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Women in African Cinema:
An aesthetic and thematic analysis of filmmaking by women in francophone West Africa and lusophone and anglophone Southern Africa

Lizelle Bisschoff

Supervised by Professor David Murphy

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on the role of women in African cinema – in terms of female directors working in the African film industries as well as the representation of women in African film. My research specifically focuses on francophone West African and lusophone and anglophone Southern African cinemas (in particular post-apartheid South African cinema).

This research is necessary and significant because African women are underrepresented in theoretical work as well as in the practice of African cinema. The small corpus of existing theoretical and critical studies on the work of female African filmmakers clearly shows that African women succeed in producing films against tremendous odds. The emergence of female directors in Africa is an important but neglected trend which requires more dedicated research. The pioneering research of African-American film scholar Beti Ellerson is exemplary in this regard, as she has, since the early 2000s, initiated a new field of academic study entitled *African Women Cinema Studies*. My own research is situated within this emerging field and aims to make a contribution to it.

The absence of women in public societal spheres is often regarded as an indicator of areas where societies need to change. In the same sense the socio-political and cultural advancements of women are indicators of how societies have progressed towards improved living conditions for all. Because the African woman can be viewed as doubly oppressed, firstly by Black patriarchal culture and secondly by Western colonising forces, it is essential that the liberation of African women includes an opportunity for women to verbalise and demonstrate their own vision of women's roles for the future.

The study analyses a large corpus of films through exploring notions of nationalism and post/neo-colonialism in African societies; issues related to the female body such as health, beauty and sexuality; female identity, emancipation and African feminism in the past and present; the significance of traditional cultural practices versus the consequences and effects of modernity; and the interplay between the individual and the community in urban as well as rural African societies. Female filmmakers in Africa are increasingly claiming the right to represent these issues in their own ways and to tell their own stories. The methods they choose to do this and the products of their labours are the focus of this study. Ultimately, the study attempts to formulate more complex models for the analysis of African women's filmmaking practices, in tracing the plurality of a female aesthetics and the multiplicity of thematic approaches in African women's filmmaking.

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Introduction: Women in francophone West African and Southern African cinema

This study aims to assess the role of women in African cinema – in terms of female directors working in the African film industries and the representations of women in African cinema – and to analyse films by female directors working in the audio-visual industries in francophone West Africa and lusophone and anglophone Southern Africa. Without attempting to be encyclopedic and exhaustive, the study will provide an overview of the work of some of the most prominent female directors in these regions, with certain case studies of films being discussed and analysed in depth. The choice of studying the work from both West African and Southern African regions is an attempt to bring together these regions in one study while moving away from the tendency to flatten Africa into a single, monolithic entity. The study is not comparative as such, but will delineate the similarities and differences between female filmmaking from these regions in order to show the multiplicity of filmmaking approaches adopted by female directors from these regions. The study is situated in relation to the work which has already been done on female African filmmakers, by theorists and historians such as Beti Ellerson, Sheila Petty, Francoise Pfaff, Frank Ukadike and Kenneth Harrow, and is thus an attempt to build upon existing scholarship while at the same time addressing the gaps and adding to existing studies on women in African cinema. The thesis will attempt to formulate more complex models for the analysis of African women's filmmaking practices, in tracing the plurality of female aesthetics in African filmmaking. While the study is concerned with the representation of women in African cinema, the thesis will go beyond analysing the representation of women in the work of male directors, which has been constant in the field of African film studies since its inception, while not ignoring the work of male directors altogether. The study takes as its starting point the assumption that female directors do not work within a monolithic framework or commonality of approach, although some affinities do exist between their work. The different political, thematic and aesthetic approaches of their work will be explored through taking into account a large corpus of work selected from

francophone West Africa and anglophone and lusophone Southern Africa.

Short films, documentaries and feature fiction films are included the study. The corpus of films included is intended to give an overview of filmmaking practices in francophone West Africa and Southern Africa, without claiming to be fully representative of all the different aspects of filmmaking by women in these regions. Every process of inclusion unavoidably also involves a process of exclusion and the study does not claim to be definitive. In a small number of cases logistical and practical difficulties in gaining access to films meant that certain films could not be included. However, the films selected are representative as a sample of female filmmaking from these regions. Some of the selected films are representative stylistically and thematically, but others have been selected exactly because they are unusual or unique within a broad consideration of female filmmaking practices. Selections were also made on the basis of uncovering films on which little work has been done academically and theoretically.

The study is not disregarding the fact that many male African filmmakers have tackled women's issues in their films and created alternative visions for female emancipation and change. The study will not ignore these progressive representations created by male directors, but maintains that it is essential for these representations to be supplemented and complemented by representations created by women themselves. Much has been written on the work of male African filmmakers, and also on their representations of African women and their handling of women's issues, and comparatively little on the work of female African directors due to their underrepresentation in numbers. It is this imbalance in the theoretical work on male and female African filmmakers that the study seeks to redress. This study is thus primarily concerned with African women's films, where 'female' is interpreted as a biological and natural category (one's sex), as well as with the gender category of female or feminine, with gender being regarded as a socially and culturally constructed and learned phenomenon. Gender is thus a more fluid category than sex, since one needs to acknowledge that male filmmakers can also portray a 'feminine' sensibility in their filmic

representations of women (and certainly also vice versa). However, due to the vast underrepresentation female filmmakers in the African film industries, as well as the dearth of academic work on their films, I have chosen in this study to focus on the work of female African directors and their representations of female identity and subjectivity.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a number of female African novelists whose work challenged existing regimes of representation (Gant-Britton, 1995: 85). Writers such as Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal and Tsitsi Dangarembga from Zimbabwe created complex female characters in their work, providing an alternative discourse to persisting patriarchal representations of African women. Even though progressive gender representations had also been created in the work of male writers such as Ousmane Sembene from Senegal and Ivorian novelist Ahmadou Kourouma, the work of these emerging female writers complemented the work of male writers as women writing about women, rather than female characters and issues being represented by male writers. These female writers have over the last two decades been joined by a number of emerging female filmmakers, and because of the prevailing economic, social and political barriers to literacy in many African countries, especially for young girls, this new group of African women filmmakers may ultimately be more successful than writers in enabling consciousness-raising among African women. African film theorist Frank Ukadike (1999: 194) states that African women filmmakers are facing the challenge of regaining for women the power of self-definition and self-representation. According to Ukadike, the social and political currents in contemporary Africa involve new levels of critical awareness and new challenges to Western intellectual hierarchies. Cinema, when used as a tool in this process of awareness-raising, becomes a contested terrain in which conventional representations are challenged and African women's subjectivity reclaimed. Female filmmakers are taking part in the process of redefining identity and reclaiming subjectivity for African women.

This emerging African women's cinema aims to revise stereotypical Western representations and critique persisting traditional patriarchal structures through creating alternative

representations of African womanhood – a cinema of advocacy, education and awareness-raising through documentation, storytelling and myth-making. More and more African women are taking on this challenge as filmmakers, and the increasing number of African women directors necessitates more dedicated research in this area. In this regard, the pioneering work of film theorist Beti Ellerson has been invaluable in shaping my own enquiries into this field. Ellerson's work is based on analyses of an impressive and comprehensive catalogue of films directed by African women, and complemented by a vast number of interviews she conducted with female filmmakers. Her research has resulted in a book, *Sisters of the Screen* (2000), as well as various other publications on the topic, and also a documentary film. Ellerson's work is an attempt to initiate a new field of critical and theoretical study which she terms *African Women Cinema Studies*; my own research is intended to make a contribution to this field through updating her corpus of films, extending her analysis into new areas and providing more in-depth studies of films.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter I will describe the research methodology employed in this study, outline the main theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, give an overview of the existing theoretical frameworks and thematic classifications developed in relation to African cinema, and assess the presence of women in the African film industries. Chapter 2 will provide historical overviews of filmmaking practices in the chosen regions, in particular with respect to the participation of female directors in these film industries. Chapters 3 to 5 are thematically structured, with the intention of showing the diversity of approaches found in the work of female filmmakers, and how female directors have dealt with specific themes and issues in their work. Chapter 6 will conclude the study by attempting to delineate the possibilities of defining an African female aesthetics in the work of women directors, as well as pointing towards possibilities for further research in this field.

Research methodology

My research into African cinema and the inspiration for this study commenced with a visit to the FESPACO film festival in 2005. FESPACO (*Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la*

Télévision de Ouagadougou) is the most important African film festival in the world and takes place biennially in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. 2005 was a particular fertile year for women's filmmaking, as three feature films by West African women were included in the official competition for feature films, as well as a number of films in the short film and documentary competitions. Whereas I initially intended to focus primarily on francophone West African cinema, the abundance of South African films at the 2005 FESPACO festival (with a South African film taking the first prize that year) led to a decision to include Southern African film in the study too. My inquiries into film in West Africa and Southern Africa have relied heavily on field research which included two further visits to the FESPACO film festival in 2007 and 2009, as well as extensive research trips to South Africa, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, attending other film festivals, visiting film archives, film schools, libraries, academic institutions and film centres and interviewing film practitioners. In addition to viewing a large number of films during extensive field research, my interviews with female film practitioners were particularly helpful in gaining a more in-depth understanding of how female directors see their positions and roles in the film industries, as well as the approaches they employ and the rationale for their decisions throughout the different production phases.

Combined with this field research my directorship experience of founding and running the Africa in Motion film festival in Edinburgh since 2006 has also contributed greatly to my knowledge of the field. The festival grew out of an inspiration to make this most marginalised of cinemas more accessible to audiences. I had a strong desire to combine my academic research with practical work which would contribute in some way to overcoming the underrepresentation of African cinema in global film cultures. Film has a direct relationship with the world, and I did not want my research to be limited only to the academic sphere.

I sourced films from a variety of sources: in addition to viewing films at film festivals, in archives and in film libraries, I also contacted directors and producers across the continent to request viewing copies of films. As the majority of female African directors work in television

and video, and a comparatively small minority in bigger budget feature films intended for cinematic release, I decided from the start of my research to include films across different genres, production methods and media. This include audio-visual work funded by government organisations and film agencies intended for television broadcast and cinematic distribution, work produced through international co-productions and NGOs, as well as smaller independent productions. Many female filmmakers in Africa work on the periphery of mainstream state-funded filmmaking, which is also a consequence of the lack of established national cinemas in most African countries, with a semblance of a national cinema being present in South Africa and Burkina Faso as arguably two of only a handful of countries in sub-Saharan Africa which can make this claim. Through including audio-visual work across a wide variety of genres, styles, themes and production methods, it becomes clear that female filmmaking in Africa is multiple and diverse. Since Beti Ellerson initiated her work on African women in film and television in the 1990s, African women's filmmaking has opened up to a variety of approaches and filmmaking practices, with an increasing number of women working in the audio-visual industries as directors. The methods and rationale I employed in selecting and sourcing films to include in this study were intended to reflect this multiplicity and diversity of female African filmmaking.

Theoretical frameworks

The importance of developing suitable theoretical frameworks for analysing and critiquing African cinema is underlined by many theorists in the field. Most theorists emphasise the inappropriateness of using Western theoretical and philosophical constructs, such as psychoanalysis, without scrutinising their suitability within an African context. Neo-Marxism has been used as a theoretical basis in developing an African film critique, well-suited to the politically orientated view on African cinema. Discussions on African films have often been structured thematically or historically, with many theorists searching within African tradition, for example oral culture, for a unique African film aesthetics. Postcolonial theory potentially offers a useful model for theoretical inquiry into African cinema, but some theorists point out that it is crucial to retain a critical awareness of the possible shortcomings of a theoretical

framework that defines Africa principally in relation to its experience of colonialism. Postcolonial theory has not been used extensively to analyse African films; two recent texts in this context are: *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors* (Murphy & Williams, 2007) and *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism* (Harrow, 2007). In addition to postcolonial theory being used as an analytical tool in studying African cinema, the postcolonial period as a historical concept is also crucial with regard to African cinema, as indigenous filmmaking in Africa is primarily a postcolonial activity which commenced after African countries gained independence. This is true for most of the countries included in this study, except for South Africa, which has a colonialist and imperialist history that differs greatly from the majority of other African countries. Postcolonial theory is regarded as an important analytical framework throughout this study, as the move away from binary oppositions described by postcolonial theorists could also be applied to inscribed and prescribed gender roles, as challenged by many of the films discussed in this study. The following sections outline the two primary theoretical frameworks applied in this study, namely postcolonial theory and African feminism (including Islamic feminism in particular in the context of South Africa).

Postcolonial theory

The socio-cultural, –political and –economic changes that took place during the formation of power structures during and after the colonisation of Africa, is described by Frantz Fanon in his seminal postcolonial text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). This text is regarded as one of the foundations of contemporary postcolonial theory in that Fanon attempted to move beyond simplistic, binary conceptions of the struggle against colonialism. Fanon pointed out the complicity between nationalist leaders and colonial powers, and champions "the people" - the rural peasantry and inhabitants of shantytowns on the periphery of urban cultures. In understanding the role of nationalist ideology in creating a neo-colonialist milieu closely resembling oppression under colonial rule, the distinction that Fanon drew between the official ideology and rhetoric of *nationalism*, and the concept of *national consciousness* becomes crucial. For Fanon, nationalism as an official ideology adopted by nationalist

leaders at the advent of independence, led to a new hegemony in which groups at the periphery of mainstream society continued being oppressed by those holding economic and political power. Fanon described the situation of neo-colonialism after independence in which the national government's dealings with the people at large are paradoxically reminiscent of certain features of the former colonial power. Fanon rejected this manifestation of nationalism, while at the same time maintaining that a productive and inclusive national consciousness which recognises the multiplicity of voices within the nation, should be developed and nurtured within the independent African nation-state. In his attempt to give a voice to the oppressed and marginalised, Fanon emphasised the importance of the unification of the oppressed, often through the construction and reconstruction of male/female roles in the context of revolution and resistance. This process of unification can take place in various ways, for example through pressure by trade unions or a community of women. According to Fanon this process of uniting in official and informal ways develops out of the solidarity of nationalist movements formed out of the lumpenproletariat - the lowest, most degraded stratum of the proletariat. The process is spontaneous and the people taking part are radically revolutionary, male and female, constantly negotiating and reformulating their roles according to the needs of the struggle. Fanon maintained that it is this spontaneous and intuitive national consciousness, rather than the official ideology of nationalism which could perpetuate the marginalisation of certain groups, that will give African societies an international dimension. For Fanon this relationship between the inner workings of the nation and how it relates to other countries is essential to ensure continuing debates and discourses on cultural globality and transnationality (Fanon, 2001: 3). In the context of this thesis the processes of women taking collective action against oppressive neo-colonial structures are crucial. African women could be regarded as part of Fanon's description of the marginalised and oppressed, although this study is looking at African women from various backgrounds, not only those most marginalised and silenced. In fact, female filmmakers, who could to some extent be regarded as part of an intellectual African elite, and who hold some influence and power through the possibilities they have in creating images, could give a voice to those previously silenced, as will be shown particularly in a

number of the documentaries discussed in this study.

Fanon describes the process of colonialism and subsequent independence as a realisation that the primitive Manicheism adopted at the beginning of the struggle (for example black versus white, Muslim versus Christian) is not suitable in a milieu in which these dualities are not always so simplistic and clear-cut. According to Fanon, part of the postcolonial condition requires an acceptance that truth should be recognised as partial, limited and unstable (Fanon, 2001: 4). This continuous process of negotiating identity on many levels – e.g. gender, societal and personal – is a common occurrence in African cinema, also in the work of female directors. The questioning of simplistic dualistic binaries into temporary localities and fluid categories is a key concept of postcolonial theory and holds true for the main thesis of this study as well – when studying the work of African female filmmakers it becomes clear that in many of the films the opposition between male/female as defined by fixed traditional gender roles opens up to new, unfixed identities, changeable and multiple as required by specific situations and contexts.

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha employs deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and literary and historical criticism in an attempt to move beyond the construction of alternatives that are the antithesis of expressions of discursive dominance (Bhaba, 2001: 39). Bhabha developed the term "vernacular cosmopolitanism" to indicate the necessity of a continuation of the anti-colonial struggle that should incorporate both local concerns and international politics. Bhabha considers this continuation as temporal and non-decisive – a constant process of transformation, dislocation and adaptation which may render the struggle unrecognisable, because needs, roles and goals change as the struggle progresses. His theories relate to those of Fanon who described the struggle not as a battle, but as a series of local engagements. This process of struggle consists of continuous and progressive actions against colonialism and continuing forms of imperialism, oppression and neo-colonialism, also in the realm of gender. The outcome of this struggle, any "truth" being discovered is, according to Bhabha, always temporary and unfixed. The location of the subject in terms of

local and global positioning should result in a cosmopolitanism that incorporates the familial, ethnic, communal and global, and the construction of gender roles appears to be relevant to all these spheres. This concept of cosmopolitan communities requires inquiry into the social groups on the periphery of their societies because such a consciousness develops out of an unstable and precarious sense of survival. Oppressed groups, such as colonised peoples and women, exist on the margins of dominant discourses (e.g. colonialism and patriarchy), and their acts of resistance consist of a process of cultural translation between local and global, private and public, past and present. Bhabha imagines a "community surviving in an interstitial zone of indeterminate, between private and public, family and civil society, always in danger of being peremptorily 'nationalised', or being considered an atavistic minoritarian voice" (Bhabha, 2001: 43). When binary oppositions are being broken down, the new mode of being is positioned in the in-between space, newly positioned after the eradication of hegemonic polarity.

Bhabha uses the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism to indicate the hybridity, impurity, interweaving, and transformation taking place in the world of the marginalised subject to give rise to what he calls a "subaltern secularism" (Bhabha, 2001: 48). This means that groupings existing on the periphery of the dominant discourses should negotiate their own versions of secularism, as opposed to that being imposed on them by the oppressor. Bhabha considers dominant discourses of liberalism and secularism as outcomes of the European Enlightenment and part of the process of imperialism and colonialism, which became an oppositional egalitarian project when it was confronted with class and gender difference. The history of colonialism showed that liberal "tolerance" does not accommodate the demand for freedom and independence when demanded by native subjects who are culturally and racially different from the coloniser: "Instead of Independence they were offered the "civilising mission"; instead of power, they were proferred paternalism" (Bhabha, 2001: 49). Oppressed minority groups voicing their needs play a crucial role in the self-definition of the majority group and the society as a whole. Through resisting the creation of totalising narratives, a solidarity that is not based on similarity, but on a recognition of difference, would emerge.

The decision to take control through acts of resistance should not come from an individualistic internal desire, but rather a public demand and duty. "Secularism at its best", Bhabha states (2001: 51), "enshrines this public, ethical duty of choice, precisely because it often comes from the most private experiences of suffering, doubt, and anxiety. We need to 'secularise' the public sphere so that, paradoxically, we may be free to follow our strange gods or pursue our much maligned monsters, as part of a collective and collaborative 'ethics' of choice." Female African filmmakers could be considered as participating in this process of creating acts of resistance through their films, as the hybridity and multiplicity found in their work are contributing to what Bhabha terms "subaltern secularism", with women, as a marginalised group, negotiating and creating their own representations of female womanhood in a subversion of patriarchal dominance.

British postcolonial theorist Robert Young (1995) uses various theoretical constructs, such as psychoanalysis and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialisation and the capitalist desiring machine (in their acclaimed 1972 work *Anti-Œdipus*), in his attempts to outline the breakdown of existing physical, psychic and conceptual boundaries and limits in postcolonial states. Young maintains that third world countries would be able to overcome the tyranny of hegemonic structures that sustained colonial power and continue to sustain neo-colonial intervention, by changing psychic, political and geographical structures. In line with other postcolonial theorists, Young shows how ideologies of colonialism that constructed third world subjects as the "Other" have led to representations that suppressed the voice of the Other as well as the history of the subaltern. Through using psychoanalytical concepts Young shows how colonial discourse operated not only as an instrumental construction of knowledge, but also according to the ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire (1995: 159). It is colonial desire that constructed third world subjects as exotic beings, subjugated to a position on the margins of Western civilisation and rationality. However, this desire created an ambivalence within the colonial subject because of the continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite, a simultaneous repulsion and attraction. The inseparable forces of this coexisting desire and disgust towards "the borderline, marginal,

unclassifiable and doubtful" becomes, according to Young, "the equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence that characterises the centre" (1995: 161). Authority becomes hybridised when placed in a colonial context, and Young attempts to draw attention to this fragmentation of colonial power structures as another consequence of colonialism. By focusing on the causes and effects of colonialism within the psyches of the colonial powers, he draws necessary attention to the kind of Western society that allowed the processes of colonial oppression to happen in the first place. Young maintains that an analysis of colonial discourse shows that no form of cultural dominance is ever a one-way process and his theories are particularly useful in that it points towards the need for a re-evaluation of Western cultural and individual ideologies of identity formation, as a consequence of the violent processes and consequences of colonialism. Young's description of colonial desire which exoticised Africans is particularly relevant to African women, who have been subjected to the greatest level of exoticisation and eroticisation through simultaneous desire and repulsion in the colonial mind. The case of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoi woman exhibited for her "anomalous" physical features, is one of the best known examples in this regard. These processes have objectified African women, and through filmmaking women are finding ways of regaining subjectivity.

Ghanaian postcolonial theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) emphasises the diversity of cultures present in Africa, which makes it impossible to speak of one African identity existing pre-colonisation. Appiah maintains that identity is historically constructed, and he objects to a biologically-rooted conception of race, because a presumption that all black (or white) people are fundamentally allied by nature does not provide any scope to handle "intra-racial" conflicts. Race and history do not have to enforce an identity on African people, but will provide a choice of what it will mean to be African in future (Appiah, 2001: 227). Appiah insists that Africans must continue to reshape their identities which also means that identities that have always existed but that have been dormant can become prominent again due to specific circumstances, for example intra- or international conflicts. Identities are complex, multiple and fluid, and grow out of histories of changing responses to economic, political and

cultural forces. There is of course the danger that these competing identities can play into the hands of the oppressors, as in the case of colonial processes that highlighted the differences between African tribes in order to fragment and weaken African communities further. But, as has been pointed out in the discussion on Robert Young's theories, the stability of industrialised societies also requires a "pervasive fragmentation of social order and a proliferation of divisions between its members" (Appiah, 2001: 228). According to Appiah the development of a self-isolating black nationalism should be resisted, and this resistance is consistent with Pan-Africanism as an international project. The value of identities is relative, says Appiah, and "we must argue for and against them case by case. 'African' can surely be a vital and enabling badge; but in a world of genders, ethnicities, classes and languages, of ages, families, professions, religions and nations, it is hardly surprising that there are times when it is not the label we need" (Appiah, 2001: 230). Appiah's understanding of the multiplicity of identities present in Africa today can also be observed in the work of female African filmmakers, who come from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints and work on a diverse range of subjects and themes. The multiple roles that African women fulfil in their societies, and the different but often overlapping spheres of race, class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality and gender that inform their subjectivity, mean that female identity in Africa is fluid and plural.

Although postcolonial theory is useful in understanding and interpreting the often oppositional and conflicting forces at work in contemporary African societies, also with regard to gender, there is the danger of postcolonial theory becoming a totalising discourse in itself, defining developing countries only by their colonised status, i.e. in relation to Western histories. This could lead to postcolonial studies homogenising differences of history, geography, place and politics (Cooppan, 2000: 3). Paradoxically, the watchwords of postcoloniality are heterogeneity, difference, alterity and hybridity and while asserting differences on a theoretical and discursive level, differences become compressed on a methodological level. According to Young (1992: 163) colonialism involved not just military or economic activity, but permeated forms of knowledge, which, if unchallenged, may continue to be the very ones

through which we understand colonialism itself. Colonial discourse analysis thus cannot be a single category and one reason for this is the various ways in which African countries were colonised by different European states. The ensuing heterogeneity points to questions of historical difference but it still appears to be necessary to also construct a general object for analysis and resistance, also in practical political rule, against the divide and rule policies of colonial administration. To ignore the history of colonisation in an analysis of contemporary African culture as well as cultural products seems futile, but careful consideration of the discursive processes through which these analyses are conducted, seems to be the key to avoiding the creation and superimposition of totalising structures of thought and analysis. This study attempts to resist the creation of monolithic theories about female filmmaking in Africa through its focus on a heterogeneous body of work from different African regions.

Cooppan (in Chrisman and Parry, 2000) affirms that race and nation, class and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and culture and community are difficult terms referring both to analytical categories and constructed divisions - terms within which individuals are not simply "represented" but themselves engage in complex processes of identification and contestation. In addition, the poststructuralist endeavours of postcolonial theory to break down hierarchies completely and dissolve all binary oppositions should be scrutinised against the attempts of African countries to regain power and control over their own destinies. Roy Armes (1987) warns against postcolonial theory becoming an "inverted form of narcissism", which remains Eurocentric by implying that life in the third world is reducible to a pathological response to Western penetration. Barbara Christian calls this the "West's outlandish claim of having invented everything, including evil" (Christian quoted in Naficy & Gabriel, 1993: 245). In this respect, the breakdown and constant contesting of all power structures might not always be regarded as the optimal form of self-definition by African theorists and artists, including filmmakers. Cooppan asserts that amongst the multiplicity of significations of the postcolonial some have been more equal than others – postcolonial theories that put an emphasis on concepts such as hybridity and cultural fusion have been subjected to greater academic reproduction than those that emphasise materialist analysis,

strategic political identification, armed resistance and concepts of race and nation. "It is difficult to accept that any notion of hybridity will dilute the violence of the colonial encounter", says Loomba (2000: 17), "because there are varieties of the hybrid, some of which operate by means of the very terms that the hybrid is thought to banish – caste and class, tribe and ethnicity, race and nation."

It would thus appear that there are many contradictory forces at work in contemporary postcolonial theory, where the prescribed need for a hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity of identity on the one hand, is contrasted with the need to unify in overcoming the fragmentation brought about by oppressive forces, on the other hand. Postcolonial theory's emphasis on multiplicity and hybridity will be used as a starting point in analysing films by female directors from francophone West Africa and Southern Africa, while also looking at how acts of collective resistance against oppressive forces can be observed in the work of female filmmakers.

African feminism

The development of a philosophical mode of thought and theoretical field of study which might be branded African feminism has a complex history on the continent. The establishment of a feminist movement in Africa was delayed in some ways by the predominance of nationalist concerns during African liberation struggles – African men and women united in this struggle, and their main enemy was colonial oppression. The adversities of the liberation struggle did not really allow scope for feminist concerns to emerge, with nationalism typically privileged over feminist concerns. Only after African countries gained their independence and entered the post- or neo-colonial era – which crushed the optimism that existed during the struggle for independence – did it become clear that many norms in traditional, pre-colonial Africa as well as modern, postcolonial Africa rest on patriarchal pillars, and that there is an urgent need for these structures to be examined and critiqued. African women are often described as doubly-colonised, both by Western imperialism and patriarchal African traditions. Therefore their struggle is twofold – to uplift all

people, male and female, from neo-colonial oppression, and simultaneously to fight the traditional customs that continue to oppress women (Gant-Britton, 1995: 87). Obioma Nnaemeka (2005a: 31) describes African women's lives as a balancing act, "subject to internally imposed patriarchal structures and externally engineered imperialistic contexts." It is within the complex context of the persistence of traditional patriarchal gender structures, gender patterns introduced by Islamisation and colonial oppression, as well as the modification of gender roles under neo-colonialism and continuing Western cultural imperialism, that contemporary African women are shaping their identities and subjectivities.

Amina Mama (2001: 253) describes the collective African experience of imperialism and colonial penetration as a violent and gendered process. This process forced the re-evaluation of not only feminine, but also masculine roles within African societies. Even though colonial oppression brought about an imperative questioning and re-defining of African masculinity, some historians and critical theorists would describe the social and individual positioning of the African woman during and after colonisation as even more problematic and in need of critical re-definition. Mama maintains that the history of colonisation displays a patriarchal process whose origins can be found in the witch hunts and inquisitions of the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution's treatment of the working classes and of women. With the advent of imperialism Europe's racist ideologies and practices established the Black as exotic other, who became in the white male psyche a metaphor for Africa, "the dark and unknown continent, waiting to be penetrated, conquered and despoiled" (Mama, 2001: 255).

The racist gender values enforced under colonialism commodified African women in a process that degraded the legal status of women as imperialism advanced, and African women continue to be underrepresented in positions of influence in socio-political, -cultural and -economic spheres, including the film industry. Progress with regard to African feminist issues is further problematised by the historical fact that black nationalism often was and still is privileged over feminist concerns. Many African women actively participated in nationalist movements as resistance fighters and party activists but after independence women's

interests were betrayed by nation states with the realisation that military activity does not necessarily translate into progressive gender politics. This led to contradictory constructions of women in nationalist ideologies, for example in the call for "new women" versus "women as upholders of traditions and customs, reservoirs of culture" (Mama, 2001: 259). Mama further argues that many nationalists that inherited power from colonial masters were overtly conservative in their sexual politics and the authoritarian control of women that existed during the colonial period has often gone unchallenged in postcolonial regimes. Another obstacle in the quest for emancipation of African women is that feminism is sometimes viewed as a Western concept, and translating Western feminist principles into solutions relevant to the concerns and needs of African women is a process often regarded with skepticism. Murphy (2000: 126) suggests that decolonisation and women's liberation are inextricable issues and this interconnectedness of gender, race and class oppression forms the complex context in which African women have to formulate their socio-political agendas and negotiate their own identities within wider social and economic circumstances. This socio-economic milieu includes how women deal with issues such as traditional models of domestic structures that still persist as most advantageous for a tightly-knit supportive community, polygamy, female genital mutilation, patriarchal oppression, lack of education, and many others. Female filmmakers address all these issues, and more, in their work, as will be demonstrated in this study.

In a discursive strategy similar to the formulation of African philosophy, African feminism is often defined in opposition to Western feminism – definitions constructed around binaries such as the communal structures of African societies versus the individualist nature of Western culture. Furthermore, African feminism generally rejects radical feminism's critique of motherhood and the exclusion of men from women's issues, focusing rather on the notion that motherhood is both a biological and social role in Africa, and that gender roles are complementary rather than oppositional. Criticism against attempts to universalise Western feminist principles and translate these ideologies into the realities of African women's lives has contributed to the development of a specifically African feminist discourse. It is important

not to read African women's experience exclusively in terms of victimisation, a remnant of colonisalism, during which Africa was gendered, essentialised and feminised as "Mother Africa" in much the same way as the Orient, as described by postcolonial theorist Edward Said (in his seminal 1978 work Orientalism). The dominant role that African women play in the maintenance of the family and community is well-documented and many examples exist to refute the assumption that African women are completely helpless and subordinated, because they certainly hold control over many areas of their lives. African women are often empowered in ways different from those in the West, and multiple examples exist in African histories of matrilineal structures that gave women prominent societal roles and status. Although some theorists warn against overstating and romanticising the dominant roles African women have played in pre-colonial societies, Andrea Cornwall (2005: 10) argues that these historical examples could be seen as proto-feminist underpinnings of women's collective action, which gave rise to the collective militancy, riots and rebellion of women in the struggle against colonialism. Women's active participation in anti-colonial struggles as well as their representation in contemporary African governments indicates the complexities around the assumption that African women are much less emancipated than Western woman. This assumption results from a Western gaze onto Africa, and shows that modes of emancipation are culture-specific rather than universal. In opposition to Western feminism, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997: 4) states that African feminism is "distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal and concerned with 'bread, butter and power' issues." According to Mikell, Western women emphasise individual emancipation and self-determination, while African women concentrate on emancipated public participation within their communal and broader societal spheres. African feminism often emphasises the politics of complementarity and co-operation between women and men which are not valued to the same extent in Western feminism. Niara Sudarkasa (2005: 30) argues that colonialism and capitalism introduced and created hierarchical relations between the sexes, as opposed to the more complementary relations which existed in pre-colonial Africa. Gender complementarity as well as the modification of gender roles in contemporary African societies is a pertinent issue addressed by female filmmakers in their work, with women directors often celebrating the usefulness of gender

complementarity while simultaneously critiquing patriarchal interpretations of gender roles which continue to oppress women.

The specific experiences of African women before, during and after colonisation, as well as the ongoing struggle against Western imperialism and neo-colonial oppression, meant that Western feminism could not offer a suitable model for female emancipation in Africa, as the critique of the attempts by the first and second waves of Western feminism to universalise womanhood, categorically proved. Skepticism against Western feminism - defined by its bourgeois individualism and the quest to gain economic independence and equal rights in all spheres – meant that this Western model of female emancipation could not be embraced uncritically by African women, who felt the need to define their own agendas for self-enfranchisement. Nnaemeka (1997b: 164) describes the dilemma of Third World feminist as follows: "if they accord their traditional culture some modicum of respect, they are dismissed by feminists as apologists for oppressive and outdated customs; if they critique their cultures, they are faced with put-downs and ridicule from members of their own society as having sold out". African feminist ideas developed to a certain extent out of a resistance to simplistic formulas of global sisterhood (Gant-Britton, 1995: 87), even though solidarity between women is often seen as a characteristic of feminism and womanhood, especially in Africa.[1] Due to the disparate agendas of Western feminism and African feminism, some writers have argued that the very term 'feminism' is misplaced in an African context, and rather opt for the term 'womanism' to describe the quest for female liberation in Africa, a term initiated by African-American writer Alice Walker. "For the African womanist," states Marie Pauline Eboh (1998: 35), "the double allegiance to woman's emancipation and African liberation are inseparable. This is the philosophy of African womanism."

Although the usefulness of positing a binary opposition between African feminism and Western feminism should be scrutinised, it is clear that issues of gender, race, class and

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[1] Beti Ellerson describes in the introduction to *Sisters of the Screen* (2000) the skepticism of some participating filmmakers against the choice of the title, indicating that even amongst African women filmmakers it is problematic to assume a collective identity and endeavour.

nationhood are complexly intertwined in postcolonial African societies, possibly to a greater extent than in capitalist Western societies. The tension between Western feminism and African feminism is a result of the history of colonialism as well as continuing resistance against Western neo-imperialism, but the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive or oppositional, especially when one considers the roles and experiences of women in an increasingly globalised, trans-national and multi-cultural world. The multiple and diverse experiences of African women through processes such as urbanisation, migration and immigration could lead to the identification of some points of convergence between Western and African feminism. Nnaemeka (2005a: 32) warns that an oppositional approach could suggest that African feminism is only reactive and not proactive, whereas it does in fact have an existence of its own that is rooted in the African environment. An African feminist discourse is thus much less a response to Western feminist discourse than a manifestation of the characteristics of an African worldview.

Furthermore, the oppositions that arise from the tension between African and Western feminism, useful as they are within certain analytical paradigms, often do not necessarily contribute to the move towards emancipation for African women. In nationalist rhetoric African women are often upheld as 'mothers of the nation' and the role of women is often defined in terms of traditional African structures, which can obscure the debates around problematic issues affecting women, such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, the lack of access to education, and the underrepresentation of African women in many public societal spheres. According to Melissa Thackway (2003: 150) a number of scholars claim that female subordination in Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon, intensified by Islamic and Christian imperialism which both introduced patrilineal structures, and helped further by European colonisation which imposed capitalist economic systems on to African communities. However, these assumptions blur attempts to redefine and critique gender roles not only in terms of colonial and postcolonial experiences, but also in relation to pre-colonial gender relations. The practice of polygamy in traditional and Islamic African culture is sometimes justified in terms of the communal support structures it provides to women, but the practice is

often negatively depicted by African filmmakers and writers, who empasise its derogatory implications for individual women. This is one example that problematises the notion that the emerging African feminism is always centred around traditional communal structures and gender complementarity. Whereas notions such as power-sharing, complementarity, accommodation, compromise, negotiation and inclusiveness are often regarded as the foundations of African feminism, Nnaemeka (2005a: 37) argues for the importance of emphasising the danger of an unexamined exaggeration of gender complementarity that conceals the real gender inequalities and conflicts that exist particularly in racist and imperialist contexts. Ideas surrounding the communal nature of African feminism, as opposed to the bourgeois individualism of Western feminism, for example, may not always hold up when examining the tension between private and public identity construction in the process of self-enfranchisement. African feminism certainly differs from Western feminism, but should not merely be defined as a counter to Western feminism. For African feminist Filmonia Chioma (quoted by Eboh, 1998: 335) "[t]rue feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant."

