not master cinematic narration. For one thing, as a European, I do not belong to any West African culture myself, and although I do to a large extent rely on statements from West African filmmakers, scholars and sages, my approach cannot help being biased by the unavoidable “epistemological ethnocentrism” of which Valentin Mudimbe speaks in his seminal book *The Invention of Africa*.² My basic theoretical “tools” as a European film scholar are necessarily non-African but, hopefully, the application of these “foreign” theories to films from West Africa will allow me not only to discern the “otherness” of the films with a little more precision but also, on a purely metatheoretical level, to point to the unadmitted ethnocentric and non-universal character of Western film studies.

After a brief historical survey of the issue of tradition and modernity in the debates concerning African culture in general and African cinema in particular, I shall move to a more theoretical platform and discuss the similarities and dissimilarities between the film medium on the one hand and the oral storytelling tradition on the other hand. Eventually, I shall present a variety of West African films demonstrating a few of the numerous ways in which African filmmakers have incorporated oral tradition and/or the traditional storyteller in their film narratives.

BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

A true African cinema can only be built by breaking away from the Western cinema which is extroverted with respect to the essence of black civilisation. The latter must be the source from which our cinema draws the fecund and rich material of its art.

(Basic text from seminar in Ouagadougou 1974)

² Mudimbe 1988, p. 19.

I have modernity inside me. I have the idea of individualism inside me. I have this division inside me. It exists. But I am more than that. I cannot forget my origins. I am forced to move with the system which allows me to make my films and which allows me to see what modernity is, in order to be able to serve my origins and the group more effectively.

(Drissa Touré, interviewed in Ouagadougou 1995)

In April 1974, a string of African filmmakers gathered in Ouagadougou for a seminar on “The Role of the African Filmmaker in Rousing an Awareness of Black Civilisation”. In the “basic text” from the seminar, it is stated that “to serve this ‘civilisation project’, the cinema must avoid at all costs the reproduction of outside cultural models which, alas, are predominant”. In order to construct a “true African cinema”, the filmmakers were called upon to return to the sources and seek the basis for their films in “black civilisation”, i.e. in their African heritage including oral tradition: “The cinema and TV are doubtless the best instruments for expressing the African personality. Thus the former should primarily play an educative role by transmitting the oral tradition of our *griots* or the gestures of our artisans.”³

In 1974, when most West African countries had been independent for only about 14 years, the issues of “re-Africanisation” (Amilcar Cabral) or “the decolonisation of the mind” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o) were prominent on the political and cultural agenda. At the time, African cinema was only at its humble beginnings but it was generally considered a crucial instrument in this overall search for a true African identity. In fact, the statements from the 1974 seminar more or less echo Frantz Fanon’s predictions in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) where he claims that after an initial phase characterised by an adoption of European culture, the African intellectual will resuscitate tradition and set “a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people”.⁴ But while conceding that a cultural return to the sources might be a necessary step in the former colonies’ search for a national identity, Fanon also expressed concern that this embracement of tradition would turn the African intellectual away from the present and the future towards a static past, and that it would ultimately result in a “banal search for exoticism”.

Although Fanon’s predictions may have been a bit too pessimistic, they did not prove altogether wrong. In order to please their European financial backers and a certain European audience’s search for exotic thrills, some West African directors do seem to favour folkloristic films set in more or less archaic rural surroundings. This, however, is more the exception than the rule. But during the 1980s and especially the 1990s, many African filmmakers (in particular the younger generation) have come to feel the initial call for a return to the *echt*-African sources as a kind of straitjacket confining them to a traditional culture which, perhaps, has never been anything but a dreamt-up illusion. In the current context of increasing globalisation and cultural hybridisation, they no longer subscribe to the “commandment” that African “cinema must avoid at all costs the reproduction of outside cultural models”.

³ Djibril Tamsir Niane at the Seminar in Ouagadougou 1974, p. 18.

⁴ Fanon, quoted in Grinker and Steiner (eds), 1997, p. 642.

Like many other African intellectuals, the filmmakers refuse to be “otherness-machines”. In accordance with the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah who claims that “‘African solidarity’ can surely be a vital and enabling rallying cry; but in this world of genders, ethnicities, and classes, of families, religions, and nations, it is as well to remember that there are times when Africa is not the banner we need”,⁵ some of the continent’s most prominent filmmakers no longer want to be categorised as African filmmakers. Without denying their African background, they stress that they are simply filmmakers, like any other filmmaker in the world. Idrissa Ouedraogo, for example, who has made a string of films which have all been quite well received by Western critics (e.g. *Yaaba*, *Tilai*, and *Samba Traoré*), most vehemently refuses to be confined to an “African ghetto”. Reacting to what he sees as African cinema’s heavy load of clichés derived from “so-called tradition”, he states that “my ambition is that my films will be seen in Africa and elsewhere, and that the audience will choose to see them because they are good and not because they are ‘African’.”⁶

Does this change of perspective imply that oral tradition is no longer central to West African filmmaking? In a certain sense it does, meaning that the search for tradition and “truly African roots” is no longer a cultural imperative among the younger generations of West African filmmakers. Today, the filmmakers feel free to seek their inspiration wherever they like, inside as well as outside Africa, in tradition as well as in the global mass media. According to the young Burkinabè filmmaker Dani Kouyaté whom I interviewed at the Panafrican film festival FESPACO in Ouagadougou in 1995, “traditional society often closes in on itself, trying to defend itself”. In his view, “that is not very intelligent, because when you turn your back, you are more apt to receive a blow on the neck”. On the other hand, however, Dani Kouyaté refuses to abandon tradition altogether because, as he says:

... sometimes when you don’t know where you’re heading, you have to return to where you came from in order to think things over before continuing your journey. Today, with all the things happening to her, Africa has trouble finding out which direction to take—modernity, tradition, or some third road. We are not really capable of digesting all these things. We don’t know who we are, and we don’t know where we are going. We are between two things. Between our traditions and modernity.

Like most of his colleagues of the same generation, Dani Kouyaté declares himself ready:

... to affront the challenge, but without forgetting our roots. My reality is a cultural melting pot, and I must assume this reality, this mixture, even in my films.

In one way or the other, most West African films therefore still take their cue from oral tradition, only not in any pristine sense but in an attempt to combine the best of oral tradition with the best of modernity. To those convinced that oral tradition is archaic and static, unable to relate to a changing world, this

⁵ Appiah 1992, p. 180.

⁶ Ouedraogo 1995, p. 338.

state of affairs may sound paradoxical. But although of course related to the past, oral tradition has, in fact, never been either static or inert, and it is precisely this innate dynamism and its capacity to adjust to a changing society that has allowed it to survive through the ages.

The dynamic qualities of oral tradition have not always been acknowledged by film scholars studying the relationship between oral tradition and African cinema. Manthia Diawara, for example, claims that, “in the oral tradition, the [...] griot is conservative and his story helps us to reinforce traditional values.”⁷ Against Diawara, the Danish anthropologist Henrik Overballe argues that the traditional storytellers, “more than any others, have been carriers of innovation and change.”⁸ And according to Jan Vansina who has investigated the oral transmission of African history, oral tradition may be defined as “verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation.”⁹ In other words, you might say that oral tradition functions—and has functioned for hundreds of years—as a bridge between the past, the present, and the future; an accumulation of knowledge obtained in the past which you consult and adjust in the present in order to find your way into the future.

At the threshold of the third millennium, many African filmmakers think of cinema as a modern continuation or extension of oral tradition, and it is not unusual to hear African filmmakers referring to themselves as cinematic *griots*. The etymological origins of the word *griot* are uncertain. Interestingly, however, not least in the context of the debate concerning the relationship between tradition and modernity, *griot* seems to be a frenchified version of the Mande term *geeli* (or *gewel*, *gawlo*, *jali*, *jeliw*, *geseré*, et al., all meaning something like “people of the mouth”) for the traditional West African storyteller. The West Africans, however, have adopted the word as their own and consider the griot a kind of emblem of their traditional culture.

The griots were—and are—considered “storehouses of oral tradition”, “living museums”, and “masters of discourse”. Within oral tradition, they function(ed) as the community’s conscience and memory assuring the coherence and the continuation of the values of the community, from generation to generation.

Today, the traditional griots are facing severe competition from all the new media of communication. But the griots having always been creative artists who adapted their tales to the circumstances, the new media do not necessarily sound the death knell over traditional storytelling. Rather, they present the griot with new and powerful tools for getting his messages across to an audience which is no longer limited by the physical constraints of a non-mediated vocal and gestural transmission.

But what is actually meant when speaking of the West African filmmakers as modern day griots? According to the film scholars Keyan Tomaselli, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke from the Department of Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, the filmmakers are

⁷ Diawara 1988a, p. 215.

⁸ Overballe 1992, p. 196.

⁹ Vansina 1985, p. 27.

griots in the sense that they take upon themselves the traditional griot's role as socio-cultural commentator and carry it on by means of cinema and television:

... these filmmakers see their art as commentaries on their societies in order to enlighten people about the contexts of their experiences. Thus, seen in broader terms, the African filmmaker embodies the complex, yet multiple roles of griots/bards in their traditional contexts of origin. They are simultaneously social critics, historians, bards and seers; they criticise the present to encourage change; re-examine and reconstruct the past to shed more light on its effects on the present; and they transmit cultures and histories from the past generation to those who are present.¹⁰

While it is true that in this socio-cultural sense, the modern media of cinema and television have not rendered the griot obsolete but rather considerably extended his range of action and even allowed him to reach a global audience, it may well be objected that filmmakers who comment critically upon their society can hardly be said to be an exclusively African phenomenon. Consequently, the fact that many West African filmmakers "see their art as commentaries on their societies" is not in itself a sufficient argument for speaking of West African cinema as a continuation of oral tradition. It would seem that to continue oral tradition by means of cinema is not just a question of adopting the griot's role as the community's central communicator but also of taking stories and/or narrational procedures from oral tradition and adapting them to the modern medium of cinema. In order to use the term griot with a little more precision when speaking of West African films, it will, therefore, be necessary to present further "evidence" of this alleged continuation of oral tradition in the new audiovisual media.

Before venturing further into this issue, I would, however, like to stress once more that I do not subsume all West African films under this "otherness" category. The current West African film scene is highly heterogeneous and consists of films which may or may not take their cue from oral tradition, and which may or may not narrate in ways which differ from Western canonical narratives. But in the following, I shall take the liberty of speaking exclusively of films which are in fact "other" compared to mainstream Western film narratives.

FILM AND ORATURE —TWO FORMS OF AUDIOVISUAL NARRATION

Cinema is an art form which is completely foreign to Africa, at the same level as the airplane and electronics. But every civilisation adapts the discoveries of the modern world to its own forms of sensibility.

Richard de Medeiros¹¹

The griots being communicators par excellence, they must adapt to the new situation or adapt the new media of communication to their own needs. The griots are storytellers. They play with fundamental things, essential things. They

¹⁰ Tomaselli, Shepperson and Eke 1999, p. 65.

¹¹ In *Camera nigra* 1985, p. 227.

use the techniques of play in order to convince their audiences. And in so doing, they are not far removed from the technical medium of cinema.

Dani Kouyaté 1995¹²

“Have you ever seen a cock blowing a trumpet?” With this metaphor, Mas-samakan Diabate wants to draw attention to the fact that the technical mass medium of cinema will never be able to copy the intimate bond existing between the traditional storyteller and his audience. At first glance, oral tradition and cinema might also be said to differ fundamentally in another respect. For whereas the former relies primarily on sound, the latter is primarily a visual medium: without the sound of the spoken word, oral tradition would be deprived of its most important asset, just as cinema would not be cinema if it had no images (whereas silent cinema is still cinema).

Neither objection to the possibility of cinema adopting oral storytelling techniques is entirely valid, however. In fact, oral storytelling and cinematic narration may not necessarily be that far removed from each other. If, for instance, you replace “oral tradition” by “cinema” in the following statement, you will come up with a description which may in many ways apply just as well to most films: “Oral tradition is a train of waves charged with sound, colour, archaic forms, emotions, affects, and thoughts of men and women from bygone eras.”¹³ This kind of experiment is, of course, quite superficial, but it does point to a couple of important similarities between film and oral tradition.

Although the one may be primarily visual and the other primarily aural, film and oral storytelling are in fact both “multimedia performances” which include movement and speech as well as music, song, and dance. Furthermore, unlike books, films are not intended to be enjoyed in solitary confinement (and although the VCR has made it possible to consume films more or less in the same way as books, most films are still primarily intended for the big screen). In this sense, watching a film is a social activity usually enjoyed in the evenings, much like attending a performance by a griot.

The claim advanced by Walter Ong, among others, that vision dissects whereas sound incorporates, therefore, does not seem to have any immediate bearing on the relationship of film to oral tradition. It is true, however, that contrary to storytelling in primarily oral cultures, the modern mass media (including cinema) are the product of literate cultures—which is why Ong refers to them as a secondary orality, meaning that “they depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print.”¹⁴ As I shall argue in more detail below, this distinction between a primarily oral culture and the secondary orality of cinema has consequences for the ways in which narratives are typically organised in each of them, but it in no way precludes the adaption of oral storytelling practices to the medium of cinema.

It is, of course, true that whereas a film is finished once and for all when projected on the screen, following a preprogrammed path to the end of its story

¹² Interview in Ouagadougou 1995.

¹³ Belinga 1978, p. 17.

¹⁴ Ong 1982, p. 11.

no matter how the audience may react, oral storytelling is rarely a one-way form of communication:

Audience participation and response are an integral part of all West African spoken art, especially of narration. Listeners may be asked and reply directly to questions from the storyteller or, on their own initiative, interject exclamations of assent and approval by way of encouragement.¹⁵

Ironically, interactivity is still but a more or less futuristic dream when it comes to the modern audiovisual mass media whereas it has always been an essential element of traditional oral storytelling practices.

Even this argument calls for several objections, however. First of all, I would like to refer once more to Dani Kouyaté, according to whom it is not the instant physical interactivity between the griot and his audience that counts in oral tradition but rather the art of listening to carefully selected words:

Our sages say that listening is more difficult than talking. Some people are very good talkers, but they are not the ones held in the highest esteem by our sages. To know how to listen well, and to say only what the situation calls for, that is the essence of communication.¹⁶

Moreover, no film audience is ever completely passive, not even at cinema's present technological stage. Film spectators will always have to perform some amount of cognitive activity in response to the events unfolding on the screen. But depending on the way the narrative is constructed, this activity will be more or less demanding. And the West African filmmakers tend to invite their audiences to "work harder" than what is common with international mainstream films. Not only do they rarely tell stories just to entertain their audiences but they usually attempt to provoke or disturb them by taking up controversial or otherwise "hot" issues which will not leave African spectators indifferent. In addition, spectators watching an African film may often have to complete the story, not through direct physical intervention but by filling out gaps in the narrative, or by interpreting and decoding paradoxes, symbols and allegories, etc. In this sense, the spectators are invited to join the filmmaker in the creation of the narrative, in an imitation of the way the oral storyteller creates his tale with the help of his audience. Moreover, it is interesting to note that audiences in Africa usually also react to the film in a more immediate way, calling out to the protagonists on the screen and discussing the story with their neighbours in the cinema.

Now, narrational gaps are of course not unknown to European and American cinema. In Hollywood's so-called Golden Era of the 1930s and 1940s, permanent narrational gaps were, however, considered unpermissible flaws, but from the 1960s onwards many films, especially European, have made a virtue of distancing themselves from the fundamental closure of classical cinematic narration. And although the international mainstream cinema is constantly extending its frontiers, this non-classical Western cinema is still

¹⁵ Berry 1960, p. xviii.

¹⁶ Interview with Dani Kouyaté 1995.

considered a deviation from the norm. In West African cinema, on the other hand, open-ended narratives seem to be the norm rather than the exception.

Although some African filmmakers are undoubtedly very conscious about rejecting narrative closure, not only in order to distance themselves from Western cinema but also to obtain a certain degree of interactivity with their audience and overcome the technological “handicap” of the basically one-way medium of cinema, a more fundamental (and sometimes perhaps even unconscious) reason for this difference between Western mainstream cinema and many West African film narratives could be the general absence of narrative closure in primary oral cultures.

According to Walter Ong, narrative closure is a phenomenon which belongs to literate cultures because only writing allows the author to organise his story in a tightly knit, closed structure. The oral poet, on the other hand, has to rely on various mnemonic techniques which will result in narrative structures that differ significantly from the Western understanding of plot, or, as Ong puts it, “if we take the climactic linear plot as the paradigm of plot, the [oral] epic has no plot. Strict plot for lengthy narrative comes with writing.”¹⁷

In 1966, the French structuralist Claude Bremond defined narrative in general as:

... a discourse which integrates a succession of events of human interest into a single unity of action. Where there is no succession, there is no narrative but, e.g., description [...], deduction [...], lyrical association [...], etc. Where there is no integration into a single unity of action, there is no narrative either, but only chronology, an enunciation of a succession of uncoordinated facts. And finally: where no human interest is implied [...], there can be no narrative, for it is only in relation to a human project that the events may take on meaning and organise in a structured temporal series.¹⁸

If we are to take this allegedly universal definition of “possible narratives” seriously, orally transmitted stories would not qualify as narratives at all because they do not “integrate a succession of events of human interest into a single unity of action”. With the knowledge we have today of primarily oral cultures and their narratives, Bremond’s definition, which he shares with many other Western narratologists, stands out as blatantly ethnocentric, which is why it only deserves to be taken seriously as a local (and even at this level highly debatable) definition of Western narratives. Primary oral cultures do have narratives, in fact they rely heavily on narratives for the organisation and transmission of knowledge. Only a tight and linear organisation of events the way Bremond demands it, is not possible without the aid of writing. According to Ong:

In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in

¹⁷ Ong 1982, p. 144.

¹⁸ Bremond 1966, p. 68.

standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's "helper", and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form.¹⁹

What Ong refers to as "the psychodynamics of orality" are at the basis of all storytelling practices in primary oral cultures, whereas Bremond's conception of narrative is intimately related to writing.

Although the products of cinema and television are not written or printed on paper, at least not in their final form, the standard narrational "grammar" underlying these audiovisual discourses is largely derived from the great Western novel of the 19th century (i.e. Dickens, Balzac, et al.). To quote one of the most prominent film scholars of the moment, the American David Bordwell:

Hollywood plots consist of clear chains of causes and effects, and most of these involve character psychology (as opposed to social or natural forces). Each major character is given a set of comprehensible, consistent traits. The Hollywood protagonist is typically goal-oriented, trying to achieve success in work, sports, or some other activity. The hero's goal conflicts with the desires of other characters, creating a struggle that is resolved only at the end—which is typically a happy one. Hollywood films usually intensify interest by presenting not one but two interdependent plot lines. Almost inevitably one of these involves romance, which gets woven in with the protagonist's quest to achieve a goal. The plot will also arouse suspense through deadlines, escalating conflicts, and last-minute rescues.²⁰

In contradistinction to the typical Hollywood plot (which is more or less synonymous with international mainstream cinema), traditional oral storytelling techniques usually rely on parallelisms, formulaic repetitions, and allegorical comparisons rather than on clear chains of causes and effects. It should be noted, however, that this is not to say that pre-literate cultures are unfamiliar with causal thought. According to Ong, "they know very well that if you push hard on a mobile object, the push causes it to move." Only, "they cannot organise elaborate concatenations of causes in the analytic kind of linear sequences which can only be set up with the help of texts. The lengthy sequences they produce, such as genealogies, are not analytic but aggregative."²¹

Oral narratives, therefore, have to rely on other organisational principles than those based on chains of causality. One such organisational procedure is to work with a single thematic core which is repeated and varied through a string of otherwise unrelated episodes. According to Vansina:

... in tales the artistry consists of working with a single core image throughout by repeating it in identical or variable settings as the action develops and transforms its meaning, so as to lead the listener to plumb the depth of meaning held

¹⁹ Ong 1982, p. 34.

²⁰ Bordwell and Thompson 1994, p. 73.

²¹ Ong 1982, p. 57.

in the image. A similar goal is sought in using several core images which make up a set. The ideal set has image reflections from one image to the other.²²

This additive strategy is of course also related to the didactic aspects of the griot's storytelling, reiteration being one of the most simple techniques for making sure that one's message is understood. In longer and more complex tales, the central theme may even be repeated through a string of parallel plots or through accompanying songs and dances so that even the most inattentive spectator will have no doubts as to the message conveyed.

Furthermore, oral narratives—and the films which rely on these storytelling techniques—will usually not involve character psychology. The motivations underlying the actions of the characters may of course be explicated but usually only in a very superficial way. According to Ong, “round” characters—and introspection in general—are phenomena which belong to literate (and especially Christian) cultures, for whereas writing and print isolate, the sound-dominated verbal economy of primary oral cultures is incorporative and consonant with a holistic world-view in which the individual is typically immersed in the group and, on a larger scale, in the cosmos. In this respect, Ong's theories are in perfect accord with traditional African thought as described by the Malian sage Amadou Hampaté Bâ who states that

... everywhere where tradition is respected, the individual does not count compared to the collectivity. The family in the first place, followed by the tribe or the village, constitute unities whose interests or destiny are more important than or encompass those of the individuals of which they are composed.²³

The absence of character psychology and the emphasis on the group have vast implications for the narrative structure as well as for the audience's reception of West African films, “the principal character [of which] is always the group, the collectivity.”²⁴

According to the French film scholar Pierre Haffner, “the Americans have developed the technique of the psychodrama to perfection; the Africans do not ignore this technique, but in addition they know the technique of the “cosmodrama” which is no less effective.”²⁵ But not only are these films not structured around the project of an individual hero (unless, of course, this hero is a mythical-historical legend, but if so, he, or she, will typically be depicted as a monumental, larger-than-life icon—not a “round” but a “heavy” character, to use Ong's expressions—with only a most shallow psychological profile) but they often “diffuse” their focus to an entire group, resulting in a blocking of the audience's possibilities of identifying empathically with the characters.

Since empathic identification with the protagonists is a prerequisite for the arousal of suspense, you usually do not sit on the edge of your chair or bite your nails when watching a West African film. In fact, the impossibility of any,

²² Vansina 1985, p. 77.

²³ Hampaté Bâ 1972, p. 136-37.

²⁴ Cheriaa 1985, p. 109.

²⁵ Haffner 1978, p. 117.

more profound, identificatory engagement with the characters may well serve the griot function that many filmmakers have assumed, for their task is not to massage emotions but rather, according to Dani Kouyaté, “to provoke, disturb, question, interrogate, and push the spectators ahead.”

As for conflict, which is at the heart of Western canonical narratives, it would be incorrect to say that it is absent from West African films, only it is of a rather different kind. Whereas in Western mainstream narratives, the conflicts are usually resolved, leaving one of the opponents as the winner and the other as the loser, the conflicts represented in West African films are often not so much conflicts (in the sense described by Bordwell) as they are personified clashes of opposing principles which are, however, at the same time complementary from a larger, cosmic or holistic point of view. It is, for example, common for non-African observers to interpret the frequent opposition between tradition and modernity in African films as a conflict, which of course it may be, only usually this so-called “conflict” is not resolved in the end because tradition and modernity are just as complementary—and therefore necessary to one another—as they are opposites. In keeping with traditional thought, many West African films are, therefore, more accurately to be understood as discursive stagings of complementary opposites, rather than as stories of conflict. And in this context it is, of course, impossible to designate a winner.

For all these reasons, watching an African film may be quite a different experience from watching a mainstream Western film. According to Ivory Coast director Kitia Touré:

... when you go to the cinema to see an African film, don't expect to shiver with emotion or tremble with terror at the dramatic adventures undertaken by individual or collective heroes in extraordinary situations to the benefit of all mortals. The heart of the spectator is never pounding in the impatient awaiting of a dramaturgical climax in which the exhausted and peaceful martyr takes up action and forgets about non-violence in order to taste the sweet fruits of revenge and defend himself and his community.²⁶

It might perhaps have been expected that the transposition of traditional oral storytelling to cinema would have encountered another major difficulty in the fact that primarily oral cultures do not attach the same importance to vision as do literate cultures. This “problem” has proved to be merely hypothetical, however, for, according to one of West Africa's film pioneers, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra,

... oral civilisation is a civilisation of the “image avant la lettre”, an image which is created and recreated by the imagination from the storyteller's verbal account. The African epics are fully visualised in the mind of the spectator [sic!] who assists at the storyteller's performance.²⁷

And from his stance in cognitive psychology, David C. Rubin argues that images, or imagery, are a central mnemotechnical device for the griot himself.

²⁶ Touré 1983, p. 79.

²⁷ Vieyra 1990, p. 117.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that although within traditional West African thought, “the visible and apparent face of things is always accompanied by an invisible and hidden aspect which is the source or principle of what you can see”,²⁸ this visible, phenomenal, world and its invisible, noumenal, counterpart are intimately connected, in the sense that all visible phenomena are endowed with a symbolic value which links them directly to their underlying invisible source. According to Eno Belinga:

... everything “speaks” in the world created by God and transformed and hierarchised by man. Reality is a living book full of signs waiting to be interpreted and messages waiting to be decoded.²⁹

And Amadou Hampaté Bâ stresses that:

... to the African, the symbol is neither abstract nor mental but concrete, in the sense that it is like the echo or the tangible projection on this earth of one of the aspects of the primordial Power. The things down here are the reflections of principles up there, but inhabited reflections, containers of a felt Presence.³⁰

So just by filming the visible world, the filmmakers can hardly avoid also catching its invisible aspects which are represented through the inherent symbolic value of all tangible objects. The majority of these symbols which are “already there”, so to speak, in everyday life, will be quite familiar to a local audience raised on traditional thought whereas outsiders will have major difficulties in reading “this living book”.

In the Hollywood-style Western mainstream narration, the objects represented are usually realistically or dramaturgically motivated and not endowed with any notable symbolic surplus value. Although we may often be presented with, for instance, non-realistic thundering blizzards, their function is usually to dramaturgically enhance the bad forebodings of a scene rather than to symbolise something else. Of course, Western cinema may also thrive on certain symbolic clichés like red roses for love, but it rarely employs symbols the way they may be used in African cinema. In many West African films, however realist they may seem, the images contain much more information than meets the eye. Amadou Hampaté Bâ explains that within the Fulani and Bambara cultures, a chameleon, for example, is not just a reptile which can change colour and lose its tail but “like any other symbol, it contains a positive and a negative interpretation, because of the dualism inherent in all objects.”³¹ So where most Westerners would see only a reptile, the image of a chameleon will immediately mobilise positive connotations of idealism, wisdom, and firmness of principles, and negative connotations of hypocrisy, apathy, indiscretion, and stubbornness in a Bambara or a Fulani. This huge reservoir of living symbols is of course frequently employed by the filmmakers in their films.

²⁸ Hampaté Bâ 1972, p. 25.

²⁹ Belinga 1978, p. 21.

³⁰ Hampaté Bâ 1972, p. 128.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

In short: if there is nothing to prevent the continuation of traditional oral storytelling practices in the medium of film, they will, however, invariably result in film narratives which differ more or less significantly from those of mainstream Western film. In the following, I shall present a handful of West African films from four decades. Films which demonstrate the wide range of aesthetic and narrative consequences this inheritance from oral tradition may have for cinematic expression. For there are not two films which are indebted to oral tradition in exactly the same way.

THE GRIOT AS CINEMATIC NARRATOR

Even though oral tradition may inspire the filmmaker by its techniques (tales, proverbs, chants, or dances), it is more than a technique; it conditions an entire collective imaginary, a particular perception of visual (gestures and costumes) and auditive signs (the language of the tamtams, verbal discourse, chant, music, texts ...).

Tshishi Bavuala Matanda³²

Already in Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret* (1963), the very first fiction film to be made by a black African in sub-Saharan Africa, the griot makes his appearance on the screen. In this short film about a day in the life of a cart driver in contemporary Dakar, the griot, however, plays only a small part as a kind of street performer who makes his living from more or less cheating money from honest people like the protagonist, Borom Sarret.

When West African cinema returned to the sources in the 1970s, the griot came to play a more prominent role not only on screen but also more indirectly as a source of inspiration with regard to the narrative techniques employed. In the 1981 film *Jom—ou l'histoire d'un peuple* by Senegalese director Ababacar Samb Makharam, the griot appears in person and is endowed with the pivotal function of keeping the narrative together. After a good meal he starts telling his audience about the importance of respecting the traditional concept of *jom* which stands for honour, dignity, and integrity. *Jom* being the core theme of this extraordinary film, the griot proceeds to illustrate its meaning through a variety of stories from different ages. The griot himself appears in all these stories—which are visualised on screen—as a witness to the events, thus reminding his audience that although he may be the individual artist who puts all his skill into the telling of these stories, he also transcends his own individual time and space as a kind of personification of the community. The griot *is* the community, you might say. The resulting narrative is a far cry from the logic of “our” canonical narratives. It is an addition of variations on a central theme structured around the person of the griot, and because of this structure it lacks the dynamic progression and the suspense which non-Africans usually seek in films.

Although by the 1990s the resuscitation of tradition was no longer a rallying cry, oral tradition still makes itself felt in some of the most important

³² Matanda 1985, p. 169.

West African films of today. One of the most recent examples is the visually astounding *La Genèse* (1999) by Malian director Cheick Oumar Sissoko. *La Genèse*—which was the one African film presented at the Montreal film festival in 1999—is a highly ambitious film which has been honoured with a string of awards. It recounts the biblical story of Jacob and his brothers through mainly static shots in which the spoken word is given precedence over action. Most of the “dialogue” consists of proverbs, and the cast even features the singer Salif Keïta who plays the part of Jacob’s brother Esau but who also functions as a kind of traditional griot.

The traditional storyteller is highlighted even more in Dani Kouyaté’s *Keïta—ou l’héritage du griot* (1995) in which a griot tells the famous Sundjata epic to a little boy. The griot is played by the director’s father, Sotigui Kouyaté, who is in fact a griot himself, and who also appears in *La Genèse*. With much charm and humour, the film, which is set in the present, stages the conflict between, on the one hand, the demands of a modern, technological society in which reading and writing skills are essential, and, on the other hand, the urge to hold on to one’s roots through the oral transmission of the illustrious deeds of one’s ancestors.

