

within the ambit of the Euro-African contact, beginning from the 15th century, and which is helping to shape and reshape modern African identities. But as a developmental concept, attempts must be made to transverse the ahistorical, specific location of human development essentially within the ferment of the European colonial conquests and empire building projects of the 19th century. A more persuasive argument would be one, which sees European Enlightenment and its consequent Scientific Revolution as a cumulative build up of earlier human civilizations in the sense in which Martin Bernal conceives it (Bernal, 1987). Such a theoretical proposition neither diminishes or removes the essential globalizing character of the European Enlightenment nor devalues this character as the main force behind the current globalization of the world. What is challenged, however, is the essentialist Eurocentric conception of human development as a consequence of European colonization of much of the rest of the world.

Towards a Definition of African Cinema

The problem of definition of modern African expressive arts was first addressed in a controversial work by Chinweizu, Jamie Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu Madubuike titled *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. This work emerged within the ferment of the radical Neo-Negritudian politics of the 1980s, which tried to distance itself from Marxist aesthetics, which was then quite fashionable within the Nigerian literary scene. Their project was essentially that of cultural authentication. In the main, they tried to theorize African literature by posing the following rhetorical questions and attempting to find answers to them: (i) what is African literature?; (ii) by what criteria should African literature be judged?; (iii) what is the proper relationship between this body of works and other national and regional literatures in the world?

In answering these questions, these writers argued that there are regional literatures which include many national literatures in different languages, e.g. the American regional literatures which include the literatures of the United States (in English), Canada (in English and French), the Caribbean and South America (in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese) - and language literatures, some of which include many national literatures, e.g., (i)

British national literature; (ii) the national literatures of those countries where an exported English population is in control, e.g., Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand; (iii) the national literatures of those countries where English, though neither indigenous nor the mother-tongue of the politically dominant population or group, has become, as a legacy of colonialism, the official language in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, India, Malaysia, the Caribbean etc.

These writers further argued that attempts to incorporate African literature into European literature by critics such as Adrian Roscoe and John Povey, on account of the fact that they are written in European languages, was wrong because what determines a regional or national literature were shared values and assumptions, world-outlook and belief-systems, ethos and so on. Although they acknowledged the fact that language does embody, and is a vehicle for expressing cultural values, it is not the crucial generator of those values and cannot *alone* be relied upon to supply literary criteria for assessing those works based on the language. A useful example was that though the national literatures of Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand share English language as the medium of literary expression, this was far less than sufficient grounds to judge them as identical literatures.

These writers argued that literary works produced for African audiences, by Africans and in African languages, whether these works were oral or written, constitute the historically indisputable core of African literature. In addition, works written by Africans in non-African languages, and works written by non-Africans in African languages, would be among those for which some legitimate doubt might be raised about their inclusion or exclusion from the canon of works of African literature. To consider a work as African literature, they argued that such works needed to be appraised to determine: (i) the primary audience for whom the work is intended; (ii) the cultural and national consciousness expressed in the works, whether through the author's voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment, and diction; (iii) the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalization; (iv) the language in which the work was written.

According to Chinweizu *et al*, most African literature written in non-African languages, e.g., English, French, Portuguese,

Spanish, etc qualified as African literature for the first three reasons. Though the concept of Pan-Africanism upon which Chinweizu *et al* based their definition of African literature tends to be homogenizing in its suppression of the contending issues related to the national question in individual African countries and affiliated issues of class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc, this attempt for once tried to conceptualize the nature of African literature. The same however cannot be said for African cinema.

In a related development, Abiola Irele in the 1980s was also trying to conceptualize the basis for qualifying modern African literatures as "African literature" when he argued that

there is an African sentiment, an African consciousness, an idea of Africa, and I believe, a common African vision unified not only by history but by a fundamental groundwork of values and cultural life. But there is no African nation; in other words, the felt idea and vision have not yet found an objective form. What we have is a plurality of African states, multinational, with a diversity of customs, folkways, and especially languages Irele. (1981:48)