Nnaemeka (2005a: 31-32) states that to speak of feminism in Africa is to speak of feminism in the plural in recognition of the multiplicity of perspectives and shifting vantage points. "Attempts to mold 'African feminism' into an easily digestible ball of pounded yam," she states, "not only raise definitional questions but also create difficulties for drawing organisational parameters and unpacking complex modes of engagement." Andrea Cornwall (2005: 1-13) defines two polarised discursive strands of representations of women and men in literature on gender in sub-Saharan Africa: On the one hand there are the women-as-victim narratives that situate African women as powerless and requiring intervention, and on the other hand there are images that portray African women as strong, assertive, self-reliant heroines. However, in between these two oppositional representations there is a multitude of female African experiences which have contributed to a range of African feminist perspectives. Multiple identities and identifications should be taken as a starting point for exploring gender in Africa, states Cornwall, an approach which acknowledges the

transformative nature of gender identities and is sensitive to the range of relational and complementary subject positions taken up by women and men in different domains. The complex interplay between modernity and tradition gives rise to new identities and multiple identifications for African women, and new characteristics of African feminisms.

If plurality and multiplicity are considered to be key terms in defining contemporary African feminism, it would appear that there is an affinity between African feminism and postcolonial theory, which often, but not exclusively, enunciates itself through terms such as hybridity, difference, heterogeneity and uncertainty, as outlined in the previous section. Postcolonial and feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak (2001: 53) articulates the quest of oppressed, marginalised people as "emancipatory complicity", a process that opens up possibilities enabling the postcolonial subject to come to terms with gender, racial, class and ethnic power struggles inherent in oppressive structures such as colonialism and neo-colonialism. Spivak considers gender and class to be two discontinuous ways in which oppositions such as West and third world, centre and margin, dominant and emergent, and male and female, are undone. The process of renegotiating fixed gender roles in postcolonial Africa often leads to a heterogeneity of subject positions that might even appear ambivalent, for example in the attempts of African women to reconcile domestic roles with economic independence, without excluding either one. Seemingly oppositional social spaces and positions can be occupied simultaneously, which requires a process of knowledge construction that moves beyond fixed oppositions. A resistance against simplistic and persistent binary duality is prevalent in the gender representations in many African films included in this study and what Spivak calls the "productive, epistemic fracture of the colonial, postcolonial, hybrid subject" (Spivak in Castle, 2001: 59).

The notion of giving a voice to the subaltern and marginalised through concepts of hybridity and multiplicity provides a highly productive model for interpreting representations of gender in contemporary African cinema, since it describes the hybrid postcolonial subject as establishing multiple identities through a process of negotiating a multitude of seemingly

conflicting forces. The temporary or more enduring outcomes of this process of negotiating one's identity do not necessarily lie only in "bread, butter and power issues" relevant to the whole community, but could also lead to the questioning of one's individual female identity amongst the pressures and expectations of society. As will be shown in this study, the process of self-definition of African women as depicted through film, does not necessarily subscribe to an outright rejection of concepts of individual emancipation within applied feminist principles in the West, thus recognising that African societies undeniably also have some seemingly Western characteristics, and are part of a transnational, global structure of the transfer of knowledge and information. The danger of transferring 'white' or Western ideals of female emancipation onto the communal structures of African societies has already been pointed out, but contemporary African women have to deal with the collisions between the needs and formulations of the individual versus community in ways that do not necessarily treat the two approaches as mutually exclusive. African feminism could also usefully engage with Western feminism as points of convergence might be found between these two modes of thought. In chapter 5 of this study, I employ the work of American feminist theorist Judith Butler, in particular her description of the performative nature of gender roles, in an analysis of the range of individual, social and communal identities of African women as depicted in film. Butler's work on the performativity of identity and the 'learnedness' of gender roles seems to be particularly useful in my analysis of different manifestations of female African identity, as her post-structuralist approach to feminism has an affinity to post-colonial theory and its questioning of hierarchies and hegemonies. By utilising Butler's theories in this study, I am also suggesting that resisting simplistic binaries such as the tension between tradition and modernity and African feminism versus Western feminism would seem to be the most productive way forward in delineating African feminism in contemporary African societies.

Islamic feminism

A number of film analyses in chapter five deal with Muslim women in South Africa, thus an outline of Islamic feminism, which is used as the main interpretative framework in discussing

the films in chapter five, is included here.

Islamic feminism is essentially a form of feminism concerned with the role of women in Islam. It aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Although rooted in Islam, the movement's pioneers have also utilised secular and European or non-Muslim feminist discourses and recognise the role of Islamic feminism as part of a global feminist movement. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the teachings of equality deeply rooted in the Quran and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Quran and personal law towards the creation of a more equal and just society. Thus, Islamic feminism does not support the contention that discrimination against women is religiously based. On the contrary, it sees the oppression of women as a deviation from the original spirit of Islam and the result of patriarchal interpretations of Islam. That this oppression may appear most dramatic in the domestic sphere is the result of the tendency in some Islamic states towards secularisation in the public sphere, while at the same time leaving the private realm to regulation by Islamic or sharia law (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002). The recognition and protection of human rights, and constitutions guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens as it exists in many countries, may set up a conflict with the Muslim personal law codes that often privilege men over women. As a result, one of the major areas of scholarship and campaigning for Islamic feminists in various parts of the world is Muslim personal law. In *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement* (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002), an in-depth study of worldwide Islamic feminist movements which comprises several volumes, the authors state that legal reform is not necessarily the total answer and contend that gradual social reform within the Muslim community itself may be the only hope for Muslim women. Although some Muslim personal laws are in clear conflict with the principle of gender equality, progressive Islamic scholars maintain that it would be wrong to conclude that Islam itself is opposed to equality between the sexes.

South African Islamic feminist scholar and activist Shamima Shaikh, who passed away in 1998, most often used her public appearances to assert her belief that the Quran prescribes the absolute equality of the human moral condition and identical spiritual and moral obligations placed on all individuals, regardless of sex. In my interpretations of the films by female South African Muslim directors, I find the work of Shamima Shaikh and her compatriot and namesake Sa'diyya Shaikh most illuminating. In her writings, Sa'diyya Shaikh (2004) states her own position very clearly as being a South African Muslim woman, whose existential, spiritual, and ethical universe is based on an Islamic world-view, and whose coming of age was formulated within the socio-political context of apartheid South Africa. For her, Islam spoke to a humanity that transcended boundaries of race and demanded human agency in the quest for social justice. Her own experiences of patriarchy in her social and cultural milieu urged her to struggle with received ideas of Islam and the Islamic legacy, as well as what it means to be a gendered human being, a woman, and a believer. Shaikh focuses her scholarship on Islam primarily on what she regards as its inherent plurality and diversity, which encompasses realities of people from varying socio-cultural and political positionings. According the Shaikh, the realities of gender dynamics in Islam are as complex and diverse as the realities of women in any other religious, social, and political context. She understands the term "feminism" as "a critical awareness of the structural marginalisation of women in society and engaging in activities directed at transforming gender power relations in order to strive for a society that facilitates human wholeness for all based on principles of gender justice, human equality, and freedom from structures of oppression" (Shaikh, 2004: 148).

As with other African intellectual discourses, including African feminism, the current debates on feminism, gender, and women's rights in Islam are ideologically charged, since they are embedded in a history of larger polemics between the Islamic world and the West, within the historical context of colonialism, and a contemporary milieu of "Islam-versus-the-West" which is a continuing tension in a post-9/11 world. Islamic scholar Akbar Ahmed (quoted in Shaikh, 2002: 149) suggests that Muslim religious leaders who adopt a blanket opposition to the

West are "in danger of rejecting the essential features of Islam such as love of knowledge, egalitarianism and tolerance because these are visibly associated with the West." Islamic feminists reject Western feminist approaches which reinforce reductive views of Islam and regard it as a particularly sexist religion, just as they reject Muslims who attempt to discredit them by stating that they are involved in feminist activity as agents of Western colonialism. Islamic feminists often situate themselves alongside other so-called Third World feminisms, which critique the versions of Western feminism claiming that it can speak for the experiences of all women. These Third World feminists reject the presumption of a universal womanhood or global sisterhood as propagated in particular by the First and Second Waves of Western feminism, as these Western feminisms only represent the realities of a particular group of women – First World, white, middle-class women. From the 1980s onwards, Western feminism has responded by acknowledging issues of pluralism and diversity, and also specificity and cultural positioning. Third World feminists also dismiss the notion that the role of women in Western societies should be seen as universally normative and superior to the roles and positions of Third World and non-Western women. Thus, there are clear affinities between Islamic and African feminism, with both emphasising a world-view specific to the positioning and lived experiences of the women in these societies, as well as a focus on diversity and multiplicity of subject positionings. The theoretical groundings of African and Islamic feminism discussed in the preceding sections will be utilised in examining films by African women in subsequent chapters.

Aesthetic and thematic questions

Existing frameworks for classifying and analysing African cinema

In order to situate the thematic, stylistic and aesthetic considerations of female African directors within the broader context of African cinema as a whole, this section considers the main existing theoretical and classification frameworks, and evaluates their relevance and applicability with regard to recent developments in African cinema. According to Tunisian filmmaker and critic Ferid Boughedir (in Givanni, 2001: 109-115), the confrontation between the old and the new, often described by the "ambiguous phrase" modernity versus tradition,

is at the heart of the themes of African cinema. Boughedir identifies four conflicts between the old and the new which are often found in African films: the town versus the village; westernised women against women representing tradition; modern versus traditional medicine; and traditional art which bears a cultural identity versus art which has become a commodity and an object for consumption. Boughedir further refers to the major themes in African cinema drawn up by French critic Guy Hennebelle: the struggle against colonialism; the "childhood sicknesses" of independence; disillusionment; the rural exodus; and the condition of African women. Existing critical models relate almost exclusively to francophone African cinema, and francophone African cinema has indeed, since its inception, documented the role and position of African women in their societies, and often offered progressive representations for changing gender roles, despite the underrepresentation of women in these film industries.

In one of the best-known theoretical and historical texts on African cinema, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992), Manthia Diawara outlines a schema for the thematic diversity of African film, while positing that African films mostly belong to a social realist narrative tradition which tends to "thematise socio-cultural issues" (1992: 141). Diawara's schema consists of three categories of which the first is the social realist tendency. This entails an emphasis on contemporary socio-cultural issues, often through generic modes such as melodrama, satire and comedy, and with a focus on marginalised groups as heroes. Diawara places most of Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene's films in this category (such as *Borom Sarret, Xala, Ceddo, Mandabi* and *Emitai*) as well as the films of Nigerien director Moustapha Alassane and Malian director Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Most of Malian director Souleymane Cissé's films also belong in this category (*Baara, Finye and Waati*), though not *Yeelen*, which is undoubtedly his best-known film but quite atypical within his complete oeuvre which focuses predominantly on contemporary socio-cultural and –political issues. Diawara's second category entails films which deal with historical confrontation, in particular the colonial past, and some examples of films that belong in this category are Mauritanian director Med Hondo's *Sarraounia*; *Mortu Nega* by Flora Gomes from Guinea-Bissau;

Sembene's *Camp de Thiaroye*; and Ghanaian director Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*. The third category Diawara dubs "Return to the Source" – films whose themes engage with a search for pre-colonial traditions. According to Diawara this tendency developed out of a desire by filmmakers to be less political, and also as a strategy to avoid censorship. He identifies within this category the search for and development of a new, authentically African film language which presents a challenge to the typical Western representation of Africa and therefore a challenge to Western cinema. Primary examples include Cissé's *Yeelen*, Burkina director Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Yaaba* and *Tilai*, and fellow Burkinabe Gaston Kaboré's films such as *Wend Kuuni* and *Buud Yam.* According to Diawara African filmmakers broadly employ one of these approaches in an attempt to develop a new film language and present challenges to Western representations of Africa. Diawara (1992: 34) states that francophone West African countries were responsible for 80% of the films made across the African continent in the early 1990s and were in this sense in a leading position in relation to other African countries. FESPACO has since 1969 provided a showcase for the multitude of films produced in francophone West Africa. In the 2000s strong film industries are emerging in other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, such as Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa, as well as more and more filmmakers emerging from Central and East Africa, in countries such as Chad, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.

In a schema with marked similarities to Diawara's categorisation, Teshome Gabriel (1989: 19) posits that Fanon's analysis of the genealogy of Third World culture can also be employed as a critical framework for the study of 'Third World' films. Gabriel's schema, which consist of three phases, is based on Fanon's description of the three stages of the progression of the colonised writer – to firstly identify with the dominant and dominating colonising culture; secondly to reconnect with one's own people's traditions; and thirdly to take on a revolutionary stance, to enter the "fighting phase". Gabriel's approach is further informed by the Latin American advocates of a Third, or Imperfect Cinema, as formulated by Solanas and Getino (1969). He follows a neo-Marxist approach and formulates Third Cinema as a subversive movement from domination to liberation. Fanon's first phase *of unqualified*

assimilation becomes in Third Cinema the identification with the Western Hollywood film industry and an imitation of Western filmmaking styles. During this phase the Hollywood concerns of 'entertainment' predominate. Stylistically this phase focuses on the formal properties of cinema such as technical brilliance, since the aim is to create a spectacle. The second phase, the *remembrance phase*, entails the indigenisation and control of talents, production, exhibition and distribution. Themes employed in this phase include the return of the exile to the Third World's source of strength through, for example, an examination of tradition and history; a clash between rural and urban life; and an emphasis on folklore and mythology. Gabriel warns that the danger here is an uncritical acceptance or romanticisation of the past and thus this phase should be seen as a process, a moving towards the next stage. Stylistically this phase displays some attempts to indigenise film and a growing tendency to create a film style appropriate to the changed thematic concerns. The third phase, the *combative phase*, entails a view of filmmaking as a public service institution and a cinema of mass participation. Themes include the lives and struggles of Third World peoples, with an insistence on viewing film primarily through its ideological implications. Stylistically film is in this phase seen as an ideological tool which constitutes an agreement between the public and the filmmaker since the filmmaker is perceptive of and knowledgeable about the desire and preoccupations of the Third World masses.

Gabriel's schema corresponds closely to Diawara's categorisation of the three main thematic strands in African cinema, although Diawara considers the films historically, as opposed to Gabriel's thematic classification that lends authenticity to certain themes. According to Stephen Zacks (1999: 13), Diawara's category of social realism is similar to Gabriel's phase of unqualified assimilation in that it is characterised by films which employ music, romance and comedy to entertain the masses. Where Diawara sees this category as a popular form because of its ability to attract working class audiences who identify with the themes portrayed, Gabriel sees this category as a form of regressive, capitalist and Western-identified cinema. Diawara's "return to the source" category is almost identical to Gabriel's remembrance phase, described as a process of indigenisation in film style; looking at the

past to interpret the present. Diawara's third category of films that address issues of colonial confrontation closely corresponds to Gabriel's combative phase. According to Zacks, the differences in their categorisations as a result of Gabriel's neo-Marxist approach and Diawara's historical approach raise interesting issues around authenticity, the adaptation or appropriation of Western film styles and the applicability of Western theoretical frameworks in interpreting African films. Zacks maintains that critics should rigorously ground their theoretical projects, and should not continue to utilise prevailing assumptions without evaluating their relation to dominant systems of interpretation (1999: 15). Rather than seeing the West and Africa as antithetical, critics should grapple in an in-depth fashion with the question of what is authentically African, steering away from essentialist notions. "What we identify as authentically African apparently must exclude the European and place itself in opposition to it so as to legitimate its authority. But this game of exclusion and opposition, based on the premise […] that Europe is the centre and origin of all culture, in advance invalidates African texts as inauthentic; […] even the reaction to the other is defined by the limits of the other's discourse" (Zacks, 1999: 17). To view liberation and the decolonisation of the mind as the most important function of African films becomes problematic when the relationship between African cinema and Western cinema is viewed in a more complex fashion. There is a danger that any film that does not conform to certain revolutionary standards will be viewed as inauthentic. This is the reason why the Fanonian revolutionary model, in relation to film and other intellectual and artistic spheres, has largely been abandoned since the late 1980s.

Keyan Tomaselli, along with other theorists of African cinema such as Melissa Thackway (2003), gives prominence to a theory of traditional oral culture, orality or orature in African cinema. Tomaselli sees oral culture as an example of cultural divergence from Western constructs, in that the culture of orality assumes that the world consists of many forces interacting on a cosmological scale, as opposed to Western thinking that observes that world as made up of separate concrete objects. European methods and theories often cannot account for indigenous modes of knowledge construction and interpreting films (Tomaselli,

1996: 167). In addition to Tomaselli, attempts are also made by other scholars of African film (Frank Ukadike, Olivier Barlet, Josef Gugler) to identify, often through this link with African oral culture, a uniquely African film aesthetic. Tomaselli claims that, with the exception of a few critics (Gabriel, Gerima, Pfaff, Haffner, Boughedir and Cham), academic analysis has not foregrounded aesthetics and reception, but has focused primarily on production methods, resources and structures. The reactivation of the silenced texts in African oral traditions needs another form of argument and theory, according to Tomaselli. He maintains that there exists predominantly an oral context of subjectivity within the Third World, but in the light of continuing modernisation of societies and the globalisation of knowledge, this statement becomes more problematic. Tomaselli along with other critics claims that the new visual grammars being developed in African cinema consist of knowledge structures based on orality, but my own approach is that the ways in which this is achieved should be analysed in terms of aesthetic principles that find inspiration in existing film styles, as well as that a space should be opened up for African film grammars that do not overtly draw on African oral cultures. African cinema is not developing in isolation but as part of a worldwide phenomenon. A more useful approach would seem to be to study influences from outside of Africa in attempts to pinpoint an African film aesthetic and to contrast and compare it with characteristics of cinemas from elsewhere.

Tomaselli (1996: 170) emphasises the ideological construction of African cultures, through for example nationalist rhetoric. Historically this often included a call for a return to tradition, as in the ideologies of negritude, as well as to conceal the oppressive neo-colonialist policies of petty bourgeois politicians. Tomaselli describes culture in this respect as a "discursive romantic mobilizing agent", common to both nationalist and popular struggles. These struggles and the ensuing manifestations or affirmations of "culture" vary against the background of the differing colonial policies and indigenous experiences of African countries. It is clear that the idea of a single African cinema is too limiting in terms of regional differences, historical forms of resistance and discursive strategies and definitions of Africa during colonisation, and many theorists and filmmakers feel more at ease with the concept of

multiple African cinemas. There can thus be no one African film aesthetic, and different films will expose different levels and dimensions of culture and history. Many African directors make films in partnership with foreign filmmakers, and this certainly affects representation in African film. In addition, many African filmmakers are trained in Europe and the United States, and all filmmakers are exposed to Western film styles and aesthetics, Bollywood films, Westerns, Kung Fu and other genres, as spectators at the very least. Although Tomaselli emphasises the multiplicity of African experiences, as well as the ideologically constructed nature of African cultures, especially in attempts to promote nationalist sentiment, it seems as if he does not extend this vigilance in his goal to ground a uniquely African filmmaking aesthetic in a tradition of orality. When considering the contact of African filmmakers with Western cinema, through training and education, for example, as well as African filmmakers who still live and work in the West and form part of the African diaspora, the assumption that a unique and authentic African film aesthetic can be found, becomes problematic. This issue also highlights the problematics around categories, in terms of defining who and what can be considered truly 'African'.

Apart from value judgements as a potential undesirable outcome of Diawara and Gabriel's categorisations of African cinema, these schemas also have several other flaws and limitations, the most obvious being that they seem primarily applicable only to fiction feature films, and are largely limited to francophone West Africa. However, even if francophone West Africa provided the pool of films from which Diawara and Gabriel drew, the films of some directors from this region do not fit neatly into any of the categories - directors such as Djibril Diop Mambety from Senegal – with his fragmented modernist masterpieces such as *Badou Boy* (1970) and *Touki Bouki* (1973); and Nigerien Moustapha Alassane – who is one of Africa's first animation filmmakers and made a parody of the Western with *Le Retour d'un aventurier* (1966). These theoretical models also appear slightly outdated in the light of new developments in African cinema in the 21st century, when one takes a cursory look at some of the feature films presented at the 2005, 2007 and 2009 FESPACO festivals – for example *Africa Paradis* (2006) by Sylvestre Amoussou from Benin is a political satire set in 2033 in

which the power relationship between the West and Africa is reversed. The film tells the story of a European couple who cannot find jobs in their own country, and attempt to emigrate to the "United States of Africa". However, they cannot get visas and resort to working for a clandestine border runner, an experience through which they gradually discover the tough realities of immigration, in particular being an illegal alien exploited to serve the political interests of others. Cameroonian director Jean-Pierre Bekolo, a fiercely individualist director who has often in interviews defended his prerogative to work independently from dominant African film styles, completed *Les Saignantes* in 2005, a film widely regarded as one of the first African sci-fi films. Having already thrown neat theoretical categories into turmoil with his first two feature films, *Quartier Mozart* (1992) and *Aristotle's Plot* (1996), which transgressed genre boundaries though their fragmented narratives and metafilmic structures, *Les Saignantes*, set in the future and telling the story of two young femmes fatales who aim to rid the country of its corrupt and sexually obsessed powerful men, has been variously described as an erotic thriller and a sci-fi-action-horror hybrid.

Experiences of voluntary exile which many African filmmakers, especially the younger generation of filmmakers, find themselves in, have increasingly led to filmic themes exploring displacement and the diasporic experience, in particular from a resolutely personal and individualist perspective. Examples are Congolese director Balafu Bakupa-Kayinda's *Juju Factory* (2006), which is set in Brussels and deals with the internal conflicts of an exiled Congolese writer; Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie's short film *Pour la Nuit* (2005), which takes place in Marseille and deals with female sexual expression and individual choice; and Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness* (2002), which draws on Sissako's own personal feelings of displacement – he was born in Mauritania, grew up in Mali and studied in Russia. At FESPACO 2009, Guinean director Mama Keïta's *L'Absence* (2008) and Congo-Brazzaville director Leandre-Alain Baker's *Ramata* followed this thematic trend. *L'Absence*, which won the award for best screenplay at FESPACO 2009, tells the story of Adama, who returns to Dakar after fifteen years during which he has had a highly successful career as an engineer in Europe. Reminiscent of

Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness,* Adama is completely out of touch with his birthplace and struggles to reconnect with his grandmother and deaf-mute sister on his arrival. When Adama discovers that his sister is working as a prostitute, a night of mayhem and violence ensues in which Adama is forced to face his own demons. *Ramata* deals with a beautiful middle-aged woman stuck in an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage of 30 years. Told through flashbacks and spanning decades of Ramata's life, this film employs a visual style that is atmospheric and intimate, and perhaps closer to the 'European arthouse' tradition of filmmaking than African filmmaking in the social realist tradition. It would appear that these filmic explorations of negotiating individual identity in a foreign cultural environment do not fit into any of Diawara's thematic categories, as individual alienation and feelings of displacement is a thoroughly modern condition. Contemporary female African directors, though committed to using film as a medium of education and raising collective female consciousness, are also increasingly exploring themes of individual identity as related to experiences of exile and displacement. Contemporary African cinema, including the work of female directors, is exploding into a diversification of themes and styles, which will require a reconsideration of earlier categorisations and the development of new thematic, generic and stylistic interpretative frameworks.

Aesthetic and thematic preoccupations of female African filmmakers

The thematic considerations and preoccupations of female African filmmakers are, as is the case with African filmmaking in general, undoubtedly shaped by the socio-cultural contexts that the filmmakers find themselves within. Ousmane Sembene has said (in Givanni, 2001: 185) that "[w]hatever its form, subject or content, artistic expression stems from a lived and shared social reality." The themes that African filmmakers choose to address through their films thus often reflect the lived experiences of the filmmakers. In many cases, gender positioning further informs the work of women directors in Africa, with female filmmakers often selecting specifically female themes grounded in their own experiences, to focus on in their films, and putting female characters at the centre of the narrative.

Within the milieu of a socially and politically committed filmmaking practice existing in francophone West Africa it is not surprising that representations of progressive female characters are frequently encountered in films from francophone West Africa. These depictions of the emancipation of African women as closely connected to the development of postcolonial Africa are related to a style of filmmaking that developed since francophone African countries gained their independence and started to produce films. France's financial support and the conditions of this support also contributed to the specific types of films produced, which were often films that were popular in European arthouse circles and at European film festivals such as Cannes and Berlin, and not primarily concerned with entertainment and financial gain. However, the second generation of West African filmmakers, often described as part of a "new wave" of African film (in particular Idrissa Ouedraogo and Gaston Kaboré) firmly believe that African film can be competitive and profitable in Africa and internationally, while maintaining artistic integrity (Ukadike, 2002: 151). Despite the international success of films such as Ouedraogo's *Yaaba* (1989), distribution remains a huge barrier for most African films, which often receive only very limited or even no distribution in their own countries, and very limited distribution outside of Africa. This situation is slowly changing, with more and more African films being released on DVD and films such as Sembene's *Moolaadé* (2004) and female Burkina director Fanta Regina Nacro's *La Nuit de la Vérité* (2004) having received wide international distribution and critical acclaim. While male directors from francophone West Africa have offered multiple alternatives to stereotypical Western representations of African women, female filmmakers are increasingly joining this socially committed cinema, in particular from the 1990s onwards.

In the context of Southern Africa, South Africa has been at the forefront of creating politically and socially conscious films since the end of apartheid, with filmmaking seen as an important tool in nation-building. While the commercial and entertainment possibilities of film are also increasingly explored and developed, film continues to be seen as a way of promoting racial integration and tolerance and redefining identity in the new South Africa. The commercial and cultural models of film are seen as not necessarily mutually exclusive. Though highly

underrepresented in the South African film industry, as well as in other Southern African countries, female voices are gradually emerging in the film industries and as is the case in francophone West Africa, female directors often draw on their personal experiences and perceptions of being an African woman in the thematic considerations of their films.

When considering the thematic choices of female African filmmakers in West and Southern Africa, it becomes clear that their main prerogatives are not commercial success and entertainment, but a commitment to personal expression and the articulation of identity, as well as raising awareness, critiquing oppressive societal structures, and offering alternative views. According to Beti Ellerson (1997), African women are drawn to cinema through a desire to transmit knowledge to other women; to contribute to the development of women and Africa in general; to communicate and reveal problems and issues in African societies; to materialise their thoughts and express their identities; and to correct the negative image Africans have of themselves (and which has been perpetuated by Western cinematic representations of Africa) by portraying the humanity of Africa. In a study of this nature, it is important to differentiate between politically activist, educational and didactic filmmaking on the one hand – intended to raise social awareness and, particularly in the case of women's filmmaking, to raise consciousness about women's issues – and commercial filmmaking intended for entertainment – as is found in the video industries of Ghana and Nigeria in particular – on the other hand. Although these two approaches to African filmmaking should not be seen as mutually exclusive oppositions, since a socially informed and politically committed film can also be entertaining and popular amongst African audiences, the work included in this study tends to veer more towards the educational and awareness-raising side of the continuum.

African women filmmakers address a multitude of themes related to their livelihood in their work – they explore identity in which filmmaking becomes a form of self-expression; they examine male-female and female-female relationships; they delve into the concerns of African nationhood, encapsulating the problematics around nationalism and neo-colonialism

in postcolonial Africa; examples of female leadership and socio-economic and –political emancipation abound in their films; and issues related to the female body are investigated. The tension between tradition and modernity, an issue which is of crucial importance to the emancipation of women in Africa, is often central to their filmic representations. Their work regularly challenges stereotypical representations of African women as silent victims on the one hand, and 'mother of the nation' and 'backbone of their society' on the other hand, depicting instead the diversity of African womanhood. They explore the seeming discrepancy between the ways in which women are often depicted in film and invoked in official nationalist discourse and rhetoric – as leaders and strong, emancipated figures – and the lived realities of the majority of African women who are still subjected to patriarchal systems of oppression and control, through representing the micro-politics of women's lives and focussing on the quotidian activities of women's lives. Female African filmmakers often attach importance to the role of storytelling in African culture, and enter the industry through a desire to tell their own stories. Commonly their main goal is to offer alternative representations of African women as a counter to Western and masculinist hegemony.

However, not all films by African women are overtly linked to issues of development and raising social awareness, as some have as their main goal and intention personal expression and individual identity negotiation. Filmic depictions dealing with issues related to the female body, including beauty and sexuality, could also be seen as a more personal form of expression. Although many films emphasise the importance of communal structures, these structures have to change and adapt within societies dealing with the many consequences and contradictions brought about by colonialism and capitalist modernity. The alternative models for social change presented by female filmmakers do not necessarily lead them to unquestioningly embrace the notion of female community as always taking precedence over individualism in African societies. The outcomes of the process of identity negotiation through film could also lead to the questioning of one's individual female identity against the pressures and expectations of one's society. The real-life experiences of female filmmakers who train and often live in the West leads to diasporic and multi-racial positionings in their

films, subject positions which resist any attempt at formulating a monolithic definition of an African feminist aesthetic. In addition, filmmakers often live in African cities resembling in many ways much more closely the (post)modern, diverse environments of Western metropolises than those of rural Africa. Whether filmmakers have as their main goal offering solutions to various forms of oppression of women or expressing individual identity through personal storytelling, what becomes clear is that African women's films depict multiple identities depending on different orientations, including whether a film is set in pre-colonial or postcolonial Africa, in a rural or urban environment, or offering a diasporic view as a result of patterns of emigration and exile. Thus it seems necessary that an African feminist aesthetics in films should incorporate notions of plurality, open-endedness and indeterminacy.

Equally, different paths are taken in generic, stylistic and aesthetic choices, indicative of the multiplicity of genres present in African cinema. The majority of female directors in Africa work in documentary filmmaking, in particular in video and television, but filmmakers also embrace the fictional form, especially the short film, though the fact that only a small number of fiction feature films has been made by African women is not necessarily a choice, but a limitation imposed by lack of access to financial resources. Hybrid genres, such as docu-fiction, can also be observed, and a small number of female filmmakers also work in animation. The search for 'authentically African' genres, although attempted by various film theorists, may ultimately prove fruitless, since many African filmmakers train in the West and they do not produce their films in isolation. As outlined earlier, film theorists have attempted to define an authentic African genre and film aesthetics through an emphasis on the continued importance of oral culture, orality and orature in African traditions but this orientation becomes problematic when the effect of Western influences and the consequences of globalisation are taken into account. Many theorists and even female filmmakers evoke African women as 'natural storytellers', but Beti Ellerson (1997) states that women have not always gained from oral tradition, which often places the male as the main locus of action and warns that the traditional role of women as storytellers could also perpetuate the invisibility of women.

In terms of aesthetic choices, Kenneth Harrow (1995: 225-40) argues that most films by African women reinforce the patriarchal status quo by not being stylistically challenging enough – he seeks an aesthetic subversion of conventional narrative codes which he regards as inherently patriarchal. Harrow's arguments are based on the work of the French psychoanalytical feminists and their critique of the phallic order of the Symbolic and he calls for a meeting of French feminist thought and African feminist practices. In the search for female-directed films which are transgressive not only on the level of content but also on the level of aesthetic and narrative style, Harrow claims that most female African filmmakers, including the films of Togolese director Anne-Laure Folly and Senegalese director Safi Faye, fail to do this. Although I would not contest the fact that many films by female African filmmakers utilise conventional narrative structures and are not necessarily stylistically or aesthetically experimental, I would propose that the adoption of a theoretical framework based on psycho-analytical feminism to study African films is a strategy that risks falling into a Eurocentric positioning, especially if this leads to dismissing films that supposedly do not adopt these characteristics. According to Harrow, films which embrace conventional realist narratives and regard the camera as an invisible mechanism with which the real world is represented with its real problems, are essentially reinforcing the patriarchal status quo. On the contrary, I would argue that many films by African women, including those dismissed by Harrow, offer glimpses into the multitude of stylistic choices and identity and subject positionings available to women, far from presenting clear-cut, simple solutions to the real problems in African societies, especially those affecting women. Furthermore, this does not preclude the option available to female African filmmakers to experiment with style, genre and theme. Safi Faye certainly does this in many of her films, including *Kaddu Beykat* and *Fad'jal*, which are often described as a docu-drama, a hybrid genre, in which she drew on her professional and personal experiences to create a film which subverts the Western anthropological gaze on to African societies that postcolonial theory has repeatedly denounced. Sheila Petty (1996: 188) argues that Faye's work, in particular *Kaddu Beykat* and *Fad'jal,* offers a direction for women's representation and identification in film which is

much more positive than in many male-directed films. Petty describes the unseen narrator in *Kaddu Beykat* as an "invisible heroine of cultural identify and collective consciousness", and by positioning this heroine outside the frame space, Faye is "challenging the construction of the female subject as 'body'". Likewise, the slow-paced films of Faye as well as some of Burkinabe director Fanta Regina Nacro's short films, which focus on the cyclical rhythms of daily life rather than on driving forward narrative progression, seem to offer an alternative cinematic discourse, if not to the films of African filmmakers, certainly to mainstream Western cinematic discourse. Many of the films directed by African women give prominence to the female voice and position female characters as subjects, thereby challenging objectification and providing alternative representational strategies.

Female filmmakers not only provide alternatives to representations of African women in the Western media and patriarchal African discourse, but they are also developing innovative forms of indigenous feminist aesthetics which offer examples of how women can integrate into modern societies. According to Frank Ukadike (1999: 200) an African feminist film aesthetics should pose a challenge to dominant styles, and embody a rebellious stance which develops from a female sensibility and subjectivity in order to challenge norms of representation and established traditions of filmmaking. "African women's films construct a paradigm," he writes, "which consists of speaking from within and attempting to compose a rich and varied portrait of the African woman via canonical modification and revisionism." This study aims to contribute to revising the stereotypical images created of African women from the outside through looking at the work of female African directors and exploring the representations they create through their films.

Assessing the presence of women in African filmmaking

Although Senegalese director Safi Faye is generally credited as the first black African female filmmaker, other sources cite Cameroonian Therese Sita-Bella's short film *Tam-tam à Paris*, made between 1963 and 1966, as the first film made by an African woman (Schmidt in Harrow, 1999: 279). African women thus started making films not long after African men, and

were part of the industry almost from its inception in the 1950s. Despite the fact that more African women have made films than might generally be believed, women remain hugely underrepresented in the African film industries as directors. In an article written in 1983, Farida Ayari (1996: 181) claims that cinema is still men's business, with the technical matters of filmmaking as well as directing regarded as a male preserve. She names Sarah Maldoror (born in Guadeloupe and thus generally regarded as part of the African diaspora) and Safi Faye as some of the only exceptions. Film directories, which often exclude television and video work, usually list a very small number of female filmmakers in comparison to men. Keith Shiri's *Directory of African Filmmakers and Films* (1992), for example, lists 259 filmmakers of whom only eight are women. Directories focusing specifically on women show that there are indeed many more female directors working in Africa; Emilie Ngo-Nguidjol (1999: 320-328) lists 100 women in her filmography of sub-Saharan African women filmmakers and Beti Ellerson's study *Sisters of the Screen* (2000) lists 123 African female directors of film, television and video, some from the African diaspora. These film historians contend that the number of female African directors at international film festivals does not provide a full picture of female participation in the film industry, since African women produce more work in video and television than on celluloid. What becomes clear though is that despite the indisputable underrepresentation of women in African film industries, African women are actively taking part in the film and television industries, and it is this neglected history that this study is attempting to uncover.