Although punctuated by visualisations of the story of Sundjata, the film’s narrative has a structure that is much more “international”, and therefore much more readily “understandable” (at least to Western audiences), than that of *Jom*—which is presumably why the non-African festival goers thought very highly of it when it was presented in Ouagadougou in 1995. But the griot never reaches the end of his story, and he never gets around to telling the boy about the origins of his name which was the reason why he set out on his narrational journey. Consequently, there is no closure to the film’s narrative. As Dani Kouyaté puts it, “stories are like the wind, they cannot be put to a stop, they never end”. And as the modern griot he is, he emphasises that his ambition with *Keïta* was to “make a cinematic performance of an hour and thirty minutes and create desires, provoke responses in the audience”.

The 1973 film *Visages de femmes* by Ivory Coast director Désiré Écaré, on the other hand, may appear forbiddingly radical to a non-African audience, not because of its famous nude scene but because it consists of what seems to be two completely separate stories with no apparent connection what-so-ever: neither the characters nor the settings or the subjects are the same in the two stories. In this film, there is no griot on screen to guide the audience. The griot is replaced by a chorus of women who put the two individual stories into a more community oriented perspective by commenting on them through their song and dance. Despite appearances, the two stories are, however, intimately related, but only on a purely thematic level: both deal with the relationship between the sexes, and both adopt the women’s point of view.

Visages de femmes was shown in Parisian cinemas with some success, which is presumably explained by the “shocking” scene already referred to in which a man and a woman are having (a lengthy) intercourse in a river. In its almost 40 years of existence, African cinema has offered no other film with this kind of explicit sex and complete nudity, and in fact, if we are to believe Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, the director included this scene precisely for a Euro-

pean audience keen on (a totally misunderstood notion of) “African naturalness”.

The repetition of a core theme through musical interludes is a strategy adopted also by Ivory Coast director Sijiri Bakaba in his 1985 film *Les guérisseurs*. Here, the narrative progression is arrested at a certain point in order to give way to what initially may appear to be an arbitrarily inserted music video with the reggae star Alpha Blondy. But the lyrics of his song and the images accompanying it are only another way of communicating the film's central concern: a warning against the illusions and dangers of money and power which are contrasted to the dignity of tradition. It should be added that many African directors admit to including internationally known musical stars in their films to attract a larger audience. *Les guérisseurs* also offers a couple of songs performed by Salif Keïta who has appeared in several African films—as have other stars on the West African musical horizon like, for example, Ismaël Lô and Papa Wemba.

Although it includes no famous stars in its cast, music is an even more important element in Jean-Pierre Bekolo's modern comedy from urban Cameroun, *Quartier Mozart* (1992), albeit in a very different sense. The entire film may be seen as a kind of extended music video—at least by non-Africans—but unlike *Les guérisseurs* there is nothing didactic about Bekolo's film which simply portrays the international hybrid culture of young people living in a modern urban environment. Bekolo who claims that although filmmaking and Africa are his two main concerns, he is “not interested in African cinema”,³³ celebrates this hybridity not only through the highly creative French spoken by his characters and their constant references to French and American celebrities but also through the entire film's MTV-like rhythm and the choice of a score performed on a synthesiser. I would argue, however, that even this film reflects oral tradition in the way it focuses on the group and keeps repeating its central theme in various contexts rather than telling a causally linked story of individual protagonists trying to reach their goals.

Because of its narrative structure, *Quartier Mozart* was not very well received at least by the Danish critics who took delight in the youthful vigour of the film but deplored that Bekolo was unable to present his story in a “more mature” way.

Djibril Diop Mambety's marvellous film *Touki-Bouki* from 1973 also deals with urban youth, but here we do in fact have two individual protagonists (who may or may not be representatives of a larger group or two incarnations of the same modern “type”), and these two youths of Dakar do have a clearly stated goal: to go to Paris and achieve fame and fortune. Nevertheless, *Touki-Bouki* is much closer to modern European art cinema (Godard, Resnais, Robbe-Grillet, et al.) than it is to ordinary Hollywood narratives. But is it indebted to oral tradition? Well, the oral storyteller could hardly allow himself to juggle with time and space the way Mambety does in this film. But unlike the griot, Mambety is not engaged in any kind of didactic enterprise, and for his own personal and poetic purposes the film medium is far better suited than oral storytelling. But nevertheless, Mambety does rely heavily on tradition in

³³ Interview with Sanogo in *Écrans d'Afrique* No. 21–22, 1997.

the emphasis which he places on the symbolic value of almost all objects and natural phenomena.

According to Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, “this film demonstrates how creative use of oral tradition in the construction of cinematic narrative structure can authenticate and enhance the aesthetics of black African cinema.”³⁴ And he stresses how the *Bouki* of the title, which means “the hyena’s journey”, is a popular character in West African oral tradition where the hyena usually symbolises trickery and social marginality. Furthermore, we notice how the male protagonist’s motorcycle significantly carries a buffalo’s horns on the front and some kind of religious cross—a Dogon cross which symbolises fertility, I am told—on the back. So when the female character is having an orgasm, which—unlike the “un-African” straightforwardness of *Visages de femmes*—we see in a *pars pro toto* representation of her hand clutching the cross while the sea (which, according to Chukwunyere Kamalu, is a traditional Dogon symbol of fertility and the female sex) is foaming wildly in the background, the non-African audience dimly senses that the scene may be some kind of highly loaded intersection of symbols pertaining both to birth and to issues concerning tradition and modernity.

Touki-Bouki has been very well received—although perhaps not fully understood—by art cinema goers all over the world but the African audience is reported to have found its free-flowing poetry and unconventional treatment of time and space “difficult” to relate to.

Most African films do, however, have more straightforward narratives. This applies to the early films as well as to more recent ones, and no matter whether they tell stories from a mythical past or from contemporary life in the cities or in the country. But still the influence from oral tradition is felt in various ways.

Sembène Ousmane’s *Xala* from 1974 is set in contemporary Dakar and tells a story about one of the new African leaders who is torn between traditional values and the material temptations of modernity. Because of its linear progression and straightforward narrative neither Africans nor non-Africans will have any difficulty in following the plot. *Xala* is not a simple film, however, and non-African spectators are apt to miss a very important part of this seemingly realist film’s message which is expressed through images heavily loaded with information. According to Sembène himself, the African filmmakers “often put many simultaneous pieces of information into a single shot [...]. We do not just show a chain of events but several simultaneous possibilities.”³⁵ In *Xala*, everyday objects, costumes, gestures, language, hairdo, etc. all “speak” and thus concur to communicate the film’s central theme.

Wend Kuuni, directed by Gaston Kaboré from Burkina Faso in 1982, and *Yeelen* (1987) by the Malian director Souleymane Cissé, on the other hand, are both set in a mythical past, and both tell their rather simple narratives in almost ascetic images. With its wonderfully pure and timeless images of mythical landscapes, its seemingly universal story about the conflict between a son and his father, its strong emphasis on the symbolic value of the natural elements,

³⁴ Ukadike 1998, p. 33.

³⁵ In Sundgren 1972, p. 61.

and its foregrounding of the holy objects of the Bambara people's traditional religion, *Yeelen* has been perceived by many critics—African as well as non-African—as the quintessential “return-to-the-sources” film. They may be right, only not because the story of *Yeelen* is set in a mythical past—for, in fact, the film is a strong, albeit allegorical, comment on the political scene of contemporary Mali—but because *Yeelen* is completely faithful to oral tradition's practice of only investigating the past when it is called for by circumstances in the present. As mentioned above, oral tradition has always regarded myth and history—which are often very closely related in African culture—as tools for helping the community to come to grips with the present, a fact which is also poignantly demonstrated in Souleymane Cissé's most recent film, *Waati* (1995), which uses an orally transmitted fable as a starting point for its story about the abolition of apartheid in South Africa.

Wend Kuuni's story about a young boy who loses his speech after witnessing the death of his mother and who does not regain it until several years later, after having experienced a new emotional shock, is (according to Manthia Diawara) indebted to the legend of Sundjata, but the film's emphasis on the importance of speech may of course also be seen as an allegorical tribute to the spoken word of oral tradition. The fact that *Wend Kuuni* contains flashbacks leads Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike to the conclusion that “Kaboré appropriates and then subverts the linear structure of oral narrative for maximum effect”.³⁶ Actually, flashbacks do not seem to be that uncommon in orally transmitted narratives which, according to Ong, usually begin *in medias res* and then go back in time to tell of the events leading up to the present. It is true, however, that Gaston Kaboré also employs less clearly marked flashbacks which it would be quite correct to see as exclusively cinematic, and to Ukadike:

There is no doubt that *Wend Kuuni* illustrates how oral narrative techniques affect cinematic structure and how cinematic convention affects oral art. A clear example would be to see their functions in terms of the associations between cultural and dominant cinematic models, which in this film do not impair the authenticity of the cultural symbols and thematic alignments of the visually narrated African tale.³⁷

The same may be said to apply to the films of Idrissa Ouedraogo who is even more fond of the international narrational style than is Kaboré. Admittedly, the inheritance from oral tradition is not as evident in Ouedraogo's films, which is probably the reason why they have been so well received in Europe (except for *Le cri du coeur* (1994) which is set in Paris). *Samba Traoré*, for instance, was awarded the Silver Bear at the 1993 film festival in Berlin and it is generally considered a film which transposes the grand American tradition of John Ford, Howard Hawks, and Fritz Lang to an African setting. But I would argue that if it does not owe its narrational structure to oral tradition, it is still largely indebted to traditional West African thought (which, according to Ong, is shaped

³⁶ Ukadike 1994, p. 210.

³⁷ Ukadike 1994, p. 212.

by the primary orality of the culture) in the way it portrays its hero and his relationship with the village community.

At first glance, *Samba Traoré* would appear to be a highly unusual West African film. Not only does it tell a love story between a man, Samba, who returns to his village after having robbed a gas station in the city, and a young woman from the village, Saratou, but it also focuses on the psychology of an individual protagonist, portraying Samba as a man who is caught between his conscience and his desire to marry Saratou. A more careful analysis of the film will reveal, however, that Ouedraogo has carefully adapted his editing and the framing of his images to the story's thematic core which addresses the issue of individual greed as opposed to the traditional values of the community. Significantly, the villagers are never isolated from their surroundings in individual close-ups. Throughout the film, they are presented in long shots relating them to the landscape or in two shots when talking to each other. The standard international way of filming a conversation is to edit the scene in so-called shot-reaction shots where the person speaking and the person listening are presented in separate close-ups. The only scene in which Ouedraogo employs this practice is at the very beginning of the film when Samba is having a conversation with Saratou. Before revealing his secret to the villagers, Samba is presented in other significant close-ups which distance him from his surroundings. But once he has recognised his "sin", he is shown in the same kind of medium and long shots as the other villagers. Transgressing both oral tradition and international mainstream film "grammar" in this subtle way, Ouedraogo succeeds in presenting traditional African thought in an internationally accepted cinematic form, without compromising either of them.

Drissa Touré's *Haramuya* (Burkina Faso 1995), which can best be described as a kind of collective portrait of underworld Ouagadougou, has also been compared to Western cinema, only not to the products of the Californian dream factory but rather to Italian neorealism of the immediate post WW II era. Although it is true that *Haramuya*, like most neorealist films, was produced on a shoestring budget, this fact does not *per se* make it a film influenced by neorealism. Further points of comparison between *Haramuya* and neorealism would be the focus on everyday life, the use of non-professional actors, the social comment, and a number of other things, but again, none of these characteristics are particular to neorealism but may, in the case of *Haramuya*, just as well be seen as a heritage from West African oral tradition. In fact, the director himself was quite amused at all this learned talk about neorealism, claiming that he was not at all familiar with these Italian films. Instead, he carefully stressed his debt to oral tradition:

Africa, that's the community. In Africa, nobody exists for himself, individuality does not exist. Here it's the circle that counts! And I said to myself that I had to build my film on the circle. At the same time I was worried that I might not succeed in making myself understood, for the circular structure is not very well known outside Africa.³⁸

³⁸ Interview in Ouagadougou 1995.

That cinematic group portraits and circular dramaturgical structures are becoming more and more accepted even within mainstream American cinema—cf. *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993) and *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999)—does not change the fact that Drissa Touré himself conceives of his film work along the lines of the West African oral tradition and the “otherness” which it (usually) implies.

Even though his way of making films may thus not appear that “other”, Drissa Touré is not afraid of falling into the “otherness trap”. On the contrary for, as he says:

We have to succeed in being different without letting our difference turn into an inferiority complex. If we are different from the modern world, we will have more to offer. If we duplicate the Europeans and do exactly as they do, it won't work. For they have arrived at a level where they are disturbed by their own imagination. In a certain sense, they are crying out for help, and if we behave just like them, we won't be there to help them.³⁹

There may be some truth in this, but if, on a more general level, it implies that the main *raison d'être* for West African films would be their capacity to offer a kind of human aid to the industrialised countries, it would, of course, be a most noble mission but also a rather sad outlook for West African cinema in particular and West African culture in general.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Paradoxically, it may be argued (albeit on a purely theoretical level) that precisely by leaning on oral tradition, the filmmakers may in fact be able to help West Africa take its place on the global communication highways. Not only because oral tradition is inherently dynamic and should be able to cope even with the technological challenges of the future but primarily because it may be a kind of short cut to the secondary orality of the new communication media. It should be stressed, however, that to gain access to the fore of the global communication scene is, of course, mainly an economic and infrastructural issue, and in the present situation most West African states do not have the means to implement the new communication media on a larger scale.

If, however, we allow ourselves the liberty of indulging in a thought-play along the lines of the views on orality and literacy advanced by Walter Ong, it could be argued that a primary oral culture will have less difficulty in proceeding to a secondary oral culture than will a literate culture. In Western culture, non-printed sources of information are still not deemed quite legitimate, a fact which is poignantly demonstrated by the way older people who have been brought up to think very highly of the book and the printed word in general, are reluctant to accept that their children spend so much time in front of the television or the computer. In West Africa, on the other hand, cinema and television do not seem to be confronted with the same kind of mental resistance, just as they do not seem to have the same kind of low cultural status as

³⁹ Interview in Ouagadougou 1995.

they (still) do in Europe. In West Africa, they are generally considered simple means for communication—just as the spoken word was to the traditional griot.

It is only fair that the last word of this paper should go to one of the forefathers of today's cinematic griots, a West African film pioneer who may also have been a great visionary, for at some point before his death in 1987, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra (who in 1955 made the film *Afrique-sur-Seine* in France) advanced the following prophecy which has not yet come quite true but which has not been proved wrong either:

It is possible, and we already see it happening, that image and sound will allow the African civilisation to access modern technology more rapidly than has been the case for the Indo-European civilisation. With the audiovisual techniques, oral tradition can enter directly into the heart of a modern system of transcription, conservation and distribution. [...] It is perhaps the great chance of Africa, a continent where more than 70 per cent of the population is still illiterate, to be developing in perfect concurrence with the audiovisual media which are, themselves, in the midst of a development process.⁴⁰

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(The year in parenthesis refers to the first year of publication of the referenced work or article.)

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⁴⁰ Vieyra 1990, p. 118 and p. 126.

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Interviews

- Interview with Drissa Touré in March 1995 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
- Interview Dani Kouyaté in March 1995 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

The Sankofa bird is found in many versions. Usually the bird turns around to pick up an egg on her back, and it is interpreted as going back to tradition. This piece is cast in brass.

Sankofa and Modern Authenticity in Ghanaian Film and Television

Anne Mette Jørgensen

- Student: “What makes a film an African Film?”
Lecturer: “I think from the very beginning we should say that it’s a story told by an African and directed by an African.”
All students: Loud protests.
Lecturer: “The story has been told from an African’s point of view. That’s the first thing. And now, what we come to is African film or cinema in its totality: We want to see an African director, we want to see an African crew, and mostly an African cast and an African setting. Then you can call it an authentic African film.”
(...)
“We want to make a distinction here. An African story is a story about Africa, that’s straight and simple. A story about Africa.”
Student: “Okay, it’s an African story. So if it is told by an outsider is it still to be an African story?”
Lecturer: “It’s an African story told by a foreigner.”
Student: “But an African story told by an outsider is not an African story?”
Lecturer: “It’s not so authentic ...”

The discussion above took place during a course on Black African Cinema at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Ghana’s capital Accra in October 1998. The short excerpt from the discussion demonstrates the difficulties that the teachers and students have in defining African film. African film is a complex field of study in which narrative models, popular issues and modes of production and distribution vary and change. It was an issue that touched the students’ feelings about being Africans, and they continued the discussion inside and outside the classroom during the days that followed.

Ghana in West Africa is the home of numerous Christian and Muslim communities as well as adherents to “traditional” African religion. These communities criss-cross within a large number of ethnic groups speaking no less than 75 different languages and dialects¹ and encompassing significant social and cultural variations, for example, between large cities and small and medium-size villages and between North and South. Film, television and radio function as common points of reference in this complex nation. At the same time the audio-visual media are important scenes in a cultural struggle, to define what is African or Ghanaian.

¹ Knudsen 1994, p. 14

Ghana has about 19,5 million inhabitants² and about 8 million daily television viewers.³ Limited power supplies restrain the diffusion of television, and even though many villages have at least one video and television set, television is primarily an urban phenomenon. Radio is widespread all over the country, whereas print media are not as universally accessible, mainly due to a high illiteracy rate, about 40 per cent.⁴ Most Ghanaians do experience a film screening now and then, either in one of the 36 urban cinemas, in one of the numerous “video theatres”, as private pirate copies or by way of one of the national mobile cinema vans that drive round the countryside.

This chapter is concerned with the cultural identifications among students and teachers at the National Film and Television Institute⁵ in Accra. NAFTI is a 20 year old governmental training institution in which the majority of the directors and technicians working in the Ghanaian television or film industry have been trained.⁶ My focus here is on the television productions and films the students produced and wished to produce and on their negotiations over identifications in these productions. In the educational context these negotiations were heavily influenced by the ideological positions of the NAFTI lecturers.

The director of the National Film and Television Institute, Mr. Martin Loh, welcomed the matriculating students in 1998, by saying:

The task is bigger for us Africans. We are not here to entertain people; we have to bring enlightenment, too. We can't afford to produce film just for fun.

From the outset he wanted the students to know that contrary to other film-producing places in the world, like Hollywood, the audio-visual media were to be taken seriously in Ghana. The social and cultural problems were too pressing to allow oneself the luxury of producing film and television “just for fun”. The role of the media was to develop the country by strengthening the self-confidence of the people and their identification with an African community. This is one example of how the lecturers were promoting a dominant narrative, which echoed the debates on culture in the Ghanaian elite.

In Ghana, the struggles to define what is African were in 1998 just as spirited as at the time of liberation in 1957. In this modern context “traditions” are highly esteemed, and this is explicitly stated in the popular traditional Akan symbol, Sankofa. Sankofa is often represented as a bird, which has turned its beak backward to pick up its eggs from its back. This is interpreted as signify-

² DANIDA, 1998, p. 38. This figure is the July 2000 estimate (*World Fact Handbook*, Ghana).

³ Thompson 1995, p. 4.

⁴ DANIDA 1998, p. 38.

⁵ I did ethnographic fieldwork in Accra, Ghana, June–December 1998. I am most grateful to Director Martin Loh for granting the formal permission and to Ms. Sarah Kuntoh and everybody else in and around NAFTI, to Mr. Yaw F. Boakye, Mr. Dzaga Amevi, Mr. Fritz Baffour, Mr. Skido Achulo, Mr. Ernest Kofi Abbeyquaye and all the helpful people at GBC, GAMA and the Information Services Department in Accra. I also want to thank Dr. Birgit Meyer and Amin Alhassan Ph.D. for support and inspiration in the writing process.

⁶ NAFTI has through the years worked as a support and model for film and television training institutions all over Africa. In 1998 NAFTI was the only professional film school in West Africa. It received students from all over Africa and its staff sometimes travelled to other countries to assist in training. During my fieldwork NAFTI hosted students from the Gambia, Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso in addition to the Ghanaians.

ing “to profit in the present from experiences of the past to prosper in the future”. This expression entered almost any cultural discussion or any official speech at cultural gatherings. A poetic expression of these thoughts is given by Kayper-Mensah:

That bird is wise
Look. Its beak, back turned, picks
For the present, what is best from Ancient eyes,
Then steps forward, on ahead
To meet the future, undeterred.⁷

With my case of the NAFTI students and their negotiations with the lecturers over their films I am going to argue that this promotion of tradition is a way of creating modern authenticity in Ghana. The claim to authenticity is in ordinary speech often associated with phenomena referring to an indefinite and immemorial past. Yet the ostensible genuineness rather derives from their significance in the present. The Sankofa symbol and the cultural policies dominant among the elite at NAFTI constitute a strategic choice of elements selected to constitute a conception of a common Ghanaian cultural heritage. From the debates on “the invention of tradition” among historians and anthropologists we can learn that this kind of process is common in the modern age.⁸ I will therefore recommend that we regard the relationship between “modernity” and “tradition” as complementary rather than as a dichotomy.

While the main project of the lecturers was to shape the NAFTI films into authentic African, cultural projects, the students were often less explicit in their identifications. These divergences may be seen partly as competing ideological positions related to diverse identification processes and partly as a gap between generations, shaped by the cultural policies of various historical periods. Therefore, with a historical perspective on the Ghanaian film and television industries I will set out by tracing the changing politics of cultural identifications.

COLONIALISM AND THE FIRST AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA IN GHANA

The people in Ghana (then the Gold Coast) had their first experiences of cinema during the First World War when silent movies were screened in five cinemas in Accra and Sekondi.⁹ In 1935 British technicians installed the first radio station in Accra, Radio ZOY, and during the war the station proved indispensable to the colonisers and to those Africans who had relatives at the front line. Also during wartime, the mobile cinema vans, Aban Cine (Government Cinema), became highly popular with their combined entertaining and educational programmes, disseminating news about the war and about events in the Gold Coast in various languages to rural areas.¹⁰

⁷ Kayper-Mensah quoted in Knudsen 1994, p. 9.

⁸ Hobsbawn and Ranger 1996 [1983].

⁹ Barber, Collins and Ricard 1997, pp. 9–10.

¹⁰ Dadson 1998. Even today the government uses cinema vans for public information campaigns, for example in the introduction of value-added-tax (VAT) in 1998.

In 1948 the British inaugurated the Gold Coast Film Unit, and in 1953 this company had already grown to “one of the best equipped production units operating in tropical Africa”.¹¹ From 1949 to 1953 The Gold Coast Film Unit produced 25 films,¹² which were either newsreels or had an educational aspect.¹³ A group of young Africans were employed and trained in technical skills for filmmaking. They were also taught that the primary role of the audio-visual media was to be a tool for development. Today, this conviction is still dominant among the older generations of Ghanaian filmmakers.

During the 1950s the quest for independence was pursued among the African political leaders and the populations in the Gold Coast. In 1954 Radio ZOY was one of the very first governmental institutions to gain administrative autonomy, three years before independence.¹⁴

NKRUMAH AND SANKOFA

The first president of independent Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who was in power from 1957–66, was highly aware of the potential role of the mass media in nation building.¹⁵ He took control of an already well established infrastructure of the audio-visual media, but that was not enough. New facilities were built for the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC).¹⁶ In July 1965 Nkrumah inaugurated a non-commercial public service television station¹⁷ at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). Television, film and radio were to educate and bring together the nation and at the same time support the socialist transformation of Ghana.¹⁸ Censorship was introduced on all foreign programmes, and the media were used for national propaganda. Nkrumah upgraded the capacity of the radio, which then transmitted 110 hours a week in English, French, Arabic, Swahili, Portuguese and Hausa to large parts of Africa and Europe to carry out his pan-African vision. As he expressed it in 1961:

From this station, symbol of the true voice of Africa, we shall continue to fight for our complete emancipation, assisting in the struggle for the total liberation of the African continent and the political unification of the African states.¹⁹

¹¹ Graham, year of publication not specified.

¹² The very first film was an educational film on how to avoid tuberculosis. The two most famous early films were “Amenu’s Child” (Graham 1950; about a sick child and a mother’s struggles between traditional belief presented by the fetish priest and conventional medical treatment), and “The Boy Kumasenu” (Graham 1952; about a young boy and his challenging transition from living in a fishing village to a modern, urban life in Accra).

¹³ The British director of the Gold Coast Film Unit, Sean Graham, had a documentary, socialist realist and educative style intended for the development of the masses by watching movies about ordinary people in everyday situations. The pedagogical element was clear and the moral always explicit.

¹⁴ Karikari 1994, p. viii and Asamoah 1985, pp. 12–13.

¹⁵ Most African governments have utilised the mass media in building up the new, independent nation-states but among the anglophone African countries only Ghana and Nigeria considered the importance of film. The rest abolished their film production units when they gained independence.

¹⁶ GFIC is the former Gold Coast Film Unit, in 1957–1961 the Ghana Film Unit.

¹⁷ GBCTV which from 1996 became the present GTV.

¹⁸ Obeng-Quaidoo 1985, p. 238 and Asamoah 1985, p. 39.

¹⁹ Ansah 1991, p. 92.

Nkrumah formulated his pan-African vision in the idea of an African Personality as “the whole complex of civilised values—cultural, economic, social and political—which characterise the black peoples, or more precisely, the Negro-African world.”²⁰ The African Personality referred to all Africans as one family, and as families by definition share a past, the claim of a common heritage became central in the pan-African project.

Nkrumah revived the old Akan symbol, Sankofa, which is accompanied by the mottos: “Go back to your culture” or “Go back and take it”. Hereby he stressed the interrelatedness of past, present and future. Nkrumah’s ultimate vision was African unity, and re-building Ghana as a black nation was the first important step in this direction.

Nkrumah never elaborated on the qualities and values of the African Personality, or the contents of the African heritage, perhaps because of the existing ethnic and cultural differences. While he on the one hand encouraged unity by rallying the Ghanaians around the same symbols²¹, he on the other hand laid the foundation for a cultural struggle around the precise meaning of these symbols.

Today the cultural milieu in Ghana is still characterised by this ambivalence. The political ideals of Nkrumah live on in many Ghanaians and many now active media producers experienced the era of Nkrumah as golden years. Almost every head of department at NAFTI started his career in that period and they talked with nostalgia about the excellent equipment at GFIC, about scholarships abroad and about the well directed and professional productions of that time.

THE POLITICS OF FILM AFTER NKRUMAH

From 1966 to 1981 the Ghanaians went through five military coups.²² Of course, these political turbulences also affected the media industry, but the successive governments all continued to patronise film, television and radio as tools for propaganda and development. With the extension of television and radio services reaching more and more villages, the media became increasingly important tools for controlling the nation.²³ The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) opened in January 1979 with lecturers recruited among the personnel of GBC and GFIC, and equipment provided by German sponsors²⁴. As a national institution NAFTI’s policies were always compatible with those

²⁰ Nkrumah quoted in Agyeman 1991, p. 159.

²¹ The British social anthropologist Anthony Cohen clarifies how symbols may be important common reference points yet at the same time be differently interpreted: “Culture, constituted by symbols, does not impose itself in such a way as to determine that all its adherents should make the same sense of the world. Rather, it merely gives them the capacity to make sense and, if they tend to make a similar sense it is not because of any deterministic influence but because they are doing so with the same symbols. (...) the sharing of symbols is not necessarily the same as the sharing of meaning.” (Cohen 1985, p. 16)

²² Mazrui and Tidy 1984, pp. 242–48.

²³ The consciousness of a military threat is still present today in the Ghanaian radio and television buildings. Numerous clearings and arrangements are required to enter GBC and TV3 in Accra, and the headquarters of GBC is literally armed for war, with a military camp inside its walls and a loaded machine-gun permanently pointing from the entrance towards any potential enemy. See also Ansah 1994, p. 17.

²⁴ Asamoah 1985, p. 52.

of the successive governments but at the same time most of the lecturers have continued to adhere to the pan-African visions of Kwame Nkrumah.

Already in 1967 the political leaders following Nkrumah diverted from his anti-commercial, anti-American and anti-European course and started transmitting advertisements on radio and television in order to diminish the dependency of GBC on the Ghanaian Treasury²⁵. This intention was never successfully implemented though, and even today, licenses, rentals and sales cover only a limited part of the GBC budget.

Free flow of information became the ideal in the 1970s and 1980s. The share of foreign-produced programmes grew, and before long the African elites criticised the foreign cultural influence on their media.²⁶ In Ghana the national television station, GBCTV managed to keep a proportion of as much as 85 per cent local productions until 1985, but during the 1990s the governmental interests decreased, and in 1998 the share of local production had fallen to only about 40 per cent.²⁷ The state monopoly of the media was broken on the television scene in 1996, and independent radio stations blossomed. While a few Ghanaian film directors had already produced a handful of independent films in the 1980s,²⁸ the Ghanaian film industry experienced a veritable boom of video productions in the 1990s. All this happened in the name of pluralism, privatisation and press freedom, and liberal ideals that profoundly challenged the socialist and nationalist ideals of the pan-Africanists.

The monopoly of GTV was broken by the government's sale of the former state-run and non-profitable film company, GFIC to the Malaysian media corporation, Gama Media Systems Ltd. (GAMA).²⁹ To many professionals in the Ghanaian film and television industry this was a sell-out of the Ghanaian soul, as they still wanted a national film production. Several small independent companies are at this time trying to establish alternative television stations.³⁰

The story of the video boom is intriguing. In the late 1980s an ordinary video camera became so inexpensive that some Ghanaians working abroad and some of the more wealthy Ghanaians could afford it. Some happy amateurs bought a VHS video camera, invented a story line, gathered some friends and shot a film within a weekend or so. The film was edited in private and the actors received their share of the revenue, when the video had been sold. It turned out to be a reasonable business and in the heyday of the "video feature

²⁵ Karikari 1994, pp. 107–08 and Asamoah 1985, p. 15.

²⁶ Reeves 1993, p. xi.

²⁷ Asamoah 1985, p. 40. The tendency towards increasing imports of European and American series and other programmes, is not only a Ghanaian phenomenon. Bourgault (1995, pp. 106–07) writes that from the 1970s till the late 1980s a range of African state television companies have increased their share of foreign programmes from 50% to 70%. The largest shares are seen in Djibouti (90%) and Cape Verde (almost 100%).

²⁸ In 1980 Kwaw Ansah produced "Love Brewed in the African Pot" and in 1988 "Heritage Africa". King Ampaw made three co-productions with German television stations and Koffi Nartey produced the last Ghanaian film on celluloid in 1995, "Back Home Again".