This current work is being undertaken in the same spirit in which our literary counterparts tried to map and define their field of study in the 1980s. That such a work is late in coming should be understandable because the cinematic institutions of Africa are relatively young compared to their much older literary counterparts. My definition of African cinema is based on the tradition of an *imagined* African identity, in Benedict Anderson's sense, to which most people on the continent are committed. The term "African cinema" should be understood as a descriptive term in a plural sense to refer to the cinematic institutions of Africa as opposed to individual national cinemas. Under this descriptive rubric, individual national cinemas within the continent can be studied in all their complexities. For a film to qualify as an African film, its primary audience must be African, and this must be inscribed in the very conception and textual positioning of the broad range of African subjects, identities and social experiences, and its director must be an African. Such a conception and projection of African subject matters and personality are an adjunct of the imagined African nation, and their roots can be traced to the very structures of shared African belief-systems and world-outlook. The belief in the circle of existence: the world of the living, the

unborn, and the ancestral world; the concepts of re-incarnation and predestination, and socio-cultural correlates such as respect for elders; rites of birth, adolescence, and passage; polygamy and the extended family; community and ethnic solidarity. These issues should, however, not be conceptualized in terms of traditional African cultural authentication because such a conceptualization would be ahistorical and would not fully account for the hybridized nature of modern African cultural practices. They should rather be conceptualized as transitory hybrid cultural practices, which are constantly being creatively reworked by Africans as they try to negotiate modern institutional practices in a globalized world.

Arguably, the historically indisputable core of African cinema is made up of films employing indigenous African languages as media of filmic expression. Even though the first set of African films that followed the release of Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret* continued for a while the tradition of their much older literary counterparts by employing inherited colonial European languages as media of filmic expression, possibly as a result of the language debates initiated by African scholars of the Obi Wali school of thought in the early sixties, most African filmmakers are currently employing indigenous African languages as media of filmic expression, with subtitles in the inherited European languages (Wali, 1963, 1964; Wa Thiong'o, 1986).

The relevance of the issue of language to the definition of African cinema is important because James Potts' arguments with respect to the photographic qualities of the filmic medium and its discursive implications re-echo some of the initial problems of definition of African literature discussed earlier. A similar argument is implicit in Potts' essay titled: "Is there an International Film Language?" In the article in question, Potts equates the photographic qualities of the filmic medium with its signifiatory range and capacities — a literal equation of the medium with the message. Since he also argues that the medium is a Western invention, on the basis of technological determinism, he assumes that there is an international film language and style but that it is Western. The implication of such an argument is, of course, that Africans cannot fully utilize a modern representational medium for telling their own stories. The beginning of Potts' essay actually suggests that his arguments are geared towards implying that the

technology of the medium may not necessarily equal the message but the discursive use to which it is put:

it seems unlikely that the use of an Arriflex camera automatically imposes a Teutonic film style, that an Eclair gives Gallic flair, or that by toting a Japanese Super 8 mm. camera with a power zoom one starts perceiving the world through the eyes of an Oriental (however 'Westernised'). But it is becoming generally accepted that technology is not value-free: to some extent different technologies dictate the way in which we see the world, the way we record and interpret 'reality', and they influence the types of codes we use to communicate a message. *But technologies, whatever their source, seem to interact with the culture into which they are transferred; in some instances they are modified and new methods of using old technologies may be attributed to experimentation based on specific localized cultural needs not foreseen by the manufacturers of the equipment* (my emphasis). (Potts, 1979: 74)

However, a little further in the essay, he reverses his earlier argument by equating the medium and its narrative or signficatory range and capacities with camera technology. He specifically states that: "I would argue that it is more to do with technology than anything else. Given a Box Brownie or an Instamatic camera with a pretty basic standard lens, the tendency is to take medium-shots (or medium long shot). Then one is sure of focus and depth of field" (Potts: 79). He uses this same argument to explain the emergence of new cinematic forms in Europe and North America. As he puts it: "The development of the Eclair camera resulted in a new French filmic dialect which quickly spread around the world. Independent but parallel developments in North America also contributed to the rapid 'internationalization' of *cinéma vérité* and 'direct cinema' technique" (Potts: 80). By placing emphasis on technological determinism, Potts virtually overlooks both the historical and anthropological roots of these technological developments that preceded the discursive uses to which they were put. In other respects, he also overlooks the discursive aspect of the filmic medium which Annette Kuhn uses in her essay to argue against exclusive technological deterministic theories of the cinema. According to Kuhn,

that 16mm. portable synch-sound equipment facilitates production is not in question; it becomes possible, for example, to undertake location shooting in natural light with fast film; to

follow the spontaneous movements of subjects in the film; to film relatively unobtrusively with a two-person, or even one-person, crew; to record unscripted sounds and speech. But to suggest that technology is determining is a different argument altogether: to pose the question this way is to suggest that technology itself is outside of determination. It is, however, quite possible to reserve the terms of assertion and to give good grounds for doing so — in other words, to argue, in the particular instance of documentary film, that certain types of equipment were developed and marketed expressly to make a specific type of film-making possible and that therefore the technological developments were themselves not innocent of historical/ ideological overdetermination. (Kuhn, 1978: 75)