The fact that women direct far fewer films than men is clearly problematic, because it results in an imbalanced representation of socio-cultural complexities as well as disproportionate representations of individual and collective subjectivities and identities. Many male West African directors – such as Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo from Mauritania, Désiré Ecaré from Ivory Coast, and Cheick Oumar Sissoko from Mali – have through their depictions of female characters and the gender critiques embedded in their films put forward a vision of female emancipation as inextricably linked to African development in the postcolonial era. This view is certainly shared by many African intellectuals and writers, even though it has not

yet fully manifested in transformations in the socio-political and –economic realities of many African countries. Although the work of these male directors has been crucial in challenging Western colonialist ideologies which typically evoked the African woman as either exotic being or silent victim, many female film theorists and practitioners would claim that the male vision can never fully represent the female experience. Farida Ayari states:

> [T]he image of African women in African cinema remains essentially that created by men. Of course, African films, however modest, do present us with a fairly representative kaleidoscope of female figures. However, these are women fabricated within the imaginary of the men who make the films, regardless of how close to reality this imaginary at times may be. The image of women in African cinema is the result of a male gaze at a mostly male society. (1996: 181)

Ayari uses the Peulh proverb, "a man cannot imagine what a woman can do", to support her conviction that representations of women by male filmmakers will always be incomplete, partial and flawed. Cameroonian artist Werewere Liking goes even further in her critique of male directors' cinematographic representations of African women in an article entitled "An African Woman Speaks out against African Filmmakers", published in 1996, in which she criticises male directors for internalising, reproducing and disseminating the negative image of the African woman created and perpetuated in Western media. In terms of the underrepresentation of women in public spheres, and the importance of women taking part in opening up society to alternative views, Grace Alele Williams states: "[I]f these roles are so few, so long will the values of society continue to be formulated to the disadvantage of women" (quoted by Eboh, 1998: 35). Regardless of the extent to which these criticisms could be considered fair, it cannot be denied that progressive representations of women in films by male directors need to be complemented by representations created and directed by a female vision.

Nancy J. Schmidt and Emilie Ngo-Nguidjol have both developed comprehensive bibliographies and filmographies of African women working in the film industry (in Harrow,

1999), and although their research proves that the presence of women in African cinema is documented and recognised to a certain extent, they both affirm that much more research into the subject is needed. In terms of sub-Saharan female filmmakers, Schmidt states:

> Extensive research is needed to identify and learn about women filmmakers of the subcontinent. Information about successful and unsuccessful filmmakers needs to be collected, both for tracing the development of individual careers and for learning about the specific factors in individual African countries which are relevant for understanding the roles of women filmmakers. Future research needs to be unencumbered by European 'industrial' models of filmmaking and as broadbased as possible. If the African contexts of the creation and reception of women's films are the foci of future research, appropriate models for discussing and comparing their work will be developed. (Schmidt, 1999: 292)

For the theorist this entails researching the extent to which women participate in the African film industry as well as developing suitable theoretical frameworks to interpret their work. An approach to studying African women in the film industry and the products of their efforts should thus be pragmatic in so far as it critically considers available access for women to the film industry in terms of access to education, training, funding and distribution possibilities, but such a study should also include a theoretical approach in order to analyse the thematic, stylistic and aesthetic choices of African women filmmakers.

"No aspect of African cinema is more miraculous than the most unbidden emergence of female filmmakers on the continent," states Mahen Sophie Bonetti, a film festival organiser from Sierra Leone, in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 73). This statement recognises the difficulties that African women face in gaining access to the film industry as directors, which is often regarded as more challenging than in the case of male filmmakers. Ellerson's study highlights many crucial issues around the difficulties for women in gaining access to the African film industry and bears witness to the indisputable fact that many African women have indeed overcome immense barriers and prejudice in order to become directors, however underrepresented in numbers they still might be.

African women professionals of cinema, television and video came together for a workshop at the 1991 FESPACO, in an attempt to address the silences and omissions left by their virtual invisibility in the audio-visual industries. They released a statement that outlined their most urgent questions and needs and in it they asked, after 40 years of cinematographic production and 25 years of televisual production on the African continent, how many women are involved, what roles do they fulfil and what images of African women are shown to women of the African continent (Bakari & Cham, 1996: 35)? Their discussions during the workshop emphasised the unsatisfactory and insignificant number of women working in audiovisual professions and the problems women face in gaining access to training and funds. Their aims included putting forward their female vision of the world and gaining a controlling position on their pictures. A working group and a programme of action were set up in order to increase the number of women working in the professions of cinema and television. The importance of African women taking part in the construction of cultural products intended to challenge perceptions and change attitudes was emphasised in their statement: "[…] if pictures produced by African women do not give another view on African women's reality, then there is a great risk that women themselves, because they are the main educators of children – the citizens of tomorrow – will not be able to show an alternative vision of the world" (Bakari & Cham, 1996: 35).

The event at the 1991 FESPACO gained controversy when the panel chair asked all 'non-African' women (including those from the diaspora) to leave the meeting at the start, claiming that these women's experiences are entirely different from the experiences of women living and working in Africa. Claire Andrade-Watkins describes it as follows:

> …the workshop unleashed a riptide of emotion, confusion, and animosity which tore
> across the festival. It triggered often heated debates on a broad range of areas,
> including the relationship of the diaspora to African, relations between the French-
> and English-speaking regions of Africa and their positions within African cinema, and
> the appropriateness of FESPACO as the forum for this workshop. (Andrade-Watkins

Andrade-Watkins states, however, that the workshop could in the long run be seen as a catalyst for understanding and growth. Patterns in terms of the presence of women in the audio-visual industries were identified, such as the fact that more women work in television and video than in film, and that most women working in cinema did so as actresses, or were steered towards distribution and editing. The workshop made clear that while African women filmmakers share many of the same obstacles, there are also vast differences. In a decision similar to the FESPACO event which initially excluded women from the African diaspora, Beti Ellerson did not include any white female directors in her study *Sisters of the Screen* (2000). My own research does not disregard the work of women from the African diaspora, such as Gaudeloupean-born Sarah Maldoror or French/Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie, or the work of white female directors from Zimbabwe and South Africa. I regard their work as part of the multitude of expressions comprising female African identity.

Several years after the 1991 FESPACO gathering, at the 2005 FESPACO, the number of women working in the audio-visual medium has certainly increased, but still only three female directors were included in the official competition for feature fiction films - the feature directorial debuts of Burkinabe filmmakers Fanta Regina Nacro and Apolline Traoré as well as a feature film by German-Nigerian director Branwen Okpako. At FESPACO 2007 and 2009 no sub-Saharan women had films in the feature film competitions, though North African female directors were represented. Togolese director Anne-Laure Folly (in Ellerson, 2000: 101) ascribes the relative failure of the women's movement established at the 1991 FESPACO to the fact that African cinema is too young and has too little means, especially in supporting African women from different countries to work together and develop interconnections. The grand prize at FESPACO is the bronze statuette of Princess Yennenga, an African warrior, and the hope is often expressed that this figure will bear witness to the recognition of more African women in the expanding history of African experience through film. Despite the statuette's symbolic allusion to the important roles

women have played in African histories and cultures, no female director has won this prize since the first FESPACO was held in 1969. Burkinabe director Franceline Oubda stated in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 238):

> [The Etalon de Yennenga] demonstrates the importance of women in society. And I think to have this prize is a crowning achievement. And we women must fight so that women will achieve this. If we succeed in obtaining the Etalon de Yennenga, the efforts of women will be crowned and we will have reached a certain objective. Princess Yennenga was the proof of courage and bravery, the proof of endurance, and she was a woman who did a great deal in Burkina history. I think to fight for a woman to obtain the Yennenga is truly a step forward, and it will be for the greater welfare and improved standard of women in general.

Women in the African audio-visual industries are underrepresented for a complex variety of reasons, described by Beti Ellerson (1997) as the triple challenges faced by African women filmmakers: Firstly, the many production and distribution difficulties faced by all directors working in Africa; secondly, the obstacles women face because of their gender; and thirdly, the problems inherent in women filmmakers' attempts to reconcile the various roles in their lives. It is indisputable that both male and female African filmmakers generally face immense challenges in their attempts to make films, often working against massive odds in their attempts to gain access to training, funding, distribution and exhibition. However, it would appear that female filmmakers often face additional barriers when taking on the challenge of making films. Fanta Regina Nacro stated in an interview with Melissa Thackway (2003: 197) that there is a certain "veiled mentality" when potential funders or distributors are dealing with women. Well-known Burkinabe filmmaker Gaston Kaboré stated in an interview with Kimani Wa Wanjiru (2003): "The question of insufficient funds is a perennial one for African filmmakers and it is more pronounced where women filmmakers are concerned." African women who desire to establish independent careers regularly have to face up to the challenges posed by societal and traditional norms which perpetuate and maintain women's confinement to the domestic sphere. Some female filmmakers, such as French/Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie, claim that filmmaking is not regarded as an honourable

career for a woman. Where women have managed to gain access to the film industry, their presence and participation typically follow familiar patterns of gender relations in African societies and elsewhere – women often work 'behind the scenes', while it is the (mostly male) directors who are publicly acclaimed. Furthermore, to direct a film would mean in most cases to direct a mostly male crew, which could be problematic in patriarchal societies where the authority of women are often undermined. The majority of women who work in the African film industry – and this is certainly also true internationally – stay within stereotypically female roles, such as production managers, wardrobe and make-up assistants, editors and continuity assistants. Directing and technical roles such as camerawork are conventionally regarded as a male preserve. Women typically enter the industry through one of these conventional female roles, and the handful of women who do eventually direct feature films mostly achieve this through starting off with directing short fiction films and documentaries, often for television and video.

Many female African filmmakers have ended up directing projects that are sponsored by international bodies where they do not have a lot of control over the films. Often female directors receive specific funding or are encouraged to make films addressing specific 'female themes' such as polygamy, domestic abuse or female genital mutilation. This exposes on the one hand the danger of women being cornered into making development films on 'women's issues', but on the other hand it should be kept in mind that many women specifically choose to address in their films issues affecting African women, as will become clear in this study. Burkinabe filmmaker Valerie Kaboré stated in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2002: 129) that making only institutional films is limiting since, being forced to work with precise terms and references required by the sponsors, one cannot really measure one's capacity as a director. Short films and audio-visual development work for television and video are commonly viewed as stepping stones towards directing fiction feature films, still the ultimate career ambition for most filmmakers. In addition, many African women filmmakers do not start their careers in the film industry, but end up in the industry via other career paths, often juggling their filmmaking with another career, as well as with motherhood.

In an interview at the 2005 FESPACO, Zimbabwean director Tsitsi Dangarembga said that it is important for women to become filmmakers because they are natural storytellers, and film is just another medium for them to use in order to tell their own stories. She said that women are underrepresented in the capital-intensive world of filmmaking because it is difficult for women to penetrate. In an interview with the BBC in March 2005 she stated that the role of African women has not changed much, but still revolves around domestic as well as public responsibilities, bearing children, making and managing homes, earning a living and contributing to the running of society. She said that African women mostly still want to follow traditional domestic structures (getting married and having children) but that does not mean that women cannot emancipate themselves at the same time through education and being taught that they can excel, from an early age. She said that the underrepresentation of women in many fields is frequently due to male domination, but also due to jealousy and lack of unity on the part of women. She feels that women have to learn to speak out about their lives, their experiences and their visions.

In a personal interview with the executive director of the South African women's filmmaking association Women of the Sun, Eve Rantseli, conducted in July 2005, she stated that it is important to tell stories from a woman's perspective since women have certain ways of thinking that are different from men. She confirmed the point made earlier, namely that women in the industry are perceived to know a little bit less, especially with regard to technical matters, but stated that these perceptions are now changing. An important aspect of female directing for Rantseli is the issue of the role negotiation that women who want to pursue professional careers inevitably have to deal with. Not only in the film industry but in other industries as well, employers are sometimes reluctant to hire women because they also have the responsibilities of raising children and looking after their families. But women throughout the industry are mothers as well, and the industry should accommodate this. Her words are echoed by female South African filmmaker Omelga Mthiyane who laments the fact that women in the film industry have been shut out of technical aspects of productions for too long. "But roles are changing now", she states (quoted in Thirikwa, 2005), "[w]e have proved

to be just as good as our male counterparts in fields like scriptwriting, directing, production and the camera. It's not a bed or roses for women with demanding careers. We have to juggle between raising families and excelling in our professions."

Masepeke Sekhukhuni, the director of the Newtown Film and Television School in South Africa, said in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 301-314) that one of the school's key policies is to raise the number of women, given the fact that in African cinema and in the audio-visual industry in general, women are not that prominent in all positions. Significantly, the Newtown Film and Television School has always been run by women and they actively encourage women to apply. She regards one of the obstacles for getting women into the film industry as directors, as originating from the perceptions and ideals of women themselves, who often rather want to presenters than be behind the camera. But she states: "I always say that women are the best storytellers in Africa. Women have them, they have those stories. Women are producers, they control the budget at home, they direct. When they come they have those natural skills, they have those skills already and our men should recognise that" (Ellerson, 2000: 309). She maintains that filmmaking should be demystified to encourage women to enter and tell their own stories, because "there is some sort of idea around this issue where you find maybe somewhere, somehow women have not adequately expressed their womanhood in their films, due to the whole production process of filmmaking itself" (Ellerson, 2000: 311).

Conclusion: Towards a female aesthetics in African cinema

Against the background of the theoretical underpinnings of African feminism, the construction of a female subjectivity and sensibility within film will be considered in this study, as well as how these might lead to the construction of a female and feminist aesthetics in African cinema. Although there are apparent links between African and African feminist world views,[2] in that each group has a shared history of patriarchal oppression, Sheila Petty (1996: 186)

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[2] See for example Sandra Harding's article: "The Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities" (in Eze, 1998) for a discussion of the "curious coincidence" of gender dichotomies with dichotomies responsible for other forms of domination.

claims that each group has created its own hierarchy of priorities. Thus, although both African and feminist film are an aesthetic reaction against the mainstream, the issue is much more complex in the case of African feminism because, as Petty states further: "[…] although both feminist and African cinematic practices are deconstructive on levels of ideology and style, those who argue for a women's culture are electing to value, rather than denigrate, those traits associated with females in white patriarchal societies". Ella Shohat (1993: 45) points out the interwovenness of colonial and patriarchal discourses and states that the critique of colonialism within cinema studies has tended to downplay the significance of gender issues, curtailing the fact that postcolonial discourse has impinged differently on the representation of men and women.

Sheila Petty (1996: 185-93) outlines a number of trends within African filmmaking at the end of the 1980s. She identifies a revisionist cinema attempting to challenge traditional Eurocentric interpretations of African history with an Afrocentric sensitivity, which incorporates a deeply feminist commitment to human and equal rights for both genders. Petty describes this trend as an attempt to recover an African past and recontextualises it within present-day Africa. She emphasises the fact that African nationalism has been and often still is given precedence over feminist concerns. Whereas feminist discourse is created in a context of resistance against oppression, Afrocentric discourse, rather than defining itself in relation to the 'dominant', attempts to identify itself with an independent history and culture. Petty's critique of female representation in male-directed films poses specific challenges for female African filmmakers with feminist concerns, who are attempting to find ways of depicting simultaneously a feminist as well as an African subjectivity in their films. Furthermore, if the African woman is considered as 'doubly-colonised', both by the Western oppressor as well as the black male, there is an additional challenge to female filmmakers to actualise a space through film in which both can be critiqued. This is crucial, because, as useful and necessary as the collective action against Western oppression and imperialism is and has been historically, many African filmmakers and intellectuals acknowledge that in many countries women remain sexual objects in a culture of misogyny, chauvinism and patriarchal

oppression. An African feminist discourse in cinema has to include a critique of the norms of traditional African societies that have oppressed, and continue to oppress women. Sheila Petty (1996: 192) states: "Analysis of what constitutes feminist discourse in African cinema necessitates a continuous, rigorous investigation of how both female and male-authored texts expose and examine the interconnectedness of race, gender and class oppression."

A crucial issue with regard to the creation of an African feminist sensibility in filmmaking is raised by the divergence in viewpoints between younger and older African female filmmakers, in relation to their stance on African feminism. Consideration should be given to the fact that, although many female African directors deal with themes such as sexuality, beauty, female genital mutilation, polygamy and economic emancipation in their films, some female directors resist being labelled as 'feminist' and prefer to be known merely as storytellers, without overt reference to their gender. Older and more established filmmakers such as Safi Faye and Fanta Regina Nacro would not call themselves feminists and maintain that they display a human rather than a female sensibility in their work. They also state that men and women deal with the same problems and barriers in producing a film. In a discussion at the Cambridge African Film Festival 2005, Safe Faye said that the older generation of filmmakers tends to focus on documenting and showing societal problems, and let the audience reflect on the issues. She believes the key to enabling women access to the film industry is education, but that this is not only a woman's issue, since men and women face the same problems in gaining access to the film industry. For her being a female director is not necessarily the key issue. However, younger female filmmakers, for example Burkinabe director Apolline Traoré and French/Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie, emphasise the importance of their uniquely female perspective and experiences in making their films, and regard themselves as feminists. Obioma Nnaemeka (1997a: 4) describes this dichotomy as existing between older and often activist African women, who argue that traditional African cultures are empowering for women and have encouraged the emergence of strong, socially relevant women endowed with leadership abilities, and younger African women who seem to emphasise some of the concerns of Western feminism such as human

rights, racism, sexual harassment, and the fulfillment of desires. Most female filmmakers agree that there is a female subjectivity present in their work, and that they tell their stories differently, and in many cases have different concerns to male directors, which, as pointed out earlier, becomes problematic if female subjectivity is defined by men rather than women.

The undesirability of making categorical statements relating to a 'woman's sensibility' or a 'feminist aesthetic' in African women's filmmaking is clear, since various filmmakers have differing opinions as to what this sensibility entails, as well as whether they regard themselves as feminist filmmakers or not. It is very difficult to pinpoint and define the 'female sensibility' that many filmmakers allude to, which is an indication of the plurality of female African experiences. There is not a single specific way in which women make their films, and therefore no single female aesthetic. Female filmmakers follow a very wide range of approaches, and thus the aesthetics (such as style, form and genre) and themes (contents) they employ in their films are multiple, diverse and plural. By considering their work together in one study I am not suggesting that there is a constant and identifiable similarity or commonality of approach, but I am rather interested exactly in the diversity and multiplicity of approaches that female filmmakers employ in their work. With the explosion of audio-visual material and the increasing participation of women in African filmmaking, it is important that academic and critical studies on their films do not follow a monolithic or singular approach when analysing these films. This inherent multiplicity and plurality present in the work of female directors and how they regard women's positions and roles in Africa, further necessitates an opening up of the academic field of African feminism, which should also be regarded as diverse, adapting and developing.

As described above, African feminism has a problematic history on the continent, and not all female African filmmakers choose regard themselves as feminists or feminist filmmakers due to various reasons, not least the ideological baggage attached to the term. Even though the films I chose to include in this study all depict liberal, progressive and dynamic visions of contemporary African womanhood, to describe all these films as *feminist* or inhabiting a

feminist aesthetics would be misleading. Some films which depict a strong female sensibility and aesthetics certainly could be regarded as feminist; however, I use the notion of *a female aesthetics* in film as an overarching and inclusive term under which I include a feminist aesthetics. I am conscious of not describing all women's filmmaking as feminist, and thus I chose to adopt the term female rather than feminist in this study as this term seems to be the most inclusive in describing the wide range of female filmmaking present in Africa.

One of the most crucial issues that female African filmmakers deal with is the problematics around the representation of women, the issue of how a woman becomes an active subject in film, as opposed to a passive object being looked at. This is part of the crucial process of self-definition and identity construction through film, through which the silence of marginalised women is being broken as female directors make their voices heard to tell their own stories. This study will analyse these alternative models of constructing female subjectivity and aesthetics by female filmmakers within the plurality of contemporary African feminist frameworks.

If it is assumed, as this study proposes, that gender is a useful interpretative framework for studying cultural products such as films in postcolonial Africa, it is necessary to interrogate what the notion of a female sensibility and aesthetics in film entails. Is there a relationship between the manifestations of female sensibility and subjectivity in film and the development of African feminism, and more specifically, an African feminist aesthetics? It could also be asked whether a practice of African feminist filmmaking does indeed exist and what characteristics it displays. Furthermore, it could be asked whether and how the genres, themes and aesthetic styles of these films are informed by African feminist discourse? This study aims to address and interrogate these questions.

Chapter 2: Historical, Geographical and Regional Contexts

Introduction

The colonial powers, especially France and Britain, used film in the service of imperialism during their colonisation of African countries, setting up film units run by colonial officials and prohibiting Africans from creating and filming their own images. The films created by the colonial forces were intended to educate the colonial subjects in European ways, as exemplified by the work of the British Colonial Film Unit. Africa has for decades been the exotic backdrop for foreign films in the tradition of the Tarzan films and films such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) and *The African Queen* (1951), and this trend of using Africa as a backdrop to tell primarily Western stories still continues today. Davis (1996) describes the power of the moving image as exploited in Africa by the colonial powers as a second conquest, not merely in the acquisition of images, but also in the way these images were represented. Indigenous African filmmaking has endeavoured for decades to rectify the exoticised and one-dimensional image of Africa as perpetuated by the West

This section gives a brief overview of the histories of indigenous film industries in francophone West Africa and lusophone and anglophone Southern Africa, with a specific focus on the participation of female directors. Though the histories of filmmaking from these regions differ in many significant ways, there are also shared experiences of colonialism and oppression, and the fact that filmmaking in all these regions constitutes a challenging career choice due to economic, political and social barriers. The section will show that continuities and allegiances between filmmaking practices from the different regions can be observed, while also emphasising the geographical and historical specificity of French, Portuguese and British colonisation, and with South Africa occupying a unique and atypical position in relation to the other countries included in the study. The chapter will trace the contributions of women historically and geographically, since, though underrepresented in numbers, women have actively participated in the film industries of the countries included in this study and their contributions should not be ignored.

Southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique

Zimbabwe

Burns (2002) claims that every European power in Africa made motion pictures for its subjects, but no state invested as heavily in these films, nor expected as much from them, as the British colony of Southern Rhodesia. However, transforming the lives of their subjects through cinema proved more complicated than white officials had anticipated. Although Africans embraced the medium with enthusiasm, they expressed critical opinions and demonstrated decided tastes that left colonial officials puzzled and alarmed. In addition to the films produced by the British Colonial Film Unit, Zimbabwe has also been a location for foreign filmmaking during and after colonisation, through well-known international productions such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) and *Cry Freedom* (1987).

Britain established a legacy of documentary film in its colonies, producing colonialist instructional and educational films in adherence to their colonial policy of 'association'. Produced by the British Colonial Film Unit, these films were ideological tools intended to teach Africans the intricacies of British culture, as well as for educational purposes, for example addressing issues of health and sanitation. This legacy has resulted in documentary films being much more common in anglophone African countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and Ghana. Many governments in anglophone African countries today continue to support didactic documentary films and television programmes to the detriment of feature film production (Ukadike, 1994: 109). Tafataona Mahoso (2001: 211) critiques the proliferation of documentaries in Southern Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, which address 'development themes'. He calls this phenomenon a relationship of "centralised distance" between the North and the South, claiming that these development films, more than depicting the lived experiences and responses of Southern Africans, mostly reflect the donors' determination to convey singular messages in line with what he calls "a predetermined logomonic system" (Givanni, 2001: 211). Development films present themselves as text ignoring context, Mahoso states, and the effect of these colonial and neo-colonial obstacles is that those

purporting to 'develop' African communities hold on to pre-determined positions which prevent any meaningful representation of reality. The effects of the domination of Southern African cinema by a narrow 'development' ideology has created a perception in Zimbabwe that home-grown films are not very artistic or entertaining because they are driven by development messages. The potential range and power of Zimbabwean cinema thus remains unrealised and unexplored.

After Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980, the first Zimbabwean full-length feature film was only made in 1990 – Michael Raeburn's *Jit*. Though stifled by the political and economic crises that Zimbabwe is currently experiencing, there are occurrences of indigenous fiction filmmaking since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980; one of the prime examples, a film intended to create a fresh and unique genre of Zimbabwean filmmaking, is Tsitsi Dangarembga's short film *Kare Kare Zvako*, which is discussed in chapter 4.

In an interview conducted at FESPACO 2005, director Tsitsi Dangarembga described the Zimbabwean film history as comprising three different phases: the first consisting of foreign filmmaking in Zimbabwe. Allowing international productions to be produced in Zimbabwe was intended to lead to skills development for local filmmakers and film technicians, but this did not happen and the government eventually cut down all film activity. The second phase coincided with South African liberation and comprises films with social messages and an emphasis on building and developing a narrative around issues such as HIV/AIDS and sexuality. The current third phase consists of small films, made with very little resources, films that cannot necessarily travel yet, although production values are currently being developed.

Tsitsi Dangarembga is one of the most prominent female Zimbabwean filmmakers and was born in Mutoko in colonial Rhodesia. At the age of two she moved with her parents to England. Her writing debut *Nervous Conditions* was the first novel to be published in English

by a black Zimbabwean woman and won her the African section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989. In interview with Becky Ayebia, her publisher, at a Symposium at the 2005 Cambridge African Film Festival Dangarembga said that she sees herself as a cultural producer, not necessarily a novelist. She emphasised the importance she attaches to working in a group context, a participatory context, and that filmmaking fits this way of working very well.

Dangarembga studied filmmaking in Berlin and made her first film in 1995. Her first feature film, *Everyone's Child* (1996), deals with AIDS orphans and has a strong social message, and could thus be seen as part of the trend of films with development messages common in Zimbabwe. The film will be discussed in chapter 4. Her short film, *Kare Kare Zvako* (Mother's Day, 2004)*,* was in competition at FESPACO 2005. The film was funded by the European Development Fund, and although she had to make the film with less money than she intended, she said in a personal interview at FESPACO that she was not limited in her aesthetic or ideological vision by the European Commission in any way; they only made suggestions that she did not have to follow. Dangarembga states that she makes her films with first and foremost an African audience in mind.

Kare Kare Zvako has been screened at many international film festivals, and won the International Short film competition in Zimbabwe. According to Dangarembga the response to the film was more positive in Africa than in Europe, and generally people perceived it as something completely new and difficult to categorise, even for Zimbabweans. Dangarembga experimented with new narrative devices and says that she attempted to establish a new genre in Zimbabwean cinema through the film.

Dangarembga is also involved in developmental work, and founded the Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe (WFOZ) organisation in 2002. She said in an interview conducted at FESPACO 2005 that she became increasingly disillusioned with the way women were being portrayed in the motion pictures images seen in Zimbabwe, of local and international origin, which

prompted her decision to found WFOZ. The aim of WFOZ is to create a space for women's cinema narrative and address issues such as the results of HIV and sexual irresponsibility, and sexual harassment on the job. She is also part of Nyerai Films, founded in 1992 in Berlin and focusing on low-budget film production in Europe and Africa, ranging from documentary to feature films. In 2001 it was moved to Harare, from where it now operates with the main objective of promoting productions by emerging young filmmakers from Southern Africa.

Ingrid Sinclair is a British-born filmmaker who lived and worked in Zimbabwe for a number of years. Positioning her as an African filmmaker is thus problematic, but Sinclair's feature film *Flame* (1996) is the first and only film so far to deal with the Zimbabwean liberation war. The fact that Sinclair developed and produced the film wholly in a Zimbabwean context justifies its inclusion as an African film and the portrayals of women in the film are of particular relevance to this study. The film has created controversy and has been criticised for a number of reasons, as will be shown in the discussion in chapter 3, but its important framing of the role of women in the Zimbabwean liberation war makes it significant for this study. Sinclair, who is currently based in the UK, has directed several documentaries dealing with wide-ranging themes from art to politics and she currently work primarily in the fields of media for health and environment.

Angola and Mozambique

Southern African countries are increasingly aligned regionally as a way of encouraging and promoting African solidarity, especially since the end of apartheid, but the lusophone Southern African countries of Angola and Mozambique have entirely different histories to anglophone Southern Africa, which is also true in the case of their film industries. According to Camillo de Souza (in Bakari & Cham, 1996: 128) cinema was introduced in its colonies as an attempt by Portugal to legitimise its colonial role. A series of highly propagandist documentaries were produced, primarily aiming to illustrate the justness of colonialism's 'civilising mission'. Manthia Diawara (1992: 88) states that the Portuguese used newsreels solely for propaganda and that they did not establish any production facilities or trained

Africans in film production. The development of indigenous cinema in lusophone Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe) are often aligned with the Third Cinema of Latin America – the use of cinema as promoting and raising awareness of the struggle for liberation as outlined in the manifestos created by Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (in their piece "Towards a Third Cinema", 1969). The lusophone African countries share the legacy of a harsh and impoverished colonial reign, and a revolutionary movement for independence (Andrade-Watkins, 1999: 178). Film production was regarded as a powerful tool in the liberation struggle and a vital component in the documentation, education and dissemination of information about the war. Film production was supported by the international community, especially the USSR, with the concept of 'guerrilla filmmaking' developing out of the socialist and Marxist-inspired ideals of Third Cinema. The governments of lusophone countries played an important role in forming national cinemas after all these countries gained independence simultaneously in 1975 – President Samora Machel, for example, was committed to developing cinema in Mozambique – but these hopes were dashed by the civil wars that broke out shortly after independence in Angola and Mozambique.

Under colonial rule, cine clubs in Mozambique played an important part in the anti-colonial movement and the growth of amateur cinema on 8mm and 16mm stock was marked by a more incisive search for Mozambican reality. However, this still took place within a Portuguese perspective of Mozambique with material severely cut or banned by the Portuguese colonial censorship (Andrade-Watkins, 1999: 182). The national liberation struggle culminated in a strong cultural movement after independence in 1975, where, similarly to the situation in post-apartheid South Africa, cinema became important in the process of negotiating identity in a young and complex nation. The Mozambican government established the National Cinema Service to handle production and distribution and adopted a policy of co-production in 1985 to counter the economic effects of the war. According to Claire Andrade-Watkins (1999: 178) Mozambique insisted on merging ideology with form, content and context, in pioneering a successful model of 'guerrilla' cinema that embraced a

Marxist conception of the engagement between film and society. The film industry was nationalised because the government viewed cinema as a vital force in postcolonial development and education. Cinema production in Mozambique increased from 1976 onwards and filmmakers continued to make and distribute compelling and relevant films about the crisis in the region and the ongoing destabilisation efforts by apartheid South Africa against the socialist governments of Mozambique and Angola. Andrade-Watkins states that Mozambican cinema in particular – inspired by a vision of an ideologically engaged, alternative cinema – could have been, with appropriate vehicles of distribution and exhibition, a model for the future of African cinema. However, this vision was never realised, when the revolutionary transformation of the 1960s and 1970s reversed in the 1980s with the continuing civil war which led to internal guerrilla warfare, as well as the destabilising manoeuvres of South Africa and Rhodesia.

In the context of Angola, Marissa Moorman (2001: 107) points out, that "whatever the attempts and successes of mass mobilisation in Angola to confront the failures of Portuguese colonialism, it is clear that in the 1950s and 1960s a nationalist and revolutionary consciousness was the product of urban elites." Many of the early leaders of the MPLA (Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola) emerged from the colonial cultural context of Luanda that revolved around cinema, theatre, music and literature. Moorman suggests that the role of cinema in that environment is related to its later emergence as central to the liberation struggle's project of educating Angolans and the international community and to the post-independence exploration of national identity. As in the case of Mozambique, Angola made a number of socially-conscious films after independence, with some filmmakers starting to engage more closely with the aesthetic possibilities of documentary practice from 1977 onwards. However, film production declined from 1982 onwards with the state budget increasingly orientated towards the civil war and attempts at coordinating film production in Angola having failed. At the level of ideas, the state was less and less interested in promoting a variety of aesthetic practices and interpretations since these would inevitably have political implications within the circumstances of the civil war. The pressures on the economy and

increased guerrilla warfare meant less disposable income and a retreat from public forms of entertainment (Moorman, 2001: 116).

Guadeloupean-born filmmaker Sarah Maldoror, who was married to the Angolan revolutionary Mario Pinto de Andrade, made a great contribution to the film industries of Angola and Mozambique through her films which often focus on the role of women in the liberation struggles in these countries. Maldoror studied film in the ex-Soviet Union with Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene, and started her career in filmmaking during the years of African independence and displays in her films a deep commitment to the history of the liberation struggles of African peoples, which has earned her the 'honorary' title of being regarded as an African filmmaker. Ukadike (1994: 233) states that though she might well be regarded as a foreigner, her long service to the black and African causes and her marriage to a prominent Angolan nationalist have earned her the status of a native African. Before her main feature film completed in 1972, *Sambizanga* (discussed in chapter 3), she made *Monangambee* in 1970, a short film in Algeria about an African political activist imprisoned in a Portuguese jail. Both *Monangambee* and *Sambizanga* were adapted from stories by the Angolan novelist Luandino Vieira. About the controversy which erupted at the 1991 FESPACO women's gathering when women from the African diaspora were asked to leave, Maldoror stated the following in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 165):

> We were told to leave because we were not considered African. We are in Africa, of course I am Africa. Certainly, my parents were Africans. Why am I Gaudeloupean? Because my parents were sold into slavery. I am part of the group of African who were enslaved and deported.

South Africa

A brief history of South African cinema

Cinema in South Africa is 110 years old - South Africa is often cited as one of the first countries worldwide to marvel at the invention of the moving image. However, the history of the oldest film industry in Africa, as with the history of the country at large, is a skewed and

scattered legacy full of omissions and silences left by the absent voices of those oppressed and silenced during firstly a rule of foreign colonial powers, the British, followed by the rule of a white minority, the Afrikaners. The voices of the poor and dispossessed, the voices of women, the voices of mixed-race people and the Asian diaspora, and the voices of all the various black ethnic groups in South Africa remained almost entirely absent from audio-visual representation during the oppressive regimes that constituted South Africa's official history before the end of apartheid.

Because of South Africa's disjointed history – out-of-sync with the historical patterns of colonisation, freedom struggles and eventual independence that shaped the modern era for most other African countries – South African cinema during apartheid is generally excluded from historical and theoretical discussions of African film as a whole. Although a number of book-length studies on South African cinema have been published over the last four decades (Gutsche, 1972; Tomaselli, 1989; Hees, 1991; Blignaut and Botha, 1992; Botha and Van Aswegen, 1992; Davis, 1996), Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (2003: 1) claim that none of these studies constitutes a serious consideration of South African cinema in its own right, or offers a systematic approach to film history that problematises the absence of black voices in South African cinema. Since Balseiro and Masilela made this judgement this 2003, a number of additional volumes on South African cinema have appeared: Keyan Tomaselli's *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* (2006), Jacqueline Maingard's *South African National Cinema* (2007), and Martin Botha's edited collection *Marginal Lives & Painful Pasts: South African Cinema After Apartheid* (2007). Maingard's book in particular traces the genealogy of South African cinema into the contemporary era with a complexity absent in earlier publications.

According to Botha (2003) "the Nationalist government and big business collaborated to manipulate local filmmaking" after the introduction of a regulated subsidy system in 1956. Tomaselli (1988) gives a detailed account of the development of the subsidy system and the numerous revisions that were made to it, as well as of the films produced during this time.

The subsidy system unsurprisingly heavily favoured white, especially Afrikaans, filmmakers, and, spurred by the incentive of a tax refund, many films of a very low quality were produced. The film industry during the apartheid years failed to produce films, with a few exceptions, of enduring artistic quality or creative freedom, and entirely ignored the socio-political realities of the country. The political and ideological power of the image was of course firmly recognised by the ruling minority, and heavy censorship, as in all other cultural and societal realms in South Africa during apartheid, was put in place to prohibit the production and exhibition of films not only overtly or subtly critical towards the policy of apartheid, but also films that humanised the oppressed masses in South Africa, problematised the many race issues of the country, or depicted South Africa as a country in turmoil. Many films reinforced apartheid ideologies or romanticised the decisions and actions of the ruling minority, for instance South Africa's destabilising and brutal intervention in the affairs of its neighbouring countries, especially the Border War with Angola (1975-1989). These films portrayed a heavily one-sided, stereotypical view of the Afrikaner, and in films in which black people appear, they are, consistent with apartheid ideology, depicted as a servant class. According to Botha and Van Aswegen (1992) ideology and capital came together through the subsidy system to create a national cinema representative of the dominant ideologies of the apartheid regime under Verwoerd. This idealistic conservatism was characterised by an attachment to the past, to ideals of linguistic purity and to religious and moral norms (Botha, 2003).