²⁹ The state has kept a 30 per cent share, which is considered as insignificant for the politics of the station.

³⁰ The new television stations were Metro TV (partly private and partly owned by GTV), TV3 (owned by GAMA) and Crystal TV. By the time of my departure from Accra in December 1998 at least two more television stations were in preparation, Kwaw Ansah's TV Africa in Accra and Ashante TV in Kumasi.

phenomenon” three or four sales videos were released every week. In Accra small video theatres blossomed. The Ghanaian video features met a demand for images of the good life in the modern cities, for seeing Ghanaian actors and places on the screen and for clearly stated moral messages.³¹

The professionals in the film industry watched the course of the events with scepticism.³² They shook their heads over the poor technical quality, and considered video as a poor substitute for celluloid. “You need some kind of reputation. The video market is channelling out money, but it’s not the kind of money that I want to have!” one independent filmmaker exclaimed.³³ At the same time they acknowledged that the film industry had been reawakened, and they welcomed the ‘Africanisation’ of the video screens. During the 1990s the potentials of video production were increasingly acknowledged and even the government owned Ghana Film Industry Corporation turned feature film production into video formats. The popularity of the video features waned, however, in the second half of the 1990s.³⁴

The situation for the directors—among them those with an education from NAFTI—is very different from Nkrumah’s time, as the state is no longer the prime organiser of media matters in Ghana. Today most directors have to be producers at the same time, and the majority of these producer-directors work in their own production houses and carry all economic responsibility. Their video films are screened in the video theatres while the cinemas screen foreign films on celluloid, mainly Hong Kong action, Indian romances and American blockbusters. In order to compete with foreign productions, the Ghanaian producers need to be very sensitive towards the tastes of their audiences. Birgit Meyer describes how the market economy has led to transformations in the content of the Ghanaian video films.³⁵ Her analyses, for example, of the issues of Christianity and witchcraft in the films reveal that just as perceptions about the desires of the audiences do affect the popular films, these films may simultaneously transform public opinion about what is socially acceptable.³⁶ These processes of commercialisation and increasingly liberal attitudes towards the issues treated in the films are rapidly changing the working conditions for the graduates from NAFTI and their colleagues. The new roles for the directors and producers are both offering new opportunities and increased freedom with less control by the state, and at the same time, new constraints as their economic survival as producers is at stake. The state does not offer any support, as expressed by one Ghanaian producer:

³¹ Meyer 1999, pp. 96 and 98.

³² This cleavage between video producers and established professional film producers, such as the internationally famous director Kwaw Ansah is well described by the cultural anthropologist Birgit Meyer (1999).

³³ Koffi Nartey, interview 9.9.1998.

³⁴ In 1998 the level of production stabilised at one video film released just about every month. Some few producers had established their companies by selecting better film scripts and formats. While a VHS video feature might be produced for less than £1,000 in the early 1990s, in 1998 only the professional BETA format was used, and prices went from around £10,000 upwards.

³⁵ Meyer 1999; 2000a and 2000b.

³⁶ Meyer 2000b. In this article Meyer offers an illuminating history of the changing conditions in the Ghanaian cinema and television as related to the changing policies of the Ghanaian state during very recent years.

The state of the media now is un baffled freedom, and there's a lot of irresponsibility in the media. And this is not only on the political front but also on the social front. Just like ... when you have a free market economy ... if your local production is not efficient you'll be swallowed by foreign goods which are cheaper. And that is the case now in Ghana.³⁷

An inroad into the African film market and an effective African distribution network could improve the situation, but Ghanaian film is far from able to offer alternatives to the dominant European and American commercial television and film distributors.³⁸ We can also see a difference here between former French and former British colonies in Africa. Participation in the prestigious, biannual, pan-African film festival, FESPACO in Ouagadougou is essential for entering the international circulation of films. Francophone films dominate the festival and students and staff from NAFTI regretted that the Ghanaian video productions could not compete with 35-mm celluloid films by the famous francophone directors. They complained that the former British colonies have not received substantial cultural support, as is the case in the francophone countries, where many films are being co-produced with French partners.

GOVERNMENT SPONSORSHIP OF CULTURAL FESTIVALS

It seems as if the transmission of Ghanaian images and pan-African messages no longer gives the film production a secure position. In the meantime other sectors of cultural production in Ghana are increasingly supported by the government for this aim. Through the National Commission on Culture the Ghanaian government promotes certain common cultural symbols and narratives.

"Emancipation Day" was celebrated for the first time in 1998 to mark the abolition of slavery in England in 1834. Under the slogan, "Our Culture—Our Strength", the festival lasted seven days and attracted Ghanaians as well as other Africans, Caribbeans and white tourists alike. President Rawlings headed the event, giving an official speech at the opening ceremony and at a later wreath-laying ceremony paying tribute to those ancestors who did not die on African soil. The emotional highlights were a theatrical slave march in Accra, a large show at the National Theatre from which GTV transmitted scenes of slavery—causing elderly Afro-Americans to burst into tears on live TV—as well as a mission of bringing 'home' the skeletons of two Caribbean slaves. The ancestors of these two slaves had been traced to the Assin Manso area in Ghana. They were dug up, flown to Ghana and carried up the river from Cape Coast to the inland locality from where it was assumed that their ancestors had been sent off to the Caribbean centuries ago. Traditional funeral rites were performed following the wake of the previous night in Accra for all those hundreds of thousands of ancestors who died on their way to or on the American continent.³⁹

³⁷ F. Baffour, interview 16.10.1998.

³⁸ See Bourgault 1995, pp.106–07 on the international situation.

³⁹ A wake-keeping ceremony is performed at all funerals in Ghana. The relatives and friends of the deceased gather the night before the funeral to eat and drink, drum and dance all through the

The ceremony was described as a symbolic act to give peace to the souls of all deceased ancestors. The chairman of the organising committee, the executive Minister of Tourism made no secret of the fact that there was an important element of tourism policy in the arrangement. But at the same time he stressed the spiritual significance, the strengthening of solidarity ties between the African and Caribbean countries in a pan-African unity, and finally the fertilisation of the ground for negotiations over compensation for the slavery. In this sense, various purposes were fulfilled, while people came together in the common project.

Another fairly new identity-forging cultural event is the biannual National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC). It unifies a variety of cultural expressions of various ethnic groups in one common Ghanaian manifestation. "Let me say at once that we no longer engage in ethnic wars. These performances are to remind us of our past. To demonstrate our identity as a people and our national dignity" one chief from the Upper East Region explained in 1998, referring to the Konkomba, Mamprusi and other Northerners, dressed for war and proudly exhibiting their regalia. In this way he also referred to the national intentions of the festival, which were stated by numerous spokespersons, among them the chairman of the National Commission on Culture, Nana Akuoku Sarpong⁴⁰: "Our purpose is Sankofa and restoration on the one hand. On the other hand it is to broaden our own uniqueness." Drumming and dancing, theatre and several cultural debates took place, and the media coverage was massive.

At NAFAC 1998, a proposal was made to set up a fund in support of local traditional festivals, which are celebrated in different parts of Ghana at certain times of the year.

In every city there is a number of more or less important chiefs, and at these festivals the chiefs and their retinues are displayed with all their relics. Wealth and power are demonstrated in colourful processions, and at the subsequent *durbar*, a gathering of all the chiefs and their peoples, speeches of a political, and often moralistic nature, are made.

At all of these arrangements the cultural expressions of the various ethnic groups are displayed as representing aspects of one common Ghanaian culture. One could say that they are peculiarly Ghanaian examples of "invention of traditions".⁴¹ The content of this "Ghanaianness" and "Africaness" displayed at NAFAC 1998 and at Emancipation Day was discussed with some aloofness between persons who belonged to the Ghanaian elite. For people living in a village or city where a traditional festival took place, it was natural to participate and identify with the event. They were centred on the local chief who was directly linked to the ancestors of the lineage. Everybody belongs to a chieftancy and everybody has a place in the procession. Access is free and everybody participates, and takes part in the dancing. Apparently the traditional festivals had a greater appeal and significance for ordinary people.

night in order to watch over the soul of the deceased before the body is buried and the soul can travel to the ancestors.

⁴⁰ In his opening speech 31.10.1998.

⁴¹ Cf. Hobsbawn and Ranger 1996.

Many modern, urban people, among them my young informants at NAFTI in Accra, considered the festivals old-fashioned. The pan-Africanists thought differently, though, because all such events supported their policies. The Sankofa symbol was directly mentioned both at Emancipation Day and at NAFAC in 1998, events in which the motivating power was the combination of a Ghanaian nationalism and traditionalism in a present day identification.

POPULAR, ELITE AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

In the city genres evolved which represent Ghanaian culture in fundamentally different shapes from those described above. They are concerned with the experiences of the urban Ghanaians and they appeal to people who are living in a world, which is both modern and traditional. They can be seen as hybrid cultural forms.

The videos have already been mentioned. A new form of theatre, the *concert parties*, was invented in the post-war years and grew very popular in Ghana, especially in Accra. The *concert parties* are a kind of satirical and musical soap opera of Ghanaian everyday-life. It is a fusion of influences from western musicals and dramatic genres with the local (mainly the coastal Fanti) culture, which already appeared in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and has been developed through the years in travelling theatre. It is today a very popular weekly show at the National Theatre in Accra. Here, preoccupation is “with modernity, money, the city, gender relations, and how to live a good life in a changed world.”⁴² Also in the cities, in the 1960s musicians started playing traditional music on European instruments, and a new genre, *highlife*, was born.

Today the Ghanaian videos, concert parties, and highlife music are eagerly consumed by the urban masses. Only late, partially and hesitantly has the Ghanaian pan-Africanist oriented cultural elite recognised these genres.⁴³ Most of them are still patronising ‘pure’ forms of African culture like those supported by the National Commission on Culture. Karin Barber writes on the relationship between the cultural apparatuses (e.g. the media producers) and the popular, elite and traditional culture in Africa:

Both elite and traditional arts are, for different reasons, symbolic capital highly valued by the ruling classes—the former as evidence of progress and enlightenment, the latter as evidence of a rich historical cultural heritage. They are therefore sponsored by the government and publicised through its official organs. Popular arts are not. They are usually disregarded by the formal educational and cultural apparatus. If anything, the regulators of the formal sphere feel a little ashamed of the popular culture that seethes all around them. It is only in exceptional circumstances that they will pick out examples upon which to bestow recognition and respectability.⁴⁴

⁴² Barber, Collins and Ricard 1997, p. 5.

⁴³ The concept of cultural elites must in Ghana be regarded as covering at least two different trends: the pan-Africanists and those who are eagerly oriented towards European and American influences. The former were dominant, perhaps not in numbers, but certainly in visibility in the public debates on culture.

⁴⁴ Barber 1987, p. 11.

This is exactly what is going on in Ghana. The Ghanaian government supports cultural expressions like the traditional festivals and other displays of traditional culture, while the popular culture in Ghana is self-financing.

As ideal types we may distinguish ‘popular’, ‘elitist’ and ‘traditional’ culture. In practice the types of cultural expression are interwoven but most Ghanaians experience them as separate. At NAFTI films are thus produced with one of these types of cultural expression in mind, as they are also associated with different categories of audiences. In the different genres audiences are offered an opportunity to identify with various communities. In “traditional” culture (at village festivals, funerals etc.) it is the ethnic group, the chief and the family. In the elite culture it is the pan-African unity and the Ghanaian nation, and in the popular culture identifications are offered with “the complex and multiple roles met with in modern life, including the different ways these can clash, or be reconciled, with traditional life.”⁴⁵

These identification strategies may also involve elements of resistance, passive or active. In the case of the traditional culture this is a resistance towards everything external, e.g. other ethnic groups, national or foreign influences, while the resistance in the elite culture is unambiguously directed towards European and American culture. The popular culture is a more subtle kind of resistance, but it allows its spectators some possibilities of mediation, co-existence and integration towards the requirements of the national authorities, while at the same time expressing a critique of that very system and insisting on the autonomy of the people. The popular culture in Ghana is concerned with fundamentally different values and meanings than the other categories, and here there is no dichotomy between the modern and the traditional, rather a recognition of the latter as integrated in the former, in the modern life.

At NAFTI people naturally knew *highlife* and *concert parties*, but it was not considered appropriate or smart to go and enjoy them. The same was true for the Ghanaian *video features*. Few of the students spent time watching them in the video theatres or on television. GTV offered programmes of *concert parties* and television dramas inspired by the genre, (‘Akan Drama’ or ‘Can-tata’), and while these programmes are the most popular among people in general, only a few NAFTI students watched them.

THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE AT THE NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE

There is a profound influence on the NAFTI productions from the ideologies of the NAFTI lecturers nurtured by the cultural policies of the late president Kwame Nkrumah. The films tell narratives with validity at a collective level, and one particularly dominant narrative⁴⁶ can be recognised in most of the narratives in the NAFTI productions. I can deduce this dominant narrative as being the narration of the underdevelopment of Africa: Africa has been colonised and enslaved, dominated and exploited by the Europeans. Independence has formally been gained but in reality much economic and cultural power is

⁴⁵ Barber, Collins and Ricard 1997, p. 24.

⁴⁶ Bruner and Turner 1986 and Mogensen 1995.

still in the hands of Europe and USA. Because of this Africa is deprived. To prosper in the future, a pan-African consciousness must be mobilised, and reviving the rich, cultural heritage of the past does this. The proud traditions must be revived to regain what has been lost. The genuine and traditional Africa is what is untouched by globalisation, and it is still to be found in some villages.

This narrative was popular at NAFTI and in the dominant Ghanaian elite in general. This was probably so not only due to the fact that it had been introduced by the famous and much admired leader, the late Kwame Nkrumah, but also because, equally important, its broad appeal was provided by its ability to conceptualise the cultural, social, political and economic transformations in post-colonial Ghana. The dominant narrative, symbolised by Sankofa, is concerned with past, present and future. It promotes 'a pan-African consciousness' and 'the rich, cultural heritage of the past'.

On all festive occasions Mr. Loh expressed the official position of NAFTI on foreign films and foreign influences in general:

We are here to make films for Africans. Our local scene is being invaded, and I want you to fight against those Ghanaian video features with their useless images, insulting our people.⁴⁷

He was supported by representatives of the government such as the Deputy Minister of Communication, Mr. P. M. G. Griffiths, who stated in the opening speech of the NAFTI Graduation Festival and 20 Year Jubilee:

Our way of speaking, eating, behaving is shaped by foreign customs. Furthermore our children are watching so many foreign programmes. We have to promote African values to our children, and we don't do that by copying the foreign films, we do it by producing films different from the foreign films that we watch.⁴⁸

Fear of foreign domination was only one theme. Another was that it was important to avoid internal strife. Most Ghanaians were likely to proclaim that there was no such thing as ethnic discrimination in Ghana but in private people feared ethnic strife. Socially the students at NAFTI grouped with their ethnic fellows, and some informants drew my attention to the fact that the Ewes (who constitute around thirteen per cent of the Ghanaian population) dominated the school, the students as well as the lecturers. Some students privately accused the management of growing nepotism, but at NAFTI, as in public debates generally, ethnic matters were almost never discussed openly. Comparisons were made to Nigeria or other countries, which had experienced violent ethnic clashes, and many times people said that they were willing to put up with many injustices as long as the country had peace. The latest ethnic conflict in Ghana's Northern Region in 1993 was dealt with as non-existent.⁴⁹ Most Ghanaians believed that to avoid conflicts the ethnic differences should be played down.

⁴⁷ Mr. Martin Loh at the matriculation of the new NAFTI students, November 3, 1998.

⁴⁸ Mr. P.M.G. Griffiths, NAFTI, November 16th, 1998.

⁴⁹ For an examination and opinion on the conflict, please read Akwetey 1996.

As the late Nkrumah had recommended Ghana was to come together as a nation and therefore “Ghanaianness” was emphasised.

At NAFTI focus was frequently on “Africanness” rather than “Ghanaianness”, but this was not representative of the public cultural debates among the Ghanaian elites. Neither at NAFTI nor in general were these terms perceived as contradictory, but rather as complementary, supporting both the projects of nation-building and of African unification. This dynamic was already proposed by Nkrumah, who stressed the “Africanness” of Ghana, for example, with the image of a black star in the centre of the national flag.

‘Out-moded customs’ were severely criticised as an important obstacle to a national unification. According to Mr. Pongo, who was lecturing on documentary filmmaking, the primary objective for the film industry was to raise the living standards for the Ghanaian people by eliminating “customary practices, which are outdated, discouraged and awful”⁵⁰. As examples he mentioned female circumcision, the Trokosi girls (young Ewe girls confined to serve the priests in the ethnic shrines as punishment for crimes committed by members of their families), polygamous ‘survivals’, and the practice of having numerous offspring.

At NAFTI the attitude towards the Northerners was highly ambivalent. Many of the “out-moded customs” were believed to be especially prevalent in the North. The staff were in favour of films and television for development and change in these areas but at the same time their “authenticity” was linked to an image of a synchronous status quo, and often perceived as a reminder of the past of the rest of Ghana. The director at NAFTI claimed that the best students came from the rural northern regions, because:

... those people are not destroyed by foreign influences from the television or from the modern life in Accra. Therefore they only express their own ideas —and those of the school, as they are easier to indoctrinate.⁵¹

Both the new and the old NAFTI productions that I watched fitted into the general development strategies of the Ghanaian governments, just as they supported the general optimism of development. The moral was explicit and often directly stated at the end of the film, especially in the documentaries, as in one film about a group of small-scale producers getting together in a workshop, where the protagonist expresses the moral:

Through working hard Nicolas has come from insecurity to economic gain and personal satisfaction, and today he can feed himself, his wife and their two children. It is an exemplary life. A life that portrays what determination can achieve. And as his business expands so shall the hopes of his future grow.⁵²

The film is from 1989, but the rhetoric is not unlike the one being used in present documentary productions at NAFTI. In another film more emphasis was put on the successful incorporation of new technology without spoiling traditions. The film was produced by NAFTI for the Ministry of Agriculture,

⁵⁰ Mr. Charles Pongo, interview July 6th, 1998.

⁵¹ Mr. Martin Loh, interview, October 1998

⁵² “From Scrap to Silver” 1989.

and it demonstrated how to prevent the ruthless exploitation of the forest by using biogas from animal dung. In this film too, the message was clear-cut:

And the result is an obvious higher yield, because people of Apollonia have found a new way of doing an old thing. But one old way of life that people will not change is the way they enjoy themselves. And why? Because waste power has brought new life to them.⁵³

While this message is flowing out from the loudspeakers, on the screen there is a sequence of a dancing and drumming crowd in the village. Dancing and drumming seems to be the ultimate symbol of traditional African culture in Ghana. The majority of the NAFTI documentaries contained at least one sequence with drumming and dancing. It was often used as a kind of dramatic decoration or signal of cultural identification.

In all NAFTI films one plain message was communicated via the narrative structure. Some scholars have claimed that it is possible to identify an African narrativity with roots in the narrative structures of traditional storytellers, the *griots*. Particular features are mentioned, such as a 'non-linear narrativity', an emphasis on the collective, or clearly stated morals supporting the educational aspects of the narration.⁵⁴ The last issue is relevant for NAFTI's productions, and indeed for Ghanaian film and video in general. Even though the popular, the elite and the traditional culture are characterised by very distinct traits, all these types of cultural expression promote explicit moral messages.

But apart from that, the NAFTI films cannot be characterised as rooted in African narrativity based on oral tradition. Produced in southern, urban Ghana and primarily among a young generation of filmmakers the films never dealt with storytellers. The NAFTI lecturers told me that today it is impossible to find a true storyteller, that television had taken over their entertaining roles and that if anybody was still telling stories, it would be grandparents telling them or reading a book for their grandchildren. This is not to say that there may not be influences from oral traditions in many films in Ghana too, but connections to orality were not recognised by my informants. A deeper analysis might have shown other results, but it would require a profound knowledge of oral narrations and techniques, which unfortunately neither my informants nor I possessed. Furthermore, while most of the films with an alleged "dynamic aesthetic proper to Africa"⁵⁵ are produced by professional francophone filmmakers in the milieu around the pan-African film festival FESPACO, my informants are not a part of this network.

Pedagogics at NAFTI were deeply influenced by two issues that impeded me from differentiating between various sources of inspiration. Firstly, the successive governments of Ghana from 1957 to the early 1990s all saw educa-

⁵³ "Waste Power" 1990.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Malkmus and Armes 1991; Diawara 1988 and Gabriel 1989 (Gabriel even generalises further, applying his category of "Third World Cinema"). In books on African film, the griots are often referred to as an educated class or lineage, dancing and playing storytellers of the history of another lineage through the generations. Some griots have been travellers and then their repertoire was more varied. Historical correctness has played a less important role as the main aim was to morally educate, enlighten and entertain, while solving conflicts in the present.

⁵⁵ Diawara 1988, p. 6. It can also be added that it is likely that the *griot* tradition has been stronger in the francophone than in the anglophone countries in West Africa.

tion of the Ghanaian people as the most important role of the mass media. Secondly, the majority of the workers in the Ghanaian film and television industries—among them many of the NAFTI lecturers—were trained in a socialist realist and educational style which has continued to influence film and television production. Films were never produced exclusively for entertainment. Ascribing the moralising style in the Ghanaian films to influences of an oral tradition would therefore be to jump to unwarranted conclusions.

In explicit moral and educational messages the lecturers at NAFTI patronised an idea of a genuine Africanness to be found in the villages and in tradition as long as these did not challenge national unity. The African and national patterns of identifications were seen as powerful weapons against foreign influences dominating African culture and economics since colonisation. While these elements constituted a dominant narrative by which the lecturers represented the world, I will now investigate the visions of the NAFTI students and their representations of society in their films. Distinct ideas of what was ideal, what was acceptable and what was reprehensible among lecturers, students or audiences were negotiated at NAFTI in the classrooms, at public screenings and among the students in their spare time. The NAFTI lecturers were deeply involved in script writing and production, so the processes of negotiations, indoctrination and in some cases censorship often entered into the work process of the students. An external audience at the annual graduation festival evaluated the NAFTI productions and they were later transmitted by the national GTV.

THE CONFLICTING WORLDS OF THE NAFTI STUDENTS

Conflicts between old and new practices were of much concern to the students at NAFTI. One example was the film *Okwabrane* in which the practice of young girls being forced to marry old men collided with the demand of modern independent girls to decide for themselves whom to marry, a romantic choice. Another example was *Members of Staff*, a television drama in which a man comes to realise that he cannot keep his romantic relations with two women at the same time, as he has done for several years. It is a relatively common practice for a man to have a mistress in addition to his wife as long as he can afford it. According to the students this was a survival from a polygamous practice, which was outdated and should be eliminated. In *Members of Staff* it is the gender conscious girlfriend who finally rejects her husband and finds true love with a monogamous boyfriend.

In almost all NAFTI films such negotiations between “traditional” and “modern” practices were the pivotal point. Interestingly, when something “traditional” was to be preserved or revived, it was always a matter either of material products such as *dawadawa* or herbal medicine, of ritual (dancing, drumming, pouring of libation, etc.) or of visual expressions (costumes, hairdos, beads etc.), while “modernity” defeated “tradition” in social practice.

Unpopular traditional social practices were in focus in many NAFTI films. Some examples were male legal dominance (*Yaaba*); polygamous relationships (*Members of Staff*); the custom of having numerous children (*Dangerous Num-*

bers and *Together We Care*); and old-fashioned production technologies (*The Chorkor Smoker*, *Joint Venture*, *Salt Mining—Nature's Provision*, *Scrapcraft*, *Cassava Preservation*). In other films the theme was 'out-moded customs', such as young girls being forced to serve the traditional shrine instead of going to school (*The Call*) or scars on the body or face within certain ethnic groups signalling the ethnic affiliation (*Blemish*). New phenomena connected to modern life did receive critical comment if they constituted threats to the public well being. Examples of this are films warning against drugs (*The Last Pinch*, *Drugs*), smoking (*Air for Health*), AIDS (*Time Bomb*) or threats towards the environment (*Car Dump* and *The Forest and Our Destiny*).

This tendency is very much in line with the general ideal of the dominant narrative and the interpretation of the Sankofa symbol. The way of thinking is that if society is to prosper in the future the social practices must be evaluated and are likely to change. Yet at the same time the importance of the traditional symbols, which are considered to stem from the rich, cultural heritage, is emphasised. Not all students shared this objective, as the following examples of the Diploma productions will illustrate.

John was in 1998 writing on the script for his Diploma production, an animation film.⁵⁶ The story is this:

A modern girl steps out of an aeroplane, walks down the stairs and goes to a graveyard with flowers for her mother's grave. Then, all of a sudden, the graves are opening, and the dead start rising. In panic she runs away, but she falls. When she gets up again, her body turned towards the dead, they are passing right through her. She then looks down at herself and discovers that she has gone through a transformation. Her clothes are traditional African print, sewn and tied exactly like the Ghanaian women used to do it, her hair is twisted in corn-rolls, she wears no make-up, and she is altogether relaxed. The soundtrack reflects her transformation: the folk-rock (a genre that is virtually never heard in Ghana) accompanying her panic escape stops, and while she is rising from the ground we get to hear traditional African music with xylophones and drums.

John explained that the story line had been put into a completely different scenographic framework than he had intended from the outset. The lecturers had complained that the script was not "African", and he gave in to them. He provided the protagonist with an "African" look and introduced the traditional African music. Furthermore, in the original script the protagonist had been killed by the dead and was then reborn.

John explained that the original story was a brief autobiography of his life. Its philosophical theme was how to cope with fundamentally new situations, and his message was that first one has to face the unknown and then accept it no matter what the consequences. This was his personal experience when he, a couple of years previously, did visit the village of his mother in Benin, in which he had never lived but felt that he belonged to. He felt weighed down by his late uncles and other deceased persons whose funerals he had not managed to attend. At first he did not understand what happened but after watching some sorcerers' work, he realised that to survive he had to accept the

⁵⁶ Note that all names of the students have been changed.

supernatural. He had to face everything new that came to him. Face it and then accept it, whatever it was: “I had to sit down and rethink my whole philosophy. In myself. Be nobody. Adopt. Let me be like clay.” When I asked him to explain, he said: “Accepting that there are things that I can’t explain was one of my hardest fights. Well, it was one of my steps to becoming an African.” I still did not understand what he was talking about, but when I sceptically asked him if he had not been an “African” until then, his answer was straightforward: “Simply not. Simply not. There was a certain mentality about Africa that I just couldn’t grasp.”

This very personal experience of “Africanness” differs from most pan-Africanist lecturers’ more formal expressions. Yet, paradoxically, the notion of an “African spirit” gave John common ground with the pan-Africanists, among them his lecturers, with whom he disagreed on many other points. Another point of reference shared by John and the pan-Africanists was the consensus on which symbols to use to express “Africanness”: the way of dressing and hair-dressing and the music were all crucial elements. The aeroplane signified something absolutely “non-African”, and when the girl goes through her “Africanisation”, she gets down on the ground, the African soil, in opposition to the modern and foreign symbolised by the sky.

Interestingly, the main objective for John in making this film was not to demonstrate “Africanness”, but rather to pass on his life experience of being prepared to accept the unknown, and he wanted the film to depict a general myth of transformation. The lecturers on the other hand found that the story was useless without being an “African story”, and persuaded John to use the “African” symbols. This was just one out of several examples of the disagreements that existed between John and the lecturers and the administrators of NAFTI. He wanted to make films of an African relevance, relying on African experiences, but he was determined to make alternatives to what he saw as a narrow-minded dictated version of what “Africa” was.

John felt that the NAFTI lecturers were promoting a rather intellectual style, and his own attitude towards the intellectuals was very ambivalent. In referring to the popular proverb accompanying the Sankofa symbol, he said: “People who are saying ‘go back to your culture’ are just bringing somebody’s culture and slapping it here instead of trying to find our own way of evolving.” John was self-reflective and inquiring, trying to figure out his own “Africanness” as well as new avenues for the media in Ghana and Benin. He was looking forward to moving home to Benin after his graduation, and he planned to move to his mother’s village close to Dahomey, the area of his ethnic group, the Fon. John then wanted to make adverts in order to save enough money for his own production house: “During daytime I’m gonna work on big computers in the house, and in the evenings I’ll smoke a pipe with the men in the village.” Even though he had the possibility of making a career for himself in the United States or in Europe, which is what many of the young, wealthy and well-educated students are dreaming of, he preferred to stay in Africa.

Samuel, another student, in his diploma production was going to portray a man who is working in an action-group against prostitution and happens to get involved with one of the prostitutes. In his attempts to save her he ruins his

own marriage and turns the action-group against himself, but he manages to get her back on track. She is trained at a seamstress school and after that she gets a job. His former friends in the action-group realise that he has done a good job, and they change their strategy and build a school to train prostitutes.

According to Samuel, the message of the film was that prostitution is caused by poverty, and in order to eliminate the former the latter must be defeated. Samuel had done intensive research for this film, hanging around in the night-clubs and streets in the centre of Accra, talking with prostitutes, pimps and customers. He felt that he knew quite a lot about the subject, but that the lecturers and students, who were sceptical towards Samuel's script, doubted this knowledge.⁵⁷ One of the lecturers felt that while there certainly was a problem with prostitution, there were more crucial causes of prostitution than poverty, while another lecturer said that it was naive to believe that all the prostitutes can be saved. Besides he did not think that prostitution was a really big problem. It appeared to me as if the lecturers just did not find the topic dignified enough for a film and that the students were scandalised at Samuel interacting with the prostitutes.

Samuel had lived in Nigeria for 15 years, and in spite of being Ashante and a member of a large family in Kumasi, he did not feel like a Ghanaian, he said. "I came to Ghana when I was already a man", he explained. To overcome this problem he read about the history of his people, and he attended classes in Twi, the Ashante language. Samuel had many visions at heart for the Ghanaian society, and his goal was to establish a production company and then write and produce his own scripts. He wanted to make films on the present, on politics and on social matters. "Films that bite", he said. "We need role-models. We have to move on from the past. We are not fighting for independence any more, but for economic growth. I want to make films about the everyday hero." According to him, the crucial struggle was over money and education rather than culture and traditions. Once, Samuel had written a script at NAFTI that was critical towards the government. The lecturers had urged him to reject it and under strong pressure he gave in. He was not eager to talk about this, but he explained that he had realised the danger that he was putting himself and his lecturers into. After all, NAFTI was a governmental institution, and it was impossible to produce politically critical films here.