In contradistinction to Kuhn who places emphasis on the discursive aspect of film, Potts' arguments exclusively equate the narrative range of film with camera technology. In the essay in question, Potts also refuses to accept plurality of styles in cinematic practices. He argues, for instance, that, "On the whole, I am sceptical about 'schools' as I am about the structural or formal elements in a film which are national or even ethnic (in the sense that one is tempted to talk about them) as specifically African, Japanese or Indian" (Potts: 79). In essence, all the productive theoretical linkage which African film historians and critics such as Mbye Cham and Manthia Diawara have built between African cinematic narratives and traditional oratorical practices make no sense because Africa did not produce the cinematic camera used by Africans in film production.

Though Potts states that he does not recognize the existence of regional styles, with regards to the question of queries which the Chinese raised in respect of the aesthetic preferences of Michelangelo Antonioni's documentary on China, he argues that "quite apart from the question of the film's content, it is clear that the Chinese are unfamiliar with the *conventions* and *cinematic language* of 'Western,' neo-realistic, social documentary. Antonioni's 'tricks' are standard practice by our norms" (my emphasis) (Potts: 79). By this sheer double standard and Eurocentric definition of style, Potts implicitly equates style with camera technology. In this regard, Potts refuses to contemplate the idea of the existence of a black or Pan-African (film) aesthetics. In other words, since Africans did not invent the camera, they could not possibly tell

their own stories with it nor could there exist, by extension of such an act, an African film aesthetics. As he puts it,

even Paulin Vieyra, film-maker and author of a number of books on African cinema (including a study of Sembène Ousmane), makes this misleading generalization: "The African sensitivity is entirely different from the European or American sensitivity. We have a view of things that is completely different from that of the West. Each person sees things according to his own background and culture. The world in which the African film-maker lives gives him a vision of Africa which is not exotic, not foreign, but uniquely 'African' in cultural content." (Potts: 81)

As earlier observed, Potts' general argument in this essay re-echoes that of Adrian Roscoe and John Povey, who sought to integrate African literature into European literature — albeit on a lower level — on account of the fact that African writers employ inherited European languages as medium of literary expression. Potts' own version of the argument is implicitly proposed in this format: camera technology equals the signficatory range of the cinematic apparatus, cinematic narration and style. Since the camera is a Western invention, cinematic style is Western. By extension, since Africans did not invent the camera, there cannot exist an African film aesthetics, and by implication also African cinema. To define style in this manner would mean an equation of style exclusively with technology and medium. It will also suggest an exclusive separation of the formal structures of a text from its content, or narration from narrative.

Though African film style does not operate the type of rigid structures and strategies for narrative coherence and clarity which David Bordwell identifies with classical Hollywood style, a style derived from historical forms such as the well-made play, popular romance, and late nineteenth century short story, African film style is now generally acknowledged to derive its narrative forms and structures from traditional African oral narrative practices, especially that of professional griot genre (Cham, 1982; Diawara, 1988a). The structure of oral narrative has been studied in detail by African scholars such J.P. Clark-Bekederemo 1977; Okpewho, 1979; and Chinweizu *et al*, 1980. These studies have unearthed the complexities of traditional African oral narratives — the

various genres ranging from moralistic tales and fables, to epics, horror tales, fantasies, etc. These studies revealed further that

African oral narratives contain both linear and episodic plots, with plot structures incorporating embellishments such as narrative digressions, parallelisms, flashbacks, and dream sequences, and that characterization is elaborate and well-developed in them, with both human types and anthropomorphic types, and that language is extremely figurative, with performances incorporating song, music, and dance. (Okpewho, 1979: 135-201; Chinweizu *et al*: 22-146; Diawara, 1992: 11)