A traceable tradition of radical activist black filmmaking failed to develop in South Africa during apartheid. A few films made by South Africans in exile (for example Lionel Ngakane's *Jemima and Johnny*, 1966) as well as feature films and documentaries by foreigners (for example Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa*, 1960; Sven Persson's *Land Apart*, 1974; Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom*, 1987; Chris Menges's *A World Apart*, 1988; and Euzhan Palcy's *A Dry White Season*, 1989) served to alert the rest of the world to the conditions of the dispossessed and marginalised under apartheid. Although these films played an important role in international consciousness-raising on apartheid issues, the

problematic notion of a foreign gaze onto the South African situation – which often results in stereotypical, romanticised or simplified representations – plagues post-colonial analyses of these films. On the whole film was not used as a political activist tool from within the country in the way that it was used to depict, document and support the anti-colonialist struggles in lusophone African countries. Although a long tradition of activist theatre, as well as the use of music as consciousness-raising tool, can be traced in locations like Hillbrow, Sophiatown and Newtown in Johannesburg, the medium of film, expensive and inaccessible to most black South Africans during apartheid, was not taken up a weapon in the struggle against apartheid in the way that it was in the lusophone African countries. "South Africa, site of the most repressive society in the world, is unfortunately not the base for the most militant liberationist film indicative of oppressed societies", states Ukadike (1994: 223).

From the 1970s and 1980s a group of independent filmmakers started to make films and videos about the socio-political realities of the marginalised and oppressed black majority. A few anti-apartheid films of note were made clandestinely, a handful in which blacks took part in leading roles as script writers and directors, the best-known of these was probably *Mapantsula* (1988) by Oliver Schmitz. Other anti-apartheid, critical films of note were Andrew Worsdale's *Shotdown* (1987); Darrell Roodt's *Place of Weeping* (1986), *The Stick* (1988) and *Jobman* (1989); and Manie van Rensburg's *The Native Who Caused All the Trouble* (1989). Although most of these films were banned or heavily censored and remain unseen by the majority of South Africans, they constituted an important oppositional, independent South African cinema during apartheid. However, this category is not unproblematic since these films were mostly made by progressive white South Africans and are therefore dismissed by many theorists and critics as by no means "deeply African" (Ukadike, 1994: 223). An historical search for black South African filmmakers under apartheid delivers only a few names, of which some of the most important are: Lionel Ngakane who made *Vukani/Awake* (1962) and *Jemima and Johnny* (1965) in exile in Britain; Simon Sabela, the first black South African to direct a film in South Africa, *U-Deliwe* in 1974; and Thomas Mogotlane, who co-wrote *Mapantsula* (1988) with Oliver Schmitz. This brief history of the South African film

industry until the end of apartheid clearly shows the absence of black voices and participation in the industry, an imbalance which is yet to be fully redressed in the new South Africa. Furthermore, as the vast majority of films produced under apartheid were made by white South Africans, they occupy an uncomfortable and problematic space in an historical retrospective on South African film from a post-apartheid vantage point. These films, especially those that pioneered a critical examination of South Africa during apartheid, inhabit an in-between space, not being truly African but neither being European, and as South African cinema is gradually integrated with African cinema as a whole in the post-apartheid era, it becomes necessary to reconsider the place of these films in the history of South African filmmaking.

Contemporary South African filmmaking

South African film in the post-apartheid era is gradually being reintegrated into African cinema as a whole. The subsidy system was terminated in the late 1980s, and by the end of apartheid the film industry was left fragmented and economically unstable, after for decades being treated by the government as an industry that should provide light entertainment at maximum financial gain, rather than as a creative industry with potential for cultural expression or self-reflexivity. But the last 15 years have seen, as in so many other socio-cultural and –political spheres, massive policy and structural changes as well as a transformation in the country's national, regional and international relationships. The re-integration of South Africa into the continent's future is exemplified by the ideological notion of an African Renaissance, promoted by the South African government along with the governments of other African countries. The processes of regional, continental and international reintegration that South Africa is going through have many implications for the film industry, not least because the South African government as well as industry and commercial players are committed to encouraging film production and exhibition for its commercial, cultural and educational benefits.

The feature films and documentaries produced in South Africa over the last few years show

that multiple genres and themes are being explored – from post-apartheid dramas and struggle stories to popular comedies and musicals. Although South Africa's history of overt racialisation through racial classification still provides impetus for many current films, according to Masilela & Balseiro (2003: 5) the transition to a democracy marks a shift from an emphasis on racial politics in South African film criticism to other areas of concern, for example questions of gender, sexuality and class. Issues of identity have been one of the driving forces behind filmmaking in South Africa over the past few years and political themes dealing with South Africa's past and present have occurred in many audio-visual productions. Within the broad trend of dealing with political themes, a certain 'activist aesthetic' can be traced in fiction and documentary films. Activist cinema regards cinema not as a commercial industry, but as a tool for cultural self-definition and raising social awareness. Young, especially previously disadvantaged, emerging filmmakers are being empowered through training and funding opportunities to make their voices heard and tell their personal stories because the audio-visual medium is seen as an important democratising device in reflecting on and shaping individual and cultural identity within post-apartheid South Africa.

The role of women in South African film

The first woman to make a short fiction film in South Africa was Anna Pohl in 1959; it took two decades for three more white female directors to make feature films: Elaine Proctor, the Mozambican-born Helena Noguiera and Afrikaans director Katinka Heyns. Harriet Gavshon (1992: 251) states that of the approximately 605 feature films made in the country between 1985 and 1989, only two – *Quest for Love* (1988) and *Fiela se Kind* (1988) – were directed by women, Helena Noguiera and Katinka Heyns respectively. Palesa Nkosi was the first black woman to make a short drama, *Mamlambo*, in 1997. The first feature film by a black South African woman, Maganthrie Pillay, who is of Indian heritage, was released only in 2005. Her film *34 South*, deals with issues of rural-urban migration, race and identity. It took her eight years to complete the film, and, although she is proud to be the first black female director in South Africa, she is also outraged: "With a hundred years history, we only have three other women, all of whom are white, who have made feature films. What does that say

about South Africa? What does that say about our industry? To be the first black woman simply highlights the fact that there are thousands of other stories that need to be made" (quoted in Kriedermann, 2005).

As elsewhere on the continent, more women have directed short fiction films and documentaries, but the total number of women who have directed fiction films or documentaries remains alarmingly small. "I don't think there are more than eight women directors who have had the opportunity to direct. I don't think there have been more than ten features made by women, 20 documentaries, two dozen shorts," says South African film historian Martin Botha (quoted in Taylor, 2005: 23). This situation has changed since Botha made this statement, as many women currently work in documentary filmmaking and four more feature films have been made by women since 2005: Zulfah Otto-Sallies' *Don't Touch* (2006), *The World Unseen* by Shamim Sarif (2007), *Confessions of a Gambler* co-directed by Rayda Jacobs and Amanda Lane (2007), and *My Black Little Heart* by Claire Angelique (2008). Zulfah-Otto Sallies, Kethiwe Ncgobo, Omelga Mthiyane and Kali van der Merwe are some of the best-known documentary filmmakers in South Africa, whose work will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Lesley Marx (in Blignaut & Botha, 1992) cited the films of Proctor, Noguiera and Heyns as what should have been the vanguard of female, and possibly feminist, work in South African cinema. Although female themes and a questioning of patriarchal norms are central to their films and are also stylistically reinforced in their work, the notion of a South African feminist film aesthetic in the absence of any black female voices is deeply problematic. Although Noguiera and Proctor's films in particular display a deeper engagement with the realities of black people in South Africa under apartheid, on the whole the films by these three white directors portray the personal perspectives of the lives and experiences of white women in South Africa, and could as such only count as part of a *white* South African feminist aesthetic. The consequences of complete racial segregation under the apartheid state mean that the search for a common sisterhood between all the women in South Africa, black and

white, is an almost impossible quest. As such their films do not constitute bodies of work that emerging black South African female directors could build upon or find inspiration from. Instead, black women directors in South Africa seem to look rather towards the rest of Africa when seeking inspiration for their own careers.

Katinka Heyns started her career in film as an actress, and became one of the most beloved South African actresses during the 1960s and 1970s for her roles in films such as Jans Rautenbach's *Katrina* (1969) and *Jannie Totsiens* (1970), as well as in television series from the late 1970s onwards. She founded her own production company, Sonneblom Films, in the 1980s and has since produced and directed a number of films; her best-known work being *Fiela se Kind* (Fiela's Child, 1988), *Die Storie van Klara Viljee* (The Story of Klara Viljee, 1991) and *Paljas* (1998). *Paljas* (the term refers to something magical, for example a charm or a spell) is about an Afrikaans family in the semi-desert of the South African Karoo region, isolated and dysfunctional in their interpersonal relationships, whose lives are irrevocably transformed when a travelling circus visits their town and leaves behind a clown. *Paljas* is thematically linked to a genre of Afrikaans "magic realist" art, which has been explored in particular by female novelists and playwrights, for example Fransie Philips and Reza de Wet, as well as by the acclaimed South African novelist André P. Brink. *Paljas,* and the novels and dramas of these writers, draw on the mysterious qualities of the semi-desert Karoo landscape to create magical tales that incorporate elements of the fantastic through for example magic spells and the presence of supernatural beings. Emerging South African novelist, Rachel Zadok, artfully merges this tradition of magic realism in white South African writing with the spiritual traditions and beliefs of black South African cultures in her post-apartheid novel *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005), shortlisted for the prestigious Whitbread First Novel Award in Britain in 2005. *Paljas* was the first South African film to be accepted as an entry in the Academy Awards' Best Foreign Film category but ultimately did not obtain a nomination.

From Heyns's oeuvre, the film that displays the strongest elements of a Western feminist

sensibility thematically is *Die Storie van Klara Viljee*. It tells the story of Klara, a seamstress who lives independently, much to the incomprehension of the villagers with their conservative small-town mentality. She falls in love with a local fisherman, Pietman, a womaniser, who deserts her and has a child with Engela, Klara's antithesis and arch-rival. Pietman fakes his own death by pretending that he has drowned, and leaves the town. The paternity of Engela's child is actively speculated on by the whole village because extra-marital sexual relations are heavily frowned upon in this conservative Calvinist Afrikaner community. The villagers refer to the pregnancy in suitably euphemistic terms, familiar to any Afrikaans girl who has grown up in a Christian home – for example by stating that "she is in the other time". Klara, not knowing that Pietman has deceived her, vents her anger and grief at the tragedy that has befallen her onto the sea, deciding that the sea will never see her again and building a house behind a dune. When she finds out, inevitably, about Pietman's unforgivable deception, she decides that she can face the sea again, and embarks on flattening the dune all by herself, by making use only of a stubborn donkey pulling a ramshackle plough. For her, carrying out this punishing labour on her own is a process of purification and emotional healing, and she states: "Every load that I carry away is a load off my shoulders". The film certainly carries a strong feminist theme in its depiction of the individual emancipation of a white woman, although it is somewhat melodramatic and the ending, which sees Klara falling in love with the village teacher and thus not ending up all alone, is rather more problematic. In addition, the film suffers from being much too long and protracted, and would have been more effective if it was more succinctly edited. Heyns has been criticised for the longwinded editing of her films; this was apparently also the reason for *Paljas* not being nominated for an Academy Award.

Fiela se Kind is based on the novel of the same title by acclaimed South African female writer Dalene Matthee. It tells the story of a small white child lost in the Knysna forest in southern South Africa. He is found and cared for by a poor, coloured (mixed-race) family, who comes to regard and love him as their own. The mother, Fiela, is a formidable woman, who takes on the authorities and bureaucracy to get her son back when he is taken away because being

white it is inconceivable that he could be raised by a coloured family. The boy, Benjamin, spends his teenage years with a poor white family, mistakenly identified by the authorities as his biological family, who lives from selling wood and poaching elephants in the Knysna forest. The two families are harshly contrasted in the novel and the film, offering a penetrating take on racial issues in South Africa at the time: Fiela's family is deeply religious, has dignity and integrity, and makes a living from hard, honest work, while the white "bos" (bush) family has an educated, abusive and racist father, lives in abject poverty and does not respect the forest environment. Benjamin is finally re-united with Fiela as an adult and she offers him his rightful inheritance and ownership of the farm on which the family lives. Although the character of Fiela offers a challenging example of a strong woman prepared to take on the apartheid authorities for what she believes is just - made even more piercing because she is coloured – the ending of the film is problematic and indicative of an apartheid world-view. By reinstating Benjamin, the white male, as the rightful owner of Fiela's farm, the film is reinforcing the social and economic hierarchies of apartheid ideologies.

Helen Nogueira is Portuguese by origin and was born in Mozambique, but she came to South Africa during her native country's tumultuous bid for independence. She has worked in South Africa for most of her career, and her films employ South African themes. She graduated from the University of Natal and then went on to study film at the Paris Institut des hautes Etudes Cinematographiques in 1980, where other Mozambican filmmakers, notably the activist filmmaker Ruy Guerra, also received their education in film. Noguiera's link with Mozambican activist filmmaking during the struggle for independence is interesting, especially in the light of the relative absence of radical activist filmmaking in South Africa during apartheid. Her films, banned in South Africa because of their overt anti-apartheid sentiments, are some of only a handful of examples of the use of film as anti-apartheid activist tool from within the country itself. With her Mozambican background, it is even possible to see her work as forming a bridge between lusophone and anglophone activist liberationist filmmaking, for example in comparison with the work of Sarah Maldoror. Despite the unique space that her work occupies in the history of South African film, very little has

been written theoretically or critically on her films. She directed *Quest for Love* (1989), based on a novel by Gertrude Stein and portraying a lesbian love affair against the background of South Africa's military destabilisation campaigns in neighbouring countries; *The Good Fascist* (1992), about a Mozambique-born man's journey into fascism in South Africa elucidates the tragic human factor in South Africa under apartheid through a political thriller-cum-courtroom drama; and *Ingrid Jonker: Her Lives and Times* (2001), a documentary on the life and work of one of South Africa's best-known Afrikaans female poets, a troubled artist who committed suicide in her late twenties.

Elaine Proctor made a number of documentaries before she directed her first feature film, *On the Wire* in 1990, about a young man who has just returned from service in the South African Defense Force, attempting to put his life back together after his harrowing experiences as an unwilling defender of apartheid. *Friends* (1993) deals with the complex relationship between three young women sharing a house in Johannesburg - Aninka is the daughter of wealthy Afrikaners and an eccentric archaeologist; Thoko, a teacher, is from a poor black background; and Sophie has well-to-do British parents. Sophie takes on a very strong position against the apartheid government's policy of minority rule and joins a terrorist group determined to fight apartheid by any means necessary, with far-reaching consequences for her own and her friends' lives. Proctor as writer-director won the Golden Camera award at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival for *Friends*. Her most recent film, *Kin* (2000), tells the story of a woman, who works as a conservationist to protect the Namibian wildlife, torn between different cultures and loyalties as she discovers that people close to her in the local community are involved in elephant poaching, something they do for their own livelihood.

The work of the only three female directors of feature fiction films under apartheid shows that these women have addressed challenging issues, not only of gender but also of race and class, with their films displaying an awareness and critique of and reflection on the socio-political realities of the country. To get a fuller, post-apartheid picture of female filmmaking in South Africa, it would be necessary to look at the role of black South African women in the

film industry. Despite the important roles that women played in the anti-apartheid struggle, these contributions have not yet resulted in equal representation for women, and particularly black women, in post-apartheid South Africa. Women are still hugely under-represented in most societal spheres, including the film industry. Due to this under-representation of female directors in South African cinema, particularly black women, it is not possible yet to speak of or attempt to formulate the characteristics of a feminist aesthetic in black female filmmaking in South Africa. The reasons for the huge under-representation of women in South African cinema are to a great extent similar to the reasons for the absence of female directors worldwide. Although more and more women are entering the field, they work mostly behind-the-scenes; as editors, production managers, make-up artists or costume designers. Women everywhere are (to lesser and greater extents) exposed to cultural norms that emphasise their strong characteristics as being able to work in a team rather than take leadership, and to leave technical matters to men. For a long time women in the film industry have been shut out of technical aspects of production and these stereotypical female roles are often perpetuated by women themselves. Within a culture that sustains these prejudiced notions regarding gender roles, it is extremely difficult for women to take control of the image, tell their own stories and become directors. This is even harder for black South African women, historically 'doubly colonised', both by apartheid policies as well as by black patriarchal traditions. Zanele Mthembu, a South Africa female director of documentary film, stated in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 191): "Being a black African woman has its own problems, aside from getting into the film industry. I know the biggest obstacle that I have is being black, being African, and, most of all, being a woman."

Affiliations and networking between women is an important aspect of addressing gender inequalities and progressing feminist ideals, as has been demonstrated from the earliest feminist waves. Amongst South African women filmmakers, two organisations, Women of the Sun (WoS) and Women in Film and Television South Africa (WIFTSA) in particular address the issue of under-representation of women in the film industry, and provide infrastructures for national, continental and international networking. Women of the Sun (WoS), based in

Johannesburg, is a non-profit media organisation and resource network for African women filmmakers. The organisation started as an ambitious idea initiated by Cindy Gordon (freelance film practitioner), Seipati Bulane-Hopa (South African producer), Anne Mungai (Kenyan filmmaker), Michelle Materre (US distributor), Georgia Popplewell (Trinidadian producer and writer) and Nomsa Mwamuka (Zimbabwean freelance producer), and launched at the now-defunct South African film market Sithengi in 1998. It was initially set up to support women of colour, but the network has expanded to include white women as well. The focus is rather on Africa – if you live in Africa, or are from Africa, you identify with Africa. However, as the executive director, Eve Rantseli, pointed out in a personal interview conducted in July 2005, it is a fact that white women in South Africa have had better opportunities, and therefore WoS firstly target black women through their initiatives. WoS has about 100 members and is established nationally and continentally as a resource exchange network for African women filmmakers via commercial distribution networks, local and internationally industry organisations, NGOs and local and international student programmes. Their focus on women entails actively advocating women filmmakers, providing funding information, and showcasing films by women. Some of their initiatives include monthly screenings of films by African women, provision of training and funding support, and facilitation of the distribution of films by African women to film festivals and film and television markets internationally. The organisation has a strong approach to sharing, and, significantly, they have strategic relationships with organisations such as Women in Film and Television International and Women Make Movies, the biggest distributor of films by women in the world. They regard themselves as part of the change that has been taking place in the industry over the past few years in terms of more women entering the field; they are involved in lobbying policy makers and their work featured in the 2003 budget speech made in the South African parliament. In terms of networking between women filmmakers, their approach is that women filmmakers should be aware of each other, should find companionships and should collaborate and learn from each other.

Francophone West Africa

Francophone West African cinema from past to present

Filmmaking by Africans in francophone West Africa started after these countries (comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo) gained independence in the 1960s (1958 in the case of Guinea) and indigenous filmmaking in these countries should thus be seen as a cultural activity which commenced in the postcolonial era. Under French colonial rule Africans were denied the right to film their own countries, and the Laval decree of 1934 attempted to control the content of films and to minimise the creative role of Africans in film production (Diawara, 1992: 22). Guided by the logic of the French "civilising mission", which imposed French cultural modes and norms, French colonial powers preferred to import French films and actively discouraged the development of any African filmmaking activity (Thackway, 2003: 7). The first film directed by a black African*, Afrique sur Seine* by Paulin S. Vieyra (who was born in 1925 in Dahomey, now Benin) in 1955, is about Africans living in Paris and was filmed in France, because Vieyra was not allowed to film in Africa. The French companies COMACICO and SECMA controlled distribution, exhibition and film programming in most of Francophone Africa and when some countries nationalised film after independence, the two companies refused to distribute films to these countries. Furthermore, the practice of block booking meant that directors could not show their films in their own countries and filmmakers reacted by putting pressure on their governments to nationalise distribution and film screening (Diawara, 1992: 253). It was only after colonies gained their independence that France started to develop African film, with the creation of the *Consortium Audio-visuel International* (CAI). The film distribution and exhibition networks left by the French colonial administration after the independence of African countries as well as institutionalised support for African cinema, contributed greatly to the development of national film production in many francophone countries during the 1960s. In the 1980s, the socialist government of the Mitterrand era supported African directors, and this cultural support of African cinema and other art forms still continues today, with France (and subsequently the European Union) remaining one of the main financiers of West African film. France did not develop local cinema units like the British, with aid centralised in Paris. However, many West African filmmakers criticise the

paternalistic nature of French aid to francophone African countries. Nonetheless, it is mainly France's support of the cultural endeavours in its ex-colonies which ensured that francophone African countries were responsible for 80% of the films made across the African continent until the mid-1990s (Diawara, 1992: 34).

Although the economic difficulties and political instability prevalent in many francophone West African countries make filmmaking a challenging career choice, many internationally significant filmmakers have emerged from francophone West Africa. Of the first generation of West African filmmakers, Senegalese Ousmane Sembene is undoubtedly in the best known. Sembene was the first black sub-Saharan African to direct a film in Africa, thus earning him his honorary paternal title as the father of African cinema, and he gained international recognition in the 1960s with his third film *La Noire de…* (Black Girl, 1966). Sembene, a resolutely politically and socially committed filmmaker, made his last film *Moolaadé* in 2004. A deeply humane condemnation of female genital mutilation, the film won the *Prix Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004 and was screened at FESPACO 2005. Mauritanian director Med Hondo employed a fragmented narrative and surrealist style in his debut feature, *Soleil O* (1967), an unrepentant denouncement of colonialism. Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety's work was likewise groundbreaking stylistically through the non-linear juxtaposition of imagery and mixing of Western and African storytelling techniques in *Touki Bouki* (1973), a tale about two young Senegalese lovers' romanticised plan to move to France. Senegalese director Safi Faye became the first black woman from sub-Saharan Africa to direct a feature film, *La Passante* (The Passerby), in 1972. Guided by her educational background in ethnography and her work with French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, Faye's films are close-up studies of African cultural, political and economic life, often set in rural Africa, and combine elements of fiction and documentary filmmaking styles.

Jean Rouch played a significant role in the development of francophone West African filmmaking through introducing film technology and training technicians in the areas where he filmed – primarily Niger, Mali, Ghana and Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta). He worked, in

addition to Safe Faye, with some of the pioneering filmmakers from this region such as Moustapha Alassane and Oumarou Ganda from Niger and Désiré Ecaré from Ivory Coast. Rouch, who worked as a civil engineer in francophone West Africa during World War II, started his anthropological and ethnographic filmmaking career in the late 1940s. Through his studies of African life, in particularly documenting ritual and tradition, he came to be regarded as one of the pioneers of *cinema verité.* However, Rouch's work has also been criticised by African filmmakers, most significantly by Sembene, who, in an 'historic confrontation' between them, accused Rouch of looking at African "as if we were insects" (quoted in Busch and Annas, 2008: 2).

With Sembene often cited as the emblematic figure, many West African filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s displayed in their work a deep political engagement with the socio-cultural issues of the time, embedded in the era of decolonisation which required a formulation of Afrocentric responses to questions of identity, representation and liberation (Thackway, 2003: 8). Filmmaking was thus seen as part of the task of national reconstruction, which gave rise to the social realism and didacticism of the first generation of African filmmakers. Sembene, who was also a talented writer, turned to filmmaking as a way to overcome the illiteracy prevalent in many African countries in order to make his work more accessible to his own people. He often invoked the educational power of film in interviews and he almost always chose to use his native Wolof or other indigenous West African languages rather than French in his films. Sembene made his films firstly for his own people, and his work presents a vision of constructive change in African societies, often through denouncing neo-colonialist oppression and giving a voice to the resistance of those on the margins of society. As discussed in chapter 1, it is important, however, not to simplify this social realist vision of African cinema, since many other styles have been employed by West African filmmakers, including by Sembene.

The educational and political priorities of the first generation of West African filmmakers were underscored by the *Pan African Federation of Filmmakers* (*Federation Panafricaine des*

Cineastes – FEPACI), which was created in 1969 alongside FESPACO to encourage the creation of national film organisations, with its manifesto describing a clear need for the emergence of new aesthetic styles and genres such as semi-documentaries and didactic fictional films, with the purpose of denouncing colonialism and combating the economic and cultural alienation of independent countries in respect of the West (Barlet, 1996). The priorities outlined in the manifesto were thus aligned with the concerns of 'Third Cinema' as developed by Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in 1969 – a cinema which denounce neocolonialism, capitalism and the commercial model of cinema as espoused by Hollywood. The didactic, political and social realist model of African cinema, with Sembene as its symbolic 'father', was adopted by a number of filmmakers, including in the early work of Malian director Souleymane Cissé, the Malian director Cheick Oumar Sissoko and the Senegalese director Ben Diogaye Bey. Souleymane Cissé outlined these prerogatives in the following statement: "African filmmakers' first task is to show that people here are human beings and to help people discover the African values that can be of service to others. The following generation will branch out into other aspects of film. Our duty is to make people understand that white people have lied through their images" (quoted in Thackway, 2003: 39).

FEPACI's political aspirations have since been expanded to include the urgent requirement to create economically viable national film industries alongside the use of film as an activist tool in the continuing struggle against Western cultural and economic imperialism. The second generation of West African filmmakers, also described as a 'new wave', attempted to do just that, through making films with universal accessibility and commercial viability. This second generation of West African filmmakers who emerged from the 1980s firmly believe that African film can be competitive and profitable, while maintaining its own artistic integrity (Ukadike, 2002). Burkinabe directors Idrissa Ouedraogo and Gaston Kaboré both pursued this idea through telling authentic African stories, often set in pre-colonial Africa. Ouedraogo, one of West Africa's best-known filmmakers, has to date directed more than 20 films, including *Yaaba* (1989), which won the FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes in 1989; and *Tilai* (1990),

awarded the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 1990 and the Grand Prize at FESPACO in 1991. Kaboré made his first film, the highly acclaimed *Wend Kuuni* (God's Gift), in 1982, followed by a handful of films until the late 1990s, when he decided to direct his commitment to film towards establishing a national film school, *Imagine*, in Ouagadougou, built with his own money. Malian filmmaker Souleymane Cissé has directed half a dozen films of which *Yeelen* (1987) is undoubtedly the best-known, and arguably one of the best-known African films internationally. This visually stunning film, set in pre-colonial Mali, concerns the struggle between a young man with magical powers and his sorcerer father and has received wide international acclaim.

Senegal and Burkina Faso are historically and contemporarily two of the powerhouses of francophone West African filmmaking. Four of the pioneering directors of sub-Saharan Africa – Vieyra, Sembene, Mambety and Faye – are from Senegal. Over the past three decades, Senegal has given rise to an emerging number of prominent directors such as Moussa Sene Absa, Ben Diogaye Beye, Moussa Touré and Mansour Sora Wade. While Senegal occupies a pioneering role in West African film, Burkina Faso has also created a prolific film industry with some of the most developed production and distribution facilities in Africa. There are probably more filmmakers, male and female, from Burkina Faso than from any other West African country. This is due to a number of related reasons, including the existence of FESPACO and access to film training in the country itself – previously INAFEC (Institut Africain d'Education Cinématographique) and currently *Imagine*, a film school founded by well-known Burkinabe director Gaston Kaboré – as well as a cultural policy that supports cinema and promotes the centralisation of diverse components of the audio-visual field. The Burkinabe government supports filmmaking activity and as a result of this, Burkina Faso has delivered some of the most prominent filmmakers from francophone sub-Saharan Africa.

Female filmmakers in West Africa

The socially and politically committed films of francophone West Africa have for decades been incorporating progressive representations of African women. The dynamic depictions of

African women which exist in West African film is not surprising, if one considers, like Andrea Cornwall (2005: 1), that West Africa has offered some of the foundational images of women's power and autonomy in Africa, and some of the most potent critiques of Western assumptions. Depictions of African women in ways that offer alternatives to the usual Western stereotypical cinematic portrayal of African women as exotic being or silent victim became part of cinematic representation in francophone West Africa from the birth of indigenous filmmaking in these countries, through for example the films of Sembene, Hondo, Ivorian director Désiré Ecaré, and Senegalese director Mahama Johnson Traoré. According to Olivier Barlet (1996) it is a paradox that a cinema which is made mainly by men often uses women to question the 'virility' of society. Female characters are often those who reject the established order and in allowing women to express their dissatisfaction and through promoting for instance monogamy or intellectualism, filmmakers are challenging certain foundations of society (Barlet, 1996: 103). Although female directors are hugely underrepresented in West African filmmaking, the last decade has seen the gradual emergence of female directors in francophone West Africa. An increasing number of women in francophone West Africa are directing their own films, building on the work of the pioneering, mostly male, West African filmmakers. Although women are increasingly gaining a presence as directors in the film, television and video industries in francophone West Africa, only a handful of women have directed feature-length fiction films: in addition to Faye, the most prominent are Burkinabe directors Fanta Regina Nacro and Apolline Traoré.

One of the more successful outcomes of the gathering of women in film, television and video at the 1991 FESPACO was the formation of the National Union of Women Working in Film in Burkina (UNAFIB). Burkinabe women have thus succeeded in forming the kind of women's collective which many women directors believe is imperative for the development of women's participation in cinema. UNAFIB is a professional body for women film directors, actors, editors, designers and technicians, and helps Burkinabe women to realise their potential by using film for purposes of advocacy and consciousness-raising. They have made various films, tackling themes such as encouraging women to participate in politics, denouncing the

widespread occurrence of forced marriages in Burkina Faso and advocating the right of women to plan their families. UNAFIB's aim is to demonstrate that women are a powerful political force: "We realised that if we don't organise ourselves and show people that it's important for women to control their destinies, nobody is going to do it for us," Rolande Ouedraogo, a documentary filmmaker and one of the founding members of UNAFIB, explained in an interview to Yaba Badoe (2005). She states further: "It's vital that women get involved. It's crucial that we fight for our autonomy so that men can't tell us to stay in the background looking after children. Men should know that women can help the family and national development."

In addition to Burkinabe directors Fanta Regina Nacro and Apolline Traoré, whose work will be discussed in this study, Burkina Faso has a number of other active female filmmakers (Ellerson 2000). Valerie Kaboré is a producer and documentary filmmaker as well as the general manager of Media 2000, a production company she created after finishing her studies at INACEF in 1991. Franceline Oubda is a director at the National Television of Burkina Faso and has created a series of documentary films for television entitled 'Women and Development'. Aminata Ouedraogo is organiser and general coordinator of the *Union Panafricaine des Femmes de L'Image*, UPAFI (Pan-African Union of Women in the Image Industry) and directs fiction and documentary films. Celia Sawadogo, who is currently based in Canada, works primarily in animation filmmaking. Florentine Yaméogo works mainly in documentary films for television, often focusing on female themes. Although the majority of female directors from Senegal and Burkina Faso work in documentary filmmaking, for both cinema and television, an increasing number of women are working in fiction filmmaking, in short and feature-length formats.

Fanta Regina Nacro is part of a new, or second, generation of African filmmakers and one of the best-known female filmmakers in Africa. She initially wanted to become a midwife, but decided to study filmmaking in Burkina Faso out of a desire to tell stories, with storytelling gatherings being a fond memory from her childhood growing up in rural Burkina Faso

(quoted in an interview with Bernard Verschueren, 2002). She studied at INAFEC in Burkina Faso in the 1980s where she came into contact with fellow Burkinabe directors Idrissa Ouedraogo, Didier Ouedraogo, and Raymond Tiendrebeogo. She worked as a television announcer at the National Television Centre in Burkina, and also as an editor on Idrissa Ouedraogo's first feature film. Although she entered the film industry through editing and continuity work, she states that she knew from the beginning that she wanted to direct (give full reference). Nacro's fictional short films are made in a realist style, often employing humour and parody. Her first short film *Un certain matin* (1991), a glimpse of peasant life in Burkina Faso, received several international prizes. Nacro states that she was "an out and out feminist militant" when she made her first short film and made a conscious decision to employ a wholly female crew in rebellion against film schools which often channel women towards what are considered "women's jobs", such as editing and continuity. *Un certain matin* tells the story of a farmer who "rescues" a girl being chased by a villain by shooting her pursuer, who is in fact an actor as the chasing is a film scene being shot in the village. It is thus a film within a film, putting emphasis on the awareness, or lack of it, of film as a representation. She states that *Un certain matin* is more than just a veiled reference to cinema, but is a cry of rebellion against the fact that directors often arrive in villages and start shooting without consulting the villagers, and therefore completely disrupt the daily life of the communities that live and have their homes there.

After the success of her first short, Nacro received several offers to make films on subjects specific to women, such as female circumcision, but she states that she did not enter filmmaking to take part in the fight for women's freedom, but simply because she likes the cinema and wanted to tell stories. "This may seem something of a paradox", she said in an interview with Bernard Verschueren (2002), "but I refuse to be typecast as a director who make films about women, even though I willingly tackle feminist issues. It's the social side that interests me most, aspects of society such as male/female relationships, love, the problems of AIDS, education for girls or financial independence." Nacro said in an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 217) that she planned to make her first feature film based on the

acclaimed novel *So Long a Letter*, by female Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ, but this project was never carried through and her feature directorial debut, *La Nuit de la Vérité* (The Night of Truth) was completed in 2004 and was presented in official competition at the 2005 FESPACO.

Interestingly, Nacro claims that she draws on a human sensibility in her films; she believes that there is no real woman's or man's sensibility which could be separated (quoted in an interview in Ellerson, 2000: 211-20). However, her films, often dealing with social issues that affect women's lives, display a definite awareness of the problems that contemporary African women face. Although she maintains that it is just as difficult for a man as a woman to produce a film in Africa, she said in an interview with Melissa Thackway (2003: 197) that there exists a certain "veiled mentality" that could result in a reluctance or refusal to finance women filmmakers:

> Women have to work very hard to make their mark. However, as soon as you do manage to make that mark, to produce proper work, people forget your gender. Having said that, if a woman makes a poor film, people immediately say that that's to be expected because the filmmaker was a woman! So it's up to us to fight back, to propose good products, to prove our talents. It's a shame that we have to convince people that we can produce good work in this way, that we aren't automatically considered to be on an equal footing with other young filmmakers.

Apolline Traoré studied filmmaking in the US and was mentored by the well-known Burkinabe director Idrissa Ouedraogo. He is also the producer of her short film, *Kounandi* (2003), as well as her first feature film, *Sous la Clarté de la Lune* (Under the Moonlight), made in 2004. She made her first short film, *The Price of Ignorance*, in 2000, which won the TV-Video jury's Special Prize at FESPACO 2001.

Traoré's films always put female characters at the centre of the narrative, and in a personal interview conducted at FESPACO 2005, she stated that it is primarily her female experiences

that inform her filmmaking: "I think women are more equipped to talk about the plight of women in this world". Her first feature film, *Sous la Clarté de la Lune*, was in the official competition for feature films at FESPACO 2005 and won an award for best original soundtrack. It was the first time that there were three female directors represented in the competition for feature films, and Traoré stated that this is an indication that women are increasingly participating in cinema as directors, something she believes can only improve in the future. The film will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Safi Faye, as stated above, was the first sub-Saharan African women to direct a feature-length film, *Kaddu Beykat* (Letter from My Village), in 1975. Faye studied ethnology at the Sorbonne and film at the Louis Lumière Film School in France, eventually gaining a doctorate degree in ethnology from the University of Paris VII in 1979 (Ukadike, 2002: 29). Her initiation into cinema came with acting experiences in a Jean Rouch film and she made her first short film, *La Passante* (The Passerby), in 1972. She has to date made three feature films (*Kaddu Beykat*; *Fad'jal*, 1979; and *Mossane*, 1996) and more than ten documentaries drawing on African cultural, economic and political life. The findings of the ethnology research she did with her own ethnic group, the Serer peasants, inspired many of her films, including *Kaddu Beykat* and *Fad'jal*. Faye's films mostly address a rural milieu, and bring to the fore the central role that women play within traditional village societies. The fact that she entered filmmaking through ethnology, anthropology and teaching is indicative of the interdisciplinarity that many female African filmmakers bring to cinema, because most female filmmakers also work in other areas.