The Spice of the Savannah by the female director, Sanatu, was a documentary re-promoting the Dawadawa tree which today is almost unknown among the Ghanaians but formerly was very popular at least in the northern regions of Ghana. In the film the Dawadawa tree is presented as a healthy and delicious nutrient. Products made from the leaves, the fruits or the bark have antiseptic, anti-virus and anti-bacteriological effects and may cure infections, measles, diabetes and diarrhoea. In the film, the sponsor, a Ghanaian NGO, offers a number of appliances for processing the Dawadawa products to some women in the rural, Northern Region. We meet a range of enthusiastic women who all

⁵⁷ One example is that some of the students did not believe that action-groups against prostitution existed. Samuel and I actually experienced such a group one night in town. The groups operate in certain areas of Accra, and they consist of men who are trying to force the prostitutes away from their quarters of the city with sticks and stones.

agree that this traditional plant has to be reintroduced in households and industrial production. Prejudices impede the process: many people say that they dislike the smell or the colour, and even more crucially the Dawadawa is conceived as something backward.

In the Northern ethnic groups the Dawadawa tree was traditionally the centre of social activities such as village meetings or rituals. Its cooling shade hosted spiritual powers and mentally healing energies, divination and witchcraft. In the rest of Ghana the Northerners were often considered to be inferior bush people, and the replacement of the diverse Dawadawa products with foreign imports such as conventional drugs, Maggi cubes and Lux soap was symbolically significant⁵⁸. Modern commodities ousted traditional customs.

We see again two ideological processes going on at the same time, illustrating a profound ambivalence: while the Northerners were often considered backward by people in the South in general, the pan-Africanists connected them to tradition and the genuine Africanness. Among the NAFTI lecturers all values associated with the North or the villages were celebrated, i.e. the traditional dresses, dishes, dancing and drumming. In this very complex process the same person could speak enthusiastically about traditional village life and then ridicule the eating habits of a Northerner five minutes later. The students were ambivalent too and some of them discriminated against the “bush-people”. A poor infrastructure, a low educational level and other factors have created factual differences between the North and the South, the rural and the urban.⁵⁹ Even more important is the general acceptance of a rhetoric on ethnic, religious and cultural divisions legitimising discrimination.

Sanatu herself grew up in a village close to Tamale in the Northern Region, and she had started her career in the television industry in a local, northern branch of GTV. Later she worked as a director for GTV in Accra and she had done so for several years, but she said that her heart still belonged to the rural people. She wished to produce her films for a rural audience, to make them enlightened and proud of their culture and help them develop economically. After NAFTI she would go back to work at GBC with these intentions in her mind, but at the same time she knew the restrictions on the documentary industry. In order to produce a documentary, even at GTV, a sponsor, such as a branch of government or a local NGO was always needed.

At the film festival that followed the graduation in 1998 Sanatu's film *The Spice of the Savannah* was received with enthusiasm by the lecturers and the public audience alike. Sanatu won a number of awards, among them one for “Best Documentary”. She received credit for her combination of industrious work and promotion of traditional values. Her ideas fitted well into the intentions of the NAFTI staff, and she supported the dominant narrative with her

⁵⁸ Christiana Oware Knudsen (1994, pp. 8–12) uses the Dawadawa tree as a metaphor of static, traditional Ghanaian culture in opposition to cultural dynamics.

⁵⁹ The disparities between the North and the South started in the colonial era. The South had exportable raw materials and agricultural produce that the colonial administration decided to exploit. Therefore they discriminated against the North, starved it of infrastructure development and pushed the northerners to migrate down south to work in cocoa plantations and gold mines. The northerners served as cheap migrant labour and were not expected to be educated (I thank Amin Alhassan for pointing out this relevant background).

productions. On only one occasion did I hear criticism of *The Spice of the Savannah*. One lecturer complained that her working title which was *Surviving in the Savannah* signalled that life in the Northern Region was barbarism at the edge of existence. The final title, *The Spice of the Savannah*, signals a more colourful life, and it is in better harmony with the film at large and in particular with the closing sequence, which features four dancing children decorated with Dawadawa flowers.

Another popular production was *The Saga* by Joe. Here the subject was the slave trade and the first contacts between Africans and Europeans. The slave trade was very much on the agenda in 1998 as Ghana for the first time ever celebrated Emancipation Day in commemoration of the slaves. Joe was adding to the historical horizon of many Ghanaians by highlighting the fact that Africans were selling Africans to the white slave traders. In his film the villain is a traitor to his own people. He catches the young men violently and trades them to a white slave trader. He even catches his own relatives. In the end he repents, and sets free a group of slaves, and his family is re-united. A white missionary arrives. The Africans meet him with scepticism, but in the end the mother in the family protects and accepts him because “he has good stories in his book”.

Joe invested extra time and extra money in the film but he often felt that his crew let him down.⁶⁰ On location the co-ordination of numerous actors and crew members caused a lot of problems, and the editing process was disturbed by the soundman suddenly disappearing with friends. Fortunately, two of the lecturers did put a lot of effort into the film.

In spite of some technical errors the film was very well received at the festival. An elderly German gentleman, who represented the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, one of the most important sponsors of the school, perhaps expressed the opinion of the majority of the audience. He complained about the errors and some bad acting, but he praised Joe to the skies for his original and daring subject: “Continue and make the next one better—as soon as possible!” An elderly woman, who was a migrant from Jamaica, did not like the presence of the missionary. She found the message that the Africans accepted the missionaries was important but she wished to emphasise the Africans’ rebellion against the slave traders. Furthermore she found it extremely important that an African, rather than a European or an American, depicted the cruelties of the trade in human beings. “I saw Sankofa in your film. I did enjoy it. I saw the errors, but just the act of doing it makes me—and my daughter too—so happy. I’m so proud of you Joe, I’m so proud of you”, she said. Her rhetoric revealed that she was one of the many African-Americans coming to Ghana to celebrate Emancipation Day, and that this was an emotionally strong experience for her.

For Joe the film was indeed the realisation of a dream. While some spectators may have read the film as a critique of the white slave masters, Joe was very much concerned to tell the story that the slave trade was not only the fault of the Europeans but also connected to the power structures in West Africa at

⁶⁰ Joe added 3.5 million cedis (approximately US\$ 1,520) from his private economy to the 1.9 million cedis (approximately US\$ 825), that NAFTI had given to the production, and hereby “The Saga” became the most expensive of the NAFTI films.

that period. In this sense he wanted to “pick up from the past” a historical narrative and make it a human lesson of forgiveness and solidarity to prevent any violation like this in the future. In general Joe was very much open to foreign influences, inspired by foreign television productions. He came from the northern-most area of Ghana, to which he felt closely connected. He was not a pan-Africanist but in his preoccupation with the question of African heritage and in his deep wish to change Ghanaian society he came close to the visions of most NAFTI lecturers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The films by the NAFTI students and their visions for the future reveal a larger ideological span than the one expressed by the lecturers. The latter represent the generation that has been most profoundly influenced by first the colonial powers and later the ideologies of the late Kwame Nkrumah including the concepts of Sankofa, African personality and pan-Africanism.

Among the students there are pan-Africanists oriented towards the African traditions, young people oriented towards the Western World, not least the black American culture, and many that are manoeuvring in between these positions. The students are highly concerned with questions of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ but their answers are not as predictable as those of the lecturers are. Incipient popular genres have contested the idea of “not making film just for fun”, and most of the students are inspired by these trends. The Congolese filmmaker, Mweze Ngangura, in an essay on African “message films”, expresses an alternative future vision, which many NAFTI students probably would subscribe to:

The urgent need is not to make films that speak of Africa, but films for Africans. As a cultural work, a good entertainment film is already a contribution to development. To achieve that, it does not have to speak of development.⁶¹

Ghana is an interesting case of the negotiations of African identities as the discussions over tradition and authenticity are so explicit. The relation between “tradition” and “modernity” occupies a central role in the cultural identifications of the NAFTI students. The “traditional” is conceived by my informants as something with a continuity from the past, and is thus closely tied to a conscious or unconscious view of time as being split between past, present and future. Such a view is, according to the British anthropologist, Daniel Miller⁶², a characteristic of the concept of “modernity”. In modernity it is possible to reflect upon tradition as something located in the past. In other words it is only because we are living in modernity that we are able to talk about tradition. “Sankofa” is thus a modern symbol, and the values attached to it serve as guidelines in today’s world to determine what is authentically “Ghanaian” or “African”.

⁶¹ Ngangura 1996, p. 64.

⁶² Miller 1994, pp. 22 and 293.

Sankofa is a vehicle for creating modern authenticity in Ghana today. With the Sankofa symbol as a cultural guideline, traditions are selected and re-invented to serve the process of unification of the nation. In the process of constructing a common heritage both clearly “invented traditions” are included, and also the numerous traditions in Ghana that have through the years survived and adapted to the changing social and cultural changes.⁶³

In Ghana things are rapidly changing at the moment. New voices are talking to a broader and larger audience through independent film and television, and some of these are claiming an authenticity not primarily in traditions but in contemporary social practices of ordinary Ghanaians, urban as well as rural. At NAFTI this shift is mirrored between the generations, as the young students seem to be concerned about contemporary matters of society and culture in a different way than their lecturers. This is not an unequivocal process, but we may expect a fruitful pluralism in styles and genres in the future developments in Ghanaian television and cinematography.

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⁶³ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1996 [1983], p. 8.

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Bewildering city-life and changing gender relations is in focus in modern Swahili drama in Dar es Salaam. (Photo: Siri Lange)

“The Shame of Money”

Criticism of Modernity in Swahili Popular Drama

Siri Lange

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to modernise? What happens to African social systems with urbanisation and modernisation? How are social relations, be they between relatives, neighbours, friends, spouses or lovers, affected by increasing individualism and dependence upon money? I do not attempt to answer these questions in the following pages—that would have been an ambitious project indeed. What I do want to present are some examples of how these questions are debated in Swahili popular drama in Dar es Salaam. “The Shame of Money” (*Fedha Fedheha*) is the title of one of the many Swahili plays that attempt to come to grips with modernity, changing social relations and money. Performance theorists have argued that performances not only *mirror* society but also provide material that may be used to *think* about it and that when we study these performances “we are interpreting the people as they are interpreting themselves.”¹ Based on twenty months of fieldwork in Dar es Salaam in the period 1991–2000,² I use Swahili plays as a gateway to understand some of the social and cultural dynamics of this multicultural African city. Furthermore, I argue that this seemingly “foreign” performance mode is indeed a continuation of traditional performance modes and that it plays a role in identity formation at several levels. Before we turn to the plays proper, however, let us have a look at the history of this hybrid cultural form.

FROM COMEDY SKITS TO POPULAR THEATRE AND TELEVISION DRAMA

Commercial popular theatre developed in several African countries during the late colonial era. Examples are the Concert Party in Ghana, the travelling Yorùbá theatre in Nigeria and the Shaba theatre in Congo.³ The Tanzanian popular theatre has its roots in the same period, but did not get its present form until the early 1980s. In regard to style and thematic concerns, the various forms have much in common, but there are also important differences. While the Nigerian popular theatre often stages folkloric plays about the past,⁴ Tanzanian popular plays are contemporary and urban in outlook. One reason for

¹ Bruner 1986, p. 10.

² Fieldwork was conducted in 1991/1992 (twelve months), 1995 (three months), 1997/98 (six months), 2000 (one month). I also lived in Dar es Salaam 1979–1981. I am grateful to all the Tanzanian artists who welcomed me to work with them.

³ Collins 1997; Barber 1997 and Fabian 1990.

⁴ Barber 2000.

this difference is that the Nigerian popular theatre is closely connected to one particular ethnic group, the Yorùbá. The theatre troupes dramatise the myths and legends of this people. Tanzanian popular theatre on the other hand, is produced and consumed across ethnic divisions in a national language. The artists and audiences do not have any shared oral literature to build on, but there is reason to believe that the popular theatre itself can contribute to the establishment of common references.⁵ In this way the commercial theatre fulfils one of the intentions of the cultural policy after independence, of which it is an unintended result.

The cultural policy of the socialist one-party regime was geared towards creating a national culture based on traditional dance. In the late 1960s and early 1970s national dance troupes were established all over the country. Nationalised traditional dance with an erotic undertone proved very popular, and a decade later, some of the Dar es Salaam based groups became independent and started performing on a commercial basis in open-air bars. The groups met a demand for family entertainment in the city and tailored their performances to the rhythms of urban life.⁶ Non-ethnic and religiously neutral cultural performances turned out to have a large audience in Dar es Salaam and in 1984 there were more than forty of these groups in the city.⁷ To a certain degree, this new performance mode replaced ethnic traditional performance modes that people left behind when moving to the city from the rural areas.⁸

From their start in the late 1970s, the cultural troupes have developed their repertoire into a four hour variety show including traditional dance, acrobatics, comedic skits, full length plays, as well as popularised *taarab*⁹ songs. Most of the audience are working class and self-employed people of both sexes, mainly aged between 20 and 45, and their children. Christians and Muslims attend in about equal numbers, and the ethnic composition reflects that of the town.¹⁰ Apart from enjoying the performance, the audience make use of the show as an arena for conspicuous consumption and personal expression. Most people dress up, they have some beers or soft drinks from the bar, as well as barbecue snacks if they are out for a real treat. The tipping of the artists is an art in itself and an important part of the performance, especially during the *taarab* part.

Comedic skits, *vichekesho* (from the verb *kucheka*, to laugh) were introduced to the shows about one year after the first commercial groups came into existence. This theatre form was developed during colonial times, based on school theatre in the British tradition,¹¹ but it was also inspired by colonial didactic films as well as comedy films produced in the West. The result is a

⁵ Lange 1999, and forthcoming.

⁶ Plane 1996.

⁷ Lihamba 1991, p. 274.

⁸ The Makonde are among the few groups who have carried on their performance tradition in the urban context (Johansen 2000).

⁹ *Taarab* is a musical style developed on the East African coast around 1880 blending Egyptian, Indian and Bantu music. See Askew 1997 for the development of this form and a discussion on its contemporary form.

¹⁰ Lange 1995.

¹¹ Mlama 1983.

burlesque vaudeville-style theatre that addresses serious issues in a comical way. In the 1980s the commercial cultural troupes developed yet another new theatre form. This genre, called *michezo ya kuigiza* or simply *maigizo* (from the verb *kuiga*, to imitate), differs from the ten/fifteen minute *vichekesho* in that the plays may last up to an hour. Like the comedy skits, the plays make people laugh, but they use creative language and facial expressions more than pure slapstick and comical dressing-up. One of the groups use written scripts for their plays, but generally both genres are based on one-page written synopses that are open for improvisation.

The main reason for introducing theatre was to give the dancers time to change costumes¹² and to make the programme more varied, but the manoeuvre could also be read as resistance against the state control of performing arts. Through their cultural policy, the authorities had hi-jacked the dances by forcing them into a praise-idiom. All songs were to be performed in Swahili and to praise the nation and the political leaders, which mounted to political propaganda. As I have discussed elsewhere, the songs, in this way, lost their ability to comment and criticise, so important in the traditional setting.¹³ Political dance songs seem to have become a convention, however, and the new “tradition” was carried on by the commercial troupes—a move that secured them government support. This blessing from the authorities was important for the troupes both in order to get licenses for local performances and to get access to trips abroad. To address their own concerns however, the troupes used a genre of which they themselves had full control: popular theatre.

Theatre escaped outside intervention and control in two ways. Firstly, there was no serious attempt by the government to censor its contents. This may have to do both with its burlesque, comical form, and the fact that there has never been any overt political criticism in these plays. Secondly, in contrast to the traditional dances, staged theatre was thus not subject to ideological guidelines. *Ngoma* (traditional dance) has been in the centre of a constant public debate about authenticity where the national elite denounces the commercialisation of the dances and the groups themselves accuse each other of destroying the dances.¹⁴ Popular theatre on the other hand, was seen as a new and foreign genre and it was left to develop its own hybrid form.

As part of the economic and political liberalisation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Tanzanian government opened up for private television stations. People flocked to the bars that had invested in television sets, and only four years later, in 1997, as many as 30–50 per cent of the households in Dar es Salaam had their own set.¹⁵ At this point all the five commercial stations featured Swahili drama at least once a week. These television-plays carry on the tradition of the live theatre. In many cases, the artists work for both media, and they make television versions of their old, popular classics. The new arena has also opened up for newcomers, however, who never considered acting live in

¹² Plane 1996.

¹³ Lange 1999.

¹⁴ This debate raged in the daily newspapers *The Nationalist* (1967, 1970) and *The Standard* (1970).

¹⁵ Schifferdecker 2000.

social halls and bars (due to the low social status) but who pride themselves on being television stars. In contrast to the live theatre actors who usually have only primary education—or in the case of the more senior actors, have never been to school at all—the new generation of television actors often have secondary education. These actors have an acting style closer to Western drama and with few or no comedic effects. All actors have taken personal artist names that they use in all the plays no matter what the age or social status of the character that they are impersonating is, and their fans generally know them by these names only.

THEMATIC CONCERNS

As mentioned earlier, commercial Swahili theatre is contemporary and urban. Of the 183 plays I have studied, only three took place in a rural setting. All the others are situated in Dar es Salaam, some of them with references to, or shorter scenes from, up-country regions or foreign countries.¹⁶ Dar es Salaam is a city of about three million people. Compared to other African countries, Tanzania is not very urbanised—about eighty per cent of the population still live in the rural areas. Recent surveys however, reveal that Dar es Salaam is one of the fastest growing cities on the continent. Every day new migrants arrive in Dar es Salaam and attempt to make a living there. Despite years of *ujamaa* policies that claimed to develop the rural areas and propagated against urban life, many rural areas in Tanzania are extremely poor and still lack basic social services like electricity, clean water and clinics. The city offers new opportunities for wage labour and access to modern life and social services, but it also entails living by a monetary economy and in overcrowded housing. In the city, previously unrelated people with different ethnic and/or religious backgrounds live together under one roof in rented rooms, sharing a bathroom and space for cooking.¹⁷ Swahili popular drama—live and on television—is used by both its producers and consumers to make sense of these changing social circumstances.

Several titles clearly indicate that it is the city and the bewildering world of city-life which is the focus of attention: *Mambo yote ya mjini* (“All That Happens in the City”) *Mjini shule* (“The City Is a School”), and *Mjini kuna mambo* (“There Are Things Happening in the City”). Twenty of the theatre plays in my sample feature someone coming to the city for the first time. While theatre during the colonial era generally made fun of persons who did not know the modern “codes”,¹⁸ the plays of today usually sympathise with such persons. The sympathy is, however, often aroused by making the well-established urban characters mistreat the immigrant, by for example showering the victim with abusive language related to his or her country-bumpkin background. Abusive language and physical punishment are both generic conventions used for comical effect in Swahili popular theatre. Indeed almost all comedic skits end in a chaotic fight where everyone fights against everyone.

¹⁶ Kenya, USA, and Europe in general.

¹⁷ There are about 120 ethnic groups in Tanzania. Around 50% of the population is Muslim, 40% are Christian and 10% adhere to local belief systems.

¹⁸ Mlama 1983, p. 70.

Eight plays show persons going back to the village. In some of these plays, this is suggested as a solution to the hard realities of urban life and rural life is glorified and idealised. Other plays depict people who go back to the village and who realise that things are even worse there. The ambivalence concerning the city is an important part of the popular discourse that the contemporary Swahili drama represents. Money and what it does to social relations is another central issue in popular drama. When interviewing people about the difference between urban and rural life, I was surprised by the number of people who mentioned the need to *buy food* in the city as the biggest difference. As the following lines from Remmy Ongala’s song *Pesa* (money) so accurately express, the constant need for money is a shock to people who are used to eating their own produce:

Sisi wakazi wa Dar es Salaam	We inhabitants of Dar es Salaam
Hatuna shamba	Don’t have a shamba (fields)
Shamba letu ni pesa	Our shamba is money
Ukikosa pesa unalala njaa	If you lack money, you will sleep hungrily ¹⁹

Popular songs, popular drama and popular literature all take part in a cultural discourse about social change and urbanisation and certain themes prevail in all the genres. Mabala writes about Swahili novels:

Tanzanian popular works, similar to the Onitsha pamphlets, were directly aimed at the young urban dwellers intended both to entertain them and at the same time act as cautionary tales against the city which, like the young women it holds, is full of fatal temptations.²⁰

Similarly, the following *taarab* song by Mridu Alli warns men against urban women who pretend to love, but who are really just after a man’s money. The title of the song is *Shangingi*, a slang expression for this kind of woman:

Si khama ninakashifu	You know those <i>shangingi</i>
Haya ninayowapasha	They are very attractive
Usione wanadhifu	And I’m not blaming, I’m just warning
Ukataka kujitosa	The <i>shangingi</i> are very expensive
Shangingi maji marefu	You need to have money
Yaogwa na mwenye pesa	To run with them
Shangingi mnamjua	You know the <i>shangingi</i>
Hana mapenzi ya dhati	She doesn’t really love
Kwani wazi akwambia	And she will tell you openly
Huu ni wake wakati	If there comes a time
Bila ya kuchangamkia	When you have not given her money
Hili jiji ale wapi	And this is a city, how will you survive
Shangingi akikujua	Once a <i>shangingi</i> discovers
Kwamba wewe una pesa	That you have money
Jina atalo tumia	She will nickname you
Wewe hukuita Shefa	Sugardaddy
Akisha kukuchomoa	And when she has finished your money
Kesho akuita Lofa	She will call you a fool

¹⁹ Graebner 1997 [1989]: 113.

²⁰ Mabala 1996.

Namwambia kila mtu	I tell everyone
Ayashike matamshi	To control themselves
Penye makundi ya watu	In social gatherings
Shangingi halijifichi	The <i>shangingi</i> never hides
Asema hapendwi mtu	She says that she does not love any one
Kwake linapendwa pochi	She loves money only

<i>Kiitikio:</i>	<i>Chorus:</i>
Shangingi huyo jama shangingi	There she is friends, the <i>shangingi</i> ,
Huyo shangingi huyo	There she is
Anasema	She says
Kwake hapendwi mtu	She loves no one
Ila yeye	For her
Ni pochi tu ni pochi	It's only money, money
Huyo shangingi huyo	There she is, the <i>shangingi</i>

The *Shangingi* theme has inspired several play writers, both within the live theatre scene and among the television groups. We will consider some of these plays before we go on to plays that deal with the problem of money in more general terms.

GREEDY CITY-GIRLS AND NAIVE MEN

During the autumn of 1997, the *4 For You*-theatre group produced two “Shangingi plays” for television. *4 For You* is the most popular and professional among the new generation of theatre groups that were established by young middle class people to produce drama for television. The leader of the group, Anna Constantine (artist name Waridi) is a graduate from the College of Arts in Bagamoyo. Their play *Tamaa* (“Greediness”)²¹ is about a young man named Bishanga who has worked in the mines of Northern Tanzania and earned a lot of money. Through his friend Rich, he meets Aisha, and he falls in love with her. Aisha pushes him to buy her all kinds of things, on one occasion she does shopping for 600,000 shillings.²² Soon, all Bishanga’s money is gone and he asks Rich for help. Rich answers that he doesn’t have any money to lend him. Bishanga is left sitting on the street, like a beggar, resting his head in his hands. When Aisha and her friend Waridi later pass by him, they laugh at him and Aisha boasts that her home is full of things bought with his money.

Limbukeni (“The First Time Enjoyment”)²³ has a similar story but brings in the point that one should never give a girlfriend priority over an old friend. In this play, Bishanga comes from up-country to the city for the first time. He is received well by his friend and his wife, and stays with them in their house. Some time later he moves in with Aisha. When his friends come to visit, Aisha, is very rude to them and she lets them know that they are too dirty for her house. Two years pass, and Bishanga loses his job. When he tells Aisha the bad news, she answers him that she will not live with an unemployed man. She throws him out of the house and keeps all the property. Bishanga goes crying to

²¹ *4 For You*, ITV, 17.12.1997.

²² 600,000 shillings was equal to around 1,000 US\$ in 1997. The minimum wage was at the time 30,000 sh/month.

²³ *4 For You*, ITV, 24.09.1997.

his friends who are astonished that he could really let all the belongings be in her name.

Our third play with this kind of plot is *Kosa langu* (“My Own Fault”).²⁴ This play is a classic that has been performed live in various versions by different popular theatre troupes. When the Afro Dance Group got their first contract with a television company, they chose this play. The protagonist of this television version of the play is a middle-aged man, Small, who lives with his wife and teenage son. Like many other men, he has a young mistress whom he showers with money and gifts. When his wife finds out and confronts him with it, he throws her out of the house. The mistress moves into the household and Small tells his son that from now on *she* is his mother. The young girl is attracted to her age-mate however, and tries to seduce him. When he refuses to play his part, she tells Small that his son tried to rape her. Small immediately expels his son, and ignores the warnings from his male neighbours that he should not trust the girl. The girl asks Small for large sums of money to buy gold jewellery, and soon all his money is gone. Her mission completed, the girl hires some thugs to tell Small that they are the relatives of her husband and that they have come to take her back. The thugs beat up the old man. With a broken arm and looking really miserable, Small limps off to his former wife. She, for her part, has established herself as a small-scale trader and is able to feed herself and their son. Small pleads with her to come back, but she refuses him. In this play, the man himself, as the title justly states—is guilty for creating the situation that he ends up in. Still, he is portrayed as pitiable, and the last scene, where we see him pleading with his wife to take him back, may even win him the sympathy of the audience. The play may warn men against adultery in general, but above all it warns them against sly, scheming young girls who specialise in fooling randy, old men for their money. Although more violent, she represents the same figure as Aisha in the other two plays.

There is a general trend in popular Swahili drama to blame women for what goes wrong in male-female relationships. 47 of the plays in my sample blame the woman while only 22 blame the man. Karin Barber found the same to be true in Yorùbá popular theatre. She writes that bad, treacherous wives “fit easily and simultaneously into the traditional model of enemies and the Biblical narrative.”²⁵ This may hold true for the Tanzanian case too, but it is also clear that the theme is closely connected to modernisation and the monetary economy.

In Tanzania, transactions involving money and gifts from the man to the woman are expected in both marriage and in love-relationships.²⁶ Since there are fewer job opportunities in the city for women than for men, and since women are generally paid less for their work, there are a number of women for whom gifts from their lovers are their major source of income. From observations as well as conversations with both men and women in Dar es Salaam, I learned that if a man fails to provide the material goods, there is a big chance that the woman will take it as a sign that he does not love her, and she will

²⁴ Afro Dance Group, DTV, 1995, re-run 10.11.1997.

²⁵ Barber 1994, p.46.

²⁶ Helle-Valle and Talle 2000; Haram 1999 and Shifferdecker 2000.

leave him. Men criticise modern, urban girls for loving a man for his money only. To my question “Is there any difference in the relationship between women and men now and in the old days?”²⁷ respondents were unanimous:

“The difference is that in the past women needed true love but nowadays without money no love”, said a small-scale businessman in his early twenties. A 26 year-old student answered in the same vein: “The relationship of men and women these days depends on money. But during the old days they did not care about what a person had. There were true relationships.” A woman accountant in her thirties agreed with them: “These days, relations between men and women are directed more towards things, there is no true love.” A young Masai watchman simply said: “Women like money. They become prostitutes.” A white-collar worker, aged 29, related the development specifically to urbanisation:

It depends on your salary—if you don’t satisfy her wants, she finds another man, a boyfriend to do so. It is the habit of city women. In the village there are still real women. When women come to the city, they seek wealth. They compete with men in life, so that they can get wealth and be able to live.

He concluded by exclaiming: “Just think about it—these days men are called *mbuzi*!” *Mbuzi*, he-goat, is a Swahili slang expression used by women about rich men whom they can “slaughter and eat”—meaning spend all his money. This expression reveals that the women are very conscious about what they are doing and that their strategy when approaching certain kinds of men is to enrich themselves. If most men and some women are critical of this tendency, how then, is a woman who does choose a man out of love and not for material benefit perceived? The play *Kipendacho robo* (“Love of the Heart”),²⁸ and the way it changed through rehearsing, is an interesting case. I had been given the synopsis of this play a few days before the performance and I was very excited about it, as it was indeed an unusual play.

The synopsis of “Love of the Heart” says that the play is about a young woman named Tausi who is a medical doctor at the hospital. She has two suitors, Chande and Coaster who are both very wealthy. Dr. Tausi however, refuses them both. One day, Bracco, a poor lad, is brought to the hospital by his parents. His fever is so high that he is unable to walk by himself. Dr. Tausi likes this patient very much, and to the great surprise of his parents, she pays all his hospital bills, and even gives him money so that he can buy nutritious food when back home. Bracco soon gets well and goes back to his small-scale business; selling fish in the streets.²⁹ One day he happens to pass Dr. Tausi’s house, and she comes out to buy fish. She invites him in and advises him to quit the business, as she wants to marry him. He says that he has no money, but she assures him that she will pay the bride-price herself. Her parents send out invi-

²⁷ “*Kuna tofauti katika mahusiano kati ya wanawake na wanaume wa sasa na wa zamani?*” Together with a research assistant, I interviewed 90 residents of three different neighbourhoods in Dar es Salaam. My questions centred on recurrent themes of the Swahili drama, but without referring to the plays as such. The interviews were carried out in November–December 1997.

²⁸ Muungano Cultural Troupe, Imasco Bar, 09.09.1995 (part one) and Vijana Social Hall 17.06.1995 (part two).

²⁹ Being a street vendor is one of the very lowest and most insecure occupations in Dar es Salaam.

tation cards for the wedding, and Chande and Coaster are among the invited guests. They turn up to have a look at the lucky groom who has out-classed them both, and when they see that it is a poor man like Bracco, they leave in anger. The play ends with the grand wedding that is celebrated until late at night.