Regarding the cinema, both Diawara and Cham have revealed through their studies how oral narrative structures and performance elements such as songs, music, dance, etc., are employed by African filmmakers as authentic indices of African cultural practices and also as masks for revealing aspects of contemporary African politics and social practices. Diawara, for instance, has observed that in oral narratives, the principles of narrative action, causality, and narrative progression, are based on the subversion of a stable moral order by a negative element and/or vainglorious persona, who is contained or neutralized at the end of the narrative. In African cinema, on the other hand, some of these elements or traditional narrative principles are violated through inversion (Diawara: 12). Whereas in oral tradition, griots, being generally conservative and concerned with maintaining traditional values, always closed their narratives through restoration of social order, in African cinema, the end of most narratives are much more ambiguous and open to several interpretations. Though griots often manipulated narrative point-of-view in their stories to coincide with the point-of-view of the central character with whom we are compelled to empathize, point-of-view in African cinema is much more diffused; character point-of-view, for instance, may not necessarily coincide with narrative point-of-view, and central characters such as El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*, are not necessarily set up to invoke our empathy, but as objects of moral lessons.

Diawara also observes that while Western directors often achieve recognition by letting their stories tell themselves through various delegated narrative devices, the African director, like the

narrative performance. Though the basic narrative format in instances of dialogue between characters is shot/reverse-shot, spatial representation is strongly marked according to gender lines. As he puts it: "The external space in Africa is less characterized by the display of emotion and closeness between man and woman, and more by a designation of man's space and woman's space in society" (Diawara: 12-13).

African film style is a transitory construct that is continuously being reworked and is creatively adaptive, in keeping with the dynamics underlying the construction of modern African subjectivities and social history. However, in the midst of this transition, there is the need to define the status of shot composition, camera movement, placement, and duration, and the general spatio-temporal order of representation for films of the folkloric or return to the source genre, set mostly in rural areas, as opposed to films set within urban milieu where the pace of life is relatively faster. There is no doubt, however, that African oral narrative tradition is one of the major sources of influence upon the emergent African film style. This is not to say that African cinema is isolated and not influenced at all by Hollywood (and other) cinematic styles, but to question the basis of Potts' assertion that there is no African film style but a universal film style which is Western.

With respect to the question of definition of African cinema, the argument has been made for the necessity of such an exercise. For a film to be qualified as African film the filmmaker must be an African by birth or naturalization and the film must be based on African social experience. This qualification does not, however, imply that there is a unified perspective to African social experience or a unified approach to representing it. For instance, the concept of African personality, which is a sub-category within the pan-Africanist project, recognizes the multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious make-up of Africa, but it is also a recognition that carries with it, significant historical implications for black Africans. As Abiola Irele puts it,

ideological development in Africa, either in the form of Négritude or under its English designation, 'African personality,' has been largely a strategy with which to confront the contingencies of history. It had the primary objective of awakening the African consciousness so as to render us apt for

action. ...But if African thought has been largely a transposition to the intellectual plane of the responses to the colonial situation, it is also inscribed within a broader perspective which brings out the implications of the encounter with Europe in the very fact that we, as Africans, have become conscious of ourselves as a distinct category of men, with a responsibility to other men, it is true, but with a commitment to our particular destiny as a people. (Irele, 1981: 112-113)

The definition of African personality, together with its underlying structures of belief-systems, world-outlook, ethos, and social practices, has always been restricted to black Africans. However, the Pan-Africanist project, of which African personality is just a sub-category, has always, above all else, been a secular social vision of African unity. In this regard, it incorporates both North Africans who subscribe more to Arab culture than black Africa's, and European-Africans who subscribe more to European culture than black Africa's. Therefore, when one insists that for a film to qualify as an African film, the filmmaker must be an African either by birth or naturalization, and that it should be based on African social experience, it should be taken for granted that the term, African cinema, acknowledges the multiplicity of social experiences implicated in it.

Even within black Africa itself, there is no unified social experience as such, at the level of the *content* of every day's life. There are, however, African scholars like Wole Soyinka, Abiola Irele, Ousmane Sembène, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinweizu *et al* — scholars who are Afrocentric in the sense of arguing from a cultural center while admitting the hybridized nature of modern African identities and social experience. In essence, modern African subjectivity is always being mediated by traditional African cultural values such as a collectivized social mentality, defined in terms of kindred responsibility that is not limited solely to blood relations but covers a broad range of experiences driven by the underlying impulse to make some sacrifice on behalf of one's extended family, one's community, and one's ethnic group, in order to better fit into the amorphous colonialist state created by Europeans. In other words, this collectivized social mentality owes its origin to the ambivalence of being caught between the demands and loyalty to the modern state as "citizens" and to traditional African institutions as "subjects." The belief that apart from the accident of belonging

to a geographical region known as Africa, and of having had an identical historical experience of slavery and colonialism, *most* black Africans share a unified *structure* of belief-systems and world-outlook whose form is discernable in black Africa's social practices.