Kaddu Beykat is set in her Serer family village, Fadjal, and was shot over three weeks during the rainy season. The film commences and ends with a narrative voice-over in the form of a personal letter addressed to the villagers, and for the most part it follows, in slow-pace, the close connection between the villagers' peasant lifestyle and the rhythms and fluctuations of their natural environment. Faye asked farmers to play their own roles, while her camera follows the quotidian activities of the villagers at a respectful, observational distance

(Thackway, 2003: 152). The film criticises the government's enforcement of a peanut-monoculture for commercialisation purposes, and depicts the effect this has on the people of the village, living in a fragile economy dependent on the vagaries of the weather. This overt criticism of government policy led to the film being banned initially in Senegal. Government censors insisted that she eliminate two contentious sequences but she refused to comply. She stated in an interview with Frank Ukadike (2002: 32). "I make my films alone without government money, and I find it unacceptable to comply with government censors who want to cut my film so as to cover the atrocities they have committed against their own people." The film could best be described as docu-fiction, and presents a unique way of storytelling through conjoining fiction and documentary filmmaking, experimental both at the level of content and narrative style. Her films are different from Western ethnographic films about Africa – as opposed to looking from the outside into 'exotic cultures', a criticism often levelled against Western ethnographic and anthropological research, she looks from the inside (Thackway, 2003: 153).

Most of Faye's films, including the documentaries *Selbé et tant d'autres* (Selbe: One Among Many, 1982), *Testito* (1989) and the fiction film *Mossane* place women at the centre of the narrative and focus on the day-to-day realities of women's lives. However, Faye has stated in numerous interviews that being a female director is not necessarily the key issue in shaping the subjectivity and sensibility displayed in her films. She maintains that her films are about the whole of society since male and female roles are complementary:

> [W]omen alone cannot live in Africa. Women live in a community, and I cannot eliminate the community. This is a reflection on me: I cannot live without my people. I cannot separate out an individual. But this is typical of African cultures. You cannot live alone; you can't do it because a big family, a big community, is all around you.
> (Ukadike, 2002: 34)

In addition, Faye has stated that male and female African filmmakers face the same problems in gaining access to the film industry. In fact, she said in her interview to Frank

Ukadike that it has probably been easier for her to enter the film industry, being one of the first female filmmakers in Africa with many possibilities open to her and the attention and admiration of others. However, her conscious decision to foreground the role that woman play in village communities would suggest that Faye is drawing on her own female sensibility when making her films, a position not irreconcilable with her notion of the complementarity of gender roles in Africa.   According to Thackway (2003: 156) "Faye combines women's concerns and a powerful female voice with her own cultural sensibilities, creating a distinctive and highly personal style that reflects both her dual female and African perspectives." This duality is not incongruous in Faye's work but two interrelated perspectives which position her firmly as a female African director highly conscious of the importance of complementary gender roles in African society.

French/Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie is a writer and director from Ivory Coast and her short film *Pour la Nuit* (For the Night) was screened at FESPACO 2005. Boni-Claverie is a screenwriter and director, and has done a lot of work in documentary filmmaking. *Pour la Nuit* is her first fiction film and she was a co-writer on *Arlit, deuxième Paris* (Arlit, the Second Paris, 2005), a documentary set in the once vibrant African boom town of Arlit in Niger, which was compared to Paris and New York during the 1970s. *Pour la Nuit* was shot in Marseille; Boni-Claverie studied in Paris and lives in France and her work could thus be regarded as offering a diasporic perspective. *Pour la Nuit* will be discussed in chapter 4.

Interestingly, Boni-Claverie stated in a personal interview conducted at FESPACO 2005 that she initially wanted to shoot the film in Abidjan but could not get permission to shoot in Ivory Coast due to the political situation. It was the film's setting in Marseille which prompted her decision to use a woman of mixed race as the main character, thereby linking her African heritage and self-imposed European exile. She did not find it difficult to secure funding from France for the making of *Pour la Nuit*, and was free to do what she wanted, although certain technical constraints impelled her to shoot on 16mm rather than 35mm. For Boni-Claverie, making a film is a way to understand a human being and she stated that she is more

concerned about her own individual expression than the audience: "My films are as close as possible to my own desire," she said. In terms of the underrepresentation of women at the 2005 FESPACO, she said that this could be because not enough women are taking the step to become filmmakers due to other, more urgent, priorities such as family obligations, as well as the fact that a career in filmmaking does not carry much status in many African communities.

Anne-Laure Folly, an international lawyer and filmmaker from Togo, entered the film industry in 1992. Her films are short documentaries that feature women in real-life situations recounting their own experiences, and touch upon themes such as war, female circumcision and spirituality. One of her best-known films, *Femmes aux yeux ouverts* (Women with Open Eyes, 1993) consists of interviews with women at grassroots level in West Africa, incorporating issues of circumcision, forced marriages and HIV/AIDS. Her first film, *Le Gardien des forces* (The Guardian of the Forces, 1992) deals with fetish practices in her native Togolese village, and *Femmes du Niger* (Women of Niger, 1993) focuses on how issues such as polygamy and Muslim fundamentalism affect Nigerien women. *Les Oubliées* (The Forgotten, 1997) deals with the struggles of Angolan women in a war-torn society. This film was inspired by Guadeloupean director Sarah Maldoror's feature film *Sambizanga* (1972), which tells the story of an Angolan woman, Maria, searching for her husband, a revolutionary who fought for Angolan liberation, captured by the Portuguese and presumed dead.

Folly's experiences in international law led to her realisation that outside of Africa very little understanding exists about the continent and its people – the main impetus behind her decision to become a filmmaker. In an interview with Beti Ellerson (2000: 95), she states:

> It occurred to me that the West has a particularly thorough understanding of Asia, of Asian philosophy, but I found it curious that there is not this understanding about Africa. I thought how necessary it is that we express ourselves. Since I work in an international milieu, I know that power comes from those who say things. There is a

widespread attitude that you do not express yourself, you have nothing to say, then

you do not exist. The problem is that, culturally speaking, Africa does not say things.

Folly sees the representation of African women in her work as a moral choice, crucial for the purposes of education and awareness-raising. For her a feminine aesthetic in film entails a certain sensibility, a perception and an awareness of practices beyond the accepted standard, the familiar views and references (Folly quoted in Ellerson, 2000: 98).

Conclusion

As this chapter showed, African cinema should be seen as a postcolonial activity which commenced after countries gained independence (with the exception of South Africa, which has a more complex filmmaking history). There is a limited existence of a national cinema in most African countries, with Burkina Faso and South Africa being two exceptions. Although there is general agreement that regional and continental links are beneficial to developing national African cinemas, for example through FESPACO, there are also many complexities involved in the notion of an 'African cinema', because Africa is after all a vast, heterogeneous continent with diverse cultural traditions and divergent colonial experiences, which has left different aesthetic baggage in terms of filmmaking. African cinema inevitably has to be understood as a plural term, with a diversity of aesthetic styles, genres and themes as well as industry factors and conditions. Language barriers are an issue that often comes up at events such as FESPACO, which has historically been dominated by francophone film to the partial exclusion of films from anglophone and lusophone African countries, though this situation is slowly changing. Dubbing is often mentioned as a way to overcome this obstacle in order to increase continent-wide access to African films from different countries. It is generally felt that African films should firstly find audiences in their own countries, then on the whole continent, and finally target international audiences. However, in reality this process often takes place the other way around, with African films firstly gaining international recognition at film festivals such as Cannes, and often finding no local audiences at all.

The development of the film industries in Southern and West Africa are very different as a result of the various colonial policies of France, Britain and Portugal, legacies that still influence the shape of the film industries in these countries today. However, one approach which is, at least partially, shared by cultural practitioners in all these countries is a view of cinema which goes beyond its commercial possibilities and recognises the potential of film in addressing socio-cultural issues of contemporary importance, such as formulating and negotiating identity in post-colonial Africa, and the clashes between notions of traditional African culture and modern Africa. As the subsequent chapters in this study will show, similarities can also be found in the thematic and aesthetic choices of female filmmakers in Southern and West Africa, indicating that there are overlaps in issues relating to female emancipation and defining female identity in different parts of Africa.

Chapter 3: Women and the Nation

Introduction:

Nationalism and Feminism: Irreconcilable conflict or complementary endeavour?

The relationship between nationalism and feminism emerged as a particularly fraught and contentious negotiation as African societies moved from colonisation, through the liberation struggles to eventual independence, and into the postcolonial era. African feminists often critique the ideals of nationalism which did not allow scope for feminist concerns to emerge, even though women took on various roles in African countries' struggles for independence. In fact, some would even argue that the nationalist movements concealed crucial female concerns which resulted in postcolonial societies that continue the patriarchal oppression of women as it became clear that independence did not result in gender equality for African women. When one considers the inequality of gender roles in the post-independence era, it is somewhat ironic that African womanhood and motherhood are typically invoked as a symbolic and allegorical representation of the nation, with nationalist discourse often employing archetypes such as "Mother Africa" and "motherland", and constructing women as the "mother of the nation", where women become a trope in idealising national identity. But, as Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ has written (quoted by Nnaemeka, 1997a: 1): "The nostalgic songs to the African mother that, in moments of anguish, conflate her with Mother Africa are no longer adequate." Nnaemeka points out that nationalist discourse often disguised women's issues in a way that requires women to frame their concerns firstly within a national ideology, as a prerequisite for being considered 'political'. Nnaemeka states "…the truth of the matter is that most of the time […] nationalist politics depoliticizes women's politics, forcing the repoliticization of women's politics back on the national agenda only as an aftermath of nationalist struggles" (1997a: 2). After the revolutionary liberation struggles which led to independence, women remained marginalised from active participation in the political and economic life of the newly liberated nations.

Frantz Fanon's distinction between *nationalism* and *national consciousness* described in

chapter one is important when considering why the construction of the politics of nationalism appeared to have resulted in the demise of women's politics in African societies. Nationalist ideology had an agenda not always compatible with the demands of African women striving for an end to patriarchal oppression inflicted on them by traditional African culture as well as colonial rule. Issues of nationalism and neo-colonialism thus have a direct bearing on the formation of gender roles. The official ideology as proclaimed by nationalist leaders after African countries gained independence needs to be redefined to include the role and positions of women in the quest towards a gender-equal society. Women are certainly part of the nation (where the 'nation' is understood as a physical and spatial construct in the sense of a nation-state with national borders as well as an ideological construct), and thus rather than rejecting the nation or nationalism women need to engage with and critique the failings of patriarchal nationalism and suggest agendas for the change and reformation of nationalism which would benefit women and value their roles within the nation. For Fanon, this critique of nationalism by marginalised groups grows out of a national consciousness, and this national consciousness is also crucial in giving African countries transnational characteristics as part of the global world. Bhabha, as discussed in chapter one, also sees this redefining and questioning of nationalism as a process of cultural translation and dialogue between the local and the global in what he describes as 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Bhabha, 2001: 39). Nationalism should not become a totalising discourse but should be an evolving construct which recognises difference and multiplicity within the nation. Appiah likewise warns against the development of a self-isolating black nationalism (2001: 228) and sees Pan-Africanism as an international project.

Radhakrishnan (1997: 79) describes reality as gendered, and within this view feminism becomes much more comprehensive in scope than being a mere micro-politics, contained within the macro-politics of nationalist ideology. If we regard gender as integrated into every aspect of reality, the category of gender becomes universal in impact and necessarily influences every attempt to interpret culture and society, from a contemporary or historical perspective. In terms of the problematic relationship between nationalism and feminism in

African societies, this approach would indicate a theoretical viewpoint that rejects both radical disconnectedness and hierarchic coherency (Radhakrishnan, 1997: 79). Both nationalist and feminist preoccupations should maintain a resistance to becoming totalising discourses, because society as a whole should be seen as being made up of many interrelated and continuous discourses. Nationalist discourse and African historiography appear to have prevented such a process in terms of feminist postulations, because "[i]n the fight against the enemy from the outside, something within gets even more repressed and "woman" becomes mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist history" (Radhakrishnan, 1997: 84). In this inner/outer dichotomy that was set up by nationalist discourse, the African woman remained, ideologically at least, carefully concealed and protected within her community and culture, often through models that hold her up in traditional roles as mother, goddess or victim. "Unable to produce its own history in response to its inner sense of identity, nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously", writes Radhakrishnan (2001: 85). Joyce Hope Scott (1997: 299) warns against black male leaders attempting to improve the condition of the race exclusive of the black female, and states that "all such attempts would prove abortive unless so directed as to utilise the indispensable agency of elevated and trained womanhood".

According to Rhonda Cobham (1997: 40) the conflict between nationalism and gender lies in the problematics of fundamental categories. The transformation of the anti-imperialist struggle in Africa into nationalist movements attributed to the construction of problematic categories which are addressed in many African films and novels in, for instance, descriptions of the ensuing crisis of individual versus collective identity, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. The tension created by the formation of set, unyielding categories is also present in gender in so much that it appears as if the crisis of gender and sexual identities parallels and intersects with the socio-political manifestations of disorder and imbalance in African societies. Cobham (1997: 43) states that knowledge about sexuality in pre-colonial societies is sketchy and most anthropological accounts of gender and sexuality reveal more about the anthropologist's assumptions than about actual subjects.

Early anthropologists were, as in most of their observations of unknown cultures, mostly perplexed over what appeared to them as idiosyncrasies in gender roles and relationships that did not fit Western social expectations. These deviations from Western cultural assumptions also served as proof of an assumed depravity of primitive African societies, and contributed to a justification for colonial expansion. More recent work by African scholars sees gender roles as the product of a continuing struggle within the discursive space of postcolonial Africa, developed out of pre-colonial gender roles and identities that differed from Western societies. Cobham (1997: 44) maintains that "…part of the process of integration into an international socioeconomic order organised around the existence of nation states in contemporary Africa has involved an accommodation to and reaction against new ways of mapping gendered objects and spaces".

According to Young (1995: 225) the radical reorganisation of African political space into various forms of the territorial colonial state had a profound impact upon cultural self-definitions in these societies. The policies pursued in establishing the colonial state dramatically changed the existing cultural geography of these regions and impacted on them through the ideology and practice of classification, the establishment of colonial administrative frameworks, and the unequal provision of opportunities for social promotion available to the colonial subject. Processes of identity building according to the prescriptions of the colonial state have proven deeply flawed – as in the case of South Africa for example, where an ethnic classification policy was systematically and ruthlessly pursued by the apartheid government. Within the colonial state Africans were generally conceived of as a single implicitly racial category of subjects and the racial consciousness dimension of African nationalism clearly arises in response to this categorisation (Young, 1995: 230). The idea and ideal of the national is hugely complex in African societies, as national identity cannot be a singular notion in African countries which are largely made up of multiple ethnic groupings with their own languages, customs, traditions and histories. The nature of the administrative subdivisions created by the colonial state had a major impact on ethnic identifications, as the fluid and dynamic process of racial and ethnic identification which existed pre-colonially,

became "congealed and frozen by the new and external logic of the colonial state, whose bureaucratic rationality required territorially discrete jurisdictions" (Young, 1995: 231). The colonial state thus had a pervasive impact on patterns of postcolonial cultural identification and subsequent conflicts through its policies of racial classifications and unequal development of its territorial space. Historical examples of these racial and ethnic conflicts can be found in many African countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, the DRC, Uganda, Sudan, Liberia, Chad, Somalia and Sierra Leone. It is interesting to note that, despite the large number of African countries which have fought liberation wars and suffered subsequent internal conflicts, very few national wars have been fought between different African countries. Turshen (1998: 4) puts as three of the main causes of the continuing conflict in African countries the effects of the policies of Western powers, the interests of transnational corporations and the demands of international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank.

The idea of the nation-state is thus a problematic and unstable concept in postcolonial Africa, with a shifting significance within African political discourse. Concepts of nationalist ideologies, often inadequately and insufficiently conceptualised, developed and were disseminated swiftly in the struggle towards independence. Paul Willemen (1990: 18) argues that the West invented nationalism, initially in the form of imperialism, as nation-states extended their domination over others. This created simultaneously the hegemonic sense of 'national culture' and the 'problem' of national identity for the colonised territories. Willemen argues further that the issue of a national-cultural identity arose primarily in response to a challenge posed by the oppressor, which gives rise to an often oppositional and contradictory discourse. The notion of nationalism in Africa is often regarded as much more complex than in more homogenous Western societies, since the formation of nation-states after independence often involved a process of joining diverse ethnicities and regions on the one hand, and on the other hand partitioning regions in a way that forced regional redefinition. Thus contemporary African nation-states emerge as highly artificial and contradictory entities, by nature multi-ethnic and hugely diverse (Shohat, 2003: 57). The resulting African

nationalisms that occurred after independence are thus ill-defined and often contradictory ideological constructs. This emerging nationalism has been variously and contradictorily described as a return to the traditional values of precolonial Africa as proposed by Senghor's concept of negritude; as the progress of Africa from the dark ages of traditionalism into the era of modern technology; as the hegemony of one ethnic group over others; or as the overcoming of ethnic differences as a way of countering imperialism (Cobham, 1997: 46).

African novelists and filmmakers take part in discursive processes analysing and critiquing the suitability of an identity built around assumed natural categories. This continuing debate leads to a disruption in traditional gender roles and traditionally nationalist assumptions regarding gender categories. The optimism of the anti-colonial struggle gave way to many uncertainties, also surrounding issues of gender in relation to national ideals. Spivak and many other postcolonial and third world feminist theorists have pointed out the ways in which colonial subjects – which she terms the subaltern – have been constructed as feminine when representing the power imbalances in the relationship between Europe and its colonies. It would appear that imposed nationalist gender categories do not fit Africa's unique complexities, and more suitable models have to be created, a process in which African novelists and filmmakers are actively taking part.

Benyamin Neuberger (1995: 230) describes a close relationship between state and nation since the definition of one impinges on the definition of the other. Nations demand the existence of states just as every modern state needs the legitimacy of nationalism which is based on an existing notion or on the aspiration to build a nation. For Africa's leaders the connection between state and nation, or state and projected nation, is a "self-evident truism" – both in Western and African nationalism; the nation-state that combines one state with one nation is regarded as optimal and ideal (Neuberger, 1995: 232). African statesmen and nation builders operated in an era where nationalism had become a major ideology – Africa's leaders consciously aimed to build nations on the foundation of the existing states. All African leaders are part and parcel of the nationalist era, and in the postcolonial era they often

attempt to accelerate a process which took hundreds of years to develop in a country such as Britain. The nationalist ideals of Africa's first presidents are affirmed by for example Zambia's Kenneth Kuanda who said "our aim has been to create genuine nations from the sprawling artefacts the colonialists carved out" and Senegal's first president Leopold Senghor who stated: "The state is […] primarily a means to achieve the nation" (quoted in Neuberger, 1995: 235). Nigerian military leader Yakubu Gowon summed up the problems of the modern African nation-state when he stated: "A newly independent African state struggles against great odds of history, geography, ethnography and evil effects of imperialism to build a nation in less than a fiftieth of the time it took European states to build theirs" (Neuberger, 1995: 235). Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an "imagined community" asserts that Europe provided *the* model for the nation-state (1983: 6). Partha Chatterjee argues that "[t]he most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagining in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* within the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated by the modern West" (1993: 5). National identity is thus formulated not through sameness but through difference, where cultural and historical specificity becomes crucial. Chatterjee's notion of "fragments" as a conceptual paradigm when studying nationalism is particularly useful in the context of Africa. These "fragments" consist of units of overlapping political and social realities, subjectivities, and positionings that raise the issue of how marginal groups belong to the "nation" – it is within and through these fragments that the sense of "nation" is negotiated (Akudinobi, 2001: 124). Akudinobi argues that African nationalism should be seen as a synthesis of various intellectual histories, protest traditions, specific cultural institutions and unique lived experiences which must take into account myths, symbols, traditions, institutions, religion and memories of the nation.

According to Roy Armes (2006: 68) the anti-imperialist struggles have often led to a simple equation of independence with nationalism but the realities of post-independence Africa have led many to challenge this equation. The rhetoric of the independence struggle called for a return to traditional values, but a critical reassessment of those values is also necessary,

especially in the case of African women where the valorisation of traditional African culture often masked the patriarchal foundations of many traditional African practices. Robert Stam (1993: 243) contends that one of the problems of nationalism is the fact that the originary idea of the national erases the realities of class and gender, often concealing possible contradictions between different sectors of the postcolonial society. Thus it fails to provide criteria for distinguishing exactly what is worth retaining in the national tradition; a form of sentimental nationalism which was always bound to reinforce patriarchal social institutions. Anthias and Yuval-David (1995: 312) claim that African women's links to the state are complex, as they are on the one hand members and participants in social forces that give the state its given political projects and power, but on the other hand they are a special focus of state concern as a social category with a specific role, in particular, human reproduction. The state is not gender-neutral but constructs men and women differently and a feminist critique of the state has advanced from the realisation that the state treats women unequally in relation to men. What has become clear in postcolonial Africa is that "citizenship on its own does not encapsulate adequately the relations of control and negotiation that take place in a number of different arenas of social life" (Anthias & Yuval-David, 1995: 214).

The notion of 'national identity' will always be a contested terrain, particularly challenged by those on the margins of society, including women. With regard to filmmaking, Ella Shohat (2003: 54) states that "[a]ny serious discussion of feminist cinema must engage the complex question of the 'national'." She calls for a style of feminist film- and video-making which should challenge the masculinist contours of the 'nation' in order to continue a feminist decolonisation of African historiography through a "multi-cultural feminist aesthetics of resistance". Shohat argues that any definition of nationalism must take class, gender and sexuality into account and must allow for racial difference and cultural heterogeneity to emerge. Within this dynamic movement, the fabricated and static idea of the nation as promoted by the postcolonial state becomes an evolving, imaginary construct rather than an 'originary essence'. The negotiation of national identity thus becomes a very complex process that has to take into account the multiplicity of subject positionings which exists in all

contemporary African countries. Shohat (2003: 55) claims that in film such a perspective would result in cinematic forms that expose the fissures in essentialist views of gender, class, ethnicity and race. Nnaemeka (1997a: 2) argues that the motherland trope in individual, national and nationalist mythologies hides the traumas, disruptions and ambiguities of personal and collective stories – just as in African women's literature, filmmaking by African women can fill in the gaps in these 'official' nationalist ideologies, with women becoming agents of change and actively participating in nation building. Film thus plays a role in the process of forging the national imaginary and questioning dominant versions of national identity; contradictory and antagonistic as this process may be. Despite the problematics around the relationship between nationalism and feminism in Africa, African feminists maintain that African and female liberation are inseparable, and from the beginnings of African cinema women have played a role in documenting Africa in war, conflict and nation-building, including representations of women's participation in activism and liberation struggles. Women are actively taking part in (re)constructing the nation and redefining the nationalism, also through film, as the following sections with case studies of specific films demonstrate. In the remainder of the chapter I will firstly look at the role of women in war and conflict, during the liberation struggles and in postcolonial era, through two feature films from Southern Africa, Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (Angola, 1972) and Ingrid Sinclair's *Flame* (Zimbabwe, 1996), and one feature film from francophone West Africa, Fanta Regina Nacro's *La Nuit de la Vérité* (Burkina Faso, 2004). Secondly, a selection of fiction and documentary films dealing with nation building in South Africa will be discussed.

Women in war and conflict

Women have taken on various roles in national liberation struggles, in guerilla warfare and in the military, but they are generally seen to be in a supportive and nurturing relation to men even in cases where they have taken more risks. According to Turshen (1998: 5) feminist analysts of the armed forces highlight archetypal patriarchal institutions where the military is seen as a male preserve, run by men and for men according to masculine ideas of male bonding, male privilege, and militarist values derived from definitions of masculinity. Anthias

& Yuval-David (1995: 312) state that women often teach and transfer the cultural and ideological traditions of ethnic and national groups and thus women often constitute their actual symbolic configurations such as the nation as a loved woman in danger or as a mother who lost her son in battle. These are frequently part of nationalist discourse and rhetoric in national liberation struggles, when men are called to fight 'for the sake of our women and children' or to 'defend their honour'. It is important, however, to emphasise in this regard that the roles that women play in conflict and war are not merely imposed upon them – women have actively participated in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women (Anthias & Yuval-David, 1995: 316). Turshen (1998: 1) states that the enduring war-time picture of the active male and the passive female "has depended on the invisibility of women's participation in the war effort, their unacknowledged, behind-the-lines contributions to the prosecution of war, and their hidden complicity in the construction of fighting forces. Once these activities are revealed", she states (1998: 1), "it is no longer possible to maintain the innocence of all women." In modern forms of war, especially civil wars and liberation struggles, women are also combatants and resistance fighters and even if they are not actively involved, they often support war efforts in multiple ways.

Southern African feature films: Sambizanga and Flame

Two seminal Southern African feature films which deal with the roles of women in African liberation struggles are Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (Angola, 1972), and Ingrid Sinclair's *Flame* (Zimbabwe, 1996). The female characters in these two films fulfil divergent roles – in *Flame* the two main female characters are guerrilla fighters in Zimbabwe's war for independence and thus directly and actively participating in the liberation struggle, whereas in *Sambizanga*, the main protagonist is the wife of a political prisoner during Angola's war for liberation, with the film focussing on the less direct participation of women from within the domestic sphere. Interestingly, in both films people who were actually involved in the liberation wars took part in the making of the films, behind and in front of the camera.

Some of the tensions between African nationalist ideals and feminist concerns are tellingly played out in theoretical debates which emerged around these two films. Guadeloupean-born Sarah Maldoror was married to Angolan nationalist activist Mario Pinto de Andrade, who adapted Luandino Vieira's novella *The True Life of Domingos Xavier* into the film script for *Sambizanga*. "Sambizanga" is the name of a *musseques* (ghetto) on the margins of Luanda, though the film was shot in the People's Republic of the Congo, as Maldoror could not shoot it in Angola which was still at the time fighting for its independence. The film is set in 1961 and tells the story of Domingos Xavier, an Angolan construction worker who is arrested by the colonial secret police, tortured and finally killed when he refuses to betray a white comrade who has joined the anti-colonial struggle. The narrative evolves by tracing the path of Xavier's wife, Maria, as she goes from village to village with her baby on her back in a frantic search to find him. She is repeatedly sent from one police station to another and finds herself in a world of conflict, deception, war and politics which she has previously known nothing about. Despite her daily suffering, the film also focuses on friendship and affection and on the intimacy and protection of the domestic sphere as she is received in the homes of other villagers. The scenes of Maria's journey are intercut with scenes of her imprisoned husband, and also here the film focuses on solidarity, particularly in a very moving sequence when the prisoners delicately clean the bloodied face of her husband's corpse. Community in the film is represented as one's extended family, with a focus on the importance of collectivity and shared ideals. Maria's journey gradually leads to the awakening of her own political consciousness and thus it becomes a film more about female political awakening than about the liberation war itself.

Key MPLA leaders and guerrilla fighters took part in the film's production, and Maldoror used some of them as actors. Maldoror's main aim with the film was to make Europeans more conscious of the forgotten wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Despite the film's central theme of the liberation of Angola from colonial rule, Maldoror is quoted by Kay and Peary as having said in 1977:

> I'm against all forms of nationalism. Nationalities and borders between countries

have to disappear. I'm no adherent to the concept of the Third World. I make films so

that people – no matter what race or colour they are – can understand them. For me

there are only exploiters and the exploited, that's all. To make a film means to take a

position, and when I take a position I am educating people. Both in Africa and in

Europe woman remains the slave of man. That's why she has to liberate herself.

(1996: 47)

Due to its dual focus on women and the Angolan liberation war, a debate developed in critical circles around the issue of whether *Sambizanga* is about feminism or about nationalism. According to Frank Ukadike (1994: 234) the film gives female subjectivity special attention as it pertains to revolutionary struggles. "Here," he states, "the coloniser/colonised syndrome is poignantly depicted as a tension between exploiters and the exploited through a deliberately didactic revolutionary aesthetic." Ukadike claims that through focusing on Maria's search, the feminist aspect of the film's structure becomes apparent and he argues that the film aims at giving credibility to women's active participation and involvement in the revolutionary struggle. Barlet (1996: 20) writes that the film has been criticised for overemphasising the personal development of a woman at the cost of the larger ideals of the liberation struggle and Ukadike (1994: 234) raises this point as well when he states:

> The film is structured with a deliberate feminist slant aimed at giving credibility to
> women's active participation and involvement in this dangerous liberation struggle.
> This emphasis, lengthily dealt with, dilutes the impact of the film's concern with
> armed guerrilla struggle. Thus, regarding its effectiveness, some critics thought that
> this deficiency amounted to romanticising what could have constituted a forceful
> delineation of a liberationist uprising. However, *Sambizanga* ultimately ratifies, with
> an indelible stamp, African revolutionary agitation.

In a critique of Ukadike's reading of the film, Marissa Moorman (2001) questions the degree to which the film is about 'armed guerrilla struggle'. She states: "To assume that the film's attention to Maria is a feminist slant is to assume that the centrality of women to the struggle can only be a foreign, and ideological, import; it is to mark the representation of women's

activity as a political position and to thus naturalise an androcentric account of the nation" (2001: 119). She describes Ukadike's reading of the film as an argument that negates the gendered aspects of national identity by positioning the national subject as male and dismissing the specificities of women's activities as a 'distraction' from the real issues. Ukadike's assertions that Maldoror's focus constitutes a "deficiency" and a "romanticising" suggests that women cannot be central to the narratives of nationalism and liberation struggles, thus ghettoising women's activities. In line with Moorman's reading of the film, I would suggest that Maldoror was attempting to counter exactly this notion through placing a female protagonist at the heart of the film, an indication that her film was an attempt to critique the colonial oppression of Angola (an external oppression), as well as the oppression of women by patriarchal violence within Angola (an internal oppression). As affirmed by the theorists quoted in the introduction to this chapter, these two liberationary ideals should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but should be regarded as complementary, since the liberation of a group of people cannot be fully and successfully achieved if it happens alongside the continued oppression of a certain subsection of this group. *Sambizanga* challenges both the external oppression of Angolans by colonial forces as well as the internal suppression of women's voices by patriarchy, showing how these two emancipatory processes should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but are in fact intricately tied together. In a continuation of *Sambizanga*'s female focus, several female African directors have focused on these forgotten micro-narratives in their work; films which often bring out the contentious relationship between nationalist ideals and female concerns. Maldoror has served as an inspiration for many other filmmakers, and *Sambizanga* directly informed and inspired Togolese director Anne-Laure Folly's documentary *Les Oubliées* (1996), also set in Angola. Maldoror and Folly have both publicly talked about their mutual admiration for each other's work.

Flame is the first feature film by Zimbabwean/British director Ingrid Sinclair, and the first film set during the country's liberation struggle. Shot in Zimbabwe with an entirely Zimbabwean cast, the film is based on the real-life accounts of women who joined the liberation war.

Through extensive interviews with female ex-combatants, Sinclair created a fictional narrative which tells the story of two Zimbabwean women who took part in the struggle for independence. The film opens with the reunion of the two women in modern-day Zimbabwe, and is told in flashback from 1975 as the struggle for independence was gaining momentum. The two friends, Florence and Nyasha, secretly decided to join the liberation struggle when they were both 15 years old. They embarked on a dangerous journey across a war-torn Rhodesia to join a military training camp in Mozambique. Eventually being accepted as freedom fighters, Florence was baptised 'Flame', and Nyasha became 'Liberty'. The film traces their harsh training – exacerbated by the fact that some of the male comrades used food to get sexual favours from the female fighters – and their involvement in the struggle which eventually led to disillusionment. At their reunion in present-day Zimbabwe the two women realise that there exists no comprehensive public memory of the liberation of the indigenous Zimbabweans from colonial rule, and that what is remembered has been told from a male perspective. Sinclair says about the inspiration behind and preparation for the film:

> [B]ehind their stories lies a universal theme that women everywhere recognised – the fight for independence, and then the isolation and disregard and suppression that follows. It's time to show African women in a universal light. They're shown as victims, courageously struggling, imbued with wisdom of the earth. (www.zimmedia.com/flame)

Sinclair's aim, as she states on the Zimmedia website, was "to pay tribute to the courage of women who fought in the liberation struggle." The film contains one rape scene, which takes place in the training camp, where one of the female characters is coerced by her male comrade to have sex with him. This has created a controversy around the film which has been widely publicised in the Western media, with the police confiscating the rough cut of the film. In the Zimbabwean Herald of 13 January 1996 the reason for the seizing of the film negatives by the Ministry of Information was given as that "it contained subversive information and some of its parts were pornographic." A comment column in the Zimbabwean

Sunday Mail of 4 February 1996 accused Sinclair of "embarking on a campaign of distortion" and "re-writing […] history in the name of 'freedom of expression'", and described her as an outsider since she is was born in the UK. Zimbabwean police confiscated the rough cut of the film after the Zimbabwe War Veteran's Association, the Ministry of Information and the producers of the film failed to agree on certain changes to be made in the story before the release of the film. The main complaint of the War Veterans was the wide gap between the sort of film implied in the script submitted for the Ministry's approval at the start of the project, and the film which appears in the rough cut. Mahosa (2001: 205) quotes from a statement issued by the Director of Information stating that the dissatisfaction arose because "undue prominence has been given to certain aberrations and misdemeanours in which young women were abused, brutalised and raped, a far cry from the original script." The Director of Information concluded by stating that the Ministry decided that the disagreements between the producers and the War Veteran's Association warranted a meeting at which the Ministry would mediate between the two. The failure of this meeting led to a request for the police to seize the rushes and hand them over to the Censorship Board. The producers disputed the claims made by the Ministry of Information and said that they submitted a copy of the script beforehand, that they respected the feelings and views of the liberation fighters, and that they went out of their way to consult the veterans and take their views on board.

According to Mahosa, one of the problems which caused the controversy around the film is its attempt to mix two incompatible approaches – a Hollywood production approach based on a strict linear process, and an African approach based on the idea of a circle of mutuality and reciprocity which would lead to a work of solidarity. The producers were using the language of the African circle of mutuality, reciprocity and solidarity, while operating according to the Hollywood paradigm of contractual agreements. Emphasising Sinclair's positioning as a white British/Zimbabwean director, Mahosa claims that the exposé of the liberation war which *Flame* claims to offer is not a female African participant's perspective, as it depicts "neutralised African bodies". I do not agree with Mahosa's analysis of the female characters in the film, as they are depicted as multi-faceted – simultaneously strong, courageous,

vulnerable and flawed. In their contrasting personalities, the headstrong and fearless Flame and the studious and more moderate Liberty form interesting counterpoints to each other, further expanding the multi-dimensionality of the female characters in the film. As was mentioned above, it should also be kept in mind that Sinclair developed the script through numerous in-depth interviews with female ex-combatants, thus linking the final fictional product strongly to the reality of the liberation war as experienced by women. Furthermore, the rape scene and its consequences are rather underplayed and underdeveloped in the film, which could be regarded as more problematic from a feminist perspective than the choice to include a rape scene in the first instance. The focus on the dispute around the rape scene was unfortunate because it made the objections appear to be motivated by a desire to suppress a fact. Mahosa's concluding verdict on the film is that "*Flame* as a story remains paralysed between two unintegrated exaggerations – that of the abuse of women recruits and their feeling rather useless throughout most of the film and that of heroism of the very same women which the director says is the main motive" (2001: 208). I would argue that the sexual abuse of women recruits is hardly exaggerated in the film, but rather curtailed, and that the lack of active and productive public participation of women during and after the liberation struggle is exactly what the film is trying to critique with regard to the role and position of women in the newly-formed African nation.

Teresa Barnes (2007: 244) states that *Flame* is a deceptively complex production: while it is firmly situated in a strong nationalist perspective on the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, it simultaneously challenges the core tenets of that same narrative through critiquing the patriarchal violence women were subjected to by their male comrades during the war for liberation. The primary nationalist narrative of women fighters in the struggle was that they participated equally with men, fought alongside them and that the war experience was an important example of gender equality. The belief was that this equality would be carried on to reform certain aspects of independent Zimbabwean society, but, as in other African countries, this did not happen. "Thus," Barnes writes, "just as the post-war official and rhetorical reverence for the liberation struggle and its heroes began to solidify, so many of those heroes

found themselves excluded from the fruits of liberation" (2007: 250). The film's complex depiction of the tension between nationalism and feminism as it emerges in postcolonial African society would seem to promote the necessity for the ideological master narratives of the liberation struggle to be contested in order to allow the voices of the oppressed and marginalised to emerge. What becomes clear through the controversy around the film is that the official memory of the liberation struggle is in fact that held and perpetuated by male war veterans, who are regarded as heroes in the collective Zimbabwean memory. Any deviation from the official version of events which led to Zimbabwe's liberation is regarded as an inadmissible adulteration of a sacrosanct memory. We find this situation in the collective memories of liberation struggles and wars for independence all over the continent; as long as the experiences and roles of women during these conflicts are ignored, the official version of history used to promote nationalist discourse will remain partial and incomplete.