The play was never performed in this format however. During rehearsals, the actors changed the play, giving it a very different end. The staged version follows the script up to the point where Dr. Tausi offers to pay her own bride-price. At this point Bracco says: “That is good, but before we marry, I want you to come to my brother’s wedding which is tomorrow.” When the doctor arrives at the wedding party, she realises that it is not the brother, but Bracco himself who is getting married to a girl of his own class. Tausi screams out in shock and despair, but Bracco answers her calmly: “I am sorry to tell you, but this is my heart’s love.” The whole wedding party then ridicules Dr. Tausi. When I asked the artists why they decided to change the play, they simply said that Bracco did not want to marry someone whom he would be below (*chini*). The whole production process of the play *Kipendacho robo*—the writing of it, the communal changing of it through rehearsal, and the final performance of it, can be understood as a continual discourse about gender roles, class and the role of money.

Despite the negative view of greedy city women that both the plays and the interviews reflect, the changes that took place with “Love of the Heart” seem to suggest that men are not ready to let the situation be turned upside down. They still want to be the one who is financially strong and to keep the control that has traditionally been theirs. The Danish anthropologist Margrethe Silberschmidt is concerned with the gender antagonism that is presently found in both rural and urban East Africa. She argues that men feel extremely vulnerable in the present situation where women are increasingly powerful and independent:

Socio-economic change has brought with it new social obligations and economic expectations: among others, that men are expected to be bread-winners. Due to land shortage and unemployment, most men are unable, or unwilling, to fulfil this new role and the expectations linked to it. So men are often reduced to ‘figureheads’ of households, their authority has come under threat as have their social value, identity and sense of self-esteem.³⁰

This may explain the “need” male playwrights seem to have to blame women and depict them as evil and greedy. One group, however, has been able to dramatise the new situation in a very humorous way and without depicting women as evil beings with no scruples. By using a male dwarf actor whose artist name is Kistooli (literally “The Little Stool”), they are able to visualise the increasing power of women and the feeling of helplessness on the part of the men. In the television drama *Simba vs. Yanga*,³¹ the opening scene shows a small-scale business man who leaves home in order to sell coffee at a soccer match (Simba and Yanga are the most popular soccer teams of Tanzania). His

³⁰ Silberschmidt 1999, p. 7.

³¹ King Majuto, DTV, 26.08.1997.

wife warns him that he had better come home with money. We then see Kistooli (the dwarf) also leaving home, off to the same soccer game. His wife, who is a huge woman, comes running after him and simply lifts him up with her strong arms and places him high up in a tree. Due to his small size, he is unable to get down, and pleads with his wife for help. She refuses to help him until he has given her money to buy groceries. Another play by the same group has as its comic climax a scene where the wife takes her little husband on her hip and carries him away like a baby. Conscious or not on the part of the producers, this visualising of the increasing female power and autonomy of women has humorously captured the essence of the corresponding male feeling of vulnerability and loss of control.

Looking at the texts themselves, there is indeed an overweight of evil and greedy women compared to men. The question then arises: How do women read these representations? During fieldwork in 1995, I asked Bracco of Muungano Cultural Troupe to write down synopses of the plays that they had performed since I last visited them. One of the plays he gave me, was *Afupisha ubhai kwa tamaa* (“She/He Shortened Her/His Life for Greed”). The protagonists of this play are Bracco, a police officer in Dar es Salaam, and his sister Tausi, who is with a gang of thugs in Mwanza, a city by Lake Victoria. Tausi makes a living by letting rich men pick her up, only to rob them afterwards. Bracco and Tausi’s father, who lives in Dar es Salaam, is very sick. Knowing that he may die soon, he summons his children to give them their inheritance. Tausi gets a telegram, but she is unable to go. The father dies and his belongings and money are thus left in the care of Bracco. Bracco sends Tausi a new telegram to inform her of what has happened, and says that he will come to Mwanza. Learning this, Tausi sends her fellow thugs to rob him of all the money and property that their father left them. When Bracco finally reaches Mwanza and tells his sister that he has been robbed, she answers that he is a liar and that he just wants to keep the inheritance himself. Later in the evening, the thugs return and Bracco is shocked to recognise them as the ones who robbed him, but he does not say anything. In the night, he tries to leave with the money that their father left them, but he is caught by Tausi and beaten up by the thugs before they throw him out of the house. The next night, when they are on their way to sell the valuables, Tausi and the thugs run into Bracco and his fellow police officers. Tausi tries to run off with the inheritance, but she is shot by the police and dies.

I never saw this play on stage, but in my mind, I categorised it as just another male chauvinist play depicting a greedy woman without scruples of conscience. Laura Edmondson however, who saw a later version of the same play on stage, describes how some of the women members of the audience read this play in a very different way:

(F)emale spectators ... often express sympathy for “immoral” female characters through tipping. For example, in an *igizo* by Muungano called “On Account of Greed” (“Kwa Ajili ya Tamaa”), a sister attempts to murder her brother in order to claim their father’s inheritance. The sister is killed in a “shoot-out” scene

between sister and brother; as she lay dying, thirty to forty female spectators crowded on the stage to slip money into her hand.³²

Traditionally, only men inherit in Tanzania, and although there have been attempts to change the laws, many women are deprived of inheriting from their fathers and even their husbands. The women who went to tip the actress in this case, may have felt deep sympathy with her desperate attempt to get hold of the inheritance, disregarding the fact that her brother was willing to let her have at least part of it. Probably, the male author did not expect this reaction when he wrote the play. The case is thus a good example of what John Fiske calls “guerrilla reading” of a popular text.³³

THE SHAME OF MONEY

So far we have looked at plays that focus on greedy women. But there are also plays that are concerned with money and the effects of money on social relations in more general terms. The audience at the live theatre troupes and the artists themselves belong to the “working poor” or the “intermediate classes”. To most of them, lack of money is a recurring problem, and so are the dilemmas they face when asked to help relatives and friends financially. In a country without a social security system, people rely on networks of reciprocity. Fundraising is arranged in connection with illness, funerals, weddings and occasionally education. The fundraising involves the extended family as well as colleagues and friends. The amounts contributed are always written down and kept for later reference. By contributing generously to others, individuals build up a “social security account” for themselves and their family.³⁴

Some of the popular plays depict how vulnerable this social system is and how it may be undermined by selfish individuals. The protagonist of the comedy skit *Dobi maarifa* (“The Plan”),³⁵ for example, wants money for beer, and he tells everyone that his child is dead. His neighbours and friends pool money to help him with the burial expenses. Seeing how easy it was to fool them, he writes a sign saying that he himself is dead, and places a basket for contributions next to it. He then lies down, covered by a blanket. People get suspicious however, and the whole thing ends in a chaotic fight. This bizarre scenario is in fact closer to real life than one may think. During the same year as this play was performed, one of the actors of the group died. At the funeral, the artists were shocked to meet the father of the diseased. A year earlier, they had all been told that he was dead, and they had given their colleague money so that he could go home and attend the funeral. In a village setting it would probably have been impossible to lie about the death of a close relative. Both the real-life story and the play reveal dilemmas that people face daily; should they really trust their neighbours and friends, and is the traditional system still something to go by in a “modern” urban context? Other plays have similar bizarre ac-

³² Edmondson 1999, p. 41.

³³ Fiske 1989.

³⁴ Lange, Wallevik et al. 2000, p. 26.

³⁵ Muungano Cultural Troupe, Vijana Social Hall, 11.10.97.

counts of what people may do when they are short of money, but without bringing in the question of the support system. In *Dawa ya deni* (“Medicine against Debt”),³⁶ also a comedy, an indebted man asks his wife to tell his creditors that he is dead. As they prepare to bury him however, they realise that he is too long for the coffin,³⁷ and they decide to chop off his legs. They go to find a machete. Meanwhile, the man folds his legs. Becoming suspicious that the man is not quite dead after all, the creditors hit the “corpse” with a stick, and the climax of the play is the conventional comic slap-stick fight between the three of them.

While the above plays depict poor people who do outrageous things to their fellow poor in order to get money, other plays have a class perspective. “The Shame of Money” (*Fedha Fedheha*) for example, criticises well-to-do people who think that money is all that matters.³⁸ The play is about Richard, his wife, and their two teenage children. In the first scene of the play, their daughter Shusho has a violent fight with another girl. The parents of this girl come to talk about the matter with Shusho’s father Richard. Richard offers them money. They answer that they did not come to get money, but to discuss the case. In the next scene, Richard is told that one of his neighbours has died. Richard goes to give lavish economic support, but he refuses to stay with the bereaved overnight, as is customary in order to take part in the grief and to show solidarity. “I will not sleep on these dirty mats” he says (*Hakuna kulala kwenye mikeka michafu*). When he comes home, his daughter asks for money to go to the beach. He reaches into his pockets and gives her lots of money. To make it absolutely clear to the onlookers that here we have to do with very wealthy people, he asks his daughter which of the cars she wants to use. His question provokes laughter among the audience. The great majority of them cannot dream of ever owning a vehicle, let alone two.

Shusho leaves for the beach and Richard himself goes to a bar. There, a poor self-employed young man offers him eggs to buy. Richard gets annoyed by his offer and hits the tray. All the eggs break, and the boy despairs. Richard says that it is no problem, he will pay for them all. “So you are God, you have money” (*Wewe Mungu, una pesa*), says the boy ironically. Richard finishes his beer and goes home. At home he finds that his daughter is back from her trip to the beach, but she is in agony, having terrible stomach pains. Before they even get her to the hospital, she is dead. Her parents announce the tragedy for their neighbours and prepare the house to receive all the people who they expect will share their grief with them. The neighbours come, put money into the box, write their name in the book, and then leave. Richard tells them that the burial will take place in a few hours, but no one stays behind. They all say that they have other things to do; a soccer match, a party, a *mdundiku* (traditional dance).

³⁶ Muungano Cultural Troupe, Super Mini Bar, 09.03.00.

³⁷ Poor people in Tanzania do not use coffins proper, but place the dead body on some boards and cover it with white cloths. For simplicity however, I have translated the word *mbao* (boards) with “coffin”.

³⁸ Tanzania One Theatre, *Uwanja wa jamhuri*, Morogoro, 25.10.1997.

The devastated Richard calls his older brother, who is soon with them. The brother is shocked to see that they are sitting there all alone. He asks Richard if his neighbours have got the sad news. Richard sobs “yes,” and says that they come, they write down their contribution in the book, and then they leave. “Is that so? How have you related to your neighbours?” asks the brother. Richard says that he has been nice to them. “When they have funerals I go and give them a lot of money.” “And then?” “Then I continue with my own business.” The older brother shakes his head and says that money is not all that matters. He adds: “Well, let us bury her now.” “No”, says Richard. “It is impossible. I must wait until the neighbours come. We can’t bury her alone.” “You see?” says his brother to the heart-broken father.

The older brother then goes to summon all the neighbours and he brings them to Richard’s house. He explains to them that he has talked to his younger brother, and that he has asked him how he has behaved towards them. Now he wants to hear their side of the story. The neighbours say that they have done to Richard what Richard has always done to them in similar situations; they have contributed money, and then left. Then the egg seller and all the others recall how badly Richard has treated them. The older brother reprimands Richard and says that he should never think that money “can move a mountain”. After Richard’s older brother has mediated in this way, the neighbours start to arrange for the burial. They agree which of them should wash and prepare the corpse, who should get a coffin (boards), and who should go to the market to buy food for the communal supper that they will all share after the funeral. Richard and his wife finally have someone to help them with all the practical work, and someone to share their grief with. “I was wrong. Please forgive me” (*Nimekosea, nisamehe*) says the mother. The compere announces that the play is over with the following words: “I think we have learned a lot” (*Nadhani tumejifunza mengi*).

IDENTITY FORMATION AND “AFRICAN THEATRE”

The didactic aspect of Swahili popular drama is evident in the “Shame of Money”. Each of the early scenes depicts a situation where Richard tries to buy his way out of social conflicts and relations. At the end of the play, we are reminded of Richard’s bad deeds as each of the people he has offended recalls their encounter with him. The play has a clear and spelled out message; money is not everything, it cannot be converted into empathy and social responsibility. Both the structure of the play and its content have much in common with traditional storytelling. Elsewhere, I have argued that popular theatre in Tanzania in general is a continuation of traditional performance modes and that the two have many themes in common.³⁹ The connection between modern popular drama and traditional performance modes is made explicit in the weekly television drama programme at CTN called *Kitendawili*. *Kitendawili* is a word traditionally used when presenting a riddle, and all the plays of this programme

³⁹ Lange 1995.

have a moralistic message. As in the live theatre, the message is often summarised by one of the actors at the end of the play.

The history of popular theatre, however, and the sheer “proletarian” and burlesque air to it, has made the cultural bureaucrats and the elite ignore this genre and look for other ways to revive traditional performance modes. The Drama Department at the University of Dar es Salaam has thus developed a theatre genre called “the African Theatre”. African Theatre is stage drama based on African myths and legends. The setting is always a diffuse pre-colonial past, usually in a small kingdom and magical power and ancestral voices are natural elements. The plays often have a storyteller figure, and they may incorporate traditional music and dance. This new genre is taught both at the University of Dar es Salaam and at the College of Arts in Bagamoyo, but it does not have a life outside of these two institutions. In fact very few people see these plays. The students at the College of Arts would often include African Theatre at their yearly festival, but the audience in Bagamoyo did not appreciate the plays very much. They were often visibly bored and impudent youths would sometimes tell the storyteller to leave the stage so that the play could continue.

I discussed the lack of popularity of African Theatre with the theatre director of Muungano Cultural Troupe, Jayson Kami. He said that Muungano would never be able to survive if they were to perform such plays. Even though the plays certainly touch upon questions which are relevant in our time too, they are essentially seen as “historical” plays referring to the past, and that is not what the audience want to be served. People in Dar es Salaam as well as in Bagamoyo want to see their own reality dramatised on the stage, and they do not seem to be able to make the conflicts of the African Theatre relevant to their own life. African Theatre is supposed to continue traditional performance modes, but there is one aspect of these performances that the new genre has been unable to capture: humour. African Theatre is art theatre, and it has much more in common with contemporary European classical drama than the comical, overacted and burlesque popular theatre has.

The African Theatre genre at the University of Dar es Salaam and the College of Arts is yet another outcome of efforts to “find” an African identity in the arts, which has parallels in other African countries.⁴⁰ The producers of popular theatre on the other hand, do not feel a need to justify what they do and they are not concerned about linking their art to any past tradition. Their main concern is to give advice to urban people in a time when many people experience conflicts between ‘traditional’ and modern ways concerning the role of the family, gender relations and money. But as Catherine M. Cole argues for concert parties, this advice need not be ‘politically correct’, and it is seldom predictable. It is rather part of a “messy and complex process of cultural negotiation” (Cole 1997:372). Swahili popular drama is as popular as it is because it helps people grapple with central moral dilemmas in their own lives in a frame where stereotypical characters and comedy express, and provide relief from, contemporary tensions and contradictions.

⁴⁰ In Malawi for example, university plays are mainly set in “an ahistorical folkloric realm” (Barber 1987, p. 44).

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‘Imagined Families’ in South African Women’s Autobiographies

Maria Olausen

In South Africa, recent discussions about “the family” stress the fact that any policies based on the idea of either a nuclear family or on a functioning network in the form of an extended family do not reflect the actual situation of South African households. Male-female relations, marriages and family formations do not adhere to a clean division between, on the one hand, civil law marriages with a corresponding nuclear family, and a customary law marriage within an extended family on the other.¹ These discussions also challenge the notion that motherhood is divided neatly along racial lines where white women all live in nuclear families and embrace (or resist) a patriarchally prescribed motherhood while all black women would represent a progressive and liberating form of motherhood which encompasses entire communities and ultimately the whole nation.

A situated analysis of “family” needs to take into account the specific context but also the construction of difference whereby the representation of “family” is placed in relation to an ideal which is somehow assumed to exist in the “West” or among the more privileged in any post-colonial society. In this paper I want to discuss autobiographies written by South African women in the 1990s: Sindiwe Magona’s *To My Children’s Children* (1990) and *Forced to Grow* (1992a); Mamphela Ramphele’s *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (1996), Mirriam Moleleki’s *This Is My Life* (1997), Phyllis Ntantala’s *A Life’s Mosaic* (1993), and Nothemba Ngcwecwe’s *Not the End of the World* (1997). I want to place these texts within the context of the current preoccupation with the past in South Africa and focus on ways in which the textual construction of the female self interacts with dominant ideas about family. I therefore want to focus on the function of “the family” as a narrative strategy within the autobiographical texts (and thus not on the “information” about household formations which they contain).

The preoccupation with the past takes many different forms, from the official and public inquiries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to the publication of autobiographies, autobiographical novels and other life stories as well as an academic interest in the issues surrounding this telling of the past. In the recent volume *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*² the editors point out that much autobiographical writing in South Africa today is connected to the past in ways which serve an immediate need in the present time.³

¹ See, for instance, Sunde and Bozalek 1995.

² Nutall and Cotzee 1998.

³ The current need for re-imagining is met on many different levels and in different forms and it may well be that the most profound challenge to the past will come in a totally unprecedented

Although the texts all describe black women's lives in apartheid South Africa they tell vastly different stories. These differences are not only due to intersections of ethnicity, class, rural-urban differences with the construction of gendered experience but also with the way in which the autobiographical form is utilised and the generic demands are met or circumvented. Ngcwe's and Moleleki's texts are for instance written as political interventions, as acts of encouragement to other women who might find themselves in difficult circumstances. Jabavu's and Ramphele's texts, on the other hand, place the "life" within specific historical contexts, and give their views on these times and so influence the telling of the past. Constructions of female self-identity are therefore not necessarily central to any of these texts, instead one could say that they at times rely on generic conventions and existing models in order to more forcefully express their views of the past or their present political agenda. In texts which are sometimes used as evidence of a "subaltern voice", the identities and narratives often reflect hegemonic stereotypes. As Margaret Daymond points out the "dominant ideology shapes the utterance of the oppressed as well as the oppressor, we cannot think in terms of there being a suppressed, authentic voice that is now surfacing."⁴

One of the most pressing concerns in the texts on a thematic level is what we could term the problem of human reproduction. This is not surprising given the fact that South Africa is among the countries with the most unequal distribution of wealth in the world resulting, not only in a high crime rate, but also in the exploitation of labour. Most black women in South Africa are part of a superexploited labour force with the responsibility of caring for small children as well as providing for them. Despite these responsibilities many live in a situation where the implementation of customary law, apartheid regulations and labour regulations concerning married women's right to employment converge to exacerbate the situation even further. Their life might not be imagined or narrated primarily as "a mother's life". But the ideological options for female self-expression which inform the process through which material realities are turned into experience make it impossible for the narrators of these texts to avoid grappling with the problem of representing "family" and "motherhood".

Different versions of "family" can be seen as arrangements, which are intended to solve the problem of how to care for small children and other dependants while also earning a living. Dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity reflect the idea that a man's primary role is that of breadwinner while a woman is responsible for childcare and work within the household. The autobiographies narrating black women's lives during and after apartheid show that these constructions are a powerful part of the discourse within which the lives are imagined even though they describe a different household situation.

The fact that South African women's resistance to apartheid has been described as the struggle of "mothers" raises issues of definitions of motherhood as well as the implications of such a label for gender equality. As Desiree Lewis

form. Autobiography might not necessarily be the best form for understanding processes of identity formation or memory. Recent discussions about the meaning of literature and literary form for political change in South Africa include Boehmer et al. 1995; Boehmer 1998 and Pechey 1998.

⁴Daymond 1996, xxiii.

convincingly argues in her article on “Myths of Motherhood and Power”, there is a risk that the images of strong black women are used to misinterpret a subordinated position and justify gender inequality.⁵ The autobiographical texts show, however, that different manifestations of racial oppression and the resistance to racial subordination radically changed the terms and the possibilities of defining and understanding female identities. Gertrude Fester argues that the United Women’s Organisation (UWO) which was formed as a direct result of the Soweto uprisings in the late 1970s was instrumental in also challenging power relations between men and women despite adhering to a motherist rhetoric.⁶

As feminist and post-colonial theorists of autobiography have pointed out, women and especially women in previously colonised societies occupy subject positions which are simultaneously both on the inside and the outside of dominant understandings of subjectivity. This is particularly clear when it comes to the issue of family where women have difficulties writing a life story which would treat family only as a starting point and place of origin for the protagonist. The traditional “western” idea of an autobiography builds on the assumption of a hero who leads an active life and who therefore leaves origins in order to fulfil his heroic duties which are the reason for writing the autobiography in the first place. Through these actions where he “knows himself a responsible agent: gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires” he ultimately creates his own self, according to Georges Gusdorf.⁷ “Family” is thus something by necessity peripheral, the place he returns to from time to time but the main focus of the autobiography is somewhere else. Mary Evans similarly argues that “[a]ll genres of narrative literature (be they fiction or auto/biography) tend to be structured according to a relatively fixed pattern of gender development. This underlying plot structure is one in which the narrative agent (or hero) must be male, regardless of the actual person in the text, because the detours and obstacles that have to be overcome are morphologically female.”⁸

The writing of a life as a woman’s life thus often entails giving voice to or contesting patriarchally prescribed positions within the “family” rather than taking up new subject positions in a move which often erases or contests “family” or uses it only as a point of origin. As Dorothy Driver points out in her discussion of “Women as Mothers, Women as Writers”, “[c]onventionally, the figure of the mother spells silence.”⁹ It is therefore quite clear that the autobiography will have to renegotiate the genre as well as the meaning of family. Life stories and experience do not exist unmediated but are created through both the materiality of lives and the dominant ideas, which influence our sense of self. Women’s experience as represented in the form of a written

⁵ Lewis 1992.

⁶ This issue is complicated by the fact that while women’s political activism has led to legal change and changes in women’s self-perception, studies suggest that men still adhere to definitions of masculinity which presuppose domination over women (Fester 1998). See also Shefer and Ruiters 1998 and Campbell 1992.

⁷ Gusdorf 1980, p. 31.

⁸ Evans 1999, p. 117.

⁹ Driver 1990, p. 239.

autobiography is influenced both by the generic conventions of autobiography and by dominant definitions of family. As Dorothy Driver has shown, the focus on struggle and community in South African autobiographies in the 1980s means that “the personal, individuated ‘I’ becomes replaced by a focus on community, and a desire to find one’s self-definition within the black, rather than the white community.”¹⁰ But this did not solve the problem of women and writing since “the term *community* reads *patriarchal* community.”¹¹ Women’s voices articulated on behalf of or in relation to that community are therefore already determined by what can be seen as acceptable women’s voices.

This makes the question of a differently constituted female subject highly complex. This complexity also contains the problem of understanding and expressing “family”, kinship relations and household formations. The nuclear family is often considered a “western” family form, which through colonialism was more or less forcefully introduced in other parts of the world. While there is much historical truth in that view, it often leads to a rather simplified understanding of family forms in the “West”. It confuses the actual historical and social reality of household formations in Europe and North America with the dominant and popular idea of what constitutes a family, thus turning other arrangements into one of the characteristics of an ethnically “different” society.¹² In his study of the making of family in Western Europe and the United States, John Gillis introduces the idea of the “imagined family” which is “constituted through myth, ritual and image.”¹³ Gillis makes the useful distinction between families we live with and families we live by, where the latter conform to the idea of a nurturing, caring and stable unit. This idea of family is a Victorian invention, which spread to other parts of Europe and to the colonies. An important part of that ideology consists of creating a past where families were more stable and more authentic than families are at present. “We imagine their times to have been the days when fathers were really fathers, mothers true mothers, and children still children.”¹⁴ The iconic function of the family homestead, the grandparents and the mother as morally superior are all part of that invention of a past for the ideal family. Fragmentation and instability are seen as belonging to the present. The constant monitoring and recreation of family life is thus not seen as creating and maintaining a myth but rather as holding on to what came naturally in the past.

In the South African context one example of a text which both participates in such a process but also self-consciously comments on the function of family in the past is Noni Jabavu’s *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life* (1963). This text focuses on the home that the protagonist has left and

¹⁰ Driver 1988, p. 157.

¹¹ Driver 1988, p. 158.

¹² In Margo Russell’s study of parenthood among black migrant workers to the Western Cape for instance “Eurocentric notions of the ideal family” (Russell 1995, p. 1) are said to lie at the basis of mistaken expectations of the formation of black urban families. Rural customs are then evoked to explain a different understanding of family which presumably forms the choices in the urban areas. The degree to which this ideal informs the choices of all South Africans and the way in which it remains an ideal in all communities is not discussed. Instead Russell relies on ethnic specificity to “explain” other forms of household arrangements.

¹³ Gillis 1996, p. xv.

¹⁴ Gillis 1996, p. 3.

which she now returns to. It is not primarily an autobiography but a rewriting of home and of South Africa from the perspective of someone who has now become an outsider. The text both scrutinises the misconceptions that the protagonist had about her family and creates new myths about the past. The protagonist is a member of the South African elite, the "school people" connected to Lovedale and Fort Hare. She leaves for school in England when she is fourteen and returns for a visit in the 1950s. The text is an account of her experiences during that visit and it focuses on the old people's recollection of "traditional" life in the past and the meaning and centrality of family. While carefully adhering to the principles of the educated Christian elite, the narrator still participates in the idealisation of the rural "traditional" past, especially in recreating the idea of morally superior elders and a more people-oriented lifestyle. This idealisation is, however, undercut by descriptions of the protagonist's reactions to the changes in her childhood home due to the fact that her father had remarried. The home and family no longer fit in with the protagonist's views and needs.

Ellen Kuzwayo's influential *Call Me Woman* (1985) similarly both participates in and exposes the construction of an ideal family. Kuzwayo's autobiography shows that the idea of an extended family or several "mothers" does not necessarily protect the orphaned individual from being left homeless. The longing for a "home" takes the form of a wish for a nuclear family even while it hints at the hardships many women suffer at the hands of their husbands.

I now want to turn to the more recent autobiographies and look at how the problem of representing a female subject who, at the same time, is the family and leaves the family is approached. In these autobiographies the "imagined family" is present in complex ways. It is the structure, which supports memory, or an absent ideal around which the life is nevertheless organised. This "imagined family" is a nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female caregiver and the extended family forms and other household formations are all represented in relation to this ideal, thus also informing the ways in which family and ethnicity interact.

LIFE IN SPITE OF MOTHERHOOD

In her analysis of class in *Sindiwe Magona's* autobiography and fiction, Margaret Daymond sees Magona as positioning herself "primarily as an economic unit in society."¹⁵ For the narrative focus of the autobiography, this means that the life is seen and narrated as the story of how the rural girl became a professional woman. While the autobiography as genre demands the individual as its centre, this focus reinforces that necessity and privileges certain experiences above others. The construction of the self as economic unit comes about through the conflicting experiences of being an educated daughter of proletarian parents and a wife of a migrant labourer. The experience of motherhood is important but for this subject position it is basically one of conflict and an obstacle to the main endeavour, that of forging a self as salaried, middle-class professional.

¹⁵ Daymond 1995, p. 301.

Miriam Moleleki's autobiography is the story of a political activist. It has been written with the help of a creative writing facilitator in a project where four women in Worcester in the Western Cape told their life stories.¹⁶ These life stories are published in separate volumes. One is published in Xhosa, one in Afrikaans and two, Moleleki's and Ngcwecwe's are published in English. In the very first sentence of the autobiography the narrator takes up the voice of the political activist: "Well, I was fighting, but now I want to sit down and write a story about what I have done."¹⁷ This remains the main perspective throughout the text. The information about family, parents, siblings, husband and children, is contained within that story. The narrator brings to the fore issues which highlight the need for political activism but also the sacrifices this entailed.

The protagonist was born in the township of Klippiesdal in De Doorns in 1944. The protagonist's father dies when she is two years old but later the narrator refers to a father throughout the narrative. The narrator also gives the reader the information that "at home we were four children, three girls and one boy."¹⁸ Later it is, however, clear that she didn't have a brother but that her mother claimed the protagonist's son as her own. Although this shows a different understanding of the terms "father," "mother" and "brother" than the one assumed within a nuclear family, the text privileges the nuclear family. This is particularly clear in the description of the teenage pregnancy and the protagonist's life with her in-laws. The protagonist spends twelve years looking after her father-in-law who was bed-ridden.

But traditionally I was not supposed to even greet my father-in-law with my hand. I cannot even give him food with my hands. ...

After a year, the uncles came and had a talk and made a slaughter and made some beer to gave me permission to touch my father-in-law.¹⁹

Here it is quite clear that the prohibitions no longer serve the purposes of those in power and that they are quite willing and able to change the "traditions" in this case. The narrator moves the discussion away from individual issues and internal family problems to the larger question of the realities of young couples living with the older generation and their implications for women. "It is a custom where the women are mostly oppressed."²⁰ The narrator also shows an awareness of how older women use their power within these structures to oppress younger women and discusses her own determination not to destroy the marriages of her children.

The narrative moves on to focus almost explicitly on the protagonist as a political activist and her life as wife and mother is reflected on from this perspective. Although the narrator does draw on the discourse of women participating in political activities as mothers, this remains a rhetorical device. The

¹⁶ These are not "researcher-motivated" as defined by Judith Lütge Coullie (1997, p. 133) but initiated and written by the women themselves with a specific audience in mind.

¹⁷ Moleleki 1997, p. 1.

¹⁸ Moleleki 1997, p. 3.

¹⁹ Moleleki 1997, p. 22.

²⁰ Moleleki 1997, p. 22.

text makes a clear distinction between the activist and the mother and then points to the vulnerability of an activist mother and the mother of protesting children. The protagonist's political involvement is dated from the time of her son's imprisonment. The impact of her own imprisonment on her children is narrated as part of her political struggle and the harshness of her oppression. She was imprisoned on four occasions and at times kept in solitary confinement without being able to communicate with her family. Neither is it possible to discuss her experience of wifeness and motherhood without reflecting on the fact that her husband lost his job and her children were deprived of their mother for months without knowing what had happened to her and in addition were harassed and beaten by the police. Her later political career and achievements which she describes as "the fruit of my jailness" are placed alongside the suffering of her children.

Magona's autobiography focuses more clearly on the conflicts between the role of a dependent mother and that of an independent provider. The first volume *To My Children's Children* (1990) spans the years 1943–1966. The movements described are geographical from a rural to an urban environment, from the village of Gungululu in the Transkei to Cape Town. There is also an economic movement from a rural peasant cattle-owning existence to an urban proletarian life and later to a salaried professional and back again to the insecure and exploited existence of a domestic servant.