It is also instructive to note that there are other African scholars such as Valentine Mudimbe, Pauline Hountondji and Anthony Appiah, who, while being generally sympathetic to the social vision of the Pan-Africanist project, argue that there is no collective metaphysical outlook or social practices within black Africa to recommend it. They argue that, if anything, it might be anchored on the accident of geography, i.e., as a designation of ethnicities within the geographic enclave known as Africa and the historical experience of slavery and colonialism (Mudimbe, 1988: 153-186; Appiah, 1992: 74-171). Finally, in arguing that an African film should be based on African social experience, one does not intend it to be a legislation on approach or appropriate manner of representation but only as a commonsensical logic that an African film can only lay claim to such a designation by virtue of being produced by an African, for a primary African audience, and in representing African social experience.

In keeping with the conceptualization of modern African subjectivity as a hybrid social construct, one does not see any reason why borrowed critical frameworks cannot be applied in the criticism of African cinema. After all, modern African cinematic narratives have been borrowing freely from Western or other cinematic narrative techniques. Artistic freedom of expression is highly recommended because it can only help in further enriching African cinema. Arguably, narrative structures are basically the same all over the world. What differs from culture to culture and region to region is narrative or story-content. Theories of narration formulated in any part of the world are applicable beyond the borders of their formulators, but since the story-content or narrative differs because of the intertextuality of narratives and their implication in culture specific codes and social discourses, criticism should be responsive to these specificities by adopting a comparative approach in the analysis of texts.

The Two Major Schools in African Cinema

Traditionally, historians of African cinema have noted the existence of two radically different aesthetic schools in African cinema: "the Med Hondo school," and the "Ousmane Sembène school," "that differ in opinion with respect to the formulation of an African film style. The Med Hondo school is said to argue that propaganda does not reside only in the content but also in the form of Hollywood cinema. Scholars of this school of thought argue that African cinema should adopt an anti-imperialist approach to counter Hollywood's images and representations of Africans by devising an appropriate film style different from Hollywood's. On the other hand, the Ousmane Sembène school argues that African cinema should be conceived in terms of its destination: the post-colonial African public. Since the taste of this public has been conditioned by what he refers to as a "cinema of distraction," African filmmakers should take account of this conditioning in the production of their films if they want to cultivate and retain public patronage of their works. In the current historical phase in the development of African cinema, it is necessary to retain a form of "classic" — that is to say, comprehensible — narrative without, however, taking up all the clichés of Hollywood cinema (Bouhgedir, 1982c: 83-84; Ekwuazi, 1987: 88-93).

While there is some sense in acknowledging the existence of different aesthetic views by African filmmakers with respect to the question of an African film style, such views should not be overemphasized because African film style is continuously being creatively molded in keeping with the changing nature of modern African subjectivities, social history and politics, and because of individual filmmaker's social background. Besides, works such as Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1969), *West Indies* (1979), *Sarraounia* (1986), and Ousmane Sembène's *Emitai* (1971), *Ceddo* (1976), *Gwelwaar* (1991) and Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow's *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), all carry strong anti-imperialist tones. However, there is certainly a preoccupation, at least in Hondo's current fictional films, to emphasize the historical ambience of the colonial era, while those of Sembène tend to bestride both the colonial and post-colonial periods. Equally important is the need not to overlook the revolutionary post-colonial atmosphere within which the debate ranged. These were times when the more radicalized

and anti-imperialist the views one held, the more popular one was considered in public reckoning, especially among the youths who were disenchanted with post-colonial African leaders.