The polemics around *Flame* and *Sambizanga* show the contradictions and pitfalls inherent in the aims of female directors who attempt to uphold both nationalist and feminist concerns in their work. Films which address the role of women within nationalist discourse and activities, and which scrutinise the place and position of women in post-liberation societies, thus have to deal with a multiplicity of voices within the complex boundaries of the nation-state. Nationalist representations in film aimed at advancing unity often rely on the image of the revolutionary woman, but in anti-colonial films such as *Flame* some of the feminist critiques against nationalist rhetoric start to emerge. Films such as *Sambizanga* and *Flame* which deal with women's personal journeys and stories contribute to recreating histories and filling in gaps in the 'official' versions of national histories and liberation struggles. The films make strident political statements and thus it is not surprising that they have caused controversy. Women are portrayed as actively participating in liberation struggles in various roles. Incorporating women's voices in these histories leads to a deeper and richer understanding of events and eras. The films become custodians of memory and emphasise the importance of remembering and re-imaging the past from various different vantage points – a crucial process in the formation of a postcolonial national identity which recognises men and women

as equal subjects.

West Africa: La Nuit de la Verité

With reference to francophone West African cinema, Akudinobi (2001: 124) states that African filmmakers, as part of a 'cultural elite', are crucial to the formulation of specific nationalist discourses due to the unique position they occupy in producing cultural products for public consumption. As such, it is not surprising that the various manifestos on African cinema which were formulated shortly after independence have clear nationalist preoccupations emphasising the need to create alternative forms and styles of representation. For Akudinobi (2001: 125) the question of nationalism and its relationship to African cinema involves two principal and complementary discursive spaces: the first frames African cinema within the political sphere, whereas the second focuses on the cultural space within the nation. Francophone West African directors, such as Ousmane Sembene and Souleymane Cissé in his earlier work, show in their films a concern for the regeneration of African cultural heritage, framed within the current political era in which their films from the 1960s and 1970s were produced, a concern which Akudinobi terms "cultural nationalism." African cinema in francophone West Africa is a wholly postcolonial activity and came into being at an important period in African nationalism as West African countries moved from anti-colonial to post-independent nationalism. Francophone West African directors of the first two decades of indigenous filmmaking were thus contributing to the formulation of post-independence nationalism and the construction of the newly-formed nation-states. These films, however, do not see the nation-state as a monolithic and unchangeable construct, but show how the multiple social, political, ethnic, cultural, and class identities existing within a single African nation constantly need to be scrutinised and negotiated, thus leading to a plural understanding of the national identity. A plural understanding of the nation should also include an emphasis on gender equality and a resistance of continuing patriarchal oppression which relegates women to second-class citizens.

Burkinabe director Fanta Regina Nacro's feature film *La Nuit de la Vérité* (The Night of Truth,

2004), is a plea for a plural understanding of the nation where tolerance and respect for difference would lead to peaceful notions of national identity and belonging. With the film's strong focus on female characters, Nacro also foregrounds the importance of gender being framed firmly within concepts of the national. The film incorporates in its vision of the nation the roles of women, with national identity forged against the backdrop of reconciliation. Keeping in mind the often contentious relationship between nationalism and feminism, my analysis of the film will also look at how successfully concepts of female emancipation and nationalist ideals are reconciled or treated as complementary in the film. Set in a fictional African country, *La Nuit de la Vérité* deals with the process of reconciliation after a decade-long brutal inter-ethnic conflict, and depicts the attempts of two factions to come to a peace agreement during one night's gathering. Though the film's conclusion is optimistic in its hope for a better future for Africa in which differences would be resolved and peace and unity achieved, the film also depicts the fragility of such attempts at reconciliation, a process fraught with difficulties. Through the considerable prominence given to the female characters, the film goes beyond stereotypical representations of African women through showing multiplicity and multi-layeredness, and positioning women as active agents and subjects in the process of nation building.

The film is dialogue-driven and melodramatic, and the acting style is reminiscent of African performance traditions with different acting and narrative conventions at work than in realist or naturalist filmmaking. The film deals with the attempts at reconciliation between two ethnic groups, the controlling Nayaks and the rebel army of the Bonandés, during one night's gathering to celebrate a truce. Nacro attempts to universalise genocide, inter-ethnic and intra-national conflicts by creating a fictional plot and setting the film in an unidentifiable African country; thus the film is reminiscent of many conflicts and atrocities the world over – not only Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Sudan, but also Yugoslavia, Israel and Northern Ireland. The film invokes Burkina Faso's conflict with neighbouring Ivory Coast, as well as the burning of a Burkinabe journalist who spoke out against the government. In addition, Nacro dedicated the film to the memory of her uncle who was tortured to death,

indicating that the film is not only about war, but reminiscent of any atrocity anywhere in the world. She has stated in interviews that Yugoslavia reminded people that African countries do not have a monopoly on horror (quoted by Allardice, 2005). This fictional approach to historical events is often more convincing than documentaries on atrocities, in particular Western-produced documentaries on African conflicts which often reinforce the 'otherness' of African social realities. The fictionalisation of atrocity treats violence and trauma with more complexity and would seem to suggest that evil does not reside within individuals, but is cultivated by a system which dictates individuals' actions. In the film this hunger for violence is referred to by some characters as the demons inside them: "War opens our souls, and demons move in," states one character, and this becomes a metaphor for the unseen and often inexplicable force that inhabits people in a time of atrocity. Since the cause and perpetuation of atrocities such as genocides are often so difficult to pinpoint, fiction and metaphor as representational strategies seem to be particularly effective.

The main protagonists in the film are Colonel Theo, leader of the Bonandés and his wife Soumari; and the Nayak president, Miossoune, and his wife Edna. The film does not allow the viewer any clear-cut distinctions between good and evil through the subtle narrative interplay between the four main characters – the pragmatist and pacifist Soumari and Miossoune, and the emotional and charismatic Edna and Theo. In the opening scenes of the film Edna is seen sitting at the grave of her son, Michel, mourning his premature death. Both parties have suffered loss during the conflict – Soumari's father, a pacifist, was tortured to death and Edna's son, Michel, was gruesomely murdered by the Bonandés at the town of Govinda. Both sides struggle to overcome their grief, hatred and desire for vengeance and in this respect the film constitutes an insightful account into the potential difficulties faced by any initiative aiming at reconciliation after years of incomprehensible violence. Edna in particular finds it inconceivable that reconciliation without revenge is possible. She is very reluctant to attend the gathering and makes numerous attempts to persuade her husband that she does not have to accompany him. The attempts at reconciliation are soon shown to be rather tenuous and fragile – Theo and his brother receive a last-minute message that the

president decided his soldiers should be armed, a contravention of the original arrangement, and the Colonel retaliates by re-arming his soldiers as well. The split between the two groups is emphasised by the fact that they speak different languages, Dioula and More, the two main languages of the director's native Burkina Faso, while when communicating across ethnic borders they use French, the language of the former colonial power. The separation is further emphasised through each group dehumanising the other, as often happens in a conflict of this nature (Kemp, 2005). For example, the Bonandés refer to the Nayaks as cockroaches and tell stories of the Nayaks being half-human, half-snake. The differences between the two ethnic groups are reflected in a scene where Theo and Soumari reluctantly nibble on braised snake, a Nayak speciality, while President Miossoune and Edna cautiously try out roast caterpillars, a delicacy of the Bonandés. The desire for peace between the two ethnic groups is captured in this scene with the president's comment: "Our cooking differs but it all comes from nature." The character fulfilling the role of 'village idiot', a Bonandé called Tomoto, unknowingly feasts on snake, thinking it is fish, and his disgust at finding out he has been conned comes much to the amusement of the women who tricked him into eating the snake.

The preparation of food, slaughtering, eating and feasting become significant motifs in the film, which is clear from early on when the women start their preparations for the reconciliation feast in the kitchen, which centres around the preparation of meat. This links with the flashbacks of severed body parts, women painting graffiti relating to the atrocities on the walls of the compound, and child amputees gathered together relating horrifying tales of their mutilations. The symbolic significance of meat and butchering foreshadows the fatal inevitability of the death of Colonel Theo – after Theo attests to slicing off her son's testicles at Govinda and begs Edna's forgiveness, she persuades the captain of the Nayak soldiers, who is in fact Michel's real father, to capture Theo and roast him over a fire, away from the celebrations, in a grotesquely harrowing and macabre scene. Demented with grief over the death of her son, she bastes his burning body with marinade while screaming hysterically and calling him "king of the marinade". This point marks the dramatic climax of the film, audio-visually reinforced by the explosion of fireworks in the compound to mark the highlight

of the evening's celebrations. When this horrific scene is discovered by the others, it compels the president to shoot his wife in a literal and symbolic sacrifice to instill the message of peace and reconciliation. Edna needed a blood sacrifice to overcome her bereavement, and another sacrifice is necessary to reset the balance. In a further symbolic gesture demanded by the president, Colonel Theo, Edna and the murdered soldiers are all buried in the same grave as a symbol of unity. This message of reconciliation and unity is further reinforced when, towards the end of the film, six months later, Tomoto is seen sitting on the grave of his beloved colonel, telling him about the peace now reigning in the country, and that there are not even two separate ethnic groups anymore, but only the Bonandyakas, an amalgamation of the names of the two ethnic groups. Even Tomoto, a somewhat ignorant and simple-minded character who makes many racist statements throughout the film, is seen as embracing the peace and unity between the two groups in the film's conclusion.

The importance of remembering atrocities as a preventative force for the future is emphasised throughout the film. The film is interspersed with imagery such as murals and graffiti representing the atrocities painted by the women on the walls of the compound, possibly to serve a therapeutic and cathartic effect, as well as flashbacks of the massacres and bloodshed that took place during the ten years of conflict. Characters relate horrifying tales of witnessing their families being murdered, as well as the torture and rape they have been subjected to. The presence of the revolutionary slogan "La patrie ou la mort nous vaincrons" (literally meaning "Country or death, we will succeed") references the socialist logo and motto adopted by Burkina Faso in 1984 under the governance of prime minister Thomas Sankara, a former revolutionary and a charismatic and radical leader. However, the remnants of the imagery of war and revolution are counterbalanced by the reconciliatory imagery such as a depiction of a Bonandé and Nayak shaking hands in a poster promoting reconciliation. Symbols and imagery such as these are part of the mythologies created in imagining the nation, in the sense of Anderson's description of the nation as an "imagined community" (1983: 6). Memory is represented as a doubled-edged sword, since the traumatic process of recollecting painful memories can also perpetuate a desire for revenge,

as in the case of Edna. She recognises some of the Bonandé soldiers as the men responsible for her son's death, prompting flashbacks of the massacre at Govinda. As the night progresses, it becomes increasingly important for her to know the truth of what happened to her son and who was responsible. Colonel Theo recalls his experiences of the brutalities he carried out and authorised. His recollections are intended to invoke forgiveness in Edna, but instead it intensifies Edna's desire to avenge her son's murder in order to gain closure, as she states to Theo: "Forgiveness is God's business, not mine." However, the ending of the film reestablishes the notion that memory can aid healing. Soumari is shown in a classroom giving a dictation of peace to her students, symbolising the notion that the younger generation will play a crucial role in facilitating peace in the future. As the end credits roll, she recites: "I won't forget you. Your pain is my pain because the same memories live within us."

Interestingly, the film makes no reference to the role of colonialism as a cause of the genocide, and places the responsibility of reconciliation in the hands of Africans, while simultaneously avoiding notions of violence and barbarism as an inherent African characteristic as perpetuated in the colonialist imaginary. Possible explanations of the cause of the conflict, and ways to achieve reconciliation, are negotiated within an African ontology, imbued with a mythical and spiritual understanding of the world. The film depicts this in various ways, for example through Colonel Theo's explanation of what caused him to murder Edna's son as a temporary visitation by a demonic force; the references to the spirit of the dead wandering the blood-stained earth; the highly symbolic and metaphorical use of language; and the emphasis on ritualistic gestures such as drink offerings.

In returning to the question of whether an African film can simultaneously uphold feminist and nationalist concerns, Nacro succeeds in promoting a productive national consciousness in the film while at the same time embodying a female sensibility, through the depiction of female characters who are central to the film's narrative. As described in the introduction to this chapter, discourses on nationalism often subsume gender issues and fail to

acknowledge that within the nation there are two categories, men and women, whose relationship to each other is often that of exploiter and exploited. Through its female characters, *La Nuit de la Vérité* succeeds in moving beyond this problematic hegemonic relationship, though a nuanced representation of women in the search for a solution to form a peaceful nation. In attempting to trace the manifestation of a female sensibility present in the film, the depiction of the two main female protagonists, Soumari and Edna, is of particular interest. Women in West African cinema are often represented as a progressive, pacifying or conciliatory societal force, while men are depicted as willful, imprudent and conservative. Soumari fulfills this traditional role since she is the main reconciliatory force in the film, repeatedly stating that the country needs peace and that the bloodshed and killings must end. Even though her father has been tortured and killed, she accepts the fact that his murderer will not face execution, acknowledging that at some point the cycle of revenge and retribution must end (Kemp, 2005). She threatens to leave with the children when Theo decides to arm his men, stating to her husband: "Men make peace, men make war. It's nothing to do with me and the children". However, her efforts to facilitate the reconciliation are tireless – she bans drumming at the gathering, fearing it would invoke and awaken the memories of the massacre at Govinda where drumming lead the Nayaks, including Edna's son Michel, into a trap which cost their lives. The musicians are baffled by her demand that no drums are to be used, telling her that drums are the spices of music, a statement which later gains ironic significance. Soumari welcomes the president and his wife with the traditional calabash with millet beer, and when some of the Bonandé and Nayak soldiers later claim that the spirit of the dead is preventing them from participating in the festivities she pours out a libation on the ground to appease the dead on both sides. It is extremely difficult for the soldiers to deal with the memories of the atrocities they experienced; they distrust each other and continuously fear betrayal. When drumming inevitably starts, with Tomoto as the main instigator, the soldiers on both sides become agitated and take up their weapons. Once again, it is Soumari who calls on the president to support her in persuading the soldiers to disarm. After the discovery of the horrific sight of her tortured husband, she throws herself in front of the approaching armed soldiers, even in this moment of immense trauma refusing

to repay violence with more violence.

Soumari's antithesis is the character of Edna, who is unable to forget the barbaric murder of her beloved son and needs a blood sacrifice to overcome her grief. However, this is not a simplistic opposition, since Edna is a complex character, fluctuating between her desire for revenge and her attempts to accept the peacemaking process. The build up of tension and suspense in the film is masterfully handled by Nacro, as the viewer increasingly realises there is a chance that the reconciliation process will fail miserably, but is not able to tell what will be the catalyst for violence to erupt. In the end the eruption of bloodshed is not directly caused by the soldiers, but is facilitated by Edna. That women are capable of violence enables us to see that women's views are not monolithic and that they do not bear essential qualities such as kindness and compassion, states Turshen (1998: 10). Violent acts by women are often wilful acts of resistance against abusive husbands and lovers, and can be retributive in the face of a threat to or disruption of the family unit, as in the case of Edna. According to Nnaemeka (1997a: 19) women have the desire and ability to respond to violence with violence, and states that female violence is often a symptom of or reaction to male violence. In reference to female characters in female-authored African literature, but highly applicable to the character of Edna too, Nnaemeka (1997a: 19) writes: "The concern for freedom and survival is the impetus for the actions of these desperate women for whom the end justifies the means and for whom extreme situation demands extreme measures."

Through the characters of Soumari and Edna, Nacro succeeds in creating a rich and varied tapestry of female and human experience and emotion, rather than a simplistic representation of women as the temperate and moderating forces in African societies, or an idealised womanhood as is often employed in nationalist discourse. The female characters neither simplistically adhere to normative nationalistic models of womanhood nor reinforce stereotypes of the African woman either as silent victim, or as backbone of her society. This disruption of oppositional binaries shows that women can be both benevolent and malevolent, both victim and agent, both traditional and modern, with these roles treated as

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complementary rather than oppositional. Agency and victimhood are not mutually exclusive, states Nnaemeka (1997a: 3), as victims are also agents who can change their lives and affect other lives in radical ways. The characters of Soumari and Edna thus symbolise a range of human experience, and are in this sense a pair of character 'types' which fulfill certain symbolic and mythical roles, which, together with the two main male characters, aid the imagining of national identity and belonging. There is complementarity between the female characters and their male counterparts, rather than a depiction of the subordination of women, which shows an equal interrelationship rather than a hegemonic dichotomy between male and female. Both women are mothers and wives, and the importance of the family structure is emphasised in the film through Soumari's protective relationship with her children and Edna's despair at losing her son. Family and nation are interlinked, as Edna's loss could be read symbolically as the loss of nationhood too, which has to be rebuilt through reconciliation and an acceptance of difference and plurality.

At the film's screening at the 2005 FESPACO, the audience's reaction was particularly interesting, and it could be argued that there are certain moments in the film designed to rouse audience interaction. The comic scenes, especially those featuring Tomoto, played by Rasmane Ouedraogo who is a well-known and much-loved Burkinabe actor, caused wild outbursts of laughter, while a much more subdued response followed the shocking and dramatic moments in the film. The distressing scenes of violence caused some controversy among audiences and the film created quite a stir at its first screening at FESPACO, since the wife of the current president, Captain Blaise Compaoré, was also in the audience. African filmmakers often express their rejection of the sensationalist depictions of graphic violence in Western films and in this sense the film might be seen to challenge conventional perceptions of the type of films Africans, and in particular African women, might choose to make. But Nacro's decision to depict violence and atrocity in this film is not gratuitous or sensationalist, but rather an incisive symbolic representation and condemnation of violence and brutality, ultimately hopeful in its resolution. "All humans have their dark side and their human side," Nacro stated in an interview (Allardice, 2005), "and if one is not vigilant then the dark side

can easily take over."

When considering the dramatic theatrical acting style in the film and Nacro's decision to set the film in a fictional African country, it becomes clear that the film should be read in a symbolic rather than literal or realist way. Inter-ethnic and intra-national conflicts are played out through this symbolic tale in order to promote the notion of national unity and peace. The film is a crucial example of how issues of nationalism and feminism could be treated with complementarity in film, since it displays a revised and redefined understanding of nationalism which includes women in concepts of the nation.

Nationalism and female filmmaking in South Africa: From apartheid to the new nation-state

After the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, film became an important tool in establishing and perpetuating Afrikaner nationalism, a tradition that started with the 1916 film *De Voortrekkers* – a heavily romanticised epic propaganda piece of the infamous Battle of Blood River that took place on 16 December 1938, which in popular Afrikaner memory is recorded as the day on which God gave victory to the Boers, outnumbered by the Zulus in their thousands, disregarding the fact that the Boers had gun power and far superior weapons than the spears used by the Zulus. The similarities between *De Voortrekkers* and D.W. Griffith's deeply racist film *The Birth of a Nation*, produced in 1915, have been pointed out by South African film historians such as Edwin Hees (in Balseiro & Masilela, 2003: 49-69). In addition, Griffith had the status of a celebrity in South Africa and his films were hugely popular under the ruling minority, even after they had been dismissed by outraged African-Americans and screenings of his films have been banned in America under pressure of rising black consciousness. Indeed, *De Voortrekkers* was the cinematic triumph of a newly-founded nation, establishing Afrikaner nationalism on the myth of a new nation chosen by the Almighty God to rule over the land of South Africa, and would lay the ideological groundwork for many films produced first under the Union of South Africa from 1910 onwards, and thereafter under the nationalist Afrikaner government from 1948 until the end of apartheid in

the 1990s.

Largely ignorant of films produced in the rest of the world, bar mainstream escapist Hollywood cinema, the Afrikaans audiences of films produced under apartheid were sufficiently indoctrinated by the government's control and manipulation of the media to be resistant to any films that threatened to disrupt or problematise the carefully constructed, fragile image of the Afrikaner that was officially held up. Critical films such as Ross Devenish's *The Guest* (1977), on the tumultuous life of Afrikaans poet Eugene Marais, failed at the box office, because the depiction of Marais as drug addict was irreconcilable with the dominant ideology of the Afrikaners as a conservative and deeply religious Calvinist Christian nation. There were a handful of Afrikaans filmmakers who were critical of the apartheid system but they depicted it in ways that made their films acceptable under the regime. Jans Rautenbach challenged and critiqued the 'official' identity of the Afrikaner as well as apartheid ideologies, especially in his films *Jannie Totsiens* (Jannie Goodbye, 1970) – which takes place in a mental institution as metaphor for South Africa under the leadership of prime minister B.J. Vorster; *Die Kandidaat* (The Candidate, 1968) – a satirical film questioning Afrikaner identity through its depiction of the Broederbond (a type of Afrikaner freemason organisation); and *Katrina* (1969) – on the heart-breaking realities of racial classification and segregation under apartheid. Rautenbach was committed to exploiting the full stylistic and critical potential of the audio-visual medium, often experiencing cultural criticism and censorship as a result. His work with producer Emil Nofal and cinematographer Vincent Cox constitutes a magnificent body of work which is, according to Tomaselli (1982: 84-93), the closest that Afrikaans film has come to an 'auteurist' cinema.

From the 1970s onwards the horrors of apartheid have increasingly been exposed to the international community, often through documentary and fiction films. Most of these films represent a gaze onto South Africa from the outside, and were produced by Europeans and Americans (and a handful by South Africans living in exile). However, a small number of oppositional or alternative films were also produced clandestinely by – mostly liberal, white

and male – South Africans living in the country. These oppositional films were important in making the world aware of the brutal realities of apartheid and giving a voice to some of those marginalised during the regime.

The category of the national cannot be treated as a singular and homogenous concept within the new South Africa, with its eleven official languages and multitude of ethnicities and races. Representations of national identity in film inevitably have to incorporate plurality rather than fixed categories, as will be demonstrated later in this study through analyses of specific films. It would appear that not only in the analyses of contemporary South African films, but also in cultural interpretation and understanding in South Africa in general, a theoretical framework incorporating the ideas of multiplicity and hybridity advocated by postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak, can usefully be applied in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa is considered by many to have entered the post-colonial era only in 1994, a disjointed history which makes it very difficult to map the historical processes of colonisation, freedom struggle, independence and post/neo-colonialism that other African countries have gone through, neatly onto the South African situation. In the context of contemporary South African cinema attempting to establish a national cinema of diversity, in which the construction of identity lies to a great extent in recovering memories from the past, the issue of dealing with experiences of oppression and constructing and negotiating identity become intertwined.

Fiction feature filmmaking

In the context of apartheid South Africa, the work of the first three South African women who directed feature films displays a critique of apartheid and, importantly, does this from a female perspective since their main protagonists are usually all female. More problematically though, all three women are white and almost all the characters in their films are white too. Nonetheless, their films depict an incisive critical engagement with the South African situation under apartheid, which in fact makes their films part of only a handful of South African feature films produced during apartheid to do this. Katinka Heyns challenges the patriarchal pillars of

Afrikaner nationalism and culture in her three feature films: *Fiela's Child* (1987), *The Story of Klara Viljee* (1992) and *Paljas* (1998), which all feature a strong-willed and tenacious woman as the main character. Elaine Proctor's film *Friends*, made in 1993 and thus just before the end of apartheid, deals with the complex relationships between three young women from different backgrounds sharing a house in Johannesburg - Aninka is an eccentric archeologist from a middle-class Afrikaner background; Thoko is a school teacher from a poor black background; and Sophie, a radical anti-apartheid activist, has wealthy British parents. Sophie joins a terrorist group determined to fight apartheid by any means necessary, is captured by the security police after she plants a bomb in an airport, but is eventually given amnesty. The tensions between different ideological viewpoints are played out in the complex triangular bond of their friendship, and the somewhat idealistic ending, as they are reunited and reconcile their differences, points towards the hope for a better future for all South Africans. Helena Noguiera's film *Quest for Love* (1988) likewise deals with female political activism through the film's main characters Alexandra, an anti-apartheid political journalist, and Dorothy, a marine biologist. The film takes place in a fictional African country called Mozania, a thinly disguised Mozambique, and if read from a political-ideological perspective, is an overt criticism of the South African apartheid government's destabilising maneuvers in Mozambique and Angola. Once again conflicting political viewpoints are portrayed in the arguments between Alexandra and Dorothy, arguments which centre around the benefits of active participation in the struggle, in particular as a white liberal, versus an approach which emphasises the importance of pragmatism and education.

Darrell Roodt, one of South African's best-known directors, engaged with these same issues in his feature film *Place of Weeping* (1986), the first anti-apartheid film to be shown on the South African film circuit which was made entirely in South Africa. The film depicts a black woman's personal fight against the apartheid system, and her refusal to accept that armed struggle is inevitable. With only a handful of South African women having directed feature films to date but more and more women emerging as directors, one could expect that post-apartheid South African cinema might in the near future give rise to feature films which would

question and critically assess the continuing patriarchal oppression of black South African women. Currently, and not surprisingly, South African films which engage with the socio-political past and present of the country, do so primarily through promoting multi-cultural and –racial integration and national solidarity. Film is often, but not exclusively, used as a tool to symbolically contribute to processes of healing and reconciliation, and to celebrate the cultural richness of the country and the diversity of voices which were suppressed during apartheid. However, a critical assessment of the problems of the post-apartheid South African nation is also emerging more and more in film as this young democracy grows and matures.

In the post-apartheid era, a number of feature films have dealt with attempts at constructing the new post-apartheid nation-state, often by looking back to South Africa's troubled past, and through a focus on multi-culturalism, diversity and racial integration; a focus on issues of belonging and identity; and films dealing with memory, truth and forgiveness, in particular within the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. All these films could be regarded as contributing to the process of nation building in post-apartheid South Africa, and are thus redefining what national identity means in contemporary South African society. As Akudinobi states in relation to West African films, these South African films' social critiques should be viewed as facets of nationalism which are not premised on immutable ideas of the nation but are part of a search for foundations on which durable notions of national identity could be built (2001: 139). Apart from the TRC-themed films directed by non-South Africans (most notably *In My Country* by John Boorman, 2004, and *Red Dust* by Tom Hooper, 2004), a number of films on this theme originated from within the country as well. Ramadan Suleman directed one of the first South African films to deal with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the psychological drama *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), about two mothers forced to deal with the consequences of apartheid on their lives against the backdrop of the TRC proceedings. Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* (2004), about a disgraced policeman's journey to forgiveness follows a similar theme, as well as Norman Maake's *Homecoming* (2005). John Kani's *Nothing but the Truth,* which won the second prize at

FESPACO 2009, likewise deals with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and with issues of truth and reconciliation on a personal level.

Of particular interest for this study is Suleman's *Zulu Love Letter*, as the film focuses on the experiences of women under apartheid. South African film theorist Jacqueline Maingard (2007: 168) states that the film is unique in the extraordinary way that is makes the experiences of women central to the film's narrative. The story revolves around Thandeka, a single mother who took part in the struggle against apartheid and suffered torture and detention, and who is now attempting to rebuild her life and her relationship with her deaf-mute 13-year old daughter who was raised by her grandparents while Thandeka was fighting for the cause. The film also problematises the significance of the TRC in facilitating reconciliation in South Africa, showing how intimidation and fear hampered the process in many cases. Maingard states that the film's main message is that the national psyche is overwhelmed by the large numbers of people who suffered under the regime, who were tortured, murdered or disappeared. Significantly, it draws a picture of the post-apartheid nation from a black point of view, with one personal story standing for many others – the story becomes representative of a national story that is central to the country's future. The film is a tribute to the young women who suffered under apartheid in the 1980s alongside their male compatriots, many of whom gave their lives fighting against apartheid or were beaten, tortured and often imprisoned in solitary confinement (Maingard, 2007: 169). As in the case of *Flame* and *Sambizanga*, the film is filling in a gap in the history of the apartheid struggle, and is a significant response to the fact that the experiences of women were not always given sufficient hearing in the TRC's deliberations - the TRC has been criticised for ghettoising and sidelining women's issues. Storytelling in film becomes, through *Zulu Love Letter*, a way of remembering and recovering the past, from which reconciliation and forgiveness might then be possible in the search for the complex national identity of the new South Africa.

Documentary filmmaking

Documentary filmmaking in South Africa has contributed greatly to questioning and critiquing the nationalist tenets of the apartheid state, and redefining national identity in the post-apartheid nation. Documentary after the arrival of television in South Africa in 1976 was a carefully controlled arm of the state apparatus as depictions of political reality was censored altogether (Verster, 2007: 109). There were however, strong movements in political anti-apartheid filmmaking from as early as the 1950's. Political documentaries were not accessible to the public until the 1990s, and often these films were made under very dangerous conditions – after two States of Emergency were declared in the mid-1980s freedom of speech was heavily curtailed. The extremely oppressive policies of apartheid prevented film from being used as a tool in the liberation struggle to the extent that it was done in countries such as Angola and Mozambique. However, a number of anti-apartheid films, in particular documentaries, emerged during the 1980s. Made clandestinely, these documentaries played an important role in alerting the rest of world to the horrors of the apartheid system. These films often made claims for the end of apartheid from a position of exile, and could, in fact, mostly be seen only outside the country until the 1990s.

Of particular interest to this study are a number of female-directed anti-apartheid documentaries which focused on the participation of women in the liberation struggle. Two examples of South African documentaries of this nature are *Liberation Women* (1985) by Beata Lipman, and *You Have Struck a Rock!* (1981) by Deborah May. *Liberation Women* focuses on a number of women who were active and prominent in the anti-apartheid struggle: Winnie Mandela, Helen Joseph and Amina Cachalia. Lipman returned to South Africa from exile to make the film clandestinely, and it features the work of women with whom she took part in the struggle. Consisting mostly of interviews, the film addresses the hopes and dreams of South African women from different backgrounds, but united in their fight for the abolition of apartheid.

You Have Struck a Rock! deals mainly with the remarkable women's campaigns of the 1950s against the pass system, a system designed by the apartheid government as a

method of influx control, which confined the majority of black South Africans to the rural, undeveloped and largely infertile "homelands" (which Winnie Mandela describes as "concentration camps" in *Liberation Women*). In 1955 and 1956 women organised nationwide protests against the hated pass laws; the first involved 2,000 women in Durban and Cape Town, and the second 20,000 women who marched to the government buildings in Pretoria – all walking in groups of not more than three to get around the ban on processions. On their arrival at the government buildings they handed over petitions and stood resolutely in protest for 30 minutes. They sang a, now famous, anthem of defiance: "Now you have touched the women you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed". This march that took place on 9 August 1956 marked what is now celebrated as Women's Day in South Africa, and became the subject of Deborah May's documentary. The documentation of this non-violent civil disobedience movement, which was finally crushed by the 1960 Sharpeville massacre and the banning of anti-apartheid organisations, is assembled through a montage of archive material, photographs, newspaper articles and interviews.

There are also a number of South African documentaries from the 1980s which focus on the smaller, often forgotten, narratives of women who suffered severely under the system, in contrast to the above examples which celebrate heroic examples of women's collective and individual actions against the apartheid system. *Women Awake* (1987), produced by London-based Afrovision, is a short documentary which opens with footage of women's participation in the frontline of conflict and their involvement in the boycotts, strikes and industrial action which gained great momentum during the 1980s. After these opening scenes, the documentary turns to tell the story of a night cleaner, Elizabeth, who lives in a one-bedroom shack with no electricity or running water. Elizabeth leaves her home at 3pm each day to walk to the train station and undertake a three-hour journey to Johannesburg city centre, where she works in the luxurious Carlton business centre. She works every night from 5:30pm to 2am, at which time there is no transport back to her house. She would sleep on the floor or on a table until 6am to take a train back to her home. At home her "second shift"

would start – being a homemaker and mother to her children, with the result that Elizabeth sleeps an average of only three hours per night. The night work has severely affected her health; she has poor eyesight, back ache and high blood pressure. The film makes reference to the importance of trade unions as a way for women in the workplace to organise themselves in groups, but this was problematic for isolated domestic workers who are often fearful of joining trade unions.

South Africa Belongs to Us (1980) is a similar documentary, produced in Germany, which tells the stories of five women in different circumstances of hardship, clearly depicting how black South African women were most affected by apartheid. Martha Zane lives in a reserve ('homeland'), where there is no employment, and has a husband who has lived and worked in Johannesburg for 20 years. He sends her R40 (about £3) a month to support her and their children, whom he has only seen once a year over the past 20 years. Winnie Serobe lives in a black ghetto and works as a nurse. Even though Winnie is part of a small 'middleclass' in Soweto, she explains that black nurses earn less than half of what white nurses are paid, and describes her life as living from "minute to minute". Carol Mokoena, also a nurse, lives in a workers' barracks in Alexandria, a township outside Johannesburg, which she describes as a prison since she is separated from her children who live in a reserve and are not allowed to visit her. She states, however, that giving up your children is "one of the milder things that people suffer through the struggle". Joyce Lecedi is a domestic worker in an upper middleclass white home. She talks about the selfishness of her employer, who would leave her child with Joyce on her day off, promising she will be back soon. The final narrative focuses on the existence of women living in a shanty town outside Cape Town. Each of the five narratives is bookended by interviews with female leaders such as Winnie Mandela and Fatima Meer (ex-president of the Black Women's Federation), but it is the individual narratives of these marginalised women, and the film's meticulous and unhurried focus on the lives of women who survive on the periphery of society, which create the biggest impact. The paradox that exists between the heroic vision of the African woman which is commonly encountered in official history and filmic representation – especially in liberation struggle

narratives – on the one hand, and the day-to-day struggles of women's everyday lives on the other hand, would seem to suggest that bigger narratives have to allow scope for the micro-narratives of individual women to be heard as well. These also form part of struggle and nationalist discourse which should be recounted and remembered in the post-apartheid era.

With the unbanning of political organisations and the release of political prisoners in South Africa in 1990, the principal goal of the earlier anti-apartheid films began to be achieved (Verster, 2007: 110), and filmmakers continued to focus on the process of political transition itself. A large number of documentaries and television programmes were made on CODESA (Convention for A Democratic South Africa) and the TRC, such as Liz Fish's *The Long Journey of Clement Zulu* (1992) which follows the lives of a number of political prisoners after their release from Robben Island. New forms of observational filmmaking also ensued, such as Harriet Gavshon and Cliff Bestall's series *Ordinary People*, made by Mail and Guardian Television. Maingard (2003: 128) writes that the *Ordinary People* series proposed a possible way forward for opening up the representation of national identity through a format which reflects multiplicities rather than fixed categories of identities. In another Mail & Guardian Television series *Ghetto Diaries* (1996), underprivileged subjects were given opportunities to take cameras into their own lives, resulting in images never seen on public television in the country before (Verster, 2007: 110). As with fiction feature filmmaking, the past became a recurrent theme, through documentaries such as Lindy Wilson's *The Gugulethu Seven* (2000), about the group of seven young men who were killed in an ambush by the South African apartheid security forces in the Cape Town township of Gugulethu in 1986. Films also increasingly started to deal more directly with the aftermath of apartheid, especially for those directly involved in the struggle. This move towards dealing with present-day South Africa resulted in many films exploring the meaning of the new South Africa in terms of politics, nationhood and the individual (Verster, 2007: 111). The Project 10 series, commissioned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which will be discussed in more detail below, is an excellent example of a series of documentary films exploring these issues.