The second volume, *Forced to Grow* (1992) spans the period 1966 to 1984 where the primary focus is on personal development and individual achievement through education. The narrative is clearly structured from the vantage point of a middle-class professional. That this is the ultimate outcome of the hardships that the protagonist goes through is made clear throughout the text and forms the basis of the narrative's progression. This movement from a proletarian to a professional existence, inevitably influences the structure of the memoirs as well as the relative weight given to the different historical events depicted.

Reviewers have focused primarily on the aspect of the deprived mother in Magona's autobiography.²¹ The main hardship that the protagonist suffers is due to the fact that she is both the breadwinner and the caregiver of her children as well as the wife of a man who is "dead wearing a hat".²² The descriptions of motherhood function to move the narrative towards a redefinition of both motherhood and womanhood or rather of womanhood towards what the narrator sees as the role of the father. The function of family is central to the extent that the tension between the public life and the private life and the im-

²¹ See, for instance the reviews by Deirdre Byrne 1992 and Pat Schwartz 1993.

²² Magona 1990, p. 167. The expression "dead wearing a hat" is explained by Magona in the following way: "At the age of twenty-three, married, mother of nearly three children, I was sans husband. Not divorced. No. My husband became my former husband through a much more simple method than divorce; the method commonly referred to as "he is dead wearing a hat". [...] This saying, I think, comes from the custom of Xhosa men having to wear a hat once they have gone through circumcision and been, therefore, proclaimed MEN. Dead implies no longer there, of no use to us, or, simply, ineffectual. "Dead wearing a hat" means, therefore, the husband no longer performs those duties usually associated with that role—functions such as those of provider, protector, lover, and father. [...] However, as he is "wearing a hat", he is walking around physically appearing alive".

possibility of keeping up such a distinction in itself becomes the main content of the narrative. These redefinitions are however contained within a narrative which stresses the development of the protagonist, where both education and rural-urban migration play important parts.

In spite of this sometimes explicit identification of the protagonist with the father role, the narrator is introduced as a Xhosa grandmother. The ethnic persona is utilised in order to stress a rural African origin where the early childhood of the protagonist is also placed. The narrator evokes an oral tradition and goes to great lengths to explain why this autobiography now appears in a written form. The reader is clearly expected to see the narrative as a device which is used to introduce elements of Xhosa life to a non-Xhosa reader. This use of narrative motherhood co-exists uneasily with the protagonist's motherhood which takes place in an urban setting. Elizabeth Taylor reads Magona's celebration of rural life in opposition to South African male writers' rejection of tradition and argues that Magona brings "the vitality of precolonial culture ... into an urban, contemporary world where it may be revitalised and adapted to a new age."²³ This presupposes and reinscribes a division into rural and urban which treats the rural simply as a repository for a romantic past and fails to take into account the reality of contemporary life in the rural areas.

As in Moleleki's text, the protagonist's unplanned pregnancy is the reason for an early marriage but here it is the marriage itself and the lack of support by the husband which forms the main story. The protagonist's education and position as a teacher as well as her parents' expectations for her are destroyed and she is now left with the task of working her way back to a respectable position. The task is a daunting one—her husband finally disappears when she is pregnant with their third child after having made sure that she loses her job as a domestic servant. Marriage and motherhood are seen in terms of an inevitable dependence on a breadwinner and thus the husband's disappearance brings with it a new sense of self-determination. "I came to see I was not just alone; I was free. Free of him. Free to be."²⁴

The second volume opens with an ironical comment on the meaning of *idikazi*, a husbandless woman in Xhosa. The source of this information is a "Kaffir-English Dictionary" from 1918 compiled by an English missionary. Here the narrator no longer occupies the position of a Xhosa great grandmother with the knowledge and authority to explain customs and traditions. The main function of the discussion of the term *idikazi* is to show how inadequate that term is to describe the situation of the protagonist in the townships of Cape Town in 1967, a legal minor responsible for small children without anyone to depend on. By using a dated dictionary which uses the term "kaffir" to refer to the Xhosa, a word which later turned into a racist term of abuse, the narrator further undermines the authority of the missionary.²⁵

There are few instances where the discrepancy between the ideal of the urban nuclear family and the real life odds against that ideal are discussed. The husband's efforts to provide for his family are dismissed as totally impossible.

²³ Taylor 1993, p. 102.

²⁴ Magona 1990, p. 182.

²⁵ "Kaffir" is a loan-word from Arabic meaning "unbeliever".

At one stage he wants the family to join him in Johannesburg illegally and another suggestion of his is that they move to his family in the rural areas where they would be provided for. These proposals are indications of a different understanding of the relationship between husband and wife which leaves the wife dependent on the husband's entire family while he is absent trying to provide for her and the children. It is clearly against such an understanding that the protagonist struggles while the narrative stresses only the personal and individual aspects.

What is left out of this picture are the expectations of a different existence beyond that of the rural wife and mother and the urban housewife, expectations that had been nurtured by education. Not only is there no place for this single, still married, mother struggling to make ends meet in the township, but her ambitions towards a professional existence cannot be contained within the ideology which she admonishes her husband for not living up to. Rules, regulations, laws, habits and even people's reactions towards her are still governed by an understanding of a differently situated subject. The discourses on family life, which determine her, are so contradictory as to make coherence impossible.

"The family" in the past is here described as a functioning support system, which has been destroyed through apartheid legislation. The fact that many facets of this "past" system still exist and that they might not only be dysfunctional due to apartheid but also experienced as oppressive and contrary to the expectations of an educated woman is not entered into here. What is stressed is the fact that the protagonist's marital status is used to limit her possibilities of supporting herself. When she finally manages to secure a teaching position again, her marital status makes it impossible for her to work on other than a temporary contract basis. In view of her own marriage and the irresponsible behaviour of her husband, she also finds out that he had actually never had permission to work in Cape Town on a permanent basis. At this point the narrator comments on the naive assumptions which governed their decision to marry.

This text is firmly placed within a context where the definition of masculinity is closely tied to the ability and willingness to care for a family through work. The text seems to operate within the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, which Debbie Epstein describes as "the white, middle-class, heterosexual, family man, living with his wife and children." Epstein points out that "[m]en and women who are subordinated within social relations based on this ideal are likely to find ways, big and small, of resisting it" but that "actions or histories which undermine powerful forms of masculinity do not necessarily lead to the empowerment of women or undermine patriarchal power more generally."²⁶ Magona's text seems firmly placed within the ideological context where masculinity equals domination but it also perpetuates the view that it is the absence of a male provider which forces women out of feminine dependence.

Since motherhood is part of dependence, the protagonist's experience of motherhood cannot be represented as a coherent part of her life. All the pregnancies are unplanned in a situation where they have disastrous consequences for the main focus of the narrative, the development of a professional career.

²⁶ Epstein 1998, pp. 52–53.

Through the way in which the narrative is organised with this progression as a central feature, the pregnancies and the subsequent letdowns by the husband are mainly stumbling blocks on the way. They are important parts of the main plot and the rendering of these experiences is therefore formed by the subject position of the economic unit. Unplanned pregnancies are part of a different understanding of life than the careful juggling of career, pregnancies and child care arrangements which are part of the ideal of the urban, professional woman.

When the narrator discusses the protagonist's relationship to her children, she repeatedly stresses the need for her to support them, to take upon herself the role of the father. This does not mean that there is no conflict in this constellation from the protagonist's point of view. When the children grow older, the protagonist is often forced to leave them to their own devices in Guguletu when she goes to work. She is concerned that she is their safety but also that she is being too protective. Magona returns to this conflict in her short stories. In "Leaving", Magona (1991) depicts a situation where a mother has to abandon her children or see them starve to death. The story deals with the wife of a migrant worker who is forced to leave her children sleeping in a hut in the village while she goes off to town to find work. The employment she finds is that of a domestic worker. The motherhood Magona describes is therefore one in which the mother is responsible for both supporting the children and caring for them. The fact that the protagonist works as a domestic servant, caring for other people's children and households, reinforces the idea of a conflict within the expectations directed at working-class women.

The husband returns towards the end of the narrative as the protagonist is about to leave for New York the second time, together with the children. The possibility of a life as a migrant labourer's "widow" in the village of her husband is now mentioned for the first time as a possibility seriously considered by the protagonist. "That had been my ambition then [in 1966], to go and be a worthy village wife, pleasing to my in-laws."²⁷ The narrator now gives this additional information thus changing the story of the past. The highly qualified woman going off to take up a position at the United Nations is the one looking back at her past and seeing the possibility of a village woman totally dependent on an absent husband.

The voice of the great grandmother is again claimed towards the very end of the second volume. The reader is addressed as a great grandchild and is asked to consider the narrator as sitting on goatskin or a grass mat instead of on a chair even when the protagonist is described as a well-travelled, urban professional, happy in the knowledge that she had escaped the village.²⁸

²⁷ Magona 1992a, p. 229.

²⁸ The tension between rural, traditional habits and customs and the values which an educated professional is supposed to uphold are brought out when the protagonist after a long struggle finally manages to find a well paid position in a secondary school and, as part of her path back into a respectable existence, decides to be reinstated by the church. At this point her mother becomes an initiate of a traditional healer. Here the narrator takes a clear distance from the protagonist and explains that she was at that stage very immature and had difficulties with her mother's decision. This stage gives way to admiration for the mother's achievement and all is well. This reconciliation between traditional medicine and formal education is, however, possible only after the former has been incorporated into the latter. The mother's achievement is now seen only

Moleleki's narrative, in contrast, does not introduce ethnic difference but stresses sameness when addressing the reader. The narrator brings in the political struggle and the changes that she has helped bring about in that sphere and she demands that the idea of democratic selection also be utilised within the sphere of tradition and custom.

Tradition is very important, you know, we cannot leave it behind, but sometimes it can make you a slave.

You must take the customs like a constitution, where you can take the good things and scrap other things, things you see that are wrong things.²⁹

The narrator does not need to establish credentials as one of the people, neither does she describe the life story of a person who is safely removed from custom and tradition. The imperative to act and challenge some of the practices through a democratic process on the part of all those involved comes from the fact that the narrator is herself at the time of telling her story actively part of that community. Her life and the lives of her children are determined by those customs. In this way Moleleki's text works against the discourses on "tradition" which legitimise the oppression of rural women through aromatizing "African village life". Instead she points to a reality shaped by political forces and power struggles, which is continually changing.

In South Africa the debate on "tradition" has tended to take the form of for or against, i.e. either it is said to be reconcilable with the new dispensation or not. Both positions reveal an essentialist understanding of ethnicity. What both Moleleki and Ngcwecwe's texts suggest is that "tradition" can exist in another more democratic form, one which is less oppressive to women, and that women are restructuring "tradition" on a daily basis. According to this view, "tradition" is always changing and always the object of interventions by the state and its allies on the one hand, and by the community on the other.³⁰

THE STORY OF A WIFE

Phyllis Ntantala's autobiography has family life at its very centre and only superficially engages in the issues of resolving the question of separation, of a life apart from family. This does not mean that it is restricted to depictions of family life, on the contrary it gives a broad and fascinating description of South

as the choice of an individual and her knowledge as one type of knowledge among many others, not as a challenge of her daughter's choice of education. The same pattern is apparent when the protagonist approaches her mother's teacher for some information, despite the patronising attitude on behalf of the protagonist who makes it very clear that she expects to be praised for her lack of prejudice towards the healer. The healer is also described as gratefully acknowledging the fact that an educated person seeks knowledge from her. The type of information she seeks is, ironically enough, entirely restricted to the practical application of traditional medicine and does not in any way challenge the school's claim to superiority. Again the individual nature of the healer's enterprise is stressed and translated into the language of personal achievements. Magona returns to this issue in the short story "Enkosi Ntumba! A Daughter's Tribute" (1992) which deals in more detail with the educated daughter coming to terms with her mother as a traditional healer.

²⁹ Moleleki 1997, p. 23.

³⁰ For literature on the making of traditions see, for instance, Neocosmos 1995; Ranger 1983; Vail 1989 and Walker 1994.

African history as well as the political and social conditions in South Africa from the 1920s until the 1960s and of life in exile.

Like Magona, Ntantala refers to her children as her intended audience, not as imaginary readers/listeners but as contextualised persons living in the United States and curious about her past. The children and grandchildren are removed from rural South Africa and it is because of this that the story has to be told. The story thus stresses difference rather than the continuity between past and present.

“Tradition” is often seen in opposition to education. The narrator cannot claim roots among uneducated people nor does she seem concerned with evaluating the habits and customs with which she is not familiar. The customs in the family of her childhood are narrated with the main focus on family life and are not necessarily related to “traditional African life”. The distance to the uneducated people is often stressed. When it comes to describing the political activities of the protagonist’s father, her husband and son, this relationship to the people is contradictory. It encompasses a vision through which the elite has a social obligation towards ordinary people but at times she also expresses a wish to act not on behalf of, but as part of, the people. Ethnicity and “tradition” here exist in an uneasy and contradictory relationship to political activity.

The protagonist was born in the community of the Duff mission station in the Idutywa district in the Transkei. Her family had for generations been closely involved with supporting the mission station and being the main link between new missionaries and the community. The history of the area, which is recounted in the beginning of the autobiography, is thus also part of the family history. Ntantala, the great grandfather of the protagonist was an adviser to Sarhili, the Xhosa king at the time of the Nongqawuse tragedy.³¹ He was not convinced by Nongqawuse’s story but realised that he had no influence and therefore left for Hohita and prospered there. He was then able to assist the king after the tragedy and was subsequently given an important position at the court. After returning to the Idutywa district in 1870, Ntantala continued to have close links with the king who was now acting on behalf of the colonial authorities. Ntantala was given certain areas in which to act as an overseer. He was also a policeman. The next generation was therefore in a position to acquire land. The narrator simply says that “they had taken advantage of the land distribution.”³² The protagonist’s mother grew up at Lovedale where her family was involved with the missionary enterprise of alphabetising Xhosa, translating the bible and producing teaching material. The mother of the protagonist was educated, she had trained and worked as a teacher prior to her marriage. The depiction of a rural childhood where the ideal of a nuclear fam-

³¹ During the Frontier Wars of the 19th Century, the Xhosa found themselves increasingly weakened due to the incorporation of part of their territory into the Crown Colony of British Kaffraria. The influence of missionary teaching and the introduction of European technology led to political fragmentation. The cattle were also suffering from lung sickness. In 1856 a young woman, Nongqawuse, claimed that she had been addressed by the ancestors who wanted the people to kill all their cattle. They were also to refrain from all cultivation of the land. King Sarhili was persuaded and the disastrous cattle killings went on until 1857.

³² Ntantala 1993, p. 8.

ily coexisted happily with obligations towards relatives and the community at large has a great deal in common with Jabavu's account in *The Ochre People*. In both texts the household is described as functioning on a practical level with the help of servants and children of relatives who were placed in the household. The oppressive conditions under which the dependent children of relatives and the servants lived are not entered into in these texts—on the contrary they are described as being grateful for the opportunity to be part of this household.

When it comes to descriptions of the protagonist's marriage, the ideal of a nuclear family with a male provider for wife and children as dependants is reinforced but this ideal is narrated in opposition to romantic love. Ntantala falls in love but gives up this relationship in favour of a marriage to A.C. Jordan. The marriage is introduced in the narrative as the protagonist's choice even though it is the choice of letting her father accept the suitor for her after she herself has already turned him down. The strong focus on the nuclear family where wife and children are defined through the socio-economic situation of the husband/father is thus represented, not as the only possible mode of existence, but as a sensible choice. Although the protagonist's education and career do not challenge the idea of the husband as the primary provider, there is a shift in the narration towards the end of the autobiography dealing with the time in Britain and the United States. The protagonist takes up teaching positions at Kroonstad and Lovedale, studies at the university of Cape Town and subsequently holds a position at the Institute of Race Relations. The narrative here has its primary focus on the actual work or the contents of the studies and the later work or wish for work abroad incorporate an expression of fear of being seen only in relation to the husband. "There is nothing I fear as much as being a housewife. If I am going to be one, I must be one by choice."³³

In Magona's text, in contrast, education, diplomas and positions are referred to almost exclusively in terms of their meaning for the protagonist's career and not through a description of content. In the United States, the issue of being present in the role of a wife is again raised. The narrator protests against the treatment of the wife "as an ornament" instead of a person with her own abilities and areas of expertise.³⁴ The fact that the protagonist was present at A.C. Jordan's lecture tours in the function of his wife and not as an expert in her own right, is never discussed. After the death of A.C. Jordan of cancer in 1968 the protagonist finds that she is valued for her own work and that she is in great demand as a speaker. The shift in attitude towards wifhood is here clearly part of the experience of educated middle class women who have relied on a husband for economic security and social respectability and who, with the help of domestic servants, have taken responsibility for child care and household matters. In contrast to Magona, Ntantala is in a position where this arrangement functions even in the extreme situation of political oppression and exile. The husband is always able to provide and sticks to his duty. This text, written in the voice of daughter, wife and mother, celebrates the responsible father who brought up his daughters to be successful women. It goes on to celebrate the husband and his achievements and later those of the son Pallo

³³ Ntantala 1993, p. 192.

³⁴ Ntantala 1993, p. 216.

Jordan. The protagonist's unhappiness about being a housewife therefore stands unresolved in a text which so clearly is structured around wifhood.

Ngcwecwe's autobiography can be characterised as the story of a wife and a mother but written from the opposite end of the spectrum from that of Ntantala's. Whereas the protagonist in Ntantala's narrative comes from a privileged elite with a long family history and marries a good provider, *Ngcwecwe's* protagonist is from the very beginning deprived of all family connections. Despite this deprivation, or maybe rather because of it, the first part of the narrative tries to establish an identity for the protagonist by introducing her in terms of her place of origin, her family and her present family situation. This leads to a great deal of confusion since not all her children live with her and not all the children living with her are her own children. The focus of mother and father in terms of where she grew up is also problematic since she grew up at a mission school and her relations to the families of her parents are strained and undefined. Towards the end of the autobiography, the narrator redefines the meaning of family:

[T]here are people who have families, and they are caring for them. But even if you've not got a family, you can make a family by yourself. ... I've made families for myself. I have got a mother, I've got grandmothers, I have got sisters ...³⁵

This statement is part of a section where the narrator points to strategies and possibilities for women who find themselves outside the structures of a nuclear family. It is not a departure from the ideology of the family but a reinforcement of it. It therefore comes as a logical conclusion of an autobiography that is very much concerned with trying to develop a sense of identity as daughter, wife and mother in a very difficult situation.³⁶

In *Ngcwecwe's* text, the main focus is on the struggle to find and maintain family connections and obligations, political work and independence are often seen in contrast to these aspirations. The introduction of the protagonist is complicated by the fact that there is no straightforward place/family connection to refer to. The narrator still focuses on these and explains the family connections among those that are living together and tries to account for the whereabouts of the absent ones. This focus on family serves the function of establishing an identity also in terms of place of origin.

Ngcwecwe was born in 1943 in Sterkstroom, near Queenstown. Her father was a teacher at the Roman Catholic Mission but he left his wife and

³⁵ *Ngcwecwe* 1997, p. 111.

³⁶ This text can also be read alongside Elsa Joubert's *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* (1980) which explores a similar kind of uncertainty in relation to ethnic identity if not to family connections. The story of Poppie Nongena is a novel written in the form of an autobiography with both a first person and a third person narrator. Poppie's life is organised around the at times contradictory obligations as daughter, granddaughter, wife and mother. The expectations of her in-laws in the rural areas are initially set in opposition to Poppie's own wishes in relation to her children. The main difficulties, however, are those imposed through influx control legislation and that is what finally separates Poppie first from her husband but later also from her children. As David Schalkwyk points out, Poppie "is engaged in a struggle over the processes of change all the time: she promotes or opposes changes as they affect her rôle as a woman and a mother" (Schalkwyk 1989, p. 271). Resistance to apartheid is therefore caught up in these processes and often challenges the very structures Poppie tries to preserve.

eight children and remarried. The mother left the children at the Mission and went off to find work. She was also politically active which from the point of view of the protagonist as a young girl means an even more vulnerable position.

In the text rural origins and traditional customs are mostly discussed in terms of their oppressiveness or uselessness. This is strongly connected to the problematical relationships that the protagonist has with both her mother's and her father's families. Despite the fact that the father has maintained no contact with them, the children observe the custom of laying a stone at the grave of their half-sister and again of their father when he dies. However, in both cases the reciprocal custom of slaughtering a beast for them in order to "clean them up" is not observed. The reason given is that they are not important enough for the family and that traditional customs are therefore waived when it comes to their well being.

The description of tradition in this text does not serve the function of describing the protagonist's origins or culture. Neither does it try to introduce the unknown and romantic elements of African life to the reader. The reader is here expected to be fairly familiar with the practices described. Within the context of the rhetoric of the text as a whole, which is directed towards the reader who might find herself in a similar situation to that of the protagonist, the observations about custom and traditional practices stress the vulnerable position of women. Occasionally, the narrator addresses a reader who is unfamiliar with the situation of women in traditional societies. Here again the possibilities in a new South Africa are seen in relation to the situation of women within traditional societies and the need for women to actively participate and discuss matters that will influence their lives is discussed.

[I]n our culture, women don't go into parliament. They don't even go to the Chief's gatherings. They don't go. Even maybe if they are there, maybe for some cases, they don't discuss. They just answer the questions, and the majority of the men are going to decide for them. Now, they must know that those women are there. They are there not just to sit and receive some speeches from the men, those women are there to discuss the grievances of the women.³⁷

The primary focus is on the difficulties of women left with small children but without a provider. The protagonist's mother had to leave the children in order to be able to make a living. She had very little support from her own mother and sister and left the protagonist in charge of the younger siblings when she died. This family with the young protagonist as head and provider and her younger siblings as dependants is the first in a series of different families that the protagonist lives in. As in Magona's autobiography, education is seen as something valuable which the protagonist has to fight for. And the main obstacle here is again the fact that the protagonist is left with the responsibility of caring for small children and earning a living without any support. The narrator focuses on the dreams and aspirations of the protagonist and the complicated family situation is related as an obstacle to these dreams.

³⁷ Ncgwecwe 1997, p. 102.

At no point is the family restricted to the biological children of the mother, neither does the protagonist keep her own children with her at all times. The main hardships arise from the fact that this family form is not recognised and the protagonist has no right to continue renting the house her mother was living in. During a brief period the protagonist also lives in a “marriage”. The narrator states that she did this because she felt this would bring some security to her life. “I thought, at last I have found someone who will care for me for the coming years.”³⁸ The protagonist ends up not only as the sole provider for her own children, some of whom lived elsewhere, but also providing for the husband who spends his money on girlfriends. She is also abused by him and in the end she leaves. Because of the lack of a formal marriage, the protagonist has difficulties securing her property from the man. In a direct address to the reader and as part of her political expectations for the future, the protagonist expresses her wish that women receive better legal protection from their “husbands” also in cases where there has been no formal marriage. She makes a link to the situation of women under customary law:

... in most cases in the homelands, women are not married by law, they are married by custom. I was not married in the court. What must be done is that the law must protect an unmarried woman from her husband. There must be a law for us.³⁹

The narrator speaks from the position of an independent woman, living with her children in a shack on the property of a relative. The reasons stressed by the narrator both for entering into the “marriage” and for leaving the “husband” are remarkably similar to those in the research discussed by Ziehl.⁴⁰ Here township women, far from being passive victims and therefore ending up as single mothers actually make decisions to live alone with their children, when this is the most sensible practical solution. Nicolette Strong also quotes township women analysing the situation as one in which women leave men and take over the household instead of being abandoned by them.⁴¹

In spite of the complexities of the protagonist’s situation, the narrator closes the autobiography with clearly expressed wishes and visions for the future. The “big desire” is for a beautiful house for herself and her children, all her children, also those who cannot visit her now because there is no room for them in the shack. She also wants to invite her relatives from the rural areas to spend their holidays with her. This vision entails an understanding of the self as primarily nurturer and care-taker and the wish is for a situation in which she would actually be able to fulfil this function. The fact that some of her children live apart from her and that she is also responsible for children who are not her own are presented as the only solutions in a difficult situation not as an ideal, new flexible family form or a desirable and “natural” extended family.

³⁸ Ngcwece 1997, p. 18.

³⁹ Ngcwece 1997, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Ziehl 1994.

⁴¹ Strong 1996.

THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE IN WOMEN'S LIVES

Mamphela Ramphele's autobiography, originally published with the title *Mamphela Ramphele: A Life*, is carefully and self-consciously constructed as the life of a woman activist within the Black Consciousness movement, a stance which in itself challenges the history and basic ideology of that movement as primarily for and about black men. The focus on a positive black identity through an affirmation of a particular kind of masculinity must be understood within the context of apartheid definitions of white masculinity as well as the international context of the black power movement with its corresponding focus on male power. As Kimberley Yates argues the "language used by black men in the nationalist struggles of the time point to a consciousness ... of returning the Black man to his 'rightful' place as patriarch."⁴²

In an interview Mamphela Ramphele points out that the entire political and cultural context was one in which women "didn't matter as leaders".⁴³ Ramphele goes on to argue that it was in fact her activism within the Black Consciousness movement which triggered a greater awareness of women's oppression too. The struggle for gender equality within the movement is paralleled by a struggle over the "story" of the movement. Ramphele's autobiography comes as a challenge to the "official" version, for instance, in the form of Donald Wood's film *Cry Freedom*. The public—private divide, the function of the family in the official "life" of the black man as activist and the idea of the black woman activist as honorary male culminates in Ramphele's critique of the role she had to play as "political widow".

Reviewers have commented upon the unpretentious title of the autobiography⁴⁴ but as Sarah Nuttall points out "'A Life' suggests that it is non-centralised; that other versions of it could be told. But it also resonates with the notion that it is exemplary—both ordinary, yet somehow to be followed, a precursor life."⁴⁵ This tension between the private and the public is an important part of the autobiography. On the one hand, the central concern of the narrator is to show how the demands of political activism, which effectively obliterated any distinct private life, led to the protagonist's breakdown. On the other hand, the act of writing this autobiography, especially the form it takes of "auto-anthropology" brings the private life back into the political arena.⁴⁶

The autobiography follows a standard chronological pattern. Within this chronology the narrator attempts to separate the personal, family oriented issues from the choices and pursuit of a career and these two from the protagonist's political activism. In the beginning of the autobiography, these are quite easily separated but they become more and more intertwined until they can no longer be considered separate issues. This complete unity is achieved towards the middle of the autobiography. From there on the issues again converge, this time the separation of the professional from the personal and the political is described as the protagonist's active choice. This pattern is also closely linked

⁴² Yates 1997, p. 17.

⁴³ Yates and Gqola 1998, p. 90.

⁴⁴ See the review by Andrea Lewis 1996.

⁴⁵ Nuttall 1998, p. 80.

⁴⁶ Gevisser 1996, p. 13.

to the protagonist's relationship with Steve Biko. At the point in the narrative when the three areas are inseparable, the protagonist is also closest to Biko. Biko separates from his wife and the protagonist is expecting his child.

The death of Biko forms the starting point for a movement in the opposite direction where the personal, the political and the professional are seen as separate issues. This movement of separation of a personal life from political and professional duties can be read as a comment on the political climate during the struggle for national liberation where women's political contributions were indistinguishable from their roles and functions within the domestic sphere. As Desiree Lewis argues, Ramphele's stance redefines women as citizens by shifting "her own and other women's experiences beyond the realms of familial relationships or prescribed social contributions to the more inclusive realm of participation."⁴⁷

The text describes a protagonist who from the very beginning sets out not to be a dependant and who in her choice of profession considers autonomy the most important criterion. One would therefore expect an exclusive focus on the public activities and achievements where specifically "female" elements remain private. The text does, however, move to an open elaboration of how this "femininity" and the "private" are created. Again, the nuclear family as an ideal is powerfully present through the expectations and it is ultimately around this ideal that the narration of the protagonist's relationships are organised. In this text, romantic love is also set in opposition to a "sensible" arrangement where families are involved, but in contrast to Ntantala, Ramphele's text stresses the independence of the protagonist, she does not marry a provider but neither does romantic love lead to marriage.

The decision to live the life of a single parent must in this instance be seen within the context of other expectations of married life than economic ones but also within the context of the household arrangements as a whole. The protagonist's first marriage ends in divorce. She subsequently has two children with Biko who at this point is married. The first child dies as a small baby while staying with the grandmother in the rural areas. The second child is born after the death of Biko. While living as a single mother in difficult circumstances because of the banning order the protagonist has her mother staying with her at all times. The practical running of the household and the difficulties of childcare arrangements were things she did not worry about at this stage. In the second marriage, however, she moves to Port Elizabeth with two children but without her mother and has no domestic servants, a situation she is clearly not used to. The expectation is here on the husband to participate in the practical running of the household and in caring for the children. When he refuses, she decides to leave him. In the part of the autobiography relating the protagonist's life at the University of Cape Town, there is a much clearer analysis of the problems women encounter trying to combine motherhood and a demanding career and the temptation of trying to be superwoman. The narrator makes a point of acknowledging her domestic servants: "I am indebted to all these women who have played this effective wife role in my life."⁴⁸ Ramphele also

⁴⁷ Lewis 1999, p. 42.

⁴⁸ Ramphele 1996, pp. 174–45.

refers to other arrangements where younger women have had the role of wife in relation to older women: “Widowed well-to-do African matriarchs in the Pietersburg region, where my parents came from, used to marry wives late in life to secure essential support in their old age.”⁴⁹

The situation of a single mother is here radically different from in Magona’s and Ngcwecwe’s texts. There is a class difference where the woman again decides that she is better off alone but not because the husband would not be a good provider but because he does not live up to other expectations. In the research discussed by Ziehl these expectations of an equal participation in child care and housework are attributed only to white women but it is clearly a matter of social class rather than race or ethnicity. Ramphele’s text undermines the ideology of “African motherhood” by discussing her problematic pregnancies and expressing regret at having left her first child with her mother. It privileges a nuclear family arrangement based on romantic love and a common purpose. Life as a single mother as part of an extended support network is therefore not seen as a chosen ideal, but as the best practical arrangement for a specific time in life.

Because this text refuses to privilege the private above the public or reduce the life to a tale of the struggle for a life in the public sphere the issue of family is made highly complex. The problem of representing womanhood becomes visible when the life of the protagonist is contrasted with that of Biko during the time of their political activism. In contrast to Biko who has a wife and family—i.e. a private life separate from the political activities, Ramphele’s home and love life is inseparable from political activism at this point.