The Historicity of Modern African Knowledge, Negritude, and the Rise of African Cultural Nationalism

Officially, the Negritude Movement began in 1934 in Paris, when African and Caribbean students such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Demas, Allioune Diop, and others, gathered to reaffirm their humanity in the face of racism in Europe. However, to fully understand the roots of the cultural reawakening experienced by these students, there is the need to link up with the American black intellectual and literary ferment of the post-First World War period generally referred to as the New Negro Movement, which blossomed in the Harlem Renaissance in the works of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countée Cullen, Jean Toomer, Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Weldon Johnson. (Taylor, 2001: 126-127) But as Carl Pedersen notes, the Harlem Renaissance was part of a larger black diaspora intellectual and literary ferment, which also covers Caribbean cultural reawakening of the same era. To buttress this point, Pedersen cites the poem, "The Tropics in New York," from McKay's collection *Harlem Shadows*, which is often cited as marking the beginning of the burst of artistic creativity known as Harlem Renaissance, and Jean Toomer's collection, *Cane*, as works of Caribbean immigrants in exile in New York. (Pedersen, 2001: 259-269)

The Negritude Movement, which essentially manifested itself in cultural/racial self-revalidation, was the result of the experience of racism and of racist discourse and of the encounter between the torchbearers of the Movement and the intellectual and literary works of the African diaspora as encapsulated in the Harlem Renaissance.

Writing on the framework within which the Harlem Renaissance emerged, Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith have noted the essentiality of racial consciousness, pride and empowerment that underlay the project:

The Harlem Renaissance was a moment of hope and confidence,

spirit exemplified in the New Negro. Against the grain of enduring stereotypes, in defiance of disparagement or subservience, this rebirth and awakening seemed to herald a new age, calling for heightened race consciousness and creativity. Such confidence came from an awareness of changing times, of better opportunities created by the Great War and the Great Migration that set African-Americans flowing through the United States and between continents. (Fabre and Feith, 2001: 2)

Drawing inspirations from the black diaspora cultural/racial awakening of an earlier age, the Negritude philosophers and literary writers were to create a body of work which not only bore a critique of rationality/aesthetic theory, racial biological theories and their hierarchies of subjecthoods, but also had to reflect on the need for self-revalidation as Africans and as human beings, through archaeological excavation of African history, traditional thoughts on philosophical rationality/aesthetics, ethics and morality, and the broad spectrum of African artistic engagements, all of which, in their various disciplinary practices, articulated Africans' experience of modernity in manners that can at best be qualified as hybrid in relation to their European equivalents. These hybridized modern African philosophic and artistic expressions are often reflected in the ambivalent relationship, which is continually constructed out of the colonial experience, between the desire for African authenticity and traditions and the demands of European modernity.

African Political Nationalism and the Struggle for Independence and Modern African Identities

A major factor, which helped to speed up the process of African modernity, is the demystification of the European myth of invincibility, which Africans had imagined prior to the Second World War. As a result of the peculiarity of the uneven levels of development between Europe and Africa prior to the 15th century contact, and the fact that traditional African society identifies the color white with transcendentalism, Africans related to Europeans with some awe when they first came in contact. After all, ghosts and other categories of transcendental beings were often represented in traditional African horror tales as white. The color also figures prominently in African rituals in which it is supposed to aid the priest/priestess who ties white cloths during such rituals

to facilitate contact with communal deities or the ancestral world. Europeans looked like ghosts and their warfare tools happened to have been so potent that Africans imagined them to possess the invincibility and potency of ghosts. Also, during wars of colonial conquests, Europeans did all within their powers to recover their wounded and the dead from battlefields, thereby further re-enforcing the myth of invincibility.

This myth was shattered when Africans fighting alongside their white counterparts during the Second World War saw, them being felled like fellow Africans by bullets, the wounded had cry out for rescue, medical attention, and help, like other mortals. This experience shattered once and for all the perceived invincibility of Europeans. Having shed their precious blood to save the mother country, represented by either Britain or France, the war-hardened African veterans no longer feared the white man but most importantly, they felt they deserved to take their destiny in their own hands. In other words, they deserved self-governance. The post-war agitation culminated in the convening of the pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, where Africans and African diaspora intellectuals, war veterans, students, and the British radical community called for the independence of African and Caribbean countries.

One of the key players at the Manchester Congress was Kwame Nkrumah, who left for home in 1947 to help change the course of the struggle for independence of the then Gold Coast. After gaining independence for Ghana in 1957, Nkrumah rallied around himself fellow continental and black diaspora pan-Africanists and helped to champion the cause of Africa's liberation from colonialism. Nkrumah's pan-Africanist spirit found a soulmate in Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism, thereby creating a united platform across Africa for the decolonization of the continent.