As was emphasised in the introduction to this chapter, the fractures in the optimism that existed during the struggle for liberation and the ideals of national unity have nowhere been more overt than in the civil wars, inter-ethnic strife and brutal conflicts which have plagued many African countries since independence. Film is in this regard seen as an important tool in retaining the memory of conflict as a preventative force for the future, often through documentaries which enable previously marginalised individual voices to be heard. An example of this is the *Landscape of Memory* series (1999), a series of four films addressing issues about truth and reconciliation in Southern Africa, three of which were directed and produced by female filmmakers. As the title of the series suggests, the premise of the project is that remembering is a way of preventing these atrocities from happening again. *Soul in Torment* by Zimbabwean director Prudence Uriri deals with the civil war which broke out in Matebeleland shortly after independence from Britain was gained in 1980 – the result of a complex combination of tribal conflict, intervention by the South African apartheid government and the continuing influence of the former colonial powers. Uriri interviewed a former guerrilla fighter who fought for Zimbabwean independence, and who is perplexed by the fact that another war broke out just after they had fought for freedom and justice and thought they had won. Uriri's meeting with a member of the infamous 5th Brigade, who had carried out massacres on behalf of the newly formed Zimbabwean government, forms a counterpoint to the ex-guerrilla fighter's narrative. His deeds still torment him and, with the traditional knowledge that avenging spirits should be appeased, he feels he can only be released through receiving forgiveness from the relatives of the man he killed.

The second film by a female filmmaker in the *Landscape of Memory Series*, *The Unfolding of Sky,* was directed by well-known South African poet Antjie Krog, who reported on the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation commission and wrote a book about her experiences entitled *Country of My Skull* (2002), which was then made into the film *In My Country* in 2004. *The Unfolding of Sky* centres around a dialogue between Krog, an Afrikaner, and Deborah Matshoba, an African woman who has been a victim of the apartheid system and suffered solitary confinement, torture and detention. The two women explore the

notion of reconciliation, and what it means for each of them. For Deborah it means forgiveness – creating a culture of *ubuntu* and humaneness. For Krog it means that she as an Afrikaner, has to be forgiven. In the words of her own poetry:

in the cradle of my skull

it sings, it ignites

my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart

shudders towards the outline

     new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals

of my soul the retina learns to expand

daily because by a thousand stories

I was scorched

a new skin.

I am changed forever. I want to say:

     forgive me

     forgive me

     forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please

take me

with you.

     (Krog, 2002: 279)

Mozambican filmmaker Karen Boswall directed *From the Ashes*, the third film by a female filmmaker in the *Landscape of Memory* series, which deals with the civil war which wrecked Mozambique a few years after independence was gained. The film focuses on the stories of David the Bishop and his two sons. David sees the carnage that the civil war brought as a result of the bad spirits that entered people's souls, something that can only be rectified by

people allowing their spirits to be cleaned by traditional healers. David's oldest son, Pedro, was forced to join the militia, and Da Costa, the younger brother, was captured by the guerrilla fighters when he was eight years old, and only returned when he was 13. The father and two sons believe that the war has to be forgotten and not spoken about as this could open wounds and reignite the conflict. Da Costa, who was forced to perform terrible deeds as a guerrilla fighter, states emphatically: "The secret of living is silence." The emphasis on *forgetting* as a psychological cure contradicts the commonly accepted importance of the role of *remembering* as a way of preventing atrocities to happen again. This would suggest that memory is a double-edged sword. Krog likewise states in *Country of My Skull* that the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is very difficult to measure, having undoubtedly failed in some respects.

Female voices in post-apartheid documentary filmmaking: The Project 10 series

One of the most powerful documentary series promoting a plural understanding of the nation is the Project 10 series produced in 2004 and commissioned by the SABC. The Project 10 documentary series is of particular significance to this study because nine female directors (black and white) took part in it. The project was developed by SABC1, the NFVF in South Africa and the Amsterdam-based Maurits Binger Film Institute in Amsterdam. It consists of 13 narrative documentary films exploring intimate and personal experiences of 10 years of freedom, as told by South Africans. The project was devised as a developmental initiative designed to nurture a new generation of dynamic South African filmmakers, with the aim of helping to develop "new voices" – with the purpose of reflecting on what a decade of democracy has meant for all South Africans.

Every film in the Project 10 series was shot over a year and relates personal experiences within a country in transition. There was no content agenda and no pressure on filmmakers to make historical pieces, and the project was driven by the assumption that South Africans from various different socio-cultural backgrounds do not necessarily have something to articulate collectively. The films address issues of freedom and democracy in post-apartheid

South Africa without being overtly political, through relating previously unheard stories in a uniquely personal way. The films chart the crossing into a new era in South Africa – a transition which has proven to be a challenging process giving rise to new cross-cultural identities within a multi-cultural and multi-racial democratic society. The films were divided into three categories: Women's Empowerment; Culture and Identity; and Success Stories and some of the varied themes are: black economic empowerment, beauty, parent/child relationships, modern youth culture, exile experiences, healing through memory, non-racial co-existence, tradition, and looking back on the anti-apartheid struggle within post-apartheid South Africa.

As intimate and personal documentaries, these films are important documents of some of the diverse voices present in contemporary South African society, and as such, they all contribute to imagining the new post-apartheid nation from a female point of view. Although the films contain linear narratives that progress over the course of the year, the filmmaking style results in a certain type of aesthetic form which is unscripted, immediate and fragmented. Video-diary filmmaking is part of the larger field of digital storytelling which has emerged over the past few years in America in particular. Digital storytelling is a broad term to describe the documentation and recording of personal narratives by making use of the Internet, digital photography, video, film and other digital technology, through weaving together images, music, narrative and voice. It often includes facilitative training methods such as workshops with the purpose of enabling individuals to find their personal voice, and encouraging them to record thoughtful and emotionally direct stories through the use of digital technology. For the Project 10 series, filmmakers were trained to use the camera non-invasively, through working with a much reduced technical crew, in most cases a single camera- and sound person using small-size digital equipment, and often a hand-held camera, allowing the cameraperson to be as unobtrusive as possible.

Through Project 10 a new type of documentary style has emerged in South Africa, opening up a private space that was previously not part of the sphere of documentary making, as

asserted by Kethiwe Ncgobo, one of the directors on the project, in a personal interview, conducted in July 2005. This new style encompasses an aesthetic made up of the stylistic and formal choices of the filmmakers in expressing their personal stories in visual terms. It is not the intention of the films to make any grand or objective truth-claims through this process of documentation, but rather to document personal (hi)stories. Because the personal narratives of the Project 10 series fit within the heterogeneous social framework of the new South Africa, they aim to initiate action, or encompass what might be termed an 'activist aesthetic'. This activist aesthetic is made up of personal stories with the purpose of making a connection to wider issues and intervening in public debate. The first action they demand from the viewer, especially South African audiences, is to reflect on the issue of identity in post-apartheid South Africa, both personal and social, cultural and national. This activist aesthetic within the post-apartheid era depicts a fragmented sense of community and identity and encompasses a form of consciousness-raising cinema that is different from commercial and arthouse cinema. The Project 10 films are part of a broader project of cultural self-definition and expression, contributing to the creation of a diverse national South African cinema. Fifteen years after the end of apartheid, it is clear that the 'national' or unified coalition against apartheid is breaking down into a more fragmented picture.

This section sets out to explore in more detail three films, directed or co-directed by women, from the 2004 Project 10 series of documentaries: Belonging, by Kethiwe Ngcobo and Minky Schlesinger; Umgidi (The Celebration) by Gillian Schutte and Sipho Singiswa; and Ikhaya (Home) by Omelga Mthiyane.

Kethiwe Ngcobo, who co-directed Belonging with Minky Schlesinger, is currently Head of Drama at the South African Broadcasting Corporation in Johannesburg. She has developed and produced a number of television drama series, documentaries and comedies, locally, for the SABC and eTV, and internationally, for TVE, UNESCO and London Weekend Television. Ngcobo and Schlesinger's film Belonging is a personal story about Kethiwe's search for a place to belong in South Africa after spending the first 30 years of her life in Britain. Her

parents left SA as political exiles in the 1960s and moved to Britain, where Kethiwe was born. She eventually returned to South Africa for the first time in February 1994. This notion of 'return' is problematic as she is returning to an imagined homeland where she has, in fact, never been. The film deals with the difficulties she experienced after returning to South Africa and her attempts to overcome her feelings of alienation. It is suggested to her by her mother that her feeling of "incompleteness" might be due to the fact that she and her sisters missed out on many cultural traditions that define the individual as belonging to a cohesive community. They never experienced imbeleko, the African custom of a mother carrying her baby with a strap around her back, or ukwemula, an initiation ritual for young Zulu girls. Kethiwe's increasing anxiety to find belonging ultimately compels her to decide that a simulation of the initiation ritual intended for young Zulu girls might help her find spiritual belonging in South Africa, which she always regarded as home through an imagined, spiritual and emotional bond. Kethiwe embarks on organising an adapted initiation ritual for her and her sisters, although one of them refuses. The ritual takes place within a traditional Zulu milieu in the area of Umzimkulu in Kwa-Zulu Natal where she would have spent her childhood had she not grown up in exile. Kethiwe's desire to find validation for her feelings of alienation from her friends in similar circumstances becomes clear through many instances in the film. She finds joy and comfort in going through the initiation ritual with her older sister, in the company of all her close and extended family members from both her mother's and father's sides. Although she finds some solace in going through the initiation ceremony, the film's ending is open – Kethiwe decides that even though she may never be truly South African in some people's eyes, she has her own very personal sense of "South Africanness". Her sense of identity and belonging in the new South Africa is clearly made up from multiple different layers which subsume her gender, nationality, ethnicity, race and class, such as being a South African exile, a black woman, a Zulu woman, a single mother, and an economically emancipated woman.

Married filmmaking couple Gillian Schutte and Sipho Singiswa collaboratively made Umgidi (The Celebration) for the Project 10 series. Schutte is a writer, filmmaker and poet and began

her career as a freelance arts and culture journalist, before moving into filmmaking. She has co-directed a series of 56-minute documentaries on human rights issues, which have been screened at Human Rights film festivals both locally and internationally. Sipho Singiswa, a former political prisoner on Robben Island, has been actively involved in Arts, Culture and Skills Development work both in South Africa and abroad.

Umgidi is, like Belonging, a personal narrative about a postponed or belated ritual – a traditional ritual that could not be completed at the appropriate time due to the restrictions of living under apartheid. In Kethiwe's case in Belonging, the postponement was due to the fact that she grew up in exile in Britain, while in Sipho's case in Umgidi, the restriction was more emphatic. Sipho, an ex-political prisoner on Robben Island, is planning to return home to Gugulethu in Cape Town, to complete "unfinished business" – the long-overdue public announcement of his circumcision ritual as demanded by Xhosa tradition. Sipho was circumcised while in prison; and these initiation rituals had to take place in secret because circumcision was illegal and regarded as "vandalism of state property", as Gillian describes it in the film. The public announcement ceremony takes place in the bathroom in Robben Island prison where Sipho was circumcised. This event is imbued with symbolic significance on different levels. The importance that Sipho and the clan attach to the announcement ceremony is clear, but there is also the awareness from everyone present of the deep historical significance of the place that they are visiting. Being in Robben Island prison, a crucial symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle, fills them with pride and gratitude. The announcement ceremony is followed by a family celebration, including an animal sacrifice.

Sipho and Gillian intended the film to be about the planning and carrying out of this public announcement ceremony to the Xhosa elders, as well as the accompanying celebrations with the extended family members. However, intertwined with the story that Sipho plans to tell through the film is the story of his younger brother Vuyo, who has recently found out that he has been adopted at birth and is determined to find his biological parents. Vuyo's feelings of cultural and familial displacement are confounded by announcing to his family, and to the

complete incomprehension of his father, a sternly traditional Xhosa elder, that he is homosexual. His family believes that circumcision would integrate him into the ma-Yirha clan, but Vuyo refuses to be circumcised, to the great disappointment of Sipho, his mother and father. Vuyo's father believes that the reason for his refusal to be circumcised is because he is a Rastafarian. The culture of Rastafarianism and the label of being gay are completely foreign and incomprehensible to his father, who states: "How can it be that someone who we brought up can become something else?" For Sipho, the circumcision ritual and accompanying announcement ceremony typify a rite of passage that is essential for integration into the clan. For Vuyo, however, it has no relevance and his anxiety to define his own identity in the face of the knowledge that he has been adopted, and the mounting pressure from his family to be circumcised, results in him taking an overdose of pills on the day that Sipho's celebration begins. The accompanying celebrations are tainted by sadness at Vuyo's absence as he recovers in hospital, and as the close family members struggle to find answers and explanations for his actions. Sipho's incomprehension results in anger, because Vuyo's behaviour intervenes not only in the planned celebration, but also in the film that he is making. Even though Vuyo is unable to articulate his anxiety and explain his actions and decisions to his family, he tells them: "I'm hoping that something will come out of it. I hope that they can fill the holes that I was talking about." The film's ending, like that of *Belonging*, is open and inconclusive - Gillian and Sipho announce their next film project and inform the viewer that Vuyo has moved to Johannesburg to continue the search for his biological parents, which is of course symbolically also the continuation of the search for his own identity. The film ends with a discussion between Sipho and his wife Gillian, a white woman of Dutch heritage, on the cultural milieu in which their mixed-race son, Kai, is growing up. Although Sipho wants Kai to be circumcised at the appropriate age, Gillian anticipates that Kai, who is growing up in Johannesburg, might feel increasingly alienated from traditional Xhosa culture.

Omelga Mthiyane, who directed *Ikhaya* (Home), started her career as a researcher and production assistant, before moving into directing documentaries through intensive training

workshops at the Encounters Documentary Library. The film is narrated by Omelga, and tells the story of her aunt, Zimbili Kamanga, returning to her house in Bhambayi in Kwa-Zulu Natal more than ten years after she had to leave it due to the violence that erupted in the area around the 1994 elections. Her aunt has not been able to move on with her life after she was forced to give up her home, constantly wondering about the current occupants, but prevented from returning sooner by her traumatic memories of fleeing from Bhambayi after she witnessed her neighbour and neighbour's daughter being shot. Zimbili's return to her old house involves a gradual process of moving closer which she finds very traumatic.

When Zimbili eventually returns to her home, she finds that other people are living there. They are apologetic and reconciliatory, offering to move out if she wants them to. Although she feels embittered and resentful because other people are living in her house rent-free, she realises that they are also victims of circumstance and knows that she cannot force them to move out because they have nowhere to go. The people occupying her house are relieved by her visit, because they do not have to fear any longer that they will be evicted. By the end of the film, she had come to grips with the fact that she had lost her home in Bhambayi, and decides rather to spend her time and energy on improving her current home. The film is also a journey of finding a home for Omelga herself, as she becomes more and more intrigued by Bhambayi while making the film and decides to try and get a house for herself and her daughter in the town. Mahatma Gandhi had a house in Bhambayi – it was there, ironically, that he developed his philosophy of passive resistance, and the name of the town was derived from Bombay in India. Houses are assigned by the local council as part of the development of Bhambayi but strict eligibility criteria apply. Omelga is told by the council authorities that she cannot get a house there because she is not from that area. Her mother finds her desire to move out of the family home inexplicable, and refuses to bless her decision. For Omelga, the reason why she does not get a house in Bhambayi is not because of what she is told by the council, but because her mother refused to bless her decision. By the end of the film, she still lives in her mother's house with her ten siblings.

'Home' is a highly evocative notion; particularly in the context of South Africa where so many people were forced from the places that they regarded as home through political exile, labour migration, mandatory segregation, imprisonment, or displacement due to violence and turmoil. The notion of homecoming is applied on a literal as well as symbolic level in all three films. The physical homecoming is simultaneously a spiritual process of healing and reconciliation through confronting memories from the past in order to move forward. Because the connection to home is physical as well as symbolic, it is also a search for belonging and constructing an identity in the new South Africa, through looking into the past as well as the future. Memory forms an important part of this process, as was emphatically demonstrated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The process of publicly restoring memory – especially the memories of apartheid victims repressed and denied under apartheid ideology – and requiring other members of the society to bear witness to these memories, is often a very painful and traumatic process but one that seems to contain healing properties for a country ravaged by oppression and segregation. In *Ikhaya* memory is reconstructed through the photographs of events and people in her old house that Zimbili looks at, and through a confrontation with the past that involves a gradual process of moving closer to her old house. It is clear that this process of confronting the past is a painful experience that causes her much anxiety. The journey of remembering starts with a visit to the grave of Omelga's grandmother, Zimibili's mother-in-law; she first sees Bhambayi from a hilltop but does not feel ready to go closer; she stops at the houses of friends whom she has not seen for years as she moves closer to her own house, until she is finally ready to visit the house. Recovering memory through visual representation is also used in *Umgidi*, where the memories of the country's apartheid past are exemplified through the visit to Robben Island prison – as the visitors enter the building, they look at blown-up photographs of prisoners, including a photograph of Mandela. Slogans such as "We serve with pride" accompany the visual memories offered to visitors, and as they walk to the area where Sipho's cell is located, a sign reading "Maximum Security" becomes a loaded reference to the past. Indeed, as a museum Robben Island is a repository of memories from the past, serving a similar function as the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. Visitors to the Apartheid Museum receive upon

arrival a ticket that arbitrarily classifies their race and requires them to enter the museum through segregated entrances: "Whites only" and "Non-whites". Through an audio-visual journey South Africa's untold past is reconstructed for visitors, often with disturbing photographs and video clips of torture and violent riots not seen on television during apartheid, but the journey is ultimately an uplifting experience that leaves one with hopeful expectations for South Africa's future. Video clips of the riots in Kwa-Zulu Natal are likewise used in *Ikhaya* as flashbacks to South Africa's violent past, but juxtaposed with the depiction of present Bhambayi as a non-violent and progressive place endowed with community spirit and goodwill.

Violence has devastated many communities in South Africa, and in the case of Bhambayi, the violence erupted just before the 1994 elections. Omelga tries to find an answer for this in the film, and comes to the conclusion that the people who perpetrated the violence in Bhambayi must have been provided with weapons and ammunition by a "third force" that fuelled the violence. The facts are not clearly spelt out in the film, but it is suggested that the conflict between the regional Inkhata Freedom Party in Kwa-Zulu Natal, with Zulu support, and the ANC, which had national support, was spurred on by the Nationalist apartheid government in an attempt to destabilise the country in the run-up to the first democratic elections. Indeed, as Padarath (1998: 63) points out, ethnic identity created tribal tensions, and the apartheid system was able to use the very deprivation and dispossession it imposed on Africans to 'reinvent' ethnic differences amongst South Africa's multi-ethnic black population. The United Democratic Front developed in Natal's urban townships and posed a threat to Inkhata's hegemony in the region as a potential ally of the ANC. Violence broke out in which more than one million people fled their homes in the ensuing decade. Padarath (1998: 63) claims that considerable evidence exists of the collusion between the South African security establishment and armed vigilantes in the region, which in effect led to a low-intensity civil war. The apartheid state engineered and fuelled the violence, and this traumatic regional conflict in South Africa's apartheid history was thus much more than a simplistic notion of 'black-on-black' violence. The gendered nature of the experiences of women has

been given little attention, which is why it is all the more important for female filmmakers to create documents such as *Ikhaya* in the post-apartheid era.

These forms of violence between different political groupings continue to occur in the postcolonial era across the African continent, often manifesting in inter-ethnic conflict. There is a continuing fear amongst communities devastated by violence that, after it has subsided, it will inevitably flare up again. As perhaps most emphatically demonstrated in the case of Rwanda, there is often an underlying discomfort in these communities because in many cases the perpetrators are still alive and even living amongst the family members of victims who died during the violence. Zimbili states that the violence always seemed to be triggered by small incidents: "Hatred never dies" she says in the film. Although the peace and solidarity that now exist in Bhambayi are clearly depicted in the film, there is one incident which becomes an ominous allusion to the area's painful past. When Omelga and her aunt enter Bhambayi for the first time, a public meeting is taking place with a local council officer explaining to people the requirements for applying for a house in Bhambayi. While this peaceful public gathering is taking place, a group of Inkhata Freedom Party supporters arrive, toyi-toying, chanting and brandishing spears and shields. Zimbili is visibly disturbed by the aggressive interruption of the meeting, and retreats to the car.

Zimbili sees herself as a victim, and these silent victims of apartheid are also marginalised, although in different ways to the political exiles and prisoners encountered in *Belonging* and *Umgidi*. However, the victims of apartheid forced to leave their homes, those that had to go into exile, and those that had undergone imprisonment, are all displaced people who occupied liminal spaces during the apartheid era, and who continue the search for belonging in the new South Africa. It is imperative that the stories of these people are heard in post-apartheid South Africa, and form part of a public process of cultural self-expression, re-definition and ultimately reconciliation. Zimbili does not regard herself as politically active, and says in the film that she has never had any formal political affiliation to a party. People like her who were merely struggling to make a living under the harsh conditions of apartheid,

and who were not actively taking part in the struggle, remain the silent victims of apartheid. "We never understood what they were fighting for. I suspected it was becoming political," Zimbili tells Omelga's camera. These small narratives of people affected by apartheid are some of the most severely repressed and marginalised voices of the apartheid regime, narratives that are crucial to be remembered and retold in the new South Africa. Although Zimbili is not affiliated to any political organisation, she initiates her own affiliations in order to find companionship and improve her life. She is clearly not merely a victim, but also a survivor and agent in her own life. She formed a women's club which gathers funds to buy birthday presents for each other and celebrate their birthdays together. We see images of female solidarity with women singing together and sharing food and gifts. Zimbili is depicted as a wise and independent woman, and Omelga states in the film that she regards her aunt, grandmother and mother as the pillars of the Kamanga family; a source of inspiration to herself as a young South African woman. Through making the documentary and exploring the influences of the strong women in her life, Omelga is able to redefine her own identity as a black woman in the new South Africa.

All three films depict efforts to sustain cultural traditions and beliefs as essential for social coherence and prosperity in the new South Africa. Animal sacrifice through slaughtering represents an important aspect of communicating with and appeasing the ancestors. Animal sacrifice is part of both the belated rituals that occur in *Belonging* and *Umgidi*. *Ikhaya*, likewise, opens with scenes of slaughtering, described by Omelga, who is handed the task of cleaning up the blood, as an indispensable Zulu custom. Omelga says of her mother: "She thinks we shall have bad omens if we neglect the culture" and "whenever there is a problem or achievement, slaughter comes highly recommended." On the roof of her mother's house are the remains of previous animal sacrifices – horns, skins and bones – and her mother explains that respect for the ancestors is shown in this way. Omelga find this custom curious, but is willing to make an effort to deepen her understanding of the traditional rituals her mother believes in so strongly. Pronounced efforts are made in *Ikhaya* to find a place for tradition in modern South Africa; Omelga's daughter has an eye problem and her mother and

uncle maintain that a visit to a traditional healer to "consult the spirits" and find a solution to her ailment is the best course of action to take. "You are here today because of your ancestors", they tell her, because Omelga herself was born with a disability; a traditional healer advised that a special dress should be made for her to sleep in, and that was how she was healed. Four of Zimibile's five children are Rastafarians, and the film's portrayal of them as well as Omelga's voiceover describing them as intellectuals, seem to say that they also have a place and role in the new South Africa, in contrast to Vuyo's struggle with his father about this issue in *Umgidi*. One scene in *Ikhaya* shows the Rastafarians listening to music and philosophising together, with one of them narrating from a book entitled *African Heritage*. The scene then cuts to Auntie Zimibile, a devout Christian, praying in her bedroom. Christianity, Rastafarianism and traditional Zulu beliefs all become part of the varied assemblage of cultural expression in post-apartheid South Africa. At the end of the film, some attempts have been made to articulate identity in contemporary South Africa, and, being shot over a year like the other films, there are indications of progress and progression, but many questions remain unanswered, constructing this process as an ongoing journey to redefine issues of gender, race, tradition, modernity and belonging in the new South Africa.

Thematically, the films pose questions about the role of traditional rituals within processes of individual and collective identity negotiation within the new South Africa. All three films illustrate a desire to retain something of the protective aspects of African tradition within a modern society. As in Vuyo's case in *Umgidi*, the emphasis placed on the importance of initiation ceremonies could create a tension between spiritual beliefs and the mores of modern, secular society. However, on the whole it would seem as if rather than depicting an oppositional tension between modernity and tradition, the two are treated as complementary elements integral to development in modern African societies. The films attempt to negotiate a space between modernity and tradition by drawing on African tradition, although in an adapted, modified version, in an attempt to find a place to belong in a modern South Africa. All three films illustrate a desire to retain something of the protective aspects of African tradition within a modern society. The films show the importance of community, clan and

family ties within traditional Southern African cultures, whether Zulu or Xhosa. This is in line with the African concept of Ubuntu – an ancient African word that has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa – meaning "I am what I am because of who we all are". But one of the crucial questions the films seek answers to is: "*Who am I* within the new South Africa?", especially within the context of a personal background of being part of the political anti-apartheid struggle, either through exile of imprisonment. This question also gives rise to issues of nationalism and national identity within post-apartheid, and indeed postcolonial, South Africa, including how gender is related to national identity.

As in earlier anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles, the collective political ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle were often placed above individual ideals. Exile and imprisonment meant physical absence from the struggle on the ground, but were, somewhat paradoxically, seen as emblematic of the heart of the struggle. These temporary states of physical exclusion form an imperative part of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa, but for the individual resistance is often an ambiguous notion that has come at a painful price. The passage from nationalist ideals to post-independence is not constructed of clearly demarcated points, but intertwines as past and present become intertwined.

The Project 10 films show the need for an emergence and documentation of small, personal narratives in order to make sense of bigger social circumstances – the grand narratives of the struggle and nationalism often omitted these isolated narratives. As the identity quests of *Belonging* and *Umgidi* portray, for the individuals who have been engaged in the struggle through exile or imprisonment, the demise of apartheid has not been an end point at all, but rather a starting point which gives rise to many questions of individual, cultural and national belonging. The films delineate the impossibility of pinning down an identity, but seem to propose some possibilities for a way forward in representing multiple rather than fixed categories of identity. Viewers are exposed to a plurality of shifting ideological positionings through agency being afforded to a multiplicity of characters with divergent ideals and preoccupations. The victims of apartheid who were forced to leave their homes, chased into

exile or imprisoned are all displaced people who occupied liminal spaces during the apartheid era, and who continue the search for belonging in the new South Africa.

Another broader societal issue that the films give rise to is racial and cultural integration within the new South Africa. Both *Belonging* and *Umgidi* comprise of a black/white filmmaking partnership. In *Belonging*, Schlesinger's camera lingers on mixed-race couples walking hand-in-hand in shopping malls; filmmaking couple Gillian and Sipho constitute one of those mixed-race couples, raising their son, Kai, in an environment that embraces elements of both their respective cultures, black and white South African.

The films' narratives trace the tradition-modernity tension within post-apartheid South Africa through offering representations of *multiple hybrid modernities* taking shape in contemporary South African culture. Indeed, the traditional rituals that are depicted in the films are hybrid rituals, not carried out in their purely traditional way, but modified, adapted and transformed. When looking to the past as an aid to identity formation in a modern society, tradition cannot be treated in an unproblematic or uncritical way. One of Kethiwe's sisters refuses the invitation to take part in the belated initiation ritual, saying that it has "no meaning whatsoever" to her. This issue is presented particularly strongly in *Umgidi*, where the importance that Sipho attaches to the Xhosa tradition of circumcision is subverted by Vuyo's rejection of the tradition, while going through his own identity crisis triggered by being an adopted child and homosexual. Vuyo does not believe that circumcision would help him find a place to belong. The search for identity is marked by a state of anxiety, which is clear from Kethiwe's desire to find validation for her feelings of alienation from African diaspora friends in London. Part of the experience of African exiles in Britain is the often painful attempts they make to assert their Africanness while they live overseas, just to find that they are not regarded as African when they return to their home countries, an experience that in Kethiwe's words, results in feeling "stuck". "I can't put my life together, because nothing fits", she says. An African friend in London tells Kethiwe that she does not feel comfortable with the notion in African culture that all your actions are linked to the community, and that you are not "free" as

an individual, and especially as a woman. Kethiwe, as a single mother, probably does not feel these restrictions as much in South Africa and has come to believe that the cultural traditions that they, as exiles, miss out on are important in finding a place to belong. In preparing for the belated initiation ritual, Kethiwe expresses to her mother her incomprehension at the fact that all communication with the ancestors is conducted by males. This remark, presented as a comical moment in the film, is not elaborated upon as the action immediately cuts away from the conversation around the table, so that the viewer does not get to hear her mother's response. The film problematises the role of women in traditional culture to a certain extent, but does not develop this issue extensively. Her older sister, who still lives in London and is clearly not exposed to the restrictive aspects of traditional culture with regard to women in particular, affirms that their traditions are protective; "if we let go of it easily, we will truly be lost", she says.

In the process of opening up the possible positionings of identity and subjectivity the films raise more issues and questions than they can possibly answer. On the one hand there is the hope that looking into the past for validation of selfhood will result in some answers to remedy feelings of cultural and personal alienation in the new South Africa. On the other hand there is the realisation that traditional culture has to be reconsidered and reassessed within a post-apartheid, multi-racial and multi-cultural society. It would appear that issues of individual versus collective and national identity and traditional cultures versus modernity are treated as complementary rather than oppositional. The multitude of subjectivities represented and reflected on in the films show that truth is never fixed, allowing the audiences to construct their own meanings. The partial, fragmented and unstable narratives resulting from this type of digital storytelling lead to identities constructed not in uniformity or sameness, but in difference, tension and conflict. But this tension should be seen as a force of energy that gives momentum and impetus to the redefinition of identity in post-apartheid South Africa; a continuous and continuing process of which the films' open endings are symbolic. In their exploration of issues of nationalism, gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality, the films propose a way forward for a constructive national identity in the new

South Africa, which would also respect and display a sense of gender complementarity and equality.

Conclusion

During the liberation struggles for independence, nationalist rhetoric often used the image of the African woman to symbolically represent the nation, however, as this chapter showed, the relationship between women and the nation are far more complex. Women participated in the liberation struggles in various ways, only to find their societal roles diminished once independence was gained, in newly independent nations which continued the patriarchal oppression of women. The films discussed show how nationalist narratives are being reinterpreted to include women's voices. The official ideology of nationalism is being reassessed which means that the nation cannot be seen as a monolithic construct, but rather as made up of multiple and diverse identities. Films such as *Sambizanga* and *Flame* depict some of the diverse roles that women fulfilled during the liberation struggle, while *La Nuit de la Verité* examines gender complementarity and specifically the role of women in the post-independence nation.

In the case of South Africa, film was used as a tool to promote Afrikaner nationalism during apartheid, but also as a way to chronicle oppression and advance the anti-apartheid struggle, though not extensively. The era of democracy in South Africa has lead to a rising multiplicity of voices, and film is contributing to imagining the new nation. Nationalism cannot be regarded as a homogenous concept in South Africa, with its melting pot of different cultures, ethnicities and races, and women are taking part in constructing the diverse South African nation through film. Digital technology has democratised film to a certain extent, so that it is now possible for a multiplicity of voices to be heard, including those silenced during the previous regime.

For Radhakrishnan (1992: 80) the solution to the tension between nationalist goals and the ideals of female emancipation is an integrated cultural politics that really improves the lives of

all subjects, as well as a critical stance towards nationalist rhetoric and discourse. Willemen (1990: 4) states that filmmakers such as Sembene, Faye and Cissé refused to place a simplistic notion of national identity in opposition to imperialist or colonialist values. The multiplicity of cultural and historical formations should be recognised, as well as the complex connections between intra- and inter-national forces and traditions. As becomes clear in some films by female directors, there are possibilities for inhabiting one's culture without being indiscriminately nationalist or ambiguously cosmopolitan (Willemen, 1990: 4). Women's films which look at the place of African women within modern African nations often critique nationalist ideals without rejecting the idea of national solidarity altogether. This view of the nation would appear to relate to Fanon's description of *national consciousness*, which he views as a positive concept as opposed to the rhetoric and ideology nationalism.

Whether in video-diary style micro-narratives which give a voice to those previously marginalised, as in the Project 10 documentary series, or in more ambitious film projects which aim to reassess 'official' versions of history and nationalist rhetoric, such as in the feature films discussed, it remains important that women partake in the process of (re)imagining the nation and take an active role in creating and representing nationalist ideals. The films discussed in this chapter show how women should be regarded as part and parcel of the nation, and that patriarchal postulations of nationalism will continue to devalorise and undermine the role of women in the nation state unless action is taken. Female filmmaking which reassess the inherently patriarchal nationalist ideals that emerged after colonialism proves that feminism and nationalism are not conflicting forces, but should be complementary endeavours in the continuous process of building a positive and productive national consciousness in postcolonial African nations.

Chapter 4: The Female Body

Introduction: The female African body: A struggle for ownership

Approaches to studying the female body in relation to cinema include in the West an established critical framework of psycho-analytical feminist film theory which critiques the phallocentric male gaze onto the female body, in the work of theorists such as Laura Mulvey (in particular her seminal essay "Virtual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" first published in 1975) and Ann Kaplan (for example the edited volume *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, 1989). However, this approach, which critiques the objectification of the female body in film, is not necessarily applicable to African cinema. Ella Shohat (2003: 53) warns against universalising the parameters for feminism and using ahistorical psychoanalytical categories such as 'desire', 'fetishism', and 'castration' which might lead to a discussion of the 'female body' and 'female spectator' that is ungrounded in many different women's experiences, agendas and political visions. "Whereas a white 'female body' might undergo surveillance by the reproductive machine, the dark 'female body' is subjected to a dis-reproductive apparatus within a hidden, racially coded demographic agenda," she states (Shohat, 2003: 53). African systems of relation have a different ontology to which psycho-analytical approaches are not necessarily applicable. Regaining ownership of their bodies also entails for African women the affirmation of black beauty which consists of a struggle for female agency within a patriarchal context attempting to overturn the view of the anomalous black female body as created in the colonialist imaginary. Postcolonial theorist Robert Young (1995) describes this view of the African female body as a "desiring machine" which subsumed a simultaneous desire and repulsion in the colonial mind.

Keeping in mind the undesirability of generalising the psycho-analytical framework in relation to African women, it cannot be denied that the objectification of the black female body is also a perennial issue for African women and female African filmmakers, who critique colonialist ideologies which eroticised and exoticised the female African body. This view of the black female body is still being perpetuated in film, advertising and visual media world-wide. Thus

one might find some parallels between the critical strategies employed by psycho-analytical feminist theory, and the attempts of African feminists to transform the African woman from object to subject within African visual culture. The issue at stake is the awareness that the African woman has never owned her body, which is also proclaimed by Western feminism – the female body has always been a battlefield of male concerns. The female body has always been a site for the conflict between different forms and levels of violence. In terms of representation, it becomes a question of how a woman becomes an active subject, as opposed to a passive object being observed.

Black sociologist Felly Nkweto Simmonds (1999: 52) describes the racialisation and objectification of the black body as a double complication for black women by being female and being black. "As an African woman my 'certain private information' is not only inscribed in disciplines such as anthropology, but also in colonial narratives, literatures, photographs, paintings and so on. Here the 'facts' created by social theory and the 'fictions' created by literature can be difficult to separate. At times social theory itself becomes a fiction. […] In this white world, the Black body, my body, is always on display" (Simmonds, 1999: 53). A particular fascination with the black female body was quite explicit in the search for anatomical characteristics of different races, with the most widely-known case that of Saartjie Baartman, the Khoisan slave woman from South Africa who had been exhibited at European balls and human zoos as the Hottentot Venus in the 19th century. Her large buttocks and elongated labia were regarded as highly unusual bodily features. After her death in 1815 her skeleton, genitals and brain were put on display in Paris's Musée de l'Homme. In 1994, President Nelson Mandela formally requested the return of her remains and France finally acceded to the request in 2002. Baartman's story has inspired many writers and artists and South African filmmaker Zola Maseko made an award-winning documentary on her in 1999 entitled *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*, chronicling her troubled life and the preoccupation with her body which continued long after her death.