Apart from her work at the health centre and her own political duties, she also assists Biko in his political work. It is now clear that if you write the Gusdorf type of life of a “responsible agent ... a maker of kingdoms and of empires” the world—family dichotomy is very important.⁵⁰ The exclusive focus on the world does not mean that the private sphere does not exist, but it remains precisely that, private, a place for regeneration with only specific ritual functions in the official sphere. In Ramphele’s narrative it becomes clear that not only was she deprived of this place for regeneration herself and as a result suffered several breakdowns, but that there was no place for a ritual enactment or acknowledgement of her relationship to Biko after his death. When it comes to her own public achievements, however, there is a need to find a male connection in order to explain her existence. Biko has provided that connection and she was subjected to introductions which focused first and foremost on her relationship to him. “The public role of the political widow derives from her relationship with her husband, and thus she is there not as a woman, but as someone standing in for a fallen man. She becomes the ultimate honorary man.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ramphele 1996, p. 175.

⁵⁰ Gusdorf 1980, p. 31.

⁵¹ Ramphele 1996, p. 180.

CONCLUSIONS

The narrative construction of women's lives involves issues of human reproduction, household arrangements, ideological functions of motherhood, definitions of femininity as well as the division between public and private. These issues seem to present themselves in some form or another regardless of the actual focus of the life. The voice, which is taken up as an "I" through the narrator, will have to negotiate the dominant ideas of "women's voices" when narrating the life.

These autobiographies are no exception. When analysing the actual descriptions and definitions of "family" in these texts it is important to bear in mind that "family" functions as part of the narrative construction of the female self—either as obstacle or as fulfilment or simply as a self-evident and "natural" part of life. The information given about household arrangements is therefore informed by how the self-"family" problem is approached. This is particularly important when it comes to understanding the function of the dominant ideal of the nuclear family within a narrative, which on a referential level describes other arrangements. In these autobiographies it is clear that even though the protagonists do not always experience life in a nuclear family, it is this ideal which informs the narrative and the construction of the life as a "life"—i.e. as a coherent story about an individual. The narratives also support the view that it is the ideal of a functioning nuclear family which ultimately informs the protagonists' decisions. Other arrangements, such as different forms of extended family or the decision to leave an unsatisfactory husband for the life of a single mother, are seen as temporary solutions.

The issue of extended family in these texts is made more complicated through the fact that some of the texts introduce ethnic difference through the implied reader. This is especially true of Magona's text. The life is here constructed as "the life of a Xhosa woman" for an audience which is assumed to be "western". In the case of the other writers, descriptions of an "extended family" vary according to how the protagonist is situated. The childhood protagonist of Ntantala and the later Magona is in a position to profit from the work of other members of the family, whereas Moleleki's and Ngcwecwe's protagonists are the ones who provide the labour. For women who provide the labour, an "extended" household means more children to care for, more people in the household to provide for. These household formations are the most practical ones available in specific situations and are often initiated and created by the women in charge. The representation of family within these texts, however, shows that the "life" is not always understood and enacted within the parameters of actual household situations but within an idealised "imagined" family of the dominant culture.

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The Thinker (1992) by Agnes Nyanhongo. (Photo: Elin Skogh)

Questioning ‘Authenticity’

The Case of Contemporary Zimbabwean Stone Sculpture

Elin Skogh

“Authenticity” is a recurring theme in the literature on contemporary African art. The word “authentic” is, *inter alia*, seen as synonymous with “original” or “genuine”. Common words used when describing authenticity are “isolation”, “true”, “permanence”, “untouched”, “spiritual”, “static”, and “unchanged”. It is common to ponder on what makes art produced by contemporary African artists truly “African”.

This article addresses and questions the discourse of “authenticity” in relation to contemporary Zimbabwean stone sculpture.¹ It examines how concepts such as tribal belonging and isolation, as well as historicism and mysticism are used in writings on Africa to construct “authenticity”.

The British art historian Frank McEwen (1907–1994), who for many years worked with arts in Zimbabwe, was also the initiator of the authenticity discussion within Zimbabwean art. His theories can be found in a number of articles, exhibition catalogues, and interviews.² Several authors and journalists have followed McEwen’s approach. During the 1990s some writers attempted to move away from McEwen’s theories, but they were seldom consistent in their descriptions of the art and its sculptors.³ There are, of course, writers on African art in general who do not emphasise the authenticity of African art, but only rarely do they discuss contemporary Zimbabwean sculpture.⁴ It is to be noted, however, that Stephen David Ross in an article from 1994 explicitly rejects the ideas of authenticity as they were presented by McEwen, and puts forward an alternative theory, where cross-cultural influences are emphasised. Ross calls it Multi Cultural Theory.⁵

The focus on “authenticity” and “Africanness” can also be found in Zimbabwean cultural policy statements. The Arts Council, the subdivision of the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture that develops the policy for visual arts and the framework for their support, expresses as its aim to:

¹ A more detailed study of Zimbabwean stone sculpture is presented in Skogh 1999.

² For example in “Return to origins: New directions for African arts” and “Shona art today” in *African Arts* 1968 and 1972; and the exhibition catalogue *New Art in Rhodesia* from the Rhodes National Gallery, 1963.

³ Examples are Celia Winter-Irving’s book *Contemporary Stone Sculpture in Zimbabwe* 1993 which has been an important reference in the West; Olivier Sultan’s book *Life in Stone; Zimbabwean Sculpture Birth of a Contemporary Art Form* published in 1994; and the exhibition catalogue *Stensulptur från Zimbabwe* from an exhibition at Millesgården in Stockholm 1990, written by Roy Guthrie, the director and owner of the Chapungu Sculpture Park.

⁴ Sidney Littlefield Kasfir’s *Contemporary African Art* 1999 does include a section about Zimbabwean stone sculpture. *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace* 1999, edited by Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor includes some articles which mention Zimbabwean art.

⁵ Ross 1994, p. 599.

... encourage the essential Africanness of art in Zimbabwe, which was suppressed during colonial times, and to see that the cultural dynamics of Zimbabwean society are exercised in an essentially African way.⁶

The stone sculpture is central in the claim for an authentic Zimbabwean culture. It is, however, a contemporary phenomenon which has no centuries old tradition, nor is it characterised by a restricted imagery, as the tribal sculptures of West Africa, and it is not created as a component in tribal rituals. The stone carving which formed the basis for subsequent modern Zimbabwean stone sculpture dates back to the 1950s.

Zimbabwe stone sculpture has been internationally exhibited several times, most frequently in ethnological and anthropological museums. For example, an exhibition called "Legacies of Stone: Zimbabwe Past and Present" was held at the Royal Anthropological Museum in Brussels in 1996. Collections of Zimbabwe sculptures have also been exhibited i.a. at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968, the Rodin Museum in Paris in 1971, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1972.

HOW IT BEGAN

Frank McEwen played an important role in the development of and theorising about Zimbabwe stone sculpture, but there were also other institutions and personalities.

The mission schools in Southern Rhodesia generally encouraged artistic activities that portrayed Christian themes and imagery. The Serima, Cyrene, and Driefontein mission schools did, however, allow their students to use local imagery when picturing expressly Christian themes.⁷ The missionary Canon Paterson at the Cyrene Mission School already did so in 1939.⁸ The Serima mission did not follow until 1950, when Father Groeber introduced teaching of carving techniques, which made this mission school quite important to the sculpture production in Zimbabwe.⁹

Tom Blomefield in Tengenenge was one of several tobacco farmers who were much affected by the sanctions that followed Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence in 1965. When his farm was not profitable, in 1966, he used large stone finds on his property and created a village workshop.¹⁰ Today Tengenenge is a multi-cultural art forum with a dozen resident artists and about seventy affiliated artists from southern Africa. Furthermore, it regularly has artists visiting from overseas.¹¹

Joram Mariga (1927-) has been important for the development of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe as inventor, teacher, and role model.¹² As a nine-year-

⁶ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 178.

⁷ Sultan 1994, p. 11.

⁸ Court 1992, p. 38.

⁹ Sultan 1994, p. 11.

¹⁰ Sultan 1994, pp. 9-10.

¹¹ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 69.

¹² Guthrie 1990, p. 38.

old he started to carve in wood, inspired by his family who were wood carvers and ceramicists.¹³ Mariga received a formal carving education in Waddilove, and in 1952 he went to Nyanga,¹⁴ where he gathered pupils whom he taught in his spare time.¹⁵ In Nyanga, Mariga met Pat Pearce, who became his friend and patron.¹⁶ Through her he met Frank McEwen in 1962.¹⁷ McEwen encouraged Mariga to continue working with stone sculpture, and we can note that Joram Mariga was therefore working with stone before McEwen came to Zimbabwe.¹⁸

The Chapungu Sculpture Park, founded in 1970, is the oldest private art gallery in Zimbabwe.¹⁹ The current director Roy Guthrie was appointed 1973.²⁰ Apart from being a place of exhibition it provides a Resident Artist Programme.²¹ The Park's permanent collection at Chapungu Sculpture Park is probably the largest and most diverse collection of Zimbabwean sculpture today.²² The Park has, during the 1980s and 1990s, organised exhibitions in many parts of the world.

The Vukutu Workshop was founded by Frank McEwen and his wife Mary when they could no longer stay in Harare in 1968.²³ When the McEwens left Rhodesia the Vukutu workshop was bought by Bill Burdett-Coutts. The Vukutu Gallery was later established to display and sell art produced at the workshop. The gallery is today run by Olivia Burdett-Coutts, who is a trained art historian.²⁴

Frank McEwen influenced Zimbabwean art development in many ways. In my view, Frank McEwen's most important contributions were two-fold. Firstly, he encouraged the sculptors to explore themselves and their culture. According to Nicholas Mukomberanwa this is what McEwen told the students:

“Talk about yourself, what is around you, your tradition, culture, spirituality, whatever.” And I took this so seriously that I began looking at my own culture and I discovered that there was nothing wrong with my religion.²⁵

Secondly, McEwen's understanding of art, his contacts in Europe, and his sense of marketing were important. Without this expertise it is doubtful that Zimbabwean sculpture would have reached the European and North American art world as fast as it did.

¹³ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 97.

¹⁴ Guthrie 1990, p. 38.

¹⁵ Sultan 1994, p.8.

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

¹⁷ Sultan 1994, p.8.

¹⁸ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, April 1996, p. 12.

¹⁹ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, December 1992, p. 3.

²⁰ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 162.

²¹ Mawdsley 1997, p. 3.

²² *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, December 1993, p. 9.

²³ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, July 1994, p. 14.

²⁴ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 168.

²⁵ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, July 1994, p. 7.

Because he was considered to be a promoter of African culture, McEwen had to leave Rhodesia in 1973,²⁶ he never returned. The National Gallery's teaching institution, the B.A.T. Workshop,²⁷ was established in 1982.²⁸

THE IDEA OF A "SHONA SCULPTURE"

Zimbabwe sculpture has been described as having originated in Shona culture, and has often been called "Shona sculpture". To understand why the art form is given an ethnic attribute one must go to colonial thinking. It was common for colonial governments, missionaries and settlers to claim that they had saved the African peoples from religious, moral, and cultural ignorance and poverty. To confine the Africans to a primitive culture was imperative to justify European behaviour and policy as well as the need for Western schools and missions. The imperial powers supported stereotypes that portrayed Africans as socially and biologically inferior heathens, who were rescued by the Europeans. Furthermore, Africans were said to be violent and exotic people that had no significant history. Indeed, they were assumed to be situated lower than Europeans on the evolutionary ladder.²⁹

There was also a more romantic or naive image of Africans as genuine and natural, as opposed to the cultures of industrialised communities. Modern artists such as Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) maintained the images of Africans as happier and more genuine.³⁰ These images can be found in contemporary society as well. The anthropologist Daniel Miller, for instance, points out that western anthropologists tend to describe tribal objects as the visualisation of genuine tribal societies as a contrast to the fragmented and individualistic world of the West.³¹

Frank McEwen also held a romantic view of African art. After the second World War he felt that the European art scene had stagnated, and turned to Africa to find art that he thought would be unaffected by the European "gimmicks à la mode".³² McEwen found this in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia). The Rhodes National Gallery opened in Salisbury (now Harare) in 1956, and Frank McEwen became its first director. Before coming to Southern Rhodesia he had worked for the British Council arranging art exhibitions in France and Great Britain.³³

The original purpose of the gallery was to collect and display the "western masters", but the funding was too small for this. To establish a domestic art scene, McEwen started a workshop at the gallery.³⁴ The workshop taught, black Africans, a variety of techniques, but stone carving was not introduced

²⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷ The B.A.T. (The British African Tobacco) Company is its main financial backer.

²⁸ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 61.

²⁹ Palmberg 1987, p. 6.

³⁰ Rubin 1984, pp. 6–7.

³¹ Miller 1991, p. 64.

³² McEwen 1968, p. 25.

³³ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, July 1994, p. 2.

³⁴ McEwen 1968, p. 25.

until 1965.³⁵ The art produced at the workshop was on several occasions displayed internationally.³⁶ McEwen writes, referring to the art produced at the workshop school:

Here, at last, was some authentic art conceived and modelled from within ... an art rising from the bowels of Africa with stylistic attributes, inborn aesthetic concepts in spirit and material.³⁷

McEwen was not the only European in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s who advocated the notion of an inborn African aesthetics, which a European artistic authority was qualified to extract from the African artists. Romain-Desfossés the founder of Atelier d'Art 'LeHangar' in Zaire; Father Marc Stanislas founder of the School Saint Luc in Zaire; and Margeret Trowell director of the Makerere School of Art in Uganda are examples of other Europeans who shared the same view.³⁸ Many of these Western promoters of African arts in the 1950s and 1960s were much influenced by the psychologist Carl Jung's theories and concept of archetypes when they emphasised an inborn culture.³⁹ McEwen himself, for example, wrote that: "traditional forms would always be retrievable from the memory."⁴⁰

McEwen was possibly the first westerner that theorised about Zimbabwean stone sculpture. He described the art as authentic because he saw it as originating from an indigenous culture—"the Shona culture"—hence McEwen referred to it as *Shona Sculpture*.

The term *Shona* was created by the British colonialists to more easily relate to the Africans in Zimbabwe. It includes a variety of tribes and cultures that belong to the same language group.⁴¹ Shona Culture was not formed or named until it came in contact with other nationalities and cultures. It can thus be seen as an invention of the British colonial administration. If by "authentic" one means "with no international influence", then the concept "Shona" itself is not authentically Zimbabwean.

Today many writers acknowledge the complications with referring to "Shona Sculpture", but often lack consistency. Olivier Sultan, for example, points out the weaknesses of the term, but continues to refer to "Shona Sculpture" throughout his text.⁴² Other authors do, in a similar way, distinguish the weaknesses of the term, but still stress the relevance of the Shona culture. Winter-Irving is one of those who only occasionally uses the term "Shona sculpture", but she introduces most of her sculptor portraits with sentences such as: "It is because Moses Masaya is a Shona that he makes sculpture."⁴³

³⁵ Sultan 1994, p. 6.

³⁶ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, July 1994, p. 3.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Mudimbe 1999, p. 34.

³⁹ Kasfir 1999, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Under the category Shona one finds *Korekore* in the north of Zimbabwe, *Manyika* in the east, *Ndau* in the southeast, *Karanga* in the south, *Kalanga* in the west, and *ZeZuru* in the central parts. See Bucher 1980, p. 19.

⁴² Sultan 1994, p. 14.

⁴³ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 99.

Quite a few Zimbabwean sculptors argue that the accentuation of Shona is incorrect and limiting. Bernard Takawira (1945–1997), who was internationally experienced, was one of them.⁴⁴ He studied stone carving at the Vukutu workshop school between 1967–69, but felt overshadowed by his successful brother John Takawira, stopped carving and began studying agriculture.⁴⁵ It was not until 1977, when he left his job as an agricultural adviser to the government, that he returned to the Vukutu workshop school to sculpt full time.⁴⁶ Takawira claimed that the sculpture, in order to evolve and expand, needed to take part in the international art discourse. Enhancing a “pseudo-ethnic” interpretation would limit the art to being something exotic and primitive. He argued that the future of Zimbabwean sculpture lay in the use of its distinctive character to express global thoughts and ideas. To do this, he said, artists need to explore and take a stand toward their own culture, as well as international cultures, to find universal expressions.⁴⁷

Another artist with similar views is Tapfuma Gusta (1956–). He feels that Zimbabwean sculpture is too culturally bound. This limits its imagery and freedom to change with the course of history. He advocates a Zimbabwean art that is culturally specific, but holds “inter-cultural values”.⁴⁸ His own sculpture often portrays problems or situations in his immediate environment.

The notion of “Shona Sculpture” is confusingly similar to discourses on traditional West African art which is referred to as *Igbon Masks*, *BaYaka Masks*, *Fang Sculpture*, *Yoruba Bowls* and so on. While the masks and sculptures in traditional West African art are used in culturally and religiously specific traditions and rituals, the Zimbabwean sculpture has no evident connection to the Shona culture. Or in the words of Sultan “their work does not have any obvious, immediate meaning within the community, village or family.”⁴⁹

Even though it is misleading to exaggerate a Shona traditional character of Zimbabwe stone sculpture, this does not mean that the “Shona” culture is unimportant in Zimbabwe. “Shona” identity plays an important role in Zimbabwe, both in politics and culture.

Many facts speak against labelling Zimbabwe stone sculpture as “Shona”. Far from all the sculptors are Zimbabwean. A few have a European background. Some are from other parts of Africa. For instance, Joseph Muli (1944–) is a Kenyan Wakamba. He grew up in an Italian foster family in Nairobi, where the father was a tombstone carver. There Muli learned the stone carving techniques early in his life.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, March 1998, cover page.

⁴⁵ Sultan 1994, p. 23.

⁴⁶ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, October 1995, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Winter-Irving 1993, pp. 121–23.

⁴⁸ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Sultan 1994, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Winter-Irving 1993, pp. 110–12.

GREAT ZIMBABWE AND "THE PERMANENCE OF CULTURE"

Contemporary Zimbabwean sculpture is often believed to have descended from the stone sculptures portraying birds in the grounds of Great Zimbabwe. The belief is that the knowledge of stone carving had been dormant within the Shona people for many centuries. Influenced by the Jungian notions of archetypes and collective cultural memory, McEwen launched the concept "the permanence of culture" and with this connected the 11th century Karanga sculptors and contemporary Zimbabwean artists.⁵¹ He wrote:

... this expression through sculpture ... was a rare combination of a vital and unspoilt people with a profound but destabilised ancient artistic background dating back hundreds of years ... lying dormant was the ancient art of stone carving of Great Zimbabwe, this is the only explanation for this sudden flowering of skill and talent.⁵²

Several others have referred to the idea of the "permanence of culture" when describing Zimbabwean stone sculpture. It is particularly frequent in exhibition catalogues. To argue that the stone carving knowledge has been dormant within the Zimbabwean people is, however, to confine them to something that existed centuries ago. It describes Zimbabwean stone sculpture as something ancient, innate, and determined by history. Yet, neither McEwen, nor any other writer, offers conclusive evidence that there is a connection between Great Zimbabwe and contemporary Zimbabwean stone sculpture. On the contrary, the radical changes in history, the multi-dimensional culture, and international influences indicate the absence of a long-term sculpture dominating tradition.

The focus on Great Zimbabwe neglects the richness of the Zimbabwean cultural history and imagery, as even a cursory look at Zimbabwe's past can show.⁵³ Throughout history different peoples have inhabited the Zimbabwean plateau. The first to inhabit the area were *Khoisan* hunters. The *Khoisan* left a large amount of rock paintings.

In the 2nd century a *Bantu* people invaded the plateau from north of the Zambezi river. This early iron-age settlement lasted for about a thousand years. The people of Great Zimbabwe succeeded them. Great Zimbabwe is the 11th century ruins of a large settlement, possibly of a *Bantu* group called the *Karanga*. Zimbabwe means "house of stone" and during Great Zimbabwe's prosperity there were several smaller *Zimbabwe*s on the Zimbabwean plateau down to present day South Africa. Great Zimbabwe was, however, the largest one. Its settlers were excellent smiths and traded gold and ivory for ceramics, cloth, and beads from Asia with Muslim traders on the African East Coast. Most of the jewellery found in the ruins of the *Zimbabwe*s, was confiscated by Europeans and melted down during the early 20th century.⁵⁴ In the Great Zim-

⁵¹ Kasfir 1999, p. 51

⁵² Brokensha 1994, p. 99.

⁵³ The information on the history and cultures of Zimbabwe is taken from: Davidson 1984, Bourdillon 1987 and Bucher 1980.

⁵⁴ Davidson 1984, p. 67.

babwe grounds there were also a set of stone sculptures portraying birds. They are commonly believed to portray Chapungus (Battleur Eagles).⁵⁵

When Great Zimbabwe lost its political power a group moved away and founded the *Khami* culture in the *Torwa* state. They created their own architectural style, which was known for its elaborate decorations.⁵⁶

During the coming centuries several dynasties emerged and fell. Portuguese traders came to the African east coast in the middle of the 15th century. By the time they reached Zimbabwe, the *Barwe* were the most influential people.⁵⁷

Before the area became a British colony at the end of the 19th century, two groups of *Zulu* invaded Zimbabwe from the south. The first were the Gaza Nguni and the second the Ndebele. The Ndebele are known for their elaborate bead work and house decorations.⁵⁸

All this complexity is neglected when Zimbabwean stone sculpture is described as if it is associated only with the Shona people. It is as if the Bantu people of the 11th century were the same as the Shona of today, and as if stone carving was an art form that had been lying dormant in the Shona culture for some eight hundred years. This approach differs greatly from how Western art is treated. For instance, Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957)⁵⁹ was affected by the medieval sculptures he experienced in his childhood but not many would seriously argue that his talent, and knowledge of sculpture had been dormant within his ancestors since the 12th century. Furthermore, few would claim that his special expression was the direct result of him having 12th century ancestors, that might have been sculptors.

An important assumption in the concept of “the permanence of culture” is that the country has been isolated, and that no outside influence has been able to alter the culture. Yet, as noted above, the early cultures of the Zimbabwean plateau were not isolated from the world, and neither are the Zimbabweans of today. During colonisation Zimbabwe encountered different European nationalities, Portuguese, Germans, and foremost the British. The Europeans influenced the visual field in Zimbabwe in many ways. New building techniques and Christian imagery are examples.

Several of the early sculptors had positions at the Rhodes National Gallery. The artists had access to the gallery’s exhibitions, collections, and art books. One of the first students at the Rhodes National Gallery Workshop school, Thomas Mukarobgwa, says that Frank McEwen encouraged him to explore the formative possibilities within his own culture, and told him: “Don’t think of the books which you have seen in the library.”⁶⁰ The books were there, however, and so were other international sources of inspiration, which McEwen even encouraged the students to acquaint themselves with. When

⁵⁵ Bourdillon 1987, p. 9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10

⁵⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁵⁹ Brancusi was a Romanian sculptor that was active in Paris. He is considered one of the leaders of abstract art.

⁶⁰ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, July, 1994, p. 5.

Sidney Littlefield Kasfir asks if McEwen walked with the students through a Picasso exhibition at the Workshop School Thomas Mukarobgwa answers:

That's what he used to do. He used to take the whole group. Everyone would have to join in order to hear what he was explaining about. Because he used to explain nicely and he used to know every colour, why it was put there.⁶¹

Similarly, the students at the mission schools certainly had access to European imagery through illustrated educational and religious literature. One such student was Nicholas Mukomberanwa (1940–), who learned carving techniques from father Groeber at the Serima Mission, from 1956 to 1961.

Some writers seem to assume that art produced by Zimbabwean sculptors decreases in value and authenticity if the artist has been internationally influenced. Hence, the influence in itself is considered to be negative. This attitude was expressed by Frank McEwen who said the following about African art schools that were internationally influenced:

These are the Europeanised art schools directed by European professors of art or by African directors from European art schools. Here the destruction is absolute.⁶²

This attitude is reflected in more recent literature as well, but perhaps not with such frank vocabulary. It can be traced in a reluctance to accept or admit international influences. Celia Winter-Irving, for example, says of Tapfuma Gusta that "he has had no European mentors",⁶³ although it is well known that after he had graduated from St Ignatius' College in Chishawasha (which she does mention) and the Driefontein Mission School he obtained a British Council Scholarship and went to the City and Guilds London School of Art from 1982 to 1985.⁶⁴

Moreover, the presentation of African artists is quite different from how European artists are described. They are often praised for their ability to incorporate African images into western imagery. Take Pablo Picasso, who was much respected for his use of African images.⁶⁵ African artists that incorporate western imagery are seldom accredited for their creativity, but rather scolded as "copy cats". How is it that western artists who borrow images from other cultures can be described as geniuses, while Zimbabwean art and artists risk losing their authenticity and thus their value?

THE USE OF MYTHOLOGY

The accentuation of Shona myth and animistic faith is another way to portray Zimbabwean stone sculpture as authentic. Mor, author of *Shona Sculpture*

⁶¹ Kasfir 1999, p. 71.

⁶² McEwen 1968, pp. 23 and 25. McEwen also explains that through the use of Gustave Moreau's (1826–1898) teaching techniques he avoided this situation at the Rhodes National Gallery's workshop school. Moreau encouraged his students to broaden their field of inspiration to include not only the old masters but also motives from mythology and folklore.

⁶³ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Guthrie 1990, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Rubin 1984, pp. 241–43.

describes Zimbabwean sculpture as innocent, symbolic, and magical. He claims that the sculptors get their inspiration from an animistic faith.⁶⁶ This focus of on religion is common in publications. Sultan writes about the sculptor Henry Munyaradzi:

Known simply as “Henry”, the most widely known Zimbabwean sculptor is like a magician, a sage who knows how to find the essential and is, therefore, able to translate the essence of any being or spirit into stone.⁶⁷

The issue is not whether traditional religion and beliefs have inspired Zimbabwean sculpture, but rather that it enhances the notion of the Zimbabwean artists as different from western artists. Mor declares that the use of myth is, indeed, what separates Zimbabwean stone sculpture from contemporary Western art.⁶⁸ This is an odd assumption since the Christian faith and imagery is still frequent within Western art.

Religion is a central part of many cultures and arts. Myths are present in Zimbabwean stone sculpture, but no more than in other art forms. If Mor was correct, one would expect Zimbabwean stone sculpture to be overwhelmingly dominated by mythical or religious expressions. In this spirit, authors such as Guthrie, Winter-Irving, and Sultan often refer to myths in their descriptions and analyses of sculptures.

Several sculptors take a stand against the exaggeration of the role of Shona religion for their art. Bernard Takawira said: “The tradition established by our sculpture today is not so much spiritual, but material—the stone, and the means employed—carving.”⁶⁹ Another sculptor that shared a similar view was Brighton Sango Zotoh (1958–1995).⁷⁰ He used an abstract imagery in his art to distance himself from the traditional values set by the first generation sculptors and Frank McEwen.⁷¹ He was of the opinion that traditional values inhibit young artists, and said:

I prefer to stand back from Shona culture, to look at it critically both in my life and in my art. Some forces at play in Shona religious practices are not beneficial to the Shona. Certain individuals are harnessing Shona beliefs to evil and destructive ends.⁷²

Brighton Sango Zotoh started carving without any training, but later joined the Tengenenge sculpture community.⁷³ He did, however, feel that he was too influenced and distracted by other sculptors and left after a few months.⁷⁴ Sango Zotoh mostly worked with serpentine stone, and found inspiration in the stone’s original shape.

⁶⁶ “Conclusion”, in Mor 1987.

⁶⁷ Sultan 1994, p. 20.

⁶⁸ “Characteristics and Tendencies”, in Mor 1987.

⁶⁹ Winter-Irving 1993, p. 122.

⁷⁰ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, April 1995, p. 13; <http://www.ntwrld.com/~roickb/index6.html> 1999-06-07.

⁷¹ Loc. cit.

⁷² Winter-Irving 1993, p. 12.

⁷³ Sultan 1994, p. 27.

⁷⁴ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, April, 1995, p. 13.

Moreover, there are themes within the Zimbabwean stone sculpture which are considered to be traditionally Zimbabwean, such as the mother and child and the great spirit in the sky, but which might just as well be biblical, as Littlefield-Kasfir as points out.⁷⁵

THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF AUTHENTICITY

It would be a mistake to believe that it was the intention of Frank McEwen to support or enhance the stereotypes of the colonial powers. Nor is it the intention of more recent authors who accentuate the ideas of the colonialists. Their view of authenticity is rather the result of a wish to elevate the sculptures' value and status.

Here a comparison with feminist art theory is of interest. Roziska Parker writes in her book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine* that art per definition is a male domain.⁷⁶ Hence attempts to create a female art form will not succeed. Although well intended, any emphasis of typical female art or attributes will work in the opposite direction, emphasising stereotypes and confining women to them.

If using Parker's hypothesis in an African context, art per definition is a Western phenomenon, which is why the accentuation of typical African features and attributes would, in a Western context, confine the art and artists to being the subordinate of Western art. Similarly, the accentuation of the Zimbabwean sculpture's authenticity is a way to increase the status of the sculpture without challenging a western cultural structure or establishment.

What is it then that maintains the accentuation of mythology, and a static view of African traditions? Western art historians and anthropologists stress tribal belonging in a search for authentic cultures. Western consumers are affected by these stereotypes and expect art, produced in Africa, to hold those qualities. This is something that the gallery owners and promoters of Zimbabwean stone sculpture may exploit in their trade of sculptures in the West.

The political leaders of Zimbabwe are today, and were also during the Independence struggle, using historicism and tribalism in art and culture to give a sense of common roots, national belonging, and pride. The Zimbabwean government has promoted Zimbabwean stone sculpture as part of Shona culture and a prominent visual cultural expression. The government's use of culture and artistic expressions to unify the country is not unique in Africa. It was probably first attempted in the 1970s by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of Senegal (1960–80).⁷⁷ After Independence in 1980 the Rhodes National Gallery was renamed The National Gallery of Zimbabwe. It was funded and initiated by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture, hence the Gallery and its education center, The B.A.T. Workshop School, is much affected by the Ministry's policies.

Some Zimbabwean sculptors were active in the liberation struggle waged by ZANU. They see themselves as the bearers or ambassadors of the Shona

⁷⁵ Kasfir 1999, p. 75.