Nkrumah always matched rhetoric with action, and the proof of this was the series of pan-African congresses that he convened in 1958 to unite the continent. They included a congress of heads of governments of independent African states called in April 15, 1958 and an All African Peoples Conference called on December 8, 1958. At the December conference, Nkrumah also laid the groundwork for the kind of modernity he would want to see across

Africa after liberation from colonialism. He laid down his vision of African modernity as follows:

And here we must stress that the ethical and humanistic side of our people must not be ignored. We do not want a simple materialistic civilization which disregards the spiritual side of the human personality and a man's need of something beyond the filling of his stomach and the satisfaction of his outward needs. We want a society in which human beings will have the opportunity of flowering and where the humanistic and creative side of our people can be fostered and their genius allowed to its full expression. Much has been said about the inability of the African to rise above his low material wants. Frequent reference is made to his non-contribution to civilization. That this is an imperialist fiction, we all know. There have been great Empires on this African continent, and when we are all free again, our African Personality will once again add its full quota to the sum of man's knowledge and culture. (Nkrumah, 2001: 366)

The series of pan-African congresses called in the 1940s and 1950s were a great source of inspiration for the emergent liberation movements then struggling for independence across the African continent.

After the first wave of independence of several African colonies in the 1960s, the ideals of pan-Africanism, the whole idea that Africans should not consider themselves free until every vestige of colonialism on the continent had been uprooted, served to guide the relationship between independent African states and the liberation movements in the settler colonies which required armed struggles to secure independence. The settler colonies began to gain independence in the 1970s, with all the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands in 1975, the French Comoros and Djibouti in 1975 and 1977 respectively, Zimbabwe in 1980, Namibia in 1990, and finally the achievement of multi-racial democracy in South Africa in 1994.

The path leading to the construction of an African identity and modernity is strewn with the complexities and contradictions of the colonial enterprise. In the first place, colonialism was not a unified project. There was an implicit duality of purpose underlying the entire project, which in turn manifested itself either in terms of partial residency and exploitation (non-settler colony) or of full-fledged residency and exploitation (settler colony). However, whether the talk is of settler-colony or non-settler colony, in terms

of the rationalization of the colonial project, colonialist discourse produced a unified schema of racial hierarchization in which the European was positioned in terms of the so-called evolutionary paradigm of humanity, and of the production of both ancient and modern civilizations, as next to God, with Africans placed at the bottom next to primates, and with supposedly little contribution to human civilization.

This discourse of racial superiority versus inferiority or of civilization versus barbarism led to the inauguration of counter-discourses of racial validation and to cultural nationalism in Africa thereby helping to inaugurate the concept of an African identity. Cultural nationalism produced the Negritude Movement and a broad range of ambivalent artistic responses, with very little to show by way of social or political restitution and admission of Africans into the institutional privileges and gains of the modern experience: freedom of association and expression, multi-party democracy, the rule of law, equality and social justice, free market participation and industrialization.

The restrictions created by the colonialist state to hinder Africans from participating fully in the affairs of state and of the emergent modern economy led to political agitation for self-governance at the end of the Second World War. The reasoning then was that once independence was achieved, Africans would be free to fully exploit the broad range of institutional gains of modernity. This reasoning underlined the crux of Nkrumah's injunction to fellow Africans still struggling for independence:

My advice to you who are struggling to be free is to aim for the attainment of the Political Kingdom - that is to say, the complete independence and self-determination of your territories. When you have achieved the Political Kingdom all else will follow. (Nkrumah: 366)

What the founding fathers of modern African nation-states didn't reckon with were the post-war contradictions of Cold War rivalries and politics. Henceforth, the world would be divided into the Socialist Bloc led by Russia and Eastern Europe and the Capitalist Bloc led by the United States of America and Western Europe. This ideological division of the world left Africans and their newly independent states little room to maneuver. Every political or development policy direction was assessed by the West in terms of East-West ideological rivalries. To compound matters for most

post-colonial African leaders, their anti-imperialist rhetoric classified them as budding communists who must be routed out by all means before they contaminated others. In this respect, these leaders' every move was monitored by the Western intelligence community which wasted no time in creating crisis situations resulting in the overthrow of blacklisted regimes such as that of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana or outright elimination of the leader as happened in the case of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo. Liberation movements were equally classified as breeding grounds for communists which must be contained either through proxy allied regimes or outright military intervention. In this way, the apartheid regime in South Africa was used for many years to suppress the liberation movements in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia. Caught in this web of international East-West ideological rivalries, more than four decades of post-colonial years have been wasted in Africa. If today the continent looks poor, underdeveloped and crisis ridden, the Cold War factor must be considered alongside the corruption of most post-colonial African leaders, as reasons why the continent is considerably backward compared to the rest of the world.