⁷⁶ Parker 1996, p. 39.

⁷⁷ Ebong in Oguibe and Enwezor (eds) 1991, p. 129.

culture. Agnes Nyanhongo is one of them. This artist claims that through her art she keeps Shona culture alive for future generations.⁷⁸ Nyanhongo is regarded as the first female sculptor in Zimbabwe.⁷⁹ She was inspired by her father, the stone sculptor Claud Nyanhongo, and joined the B.A.T. Workshop in 1984.⁸⁰ In 1987 she began to work at the Chapungu Sculpture Park.⁸¹ Agnes Nyanhongo derives her inspiration from nature, her mental images, and the stone's original shape.⁸² Furthermore, she often portrays her experiences as a woman. She says: "I try somehow to express the role women play in society and the way they are being treated—they are not yet free."⁸³

THE COMMON INTEREST IN AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF AUTHENTICITY

The stress on authenticity leads to an air of mysticism and magic, which makes Zimbabwean stone sculpture beautiful to look at, but exotic and peripheral to contemporary Western art.

The western art community could benefit from the incorporation of African artists and art historians. It would induce a larger understanding of different African imageries and concepts. A forum where African and western art historians could meet may lead to a more dynamic and nuanced art discourse. Perhaps, this involvement would facilitate the establishment of a more global definition of art. For all involved, it would mean access to increased imageries, materials, and techniques.

There are many signs of differential treatment. For example, Zimbabwean sculptors are not described in the same way as western artists. It is common to refer to the Zimbabwean sculptors on a first name basis, which does not occur in literature on western sculptors. To quote one example, Winter-Irving refers to the artists Sanwell Charm and Barakinya Gosta as Sanwell and Barakinya.⁸⁴

The stress on authenticity also tends to put focus on the sculptors as a group and not as individuals. This seems to deprive the Zimbabwean sculptors of responsibility for their own art. That is, it is not the artist's skill and precise decisions, his/her creativity and extensive knowledge of the material that is described as the source of these sculptures, but rather a divine atavistic inspiration.

To accentuate ethnicity, historicism, isolation, and mysticism when describing Zimbabwean stone sculpture is a disservice to both the art and its sculptors. It makes Zimbabwean stone sculpture seem exotic, magical, and primitive, when it—on the contrary—is individualistic, secularised, and cosmopolitan.

⁷⁸ *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, March 1993, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Musundire 1994.

⁸⁰ Mawdsley 1995, p. 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸² *The Chapungu Sculpture Park Newsletter*, March, 1993, p. 10.

⁸³ Mawdsley 1995, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Winter-Irving 1993, pp. 81–84.

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Illustration to a book by the Swedish 19th century hunter and adventurer Charles John Andersson.
(Here reproduced from Bo Bjelfvenstam, *Svenska resenärer och äventyrare*, Natur och Kultur 1997).

A Continent without Culture?

Mai Palmberg

In a “close reading” of what current high school textbooks in Sweden say about contemporary Africa it struck me that there was very little culture around.¹ Cultural production in contemporary Africa of the kind this book discusses is conspicuously absent in the schoolbooks. This finding intrigued me. I offer my thoughts of why this is so as a contribution to a discussion, rather than as verified conclusions.

One can see the schoolbooks as reflections of the established view of things. Schoolbooks are indeed excellent study objects for the mainstream images offered in the public sphere. They contain material which has been sifted at many stages (from the writer to the publishing companies and their editors in consonance with the prescribed curriculum) before they are packaged as standardised prescribed knowledge and sanctioned views. Even if the Africa presented in the schoolbooks is not all there is to Africa images in society, they do still reflect important and influential ways of looking at Africa and Africans. What is important is not only what the books say, but also what they fail to mention.

WHAT AFRICA?

There is in every society a certain amount of ethnocentrism, a tendency to see one’s own community as the centre of the world, and its traditions, beliefs, and customs as the yardstick for the “normal”. What is distant and different will easily be perceived as strange and odd. For the schoolteacher and the text book author the task of knowing, understanding and describing the cultural ways of distant peoples can seem overwhelming, and yet that is one of the tasks of the school. “Internationalisation” is even one of the explicit objectives of the Swedish school.

The difficulty does not stem from the geographical distance or from the multitude of peoples and cultures. The difficulty starts in the definition of “otherness”, which draws on the Western notions of evolution (discussed below). Africa is secluded in its own corner, very much ‘other’. In a general discussion on how to build boats, store grain, bury the dead or use Internet it would indeed be possible to also draw in examples from African societies. Yet this is not done.

¹ The study covered 46 basic books for high schools in use in 1999 in the subjects of religion, history, civics (Swedish: samhällskunskap), and geography. The results are published in Palmberg, Mai, *Afrikabild för partnerskap? Afrika i de svenska skolböckerna*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2000. [Africa image for partnership? Africa in the Swedish schoolbooks]. An earlier study of the Africa image in the then current schoolbooks resulted in 1987 in a more polemical book: *Afrika i skolböckerna. Gamla fördomar och nya*, SIDA & Framtid för Afrika, Stockholm 1987 [Africa in the schoolbooks. Old and new prejudices].

I think the theory of evolution has much to do with this. But even without the intellectual heritage of this theory, the mental distance created between the Nordic or Swedish “us” and the African “them” has less to do with closeness in geographic terms than with imagined lack of cultural affinity. It is not just a question of how Africans are viewed either. The most distant “others” are the peoples whose way of living, thinking and worshipping seem the oddest and most different from “us”. A longitudinal study of Swedish schoolbooks from 1870 to 1985 for example pointed out that the Samic people of northern Sweden were treated with as much distance as “indigenous” people in other parts of the world.²

We are clearly talking about cultural differences here, and it is wise to remember that ideas about culture and cultural levels have long been at the centre of the definitions of “otherness”. When racism is sometimes discussed as if only biology was in focus before, and only culture now, we are deprived of understanding how racism started and caught on.

One can ask whether Africa is treated any differently from other parts of the “Third World”, for example, South East Asia or Latin America. I think the answer is yes. Africa is given a special place on the mental map in the Western world, and also in Sweden. It is undeniably seen as the most primitive, the most underdeveloped and exploited, the most miserable and incapable, and the continent with least culture.

But what is Africa? One may indeed ask in what sense is Africa anything more than a geographical unit? Africa is a continent with 54 countries,³ it has somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 languages,⁴ and more than 750 million people live there under quite different living conditions. The economic preconditions for a decent standard of living vary a lot. In some places there are mineral resources, water resources, fertile land and/or petroleum to be exploited. In other places there are hardly any of these gifts of nature.

The cultural variety is great among people with different ways of life, from the nomads in semi-arid lands to those permanently settled in the cities. Customs and habits vary from Tunisia in the north to the Kwazulu in southeastern South Africa. Religion is on the whole very important, but even what is called “traditional African religion” means different rites and rules in different communities. Education has created a layer of globally oriented men and women, most prominently in the cities, who think and live differently from their relatives in the countryside.

All this is hardly seen in the schoolbooks. Without blinking “Africa” is talked about as if all its parts were interchangeable. One mundane reason for this is the fact that so much has to be covered in the schoolbooks as part of what a young person should know something about. Another reason for the generalisations is the very compressed, abstract and impersonal language that stands out in the schoolbooks. The ideas of objectivity, in the sense of impar-

² Olsson, Lena, *Kulturkunskap i förändring. Kultursynen i svenska geografiläroböcker 1870–1985*, Liber, Stockholm 1986, 101 ff.

³ Including Western Sahara. Eritrea was the 53rd African country to be accorded full membership status in the United Nations.

⁴ The fairly wide discrepancy in figures depends on how dialects and languages are defined, something over which linguists have not agreed.

ality, probably contribute to this school-speak, a rather effective sleeping pill. But although one must concede that generalisations sometimes have to be made, neither the standards of language nor the need to summarise and be brief can be used to defend the sweeping generalisations about Africa.

The concept “Africa” is an ideological construct born in Europe and as old as European penetration and exploitation of Africa. Only the Europeans saw “Africa” as one then. To them it was all sameness, to the Africans it was all differences. Of course, to them the Europeans were much the same. Inevitably, though, the generalised concept of Africa also gained a foothold among Africans and African descendants in America. As V.Y. Mudimbe, Kwame Anthony Appiah and a number of other African thinkers have pointed out it is risky but understandable that black people identifying with Africa and its emancipation from colonialism and racism adopt the idea of “Africa” as a mirror image of the colonial ideology.

The “invention of Africa” which Mudimbe speaks of, has been internalised to a large extent. The identity as “African” is for many living in Africa an important self-categorisation. However, being “African” is not the only one identity label, just as the case would be in other parts of the world, where region, ethnic group, nation, gender, age and generation etc. combine in various ways to make for the multiple identities we all construct for ourselves.

For many Africans the African identity means defending “African values” and “African culture” in a world of modernisation and globalisation. The threat is often perceived as the increasing dominance of Western values, and when asked what precisely the cornerstones of “African identity” are, I have often been given the answer that it is about human relations. To be African, then, is to have respect for old people, to share your assets with your family, and not only the immediate family but also your extended family, and to take care of the sick and the old as a matter of course. The Western way of life scares us, they say, but also acknowledge that it is gaining a foothold. The past two decades have seen an urban middle class grow where it is becoming natural to contain the money and social responsibility within the nuclear family. The AIDS plague has dramatised these changes with the growth in numbers of orphans who cannot always count on the solidarity of the extended families.

Such discussions about trends and identity patterns are absent from the Swedish schoolbooks. “Africa” stands unquestioned for one type of society, and one type of people. The “real Africans” are peasants in the countryside, never urbanised middle class, to mention one set of differences. It seems to me that if the concept “Africa” is never dissolved into smaller parts it will be difficult to encounter culture in Africa. Simplicity and generalisation reign when the schoolbooks deal with their fictive entity, “Africa”. Culture is by nature complex, and on this score already fits badly into the design.

Generalisations and simplifications have made for an underlying dictum that “one African is all Africans”. Much more than is the case with Asia and Latin America the generalisations become “Africa”. One expression of this is the phenomenon where a picture of any African stands for all Africans—with neither name nor place. A well in the semi-arid areas of Mali becomes a water-

hole in Africa; a Tanzanian woman working the soil in a savannah landscape becomes the African peasant.

I have never, however, seen a picture of large pyramids with a caption like “An African pyramid”. Why? Not only because we know the pyramids were built in Egypt, I suspect. Probably also because we know the pyramids are cultural monuments, and we know there was culture there. One cannot be so sure about the rest of Africa.

IDEAS OF EVOLUTION AND THE NON-MODERNITY OF AFRICA

There seems to be something special about Africa, even in comparison with other formerly colonised parts of the world. The generalisations are more sweeping, culture given less space and recognition, and individuals are less conspicuous.

Three factors seem to be involved.

Firstly, the ideology legitimising the trade with human beings from Africa sold as slaves in the Americas, which claimed that blacks were fit for labour but hardly for civilisation. Western society from the 1500s to the 1800s was built on the slave trade.

Secondly, when the slave trade was being abolished, the direct colonial partition of Africa started, which also required its legitimising ideology. At the same time, in the late 19th century, so-called scientific racism began to gain a foothold as established thinking. Racism declared the Northern Europeans as the highest “race” and the Africans as among the lowest.

Thirdly, colonial rule thus instated began to be demised only in the 1950s, with a major wave of decolonisation in the early 1960s. The last colony, Namibia, became independent (from South African rule) only in 1980, and South Africa was rid of white minority rule only in 1994.

Fourthly, Africa continues even after decolonisation to feature on the lower stages in the theory of evolution, which became the foundation of the Western worldview in the 19th century and continues to play an important role. The theory of evolution often runs as a subconsciously adopted way of organising knowledge. This theory of evolution posits parallels between organisms and societies, all developing from lower to higher forms. The metaphor of growth also entails the idea of change with a direction and a purpose, cumulative change, the idea of development stages.⁵ All societies can in accordance with this be placed on an imagined hierarchical ladder.

The theory of evolution, when applied to societies, is inspired by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution of the organisms, and his *Origin of the Species*. But Darwin did not talk much about societies. Herbert Spencer is perhaps the man who earns most credit (if credit is earned for it) for applying the evolutionary ideas to societies, not least with his application of the imagery of the “survival of the fittest” to human collectivities. In any case, the ideas of human development were so pervasively imbued with the ideas of evolution that it would be wrong to attribute these ideas to only one thinker, and a controver-

⁵ Nisbet 1969.

sial one at that. The theory of evolution became widely accepted and hardly challenged at all as kind of secular religion. Nor is there even today, despite some critical discussion, a well-formulated and widely accepted alternative to the evolutionist worldview.

The evolutionist development theory is today not as often explicitly advocated. We can trace evolutionism in statements like “there is not yet” this or that attribute of modernisation, revealing a notion of stages of development. But I would like to join Robert A. Nisbet in his warning:

... one of the most frequent of all phenomena in the history of ideas is this one: that long after a principle or “axiom” has been forgotten, or ignored, or transmuted into metaphor alone, principles that are themselves rigorously drawn from the initial principle remain intact, remain relevant, and are sources of countless hypotheses in the study of human experience.⁶

It would help considerably to develop a critical attitude to the ideas of the evolutionary ladder if the theory of evolution was mentioned at all in the schoolbooks. But many ideas that have shaped Western thought are simply ignored, as if they were not part of the forces shaping history. Probably we are not supposed to talk about them, since they are not the pride of Western thinking. The same is true of the ideology and pseudo-science of racism.

Probably it is difficult even to understand present thinking about Africa without some knowledge of the ideological history. The optimistic belief in development with a little help from Western friends has been replaced by an almost contemptuous view of Africa’s possibilities, called “afro-pessimism”, sometimes coupled with calls for the recolonisation of Africa. While evolutionism said that all societies could reach the higher levels, we now see lapses back to racism, which says that the lower peoples are hopeless cases.

In the assumption about lower and higher forms evolutionary thinking is close to racism. But, as we see in the afro-pessimists, on an important score racism departs from evolutionary theory. According to the latter, development can (and in modernisation theory should) take place from one stage to the other. Those societies and peoples on lower echelons can be helped by those higher up to become like them. Racism, on the contrary, says that lower groups of people, constituting “races” by their biological and cultural characteristics, have inherited their inferiority and are doomed to it. In racism the culture of “the other” is of no interest, except perhaps to point at “evidence” of inferiority.

Racism is mentioned in the schoolbooks, but attitude substitutes for analysis. The message seems to be: “We should be kind to the foreigners.” Not: “We must combat racism and replace it by a conscious ideology of equality.”

A curious feature of the discussion is the fact that “race” is accepted as a valid category of classification. This is remarkable as we possess not only the logical and ethical questioning of the concept of race presented in the 1960s by Ashley Montagu and others,⁷ but also the findings in the 1980s and 1990s of

⁶ Nisbet, 1969, p. 11.

⁷ Ashley Montagu was one of a group of social scientists and biologists called together by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to analyse racism

modern genetics that there is no scientific basis at all for dividing humankind into races.

Let me quote one example of the persisting acceptance of race as a meaningful category. A schoolbook from the largest and quite respected Swedish publisher of schoolbooks published in 1996 contains a picture of SA soldiers in Nazi Germany parading a German couple, one of whom is Jewish. They are forced to carry posters “confessing” how low and immoral they are to be together with a person of the other “race”. The caption in this history textbook explains the scene, but then adds: “The way the Nazis speak about races is unscientific and creates—consciously—confusion. Jews and Germans do belong to different peoples, but to the same race, the white race.”⁸

“UNDEVELOPED”, “DEVELOPING” AND “PRIMITIVE”

The notion “undeveloped” is drawn directly from evolutionary theory. In the debate on the West and the rest in the 1960s and 1970s a Marxist-inspired alternative concept of “underdevelopment” was introduced. The novelty here was an insistence that, for example, African societies had not been lagging behind in development (underdeveloped), but had been actively underdeveloped by the capitalist metropolitan centres. The underdevelopment of Africa was the other and necessary side of Western development into industrial and modern society.⁹

Nowadays the accepted term is “developing countries”, which might be an attempt to get away from the metaphor of growth, but of course begs the question: developing from what into what? All these different labels presuppose an evolutionary ladder. Perhaps one can add that the word “develop” requires that there is a teleological purpose. To “develop” is to “unfold” something predetermined, and already existing as in an embryo.

In Western thinking there are seemingly contradictory attitudes to Africa, a peculiar doubleness, in which Africa presents itself either as undeveloped (or underdeveloped or developing), or as primitive. Sometimes “primitive” is used as synonymous with the negatively tainted undeveloped, but often it is given an unambiguously positive value. “Primitive” is seen as unspoiled, original, unadulterated, and close to life. Artists, but not only they, have been jealous of the primitive people in Africa and elsewhere. These two attitudes can be called, on the one hand, the hierarchical and condemning attitude, and on the other, the romanticising and idolising attitude. In the former case Africa is deplored for what it does not have, in the latter case it is admired for what it has.

The romantic notions of the “noble savage” dominated until the era of the Enlightenment. A new view of things was heralded by Thomas Hobbes, who did not view the savage as noble but as uncivilised and belligerent. To the extent that culture was recognised at all as existing in African societies it was

scientifically. They met four times between 1949 and 1967, and the whole project was obviously prompted by the experience of the Holocaust. See Malik 1996, p. 15.

⁸ Göran Körner and Lars Lagheim, *Historia 8. Världskrigens tid*, Natur & Kultur, Stockholm 1996, p. 197. One wonders what the authors really want to say. That the Jews are just as good as Germans, and together they are better than some other races?

⁹ Walter Rodney 1972, which puts this view squarely in well-documented historical analysis.

considered to be on a very low level and not worth preserving. By bringing the blessings of Christianity and the money economy, the West would bring civilisation to the pitifully primitive Africans.

Both the romantic and the condescending image of Africans derive from the European image of Europe rather than from a serious attempt to characterise Africa. "Africa" is invented as a site for dreams and fears. The romantic view reflected the ambivalence towards industrialisation and the changes it brought with it, and represented dreams about the natural life before the Fall.

The condescending view has turned into an attitude of pity. This is the view that colours the image of Africa as it is represented in the schoolbooks. Outside the schools, though, the romantic images still flourish, in different forms. One example is the great popularity of African dance (mostly in a generalised form where nobody asks what dance it is and what place it has in which society). Another example is the arrival on the music scene of so-called world music, which is often African popular music. In the fashion world we witness a fetishism with "African patterns", sometimes derived from African textile artisanship, sometimes simple symbols of safari trips.

Two lacunae in the treatment of cultural phenomena in Africa in the schoolbooks can be explained against the background of tacit evolutionism. One is the little place given to the religious beliefs and practices in Africa, which are variably called "animism", "non-scripture religion" or "traditional religion". In the rare cases where this non-scripture religion is mentioned at all the treatment is awkward and one certainly does not get the impression that there is anything to learn from it, or anything positively interesting.

Other missing subjects are all genres that can be put under the heading "modern culture", such as literature, film, and modern pictorial art. How can we explain that neither "traditional" nor "modern" culture in Africa thus seems worth mentioning? I think the answer lies in the way that evolutionary theory puts a value judgement on what is considered "traditional" and "modern". When it comes to "traditional" religion the most considerate thing to do is apparently to bypass this strange and primitive feature of African society, which is on its way out anyway as soon as modernisation gets under way.

The "primitive" is seen as "genuine" but at the same time representing a lower level of development. What is "modern" on the other hand, such as writing in English or French, painting on two-dimensional flat surfaces, or telling stories on celluloid with equipment from Europe or Japan, is defined not as genuine and authentic, but foreign. This is clearly not the view of the African artists, but their view does not seem to be of any consequence when Western stereotypes are formed.

There are many ideas of what is genuinely African. Countryside and peasants are genuinely African; cities are not, nor educated middle-class Africans. The African woman with a hoe is nowadays a frequent illustration of Africans.

Modern technique is seldom found in the schoolbook illustrations. There are some exceptions. My favourite picture is of a camel carrying solar panels which give power to two refrigerators, also on the camel's back, which contain heat-sensitive medicine. Many more pictures of the reality of the traditional-modern mix are needed. Where are people in the townships in South Africa

talking on their mobile phones, cattle herders who walk around listening on their transistor to the latest news on Voice of America, or video bars in Nigeria where people watch the latest movies from the United States or Europe?

There are 40 cities with more than one million inhabitants in Africa, but the big cities are defined as not genuinely African. The schoolbooks I have examined very seldom contain a picture of African cities. There are a few exceptions: some pictures of Cairo, Cape Town or Johannesburg, and a few of Nairobi. These exceptions reinforce the message that cities are not really African, nor do they exist in “black Africa”. We seem to have a remnant here of colonial ideology which claimed that urban societies were Western by definition, and not the “natural” milieu for Africans, who should be in the cities only as temporary labour, but not to settle.

“AFRICA” AS SHORTHAND FOR “DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS”

For all these theoretically derived explanations of the failure to acknowledge culture in Africa, there is also a rather trite explanation for its absence. The space that can be given to Africa in the schoolbooks seems to be fully occupied by the all-dominant theme of development problems. I do not know whether this is peculiar to Sweden. Has the development assistance initiated in the 1960s and coloured by the largely Social Democratic official language of solidarity and social justice created a special Swedish Africa image? Or possibly a relatively homogeneous Nordic way of seeing Africa?

In the schoolbooks “Africa” becomes synonymous with “development problems”. As in the mass media “Africa” is problems. But there are differences. In the news Africa surmounts the news threshold only with catastrophes, massacres and sensations. The schoolbooks do try to give a background and a panorama of the global injustices. In the picture material very few pictures are included which can compete with the close-ups in the mass media of catastrophes, pictures which appeal solely to the viewers’ emotions. Only a minority of the pictures from Africa in the schoolbooks describe catastrophes. In fact, a much smaller proportion of the pictures than the text relates to problems. While many picture editors seem to have attempted to portray normal life and culture (in a broad sense, including production), the text makers often portray little else than the disruption of life.

There is little reason to doubt the sincerity behind the making of the schoolbook image of Africa as the home of misery. The intention is to make the students aware of global injustices and instil an internationalist conscience to contribute to the reduction of the gaps between North and South. In the 1980s there was a clear linkage to the official development assistance, a linkage that could have adverse effects for the attitudes towards expressions of African culture. The development assistance was clearly based on an ethnocentric view of the donors’ societies as the models, and the “irrational” and “primitive” features of the African societies as relics of a society to leave behind in pursuing modernisation. But the space given to development assistance could be seen as an attempt to support international solidarity.

Today's schoolbooks talk less about development assistance than those in the 1980s, but not necessarily because the modernisation ideology has been abandoned. The explanation probably lies in the shrinking public acceptance of development assistance, and the shattering of the belief in rapid progress for Africa. A new factor has been added to the list of problems, that of alleged political immaturity or rottenness. Politics in Africa was hardly discussed before, now it is, frequently with a tone of arrogance and wholesale generalisations. Democratisation is seen wholly as a principled demand from outside, while no single schoolbook recognises the existence and role of popular movements and protest.

If the school pupils really learnt everything their books said about global injustices and the problems facing most African countries they would be well informed, possibly also concerned. But the question is whether the overwhelming dominance of the lacks and problems will not turn off any potential interest in Africa. There are also some inbuilt problems in making underdevelopment the theme *par excellence*. The overriding aim in presenting Africa in the schoolbooks seems to be to appeal to the students' conscience and pity in seeing how "they" are so much poorer than "us". This requires an image where difference in kind and in development level is stressed. Images of sameness do not fit, since they can disrupt this construction of images for a good cause.

AFRICANS AS OBJECTS

To create culture one must have the capacity to be a subject, not just an object. Development assistance and emergency aid have the double character of both being acts of solidarity and condescending paternalism. Which side dominates depends on power relations and how these are reflected in views in vogue. Supposedly solidarity is based on a notion of equality, as aid to a brother or sister in need.

The view of Africans as only passive objects, with no capacity to take their own initiatives, is reproduced in the mass media. On the whole they describe the catastrophes and wars that have plagued parts of Africa in a way which tells the audience in the West that it is only through them that aid can come. It began with the so-called "Biafra syndrome" originating in the reporting of the civil war in Nigeria 1967-70 between the federal government and Eastern Nigeria, which tried to break away as "Biafra". Numb and starving children staring into the camera, appealing for help to the Western viewers of the pictures, gave the image of Africans who were entirely helpless by themselves.

This kind of picture was often used by humanitarian organisations, but they later seriously reconsidered their strategy, and tried to steer clear of the Biafra syndrome. They faced a similar dilemma as the governments and organisations giving development assistance. To open people's purses, or to make them support part of their taxes going to Africa, the donors want to impress people with the great need and the deep misery that their aid is aimed to reduce and alleviate. But the bombardment of the public with repeated images of helplessness can make people tired and sceptical that things improve at all through aid. The conclusions drawn by the aid organisations were that they

needed to focus on the local actors who on their own initiative worked for change and emergency relief with the help of external aid. A similar ethical discussion on the mass media has taken place in some few books,¹⁰ but does not seem to have influenced the mass media, whose increasing commercialisation and centralisation makes for more superficiality and more sensationalism. Any effort to make Africans into subjects will continue to have a formidable counteracting force in the mass media.

In the schoolbooks the question of Africans as objects comes up clearly in the way that history is presented. To a surprising degree the history of Africa in Swedish schoolbooks is still the history of Europe in Africa. I have tried to give a measure of this Eurocentrism by registering which Africans and which non-Africans are mentioned by name. In the 46 books with any material on Africa only two Africans were mentioned in more than 5 books: Nelson Mandela (in 18 books), and F. W. de Klerk (in 8 books). An African leader of great popularity in Scandinavia, Julius Nyerere, is only mentioned in one book. If we can see the mentioning of names as a standard of what one ought to know about Africa, we find in the current Swedish schoolbooks more than 5 mentions of Bartholomeu Diaz, Vasco da Gama, Leopold II, Henry Morton Stanley, Queen Victoria, and Mohandas Gandhi.¹¹

If Africa has been only or mainly an object of external adventures and exploits, and if today we see Africans on TV as passive objects in situations of catastrophes, it will be tempting to assume the same lack of initiative in the cultural field. Why would Africans bring anything interesting to the world from the field of culture if they were totally helpless in the economic and political fields?

One way of correcting the picture could be to talk about the achievements of Africa before the Europeans came, and before Africa was finally partitioned in the 19th century among the colonial powers. But here something deplorable has happened. While in the 1980s some books included good material on precolonial African kingdoms,¹² in the 1990s there was much less space devoted to precolonial African history. Probably this has to do with the general reduction of the place of the subject of history in Swedish schools. And when history is cut, the first victim is precolonial African history. Needless to say, the handicraft and art from the precolonial empires is nowhere to be found in such books, which do not even recognise the societies in which they were created, as having existed.

¹⁰ See for example Jonathan Benthall 1993 and Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer 1986.

¹¹ Gandhi's time in South Africa is described at some length in a few text books in religion. He is the only non-African in my short list here who did not come to exploit and profit. Queen Victoria of course never was in Africa, it is the naming of Lake Victoria and the Victoria Falls which have paved her way into the schoolbooks' Africa texts.

¹² One can add that the notion that only kingdoms are proof of advancement must be based on questionable evolutionary assumptions. One excuse for this exclusive attention to kingdoms is that they were better known than the stateless societies.

THE DISMISSAL OF THE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

In one sense, though, the schoolbooks do talk at some length about culture in Africa. This is not about cultural production *per se*, but about the perhaps most important pillar of cultural identity and cultural production, namely language. Africa is a continent of many ethnicities, and almost every country is multicultural, containing more than one ethnic group. But how do the schoolbooks deal with this feature? A very negative evaluation of the multicultural societies taints the descriptions. It is ironical that this is done at the same time as attempts are made, however awkwardly, to make the students accept the growing multicultural character of Swedish society.

Let me quote one typical example of the way the multiethnic character of African countries is treated:

The drawing of the borders by the colonial powers has led to many border conflicts and civil wars in Africa. They have been fought between many families and peoples—among other places in Liberia, Nigeria, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Angola.¹³

These few sentences manage to give a lot of misleading information on Africa. *Firstly*, they give the impression that conflict is the most outstanding feature of contemporary Africa. It is futile to deny that there have been conflicts, or that, for example, the African continent has more displaced people than any other part of the world. Yet less than half the countries have suffered serious conflict during independence, and only a few conflicts have been long lasting. *Secondly*, we are given a picture where differences as such (between peoples, indeed, according to the text above even between families) lead to conflicts. I would venture to counter that wars are never fought between families or peoples, but always between armies or armed groups, and that it is the interests that they represent which can give us a clue to the reasons for the conflict. *Thirdly*, we have here yet another example where a declaration of guilt on the part of “us” in the West, who drew the borders during colonialism, substitutes for analysis. *Fourthly*, the clear implication here is that a country, which contains within its borders several ethnic groups, is bound to have trouble.

In the fairly brief material that one can find in the schoolbooks on particular conflicts in Africa, such as the Congo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia, no other possible factor is given much attention than the ethnic diversity.

The whole idea of multicultural states is thus dismissed as nothing but a recipe for disaster. Or is it? There is one interpretation that might save the idea of the multicultural society in the North, but at the expense of sinking Africa. Lurking behind the dismissal of multi-cultural Africa there is perhaps our old acquaintance, the theory of evolution. Maybe conflicts in Africa are just the expected thing, in societies at that stage of the evolutionary ladder? The view of the savage presented by Thomas Hobbes, and the idea of the social contract by John Locke, are old but not dead.

¹³ Jan Wester and Arne Lindquist 1997, p. 353.

It is difficult to explain the way multi-culturalism in Africa is treated unless there was an assumption based on evolutionism that Africa is fundamentally different from Europe.

If traits of sameness were given attention we would see that African societies could teach the now emerging multi-cultural societies a lot. Most Africans have grown up in a multicultural and multilingual environment, and almost every small and large town is a meeting-place of cultures. Yet the many languages of Africa, if mentioned at all, are constantly treated as a major problem, never as an asset of cultural diversity.

In conclusion, the images of Africa in the established schoolbook version have so many crippling limitations that it seems only a revolution can change them. Perhaps only the meeting with contemporary cultural production from Africa, whether films, fiction, dance, music, or with the world of sports, can expose the irrelevance of the Eurocentric Africa images for real encounters in the real world.

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