To compound issues further, decolonization preserved colonialist state apparatuses/institutions that needed reforms. Reforms would be misinterpreted as signs of political disloyalty on the part of the imperial powers. As earlier noted, once political reforms were conceived, strategies for containment of perceived disloyalty were put in place by Western powers and often took several forms: sponsorship of military coups (after all the armed forces were mentally and psychologically dependent upon the imperialist powers for military supplies and training), withdrawal of development aid or loans, and sometimes outright economic embargo as was the case in Guinea-Conakry at the times of President Sékou Touré. All of this created distractions from the set-goal of nation building and the pursuit of modernity by post-colonial African leaders. As the populace became alienated, gradually, the post-colonial state came to assume the image and likeness of the colonialist state it replaced.

A feeling of betrayal of trust and of angst towards the post-colonial state began to replace the grand optimism that preceded the struggles for liberation and independence. This feeling of betrayal of trust on the part of the masses also produced its own

broad range of ambivalent artistic practices in relation to the concept of African modernity. On the part of the leaders themselves, there was also a general feeling of insecurity and alienation from the populace and a dilemma of helplessness arising from an inability to embark on proper reformation of inherited colonialist state apparatuses for fear of misinterpretation of their intentions by the imperialist powers and of consequently being overthrown.

Caught between these two devils, post-colonial African leaders decided to sacrifice their local constituencies by keeping the colonialist state intact thereby subverting the modernization projects in their countries. The casualty of this development was multi-party democracy and its institutional checks and balances that were replaced by dictatorships of one-party system. This subversion led to the polarization of the post-colonial state and of its social institutions and social relations. What was essentially a dictatorship of an individual soon began to be interpreted as a dictatorship of an ethnic group, with the ethnic group of the dictatorial leader being read as the privileged one. Those ethnic groups which felt alienated from power first protested and either resorted to armed struggles for self-determination or bid for power through the musical chairs of coups-counter-coups and the experience of ethnic cleansing and massacres in Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The end-product of this general atmosphere of insecurity is, of course, the perennial postponement of the full realization of the set-goal of an African modernity. In the midst of the failures of the post-colonial state in Africa, how have African artists and writers represented the desire for and experience of modernity on the continent?

The Significance of the Modernity Thesis to the Criticism of African Cinema

As an institution, African cinema can be grouped alongside other modern media of mass communication such as the radio, the telegraph, the telephone, the television, and the print media as modern communication media introduced into Africa through colonialism. Another contemporary medium already making a strong impact is the Internet.

The introduction of these modern communication media also came hand in hand with other institutions such as modern state institutions of governance, educational systems, modern transportation, policing and legal institutions, modern bureaucracy, systems of accounting and record keeping, modern armed forces, the printing press, and modern manufacturing processes and labor relations. The introduction of the foregoing factors of modernization marked the entrance of Africa into modernity. As is common knowledge, the contact between Europe and Africa is not without its downside in the generation of social experiences such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonial conquests, forced labor, and the attendant social mentality of racial superiority/inferiority complex. However, as is to be expected, the peculiar process of Africa's entrance into modernity has produced a feeling of ambivalence towards the whole project of modernity in Africans.

The root cause of this ambivalence can be traced to educated Africans' contact with a body of European racist and colonialist discourse that tended to negate the humanity of Africans. Reactions to this body of discourse have produced a complex body of discursive responses in both literature, the arts, letters and the cinema, works which show that while Africans eagerly embraced the process of modernization and its institutions as introduced by the European colonial powers, Africans also rejected racist and colonialist discourse, an uncanny process which often manifest in ambivalent simultaneous acceptance/rejection of modernity. Modernity has, therefore, been embraced with a lot of suspicion and ambiguity.

The range of reaction has sometimes swung between cultural nationalism (as in Negritude), political nationalism (in the pre-independence years), antipathy towards the post-colonial state and its institutions, and towards the whole project of modernity. The current moment has been marked by the discourse of Afro-pessimism. The context within which this ambivalence emerged towards modernity is to be examined shortly. For now, there is need to consider the issue of the peculiarity of the African experience in modernity because as people literally thrust into modernity, their experience of it is not exactly the same as that of Europeans whose peculiar socio-history helped produce the historical moment referred to as modernity.