With reference in particular to slavery, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (1999: 311) maintains that physical

brutality and force transformed the African body from a liberated body to a captive one. She states that under the slave economy and colonisation two kinds of bodies were produced: the body of knowledge (the oppressor) and the body of labour (the oppressed). She describes as a consequence of slavery a brutal disruption of the African kinship system which denied the captive female a gendered position. The body has become the most celebrated site for addressing a wide range of cultural configurations, in particular from a feminist perspective, and the many studies on the body address numerous ways of using the human body and embodiment as a conceptual tool for exploring various issues such as the problematic nature of sex, sexuality and gender; disease and illness; pain and self-alienation; and deconstructing the body-mind dualism in Western metaphysics. Describing the captive female body as a site of physical and psychological trauma and enforced sexual practices, Bakare-Yusuf asks:

> What of the body that is always under the seduction of death, white racist violence, diseases, perverse heterosexism, pervasive additions and unemployment? I am talking about the body that is marked by racial, sexual and class configurations. It is this body, this fleshy materiality that seems to disappear from much of the current proliferation of discourses on the body. (1999: 313)

French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault described the interdependency between the materiality of the body and its functioning, representation and regulation in discursive fields in his work on the body, which bears similarities to the work of the so-called second-wave feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Foucault described the historical specificities which produce the body in discourse and how everyday practices structure the way in which experiences of the body are organised. The body is always a political field, Foucault maintained, where "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, for it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (1991: 173). According to Foucault this new body comes into being through new modes of subjects, and such a body also produces power that facilitates resistance, rebellion, evasions and disruptions. Power and discourse are thus interconnected, as

discourse becomes just one of the modes in which political power manifests itself. Embodiment and representation are interconnected in the way that to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being represented, which is almost always the condition of those without power (Bakare-Yusuf, 1999: 313). Feminists and black theorists have pointed out that the association of blacks and females with corporeality and embodiment has denied them subjectivity.

The struggles of the women's movements over reproductive rights, sexual choice and bodily integrity are bringing into the open new perspectives on abortion, fertility control, women's health, sex education, female circumcision, child spacing and demographic growth (Campbell, 2003: 170). Female African filmmakers address many of these themes and explore notions of the black female body in relation to issues such as beauty, sexuality, motherhood, health, initiation and rites of passage ceremonies and female genital mutilation. Rather than rejecting corporeality and embodiment altogether, they aim through their work to reclaim ownership of the black female body, and to reinsert female subjectivity and agency through representation.

Female beauty

"Even though history has been terribly unkind to the African body," Bakare-Yusuf (1999: 312) writes, "the body was and still is capable of being something quite beautiful, quite sensuous, quite joyous. There is always a memory of the 'flesh', of the flesh that was once liberated." As described above, the fascination with the black female body during slavery and colonialism turned the female body into a spectacle and an object of erotic desire and repulsion, which denied African women subjectivity through focusing on their 'anomalous' features – such as their body types, hair and black skins – and by regarding the female African body as hyper-sexualised. Historical remnants of these processes have been internalised by African women, and are exacerbated by the infiltration of contemporary models of Western standards of beauty in a globalised world, as is clear from the number of hair straightening and skin whitening products which can be found in shops in African cities all over the

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continent, and where sizeable African diaspora communities can be found in the West. African female filmmakers explore these issues and notions of female beauty through the depiction of women's relationships with their bodies. Cameroonian director Agnes Ndibi's documentary *Fantacoca* (2001) looks at the cultural phenomenon of skin bleaching in Cameroon and the challenge it is posing to the notion of black pride and identity. South African filmmaker Omelga Mthiyane's documentary *Body Beautiful* (2004) explores the body image of black South African women through four women from different backgrounds and with different body shapes and lifestyles. Her film offers interesting insights into how black South African women regard their bodies. A beautiful model, Vanessa, talks about her weak body image and her use of laxatives, and states that societal norms of beauty are constructed. Mihlali, a student, initially talks about her self-confidence and love for her body even though she is overweight, but eventually acknowledges that she is often hurt by her friends' offensive comments and insults. Rose, a receptionist, is also overweight and ascribes her poor diet to the difficulties in finding healthy food in the townships, where one out of four children under nine years old are malnourished, and foodstuffs such as meat and starch are much cheaper than vegetables. Indeed, a dietician interviewed in the documentary states that the highest rate of obesity in the country exists amongst black South African women, which is directly related to levels of income and education. The fourth woman featured in the documentary, Phoebe, is a travel agent and extremely health conscious and active. A few South African men interviewed in the documentary state that they prefer bigger women, a cultural phenomenon which is often cited in relation to Southern Africa. The majority of black Southern African women have body types which do not conform to the standards of beauty propagated in the Western world, and what becomes clear from the documentary is that some women embrace their body types while others strive to Western models of female beauty. The filmmaker ends the documentary by stating "A healthy body regardless of shape is a body beautiful." Through focusing on four black South African women from diverse backgrounds the documentary promotes the notion that beauty should not be seen as a monolithic concept, and that outer beauty is intricately connected to issues such as body-image, self-acceptance, confidence and health.

Two films in the Project 10 series deal with female beauty – Andrea Spitz's *Hot Wax* and Jane Kennedy's *Cinderella of the Cape Flats*. *Hot Wax* is an intimate look at the life and work of a black beautician, Ivy, who runs her own beauty salon in Johannesburg. Ivy is a big and bubbly woman who, remarkably, set up her salon during apartheid, at a time when it was near impossible and very unusual for a black woman to run her own business. Most of her clients are white Jewish women from the upper middle-class, tree-lined northern suburbs of Johannesburg, while Ivy lives in a township. Some of her clients have been coming to the salon for over 25 years, and Ivy has become a confidante and counsellor for many of the women. "Ivy is a mother figure and a tonic", one of them tells the filmmaker, and we view intimate scenes of Ivy and her clients gossiping about boyfriends and husbands and discussing gender relations, while Ivy gives pedicures, manicures and waxes. The women also talk about contemporary South Africa – about the high prevalence of crime, and the electric fencing and cluster living that the security situation in the country has led to. As with the subjects of all the Project 10 films, the viewer gets to know Ivy well over the year that Spitz's camera follows her: Ivy has experienced pain and trauma when one her sons died of AIDS four years earlier, and the documentary also moves outside of Ivy's salon as Spitz is invited by Ivy to accompany her on a visit to her mother. Ivy tells Spitz that she feels that she has never experienced love and tenderness from her mother, though Ivy herself is depicted as an affectionate and loving mother to her own teenage daughter, who looks up to her as a role model of an emancipated and independent woman. *Hot Wax* is an extraordinary glimpse into black female emancipation, cross-racial friendships and female solidarity between white and black South African women, with an intimacy and closeness to the subject as a result of the relationship of trust between the Ivy and the filmmaker.

The themes of beauty and female emancipation are also linked in Jane Kennedy's *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* which deals with working-class women in the Western Cape garment industry. These women, who are mostly coloured, work long hours every day to make clothes for other women which they would never be able to afford themselves. Once every year they

get an opportunity to take part in the Annual Spring Queen Pageant, the largest beauty pageant in Africa, organised by the South Africa Clothing and Textile Workers Union. Around 86,000 women take part and every factory crowns their own Spring Queen, from which the Queen of Queens is then crowed. The documentary follows the journeys of a number of women who take part in the pageant for the company Rex Trueform, with many close-ups on their hands as they are toiling in the factory, a job for which they are paid around R2,400 (around £200) per month. The women practise for the pageant in their lunch break, and the run-up to the event is a time when morale is boosted and fewer women are absent from work. The story eventually focuses on Beverley, a single mother, who wins the crown for Rex Trueform and makes it to the final. "It's one time in a year that we can really loosen up and enjoy ourselves", Beverley says, and she talks frankly about her hard life, being sexually abused by her cousin when she was a teenager, and shares her dreams for her and her son's future. After winning the crown for her own factory, Beverley goes to speak to her bosses to find out if there might be a new job for her, or any other benefits. The extent of their support is to get a new dress made for her for the finals. Beverley does not win, and nothing changes for her. "I'm still in a factory, I'm still just Beverley", she states, as the last shot of the film shows her walking away – for a short time her dreams of a better future seem tangible, but ultimately everything has stayed the same.

These two Project 10 documentaries link notions of black female beauty and the quest for female emancipation in interesting ways. In Ivy's case, her work as a beautician has made her financially independent and has also positioned her as much more than merely facilitating the outer beauty of her clients – she is a nurturing and caring mother figure and counsellor to her mostly white clients, and thus she has also broken down racial boundaries at a time in South Africa when racial categories and segregation were strictly enforced. In Beverley's case her quest is rather more desperate, as she pins a lot of hope on winning the contest and thus changing her circumstances. However, I would argue that the role of the beauty contest in the lives of the women who work in the Cape garment factories should be read differently from how beauty contests are usually regarded in the West – as anti-feminist

and perpetuating the objectification of women and the female body. The beauty contest depicted in the documentary is an emancipating and self-affirming event to the women who take part in it, and the one time in a year when the monotony of their working lives are lifted and when they can feel good about themselves. The documentaries discussed in this section all seem to indicate that an affirmation of black female beauty plays a role in emancipating African women and that acceptance of your body, and rejecting or at least scrutinising the societal norms and pressures from inside and outside, plays a role in female happiness and fulfilment.

Sexuality and female desire

African cultures are generally more closed than Western cultures with regard to public displays with sexual or erotic connotations, as the result of a different perspective on intimacy and privacy than that which exists in Western cultures. These societal norms have lead to the relative absence of explicit displays of sexuality and nudity in African film. With reference primarily to francophone West African film, Francoise Pfaff (1996: 255) states that this is a result of African filmmakers' awareness of the voyeuristic implications of displaying eroticism in film – in particular with regard to the white male gaze onto the 'erotic' black female body. Filmmakers find other ways of depicting romance and passion, for example through prolonged gazes between lovers and verbal rather than visual expressions of sexual desire. However, there are a few films which explore issues of sexuality more overtly and display contextual nudity, most notably Fanta Nacro's short film *Puk Nini*; Ivorian (male) filmmaker Désiré Ecaré's *Visages de femmes* (1985); and Mambety's *Touki Bouki* (1973) – all films which created contention because of their depictions of sexual relations and even endured accusations of pornography. Pfaff (1996: 259) states that the dominant viewpoint within African cultures is that sex is practiced within marriage and is closely regulated through initiation rites and social rules imposing abstinence. The primary aim with regard to sex is procreation rather than erotic pleasure alone, a viewpoint which suggests that 'respectable' African women are not expected to exhibit signs of pleasure. However, this perspective should be scrutinised in terms of its possibly patriarchal origins and how it might restrict

female expression and choice. Not all female African filmmakers ascribe to this belief, which is problematised particularly when viewed from an exilic or diasporic perspective, as in French/Ivorian director Isabelle Boni-Claverie's short film *Pour la Nuit*, a film which is audacious and unapologetic in its depiction of female sexual freedom and choice.

Fanta Nacro's short film *Puk Nini* (1996), which means "open your eyes, be vigilant", created controversy due to its rather explicit sexual scenes. The film deals with a woman attempting to come to terms with her husband's infidelity, and includes intimate sequences of the husband and his lover in bed. Nacro has stated that the film is an urgent reaction to marital crisis in Africa's large towns and cities, and also a critique of African feminist associations that simply copied modes of resistance from European feminist associations, even though the context and concerns are quite different. According to Nacro, the African feminist movement fought for the abolition of polygamy, but was unable to offer an alternative, with the result that men developed their "third offices", a kind of harem outside the monogamous couple. This resulted in the lawful wife losing out because in a polygamous set-up each woman had her own role and position. Nacro asserts that her experience of polygamy has been positive – her maternal grandfather had six wives and her paternal grandfather, who was a king, had 11 wives: "I live in a polygamous environment but the family framework was so well constructed that it was never a negative experience" (quoted in an interview with Bernard Verschueren, 2002). Reactions to the film were quite negative in several West African countries, but she affirms that it was her intention that people should adopt a reflective approach. Some people interpreted the sexual scenes as pornographic, but Nacro stated at a press conference after the press screening of *Puk Nini* at FESPACO 1997 (quoted in Ellerson, 2000: 218): "[O]ne must understand the difference between a pornographic and an erotic film. I think that my film is, simply speaking, sensual." The film certainly was unprecedented in a francophone West African context in its displays of sexuality. Later films by francophone West African directors, male and female, show a more daring approach to depicting sensuality and sexuality.

Pour la Nuit (For the Night) was shot in Marseille; Boni-Claverie is of mixed race, studied in Paris and lives in France and her work could thus be regarded as offering a diasporic perspective. The film is about a woman of mixed race, Muriel, who meets a man, Sam, in a chance encounter on the night before both have to face a momentous personal event – the next day is the funeral of Muriel's mother and Sam's wedding day. Muriel, the daughter of a French father and African mother, seeks escape from her grief and anxiety by embarking on one night of unsolicited and uninhibited sensual pleasure. The film opens with Muriel at her mother's death bed, with a curtain separating the family members as they talk to each other – a visual representation of how the main protagonist feels cut-off from what is going on around her. Muriel leaves the family home and meets Sam, and as the evening progresses, both characters try to find solace in each other's company as they plunge into their one night of togetherness – they wander the streets of Marseille, dance a tango in a bar, and have sex on a beach. But their encounter was always fated to last for only a night; the next morning Sam's wedding car passes the funeral procession, signaling the end of the brief moment in which their two worlds temporarily collided. The film is shot in black and white, with a close-up camera focusing intensely on the characters and their bodies. Oliver Barlet (2004) states that this is a departure from the remote, distanced camerawork often used in francophone West African cinema and it certainly gives the film the feel of a very personal, internal journey rather than intending a character to metonymically represent a collective, as is often the case in the social realist films from francophone West Africa. Indeed, depictions of individual desire are becoming more common in francophone West African cinema, in particular in films made from a diasporic or exilic perspective, which indicates that the positioning of desire and sexuality perhaps have more to do with the location of the filmmaker rather than being gender-based. The films *L'Absence* (2008) by male Guinean director Mama Keïta, and *Ramata* (2008) by Congo-Brazzaville director Leandre-Alain Baker, follow this trend, with both films depicting male and female sexuality and desire from an individualist, personal perspective, with close-up and intimate camerawork stylistically similar to *Pour la Nuit*. These recent developments in West African cinema would suggest that African cinema cannot be essentialised to its historical social realist origins, but that a space should be opened up in

the theoretical realm of African film criticism which would allow for other themes, styles and genres to be explored.

South African films are rather less 'prudish' than the earlier francophone West African films in their depictions of sexuality and desire, although films which represent these issues overtly are still relatively rare when dealing with black South African subjects. South African documentary filmmaker Kali van der Merwe explores female sexuality in her documentary *Doing It! The trauma and ecstasy of sexuality* (2003). Four articulate and self-aware young South African women from diverse backgrounds talk about their sexuality and their entry into womanhood. Antoinette is white and English-speaking, was adopted when she was seven years old, and experienced sexual abuse by her adopted father until she was 18. Linda grew up in rural Transkei and found out she was HIV positive when she was 20 years old. Zandi, a Zulu woman, tells about the alienation she experienced as a child, and how she eventually realised that she was homosexual after seeing two women on television and identifying with what she saw. Shameema is coloured, was also sexually abused by family members from a young age, and eventually started a female rap group as a way to channel her anger and resentment more positively. The format of the documentary encourages the women to be self-reflective since the director asked them to do their own filming while they talk to their friends about sex.

The making of the documentary opened up a space for these four young women to talk about their sexuality, including related issues such as relationships and health. The personal narratives of the four women are interspersed with their own filming as well as dramatised scenes of events they talk about. The stylised camerawork and editing makes it unlike most narrative documentaries. It becomes an exploration and affirmation of female sexuality which focuses on the multiplicity of female voices in the new South Africa and takes into account race and class differences.

Taboo desires: Lesbianism and African film

Homophobia is rife in many African cultures and homosexuality is a taboo in most African countries, and as such it is not surprising that very few filmic representations of homosexuality exist within African film. Only a sprinkling of films have dealt with this issue – a handful of films have been made which deal with gay issues, and even fewer films have addressed issues of lesbianism in an African context. South Africa is the one exception, with a number of films being made since the mid-1990s addressing homosexuality, in particular gay culture, and mostly from a white point of view. South Africa's liberal constitution and the expansive human rights bill adopted after the end of apartheid ensure that gay rights are recognised and discrimination against homosexuals is not tolerated, officially at least. Though these rights are underscored legally, the reality on the ground often appears very different, as homophobia also exists in South Africa, where, as in most other African countries, it is viewed as "un-African" in particular among the black South African population in townships and rural areas. Apart from the small number of South African films dealing with lesbianism, only two films dealing with this issue could be found from Zimbabwe, and one feature film from francophone West Africa – Senegalese director Joseph Gaï Ramaka's *Karmen Geï* (2001) which is an adaptation of the famous opera by George Bizet set in a female prison on Goree Island. When keeping in mind the dominant homophobic attitudes in most African countries, it is not surprising that so few films have dealt with the subject of lesbianism, but nonetheless a small number of female African filmmakers have been brave enough to represent the topic of lesbianism in their films.

Several African countries have extremely strict legislation regarding homosexual acts and relations. Botha (2008) states that, apart from South Africa, only Egypt, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Madagascar do not have legislation which directly targets gays and lesbians, but other laws in these countries could be used by the authorities or police to prosecute their citizens for homosexual acts. But even in countries without overt anti-gay legislation, the general public considers gays and lesbians to be deviants and the discussion of homosexuality in the media or public is a social taboo. Homophobic pronouncements have

been made publicly by African presidents, in particular by Namibian president Sam Nujoma and Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe. Nujoma declared in March 2001: "The Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality or lesbianism here. Police are ordered to arrest, you, deport you and imprison you" and Mugabe stated in 1995: "Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe" (quoted in Campbell, 2003: 155). Homophobic statements have also been made by presidents Arap Moi of Kenya and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. In 1995 the Zimbabwean government prohibited the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwean (GALZ) organisation from participating in the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. GALZ was formed in 1989 as part of a worldwide effort to create an environment where questions of sex, sexuality and human sexual orientation could be discussed openly. Campbell (2003) points out that gay activists worldwide seized an important political space in the period of the AIDS pandemic from the 1980s onwards to create new cultural voices along with a new political analysis that made central the connections between homophobia and other forms of oppression. In conjunction with their feminist allies, gay and lesbian activists throughout Africa have begun to open up the political space for discussion of liberation beyond the parameters of race and colonial domination. As described in the overview of African feminism in this thesis, Third World feminists made clear the links between race, class, gender and sexual oppression, and homophobia could be regarded as located at the intersection of these oppressions. Thus, anti-gay speech and behaviour cannot be separated from economic exploitation, sexism and the oppression of women. To emphasise the alliance between feminists and gay rights activists, Campbell (2003: 156) states "[f]reedom-loving persons everywhere understand the necessity to defend the rights and dignity of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation."

In the context of Zimbabwe, Mugabe's homophobic comments, as well as his demands for the return of the land which lead to the notorious farm invasions, were constructed as his opposition to 'white culture' and 'cultural values' that threatened the preservation of 'African' culture. This could be expanded to other African countries, as the core reason for the homophobic attitudes in African cultures is the fact that it is seen as a Western import and

thus as threat to African cultures and traditions. Mugabe used homosexuality as evidence of degenerate Western sexual practices, but many gays and lesbians, as well as African women who have suffered under gender oppression, have opposed the tendency to essentialise African culture in order to mask and perpetuate patriarchal domination and gender violence. The AIDS pandemic in Africa certainly requires a more open discussion on sex and sexuality in environments where, particularly in pre-colonial Africa, strict codes existed and still exist concerning the discussion of sex and sexuality. The social construction of AIDS as a gay disease in the West was double-edged in perpetuating ignorance and intolerance. "The intricate web of silence on sexuality, as well as disinformation and psychological warfare in relation to AIDS, require clarity, openness, democratic discourse and political leadership in order to organise society to combat the spread of this pandemic," states Campbell (2003: 158). There is a growing awareness that the struggle against AIDS must be a struggle against sexism, violence, economic oppression and homophobia. Campbell is unequivocal in his statement that homophobia is a weapon of sexism and male supremacy. Many supporters of the liberation of Africa argue that the question of homophobia is a diversion from more pressing questions in Africa, similar to the tendency to regard women's issues as secondary, but an analysis of the relationship between patriarchy, sexism and homophobia reveals a central link to patriarchy and power.

Film historian Martin Botha (2008) claims that the homosexual experience is unique in South Africa because of the country's history of racial division and subsequent resistance. Homosexual identities in South Africa have been formed by a long history of racial struggle against an extremely oppressive system. "Apartheid legislated who people were, where they could live, with whom they could associate, and even what kind of sex they could have. Asserting a lesbian and gay identity in South Africa became a defiance of the fixed identities – of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality – that the apartheid system attempted to impose upon the whole society," states Botha (2008). Gay subcultures existed in the major urban centres in South Africa by the mid-1950s, and with the exception of Cape Town, where there had been a gay culture based in the Cape Malay communities. These subcultures were

mostly white, male and middle-class. The development of urban centres was paralleled by a system of black migrant labour that resulted in single-sex compounds which created opportunities for homosexual encounters. Lesbians experienced far greater pressure to remain closeted and had far fewer public meeting places than men. The silence on lesbian issues was compounded by the fact that women's organisations, such as the ANC Women's League, did not address issues of sexuality. The repression and regulation of sexuality by the apartheid government were linked to racial legislation and sexual policing based on the values of the Christian Nationalist apartheid ideology. Under apartheid interracial sex was criminalised and the Immorality Act of 1957 made everything from prostitution to soliciting for immoral purposes and sex with mentally challenged persons illegal and punishable by prison sentences of up to six years.

During the era of liberation in Southern Africa, the politics of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Mozambique were inextricably linked, as it was understood that the architects of apartheid held economic and military power which affected the entire region (Campbell, 2003: 159). Issues of female oppression and homophobia were not addressed at the height of the regional anti-apartheid movement, and in countries such as Zimbabwe concepts of the patriarchal family and heterosexual relations began to be packaged as central to the national liberation project. South Africa, after the end of apartheid, strived to rise above the pitfalls of male-centred legislation. Section 9 of the Constitution of South Africa, adopted in 1996, prohibits discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of race, gender, sex, religion, age, disability and many other criteria, including sexual orientation. In fact, South Africa is at the forefront worldwide with one of the most progressive constitutions regarding gay and lesbian equality. This political climate based on open expression and tolerance grew out of the legacy of the apartheid struggle that created a serious commitment to the elimination of discrimination on any basis in South Africa. Whereas the outlawing of discrimination of all kinds was central to the regional consciousness of building a new order after apartheid, in Zimbabwe the Law and Order Act and the Sexual Offences Act were used to harass, arrest and persecute homosexuals. The refusal to consider the rights of gays and lesbians in

Zimbabwe was in stark contrast to the legal climate in South Africa. The leaders in Zimbabwe, who had been at the forefront of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas during the struggle for liberation, at a particular moment exhausted their potential for leadership and patriarchy became entrenched in all areas of political governance – this is the core aspect of what Campbell (2003: 162) describes as the "exhaustion of the patriarchal model of liberation." Anti-gay rhetoric in Zimbabwe became a component of the masculinist conception of liberation and independence. Morgan and Wieringa (2007: 11) affirm this point as they state that the general homophobia of postcolonial governments is compounded by the local patriarchal system in each country, making lesbian women doubly oppressed. Black male self-affirmation as a way of overcoming the emasculation black men experienced under colonialism can turn into its opposite and become a tool for patriarchy and continued oppression of marginalised groups such as women and homosexuals. Although evidence exists that there were numerous family forms and a high degree of tolerance for people with alternative sexual behaviour as well as examples of same sex relationships in pre-colonial Africa, the nuclear family and heterosexual relations became associated with African traditions and cultures in postcolonial Africa. Homophobia became a convenient instrument for state ideological reproduction where homosexuality came to be associated with mining compounds and colonial history.

There is little dispute that same-sex relationship existed in pre-colonial African societies and a few publications explore same-sex patterns in Africa, including Murray and Roscoe's *Boy-wives and female husbands: Studies in African homosexualities* (1998); Amaduime's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1998); and Morgan and Wieringa's *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (2005). Although same-sex relationships did occur in pre-colonial Africa, the authors of these collections conclude that it is not clear what the sexual meaning behind these relationships was, as the homosexual identities of contemporary society, in particular as practiced in urban African centres, did not exist. It is clear from these studies that a wide variety of same-sex practices and relations exists in various African contexts, both historically

and in present times. The terms homosexual, gay and lesbian are not appropriate to non-Western contexts, specifically with regard to pre-colonial same-sex practices. According to Morgan and Wieringa (2007: 281) homosexuality as it is lived today in Western countries is far removed from the life of, for example, the Lovedu rain queen in northern South Africa with her hundreds of wives, or that of an early twentieth century female-husband among the Nuer in Sudan, the Nandi in Kenya, the Igbo in Nigeria or Fon in Dahomey (present-day Benin).

In terms of the attitudes towards same-sex practices in postcolonial Africa, Murray and Roscoe (1998) and Morgan and Wieringa (2005) state that it is ironic that African leaders such as Mugabe, who are defenders of African cultures, are in effect reproducing European sexual codes as African values. The taboo on homosexuality and the resulting homophobia of African societies is based on European, not African morality, these authors conclude, as it was colonialists, and in particular missionaries who instilled homophobic attitudes in African societies. African leaders who speak out against homosexuality in African cultures often claim that it is un-African and a Western import, thus maintaining the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental to African societies and that it was introduced by Arab slave traders and European colonisers. In proclaiming African culture as heterosexual and thereby perpetuating homophobia, African leaders are in fact displaying an ignorance of African cultural traditions. The homophobia existing in most of Africa, the authors of the above mentioned publications maintain, is part of a conservative tradition that became prominent in the context of imperial expansion and the spread of Victorian ideas on sex, sexuality and same-sex relationships.

Morgan and Wieringa's (2007) extraordinary collection on the lives of African lesbians is the result of their African Women's Life Story Project – a research project which provided opportunities to train women activists from different African countries to collect personal narratives on a range of issues related to sex and secrecy. The interviews in the book include participants from South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania and Uganda. The researchers faced the challenge of getting five lesbian women each to agree to

be interviewed, not an easy task in a society where it is difficult for people to trust researchers with such sensitive information. In their study of the anthropological research on same-sex relations amongst women in pre-colonial Africa, Morgan and Wieringa found that different types of female friendships and women marriages have occurred between powerful women such as rain queens and traditional healers (called sangomas in southern Africa). Although anthropologists and ethnographers did study and document these practices, they did not understand them fully. The internalisation of intolerance and homophobia spread by missionaries has resulted in a silence around female same-sexuality that has made African same-sexuality difficult to document. This silence and fear has been internalised by most of the interviewees in the project. The silence in which most African women in same-sex relations live their lives causes their marginalisation from society. Coming out is very dangerous in African society, and could lead to hate crimes such as 'corrective' rape and even murder. Morgan and Wieringa dedicated the volume to the memory of Fanny Ann Eddy, the chair of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association (SLLAGA), who was murdered in her office on 24 September 2004, and to all the other African lesbians who have been victims of hate crimes.

The formation of the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) was one outcome of Morgan and Wieringa's research, a network which explores how present-day and historical forms of women's relations in Africa are related to global movements. In Africa, local movements and networks of self-identified lesbian women have developed in relation to global movements, creating new visions and spaces for living non-normative social and sexual practices (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 310). The women who have a connection with the global gay movements are generally the young, higher-educated, urban, self-identified lesbian women – a small section within larger groups of women who express a much wider variety of same-sex practices. Traditional women marriages were lived openly as they were fully institutionalised in the societies in which they occurred. Lesbian men and ancestral wives are just some of the practices, which effect notions of gender identification. Morgan and Wieringa (2005: 324) found that all the respondents in the project dream of becoming sexual citizens

in their own cultures. Despite having birth rights to their countries, they feel displaced because their desires and sexual practices are located outside proscribed forms of socio/sexual citizenship. The homophobia in postcolonial African states has resulted in same-sex identified women feeling alienated from the project of nation-building in their own countries.

South African film theorist Martin Botha (2008) points out that a wealth of books has been published on the subject of lesbian/gay/queer films in North American, Australian and European contexts, but not a single book has been written about the media portrayal of gays and lesbians in Third World countries. With contemporary South Africa being the exception in terms of filmmaking which addresses homosexuality, a number of significant films have emerged from the country, such as *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* (1998) by Greta Schiller, a semi-biographical documentary portrait of Cecil Williams, who was being chauffeured by Nelson Mandela on the day the future President was arrested near Maritzburg. Williams was a communist and ANC activist, a dedicated campaigner and recruiter for the ANC, and also flamboyantly gay. It is significant that on the day that Mandela was captured, the comrade in the car with him was a white gay man, whose lifestyle was known to prominent leaders like Walter Sisulu and Mandela in the ANC and South African Communist Party. Botha (2008) states that in interviews by Mark Gevisser, who did the research for the film, he was told by ANC activists that if one wants to understand why the older generation of ANC comrades are so receptive to the notion of gay equality in the constitutional debate one needs to go back and look at the role that Williams, a gay man and communist, played within the liberation movement. The history of gay life in the Western Cape coloured communities is depicted in two documentaries by Jack Lewis: *Sando to Samantha: aka the art of dikvel* (1998) and *A Normal Daughter: The life and times of Kewpie of District Six* (1997). Jack Lewis is also the founder of the Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which first took place in 1994. In 2003 he directed *Proteus*, based on a true story, about a relationship between a Dutch sailor and a Khoi convict who were both sentenced to drowning for the crime of sodomy in the 18th century Cape. Due to the severe

lack of freedom of speech and strict censorship until the end of apartheid, no homosexual characters can be found in South African films made until the 1990s. During the 1980s, gay movements such as Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LAGO), which became the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA), as well as black gay activist Simon Nkoli's Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) became part of a broad democratic movement. Melanie Chait's *Out in Africa* (1991) was the first South African film to deal with the gay and lesbian struggle in South Africa. In 2002 Botha wrote "despite the positive changes in the film industry, a new constitution which prohibits discrimination against gays and lesbians, as well as a strong gay movement in the form of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, our images of gay men and women are limited and still on the margin of the film industry. One ends up with less than ten short films, a few documentaries, less than five features with openly gay and lesbian characters and virtually no television programmes." This situation has slowly been changing over the past few years.

As has been emphasised previously in this study, the experiences of white women in South Africa are very different from those of black South African women, and this is certainly also true in the case of sexuality. A handful of South African films by female filmmakers have addressed lesbianism in a white South African context, including pioneering female director Helena Noguiera's feature film *Quest for Love* (1989) and Inger Smith's short film *Love Poem* (2005). *Love Poem* is, as the title indicates, a visual poem exploring the romantic relationship between two young white South African women. The film is stylistically dream-like and intimately depicts the closeness and sensuality between the two women. Another film of interest in this context is *The World Unseen* (2007), by Shamim Sarif, a writer and director born in the UK and of South Africa-Indian heritage. The film is based on Sarif's novel of the same title and, set in 1950s apartheid South Africa, it depicts the dangerous sensual friendship which develops between two beautiful Indian women, both marginalised by the regime.

Mozambican/South African director Helena Noguiera's *Quest for Love* stars two of the most

popular Afrikaans actresses of the 1980s, Jana Cilliers and Sandra Prinsloo. Cilliers plays Alexandra, a political journalist, and Prinsloo plays her lover, Dorothy, a marine biologist. Most of the action takes place in a fictional country bordering South Africa, Mozania – a thinly-disguised Mozambique. The film commences when Alexandra is released from prison in South Africa after being convicted with her ex-lover of plotting military intervention in Mozania. She returns to Mozania to reunite with Dorothy, but on her arrival Dorothy is absent. The past is reconstructed through flashbacks throughout the course of the narrative, linking Alexandra's memories of the events that led to her imprisonment with her current self-discovery and personal transformation, until she is finally reunited with Dorothy. The two weeks that she has to wait for Dorothy provides her with time to reflect on their relationship as well as her own political and ideological stance. Alexandra's character develops from being a somewhat naïve and idealistic activist journalist, distanced from the actual people whose lives are damaged most by the apartheid government's actions (a general criticism towards privileged white liberals), to realising how she could best help the people of Mozania as she initiates the building of a school in the local village. Apart from photographs and stylised flashbacks of violent scenes from the independence struggle, the flashbacks consist mostly of arguments between Alexandra and Dorothy regarding the values of political activism against those of grass-roots pragmatism and education. Alexandra's political activism is contrasted with Dorothy's community involvement, serving her people with her scientific knowledge and with humanitarian concern. Dorothy encapsulates this conflict between their different ideological positions when she says: "What is the use of freedom if people are dying of hunger?", revealing some of the complexities of liberation struggles and subsequent independence, in which the optimism of the struggle doctrine did not necessarily translate into improved lives of the people after freedom was gained. The film was banned in South Africa not only for its overt anti-apartheid statements, but also because of its lesbian subject matter. The sexual scenes between Dorothy and Alexandra are highly erotic and sensual, and must have been entirely out-of-bounds for the censors of the time. Botha (2002) regards *Quest for Love* as one of the highlights in the history of South African cinema, claiming that more than ten years after its release it still comes across as a powerful and

complex portrait of political and sexual themes within a contemporary South African setting.

A small number of South African films have depicted the experiences of black lesbian South African women. *Everything Must Come to Light*, directed by male filmmakers Mpumi Njinge & Paulo Alberton (2002) tells the unusual stories of three lesbian South African sangomas – traditional healers in Southern Africa who look after the health and spiritual welfare of people. After leaving their husbands, the women were visited by their male ancestral spirits who instructed them to take wives. As a result of this command they started to explore their sexuality and became intimate with other women. The documentary focuses on the relationship between the sangomas and their ancestors and the role the ancestors play in shaping the sangoma's healing powers and sexuality. A lesbian sangoma, Nkunzi Nkabine, contributed a chapter to the volume by Morgan and Wieringa (2005: 231-258) and participated in the background research for *Everything Must Come to Light*. Nkabine describes her own experience of getting a call from the ancestors to take a wife, but she also describes the negative attitudes which exist towards homosexuality amongst the general public. She contributed to the Gay and Lesbian Archives which were established in 1997 to create and document the history of same-sexuality in South Africa. She states that it had been extremely difficult to uncover the history of black lesbians until she started to focus on same-sex sangomas in 1999. Even though same-sexuality has existed amongst sangomas historically, heterosexual male sangomas who control the oral history and information passed down from generation to generation have insisted that same-sex relationships should be kept secret. Nkabine found that when pressed, the elders acknowledged that it has always existed secretly among sangomas. A few young female sangomas in their twenties started coming out from the mid-1990s in Soweto, despite harassment from the general public and criticism from their trainers and other older heterosexual sangomas. Nkabine states:

> Same-sex sangomas are powerful people at the centre of African culture. They
> therefore occupy a special position in society as they are respected and feared.
> Sangomas who are involved in same-sex relationships don't have the problem of
> being harassed by the community. Lesbian rape is a punishment and seen as

necessary by thugs in order to teach visible lesbians a lesson. However, same-sex

sangomas are not raped as people are afraid of the sangomas because of the power

that they believe sangomas have. (2005: 232)

Nkabine interviewed five female sangomas who have ancestral wives. In order to become a

sangoma, one needs to receive a calling from the ancestors, who play a critical role in the life

of a sangoma. The ancestors in southern African cultures are the holy spirits of deceased

family members who provide sangomas with the gift of healing and divination. Every

sangoma needs to find the right trainer, a process which is guided by the ancestors. As

depicted in the documentary, all the sangomas Nkabine interviewed received the instruction

from their ancestral spirit to take a wife. In order to marry, the sangoma needs to pay lobola

(bride price) to the wife's family. There would frequently be a male- or female-identified

partner in same-sex relationships amongst black lesbians in South Africa. As depicted in

Everything Must Come to Light, and confirmed by Nkabine's interviews, same-sexuality

amongst female sangomas is not uncommon in southern African cultures and largely

tolerated by the society in which the sangomas practice, except in rural areas where same-

sex relationships amongst sangomas are generally kept secret. Same-sexuality amongst

sangomas would appear to be a traditional practice, and in its occurrence in contemporary

African societies, especially in urban centres, it seems that the lines between traditional

same-sex practices and present-day homosexual identities become blurred.

In an interesting counterpoint to *Everything Must Come to Light*, female South African

filmmaker Catherine Muller produced and directed the documentary *Four Rent Boys and a

Sangoma* (2004), which follows the lives of five African men who have sex with other men for

traditional, cultural and economic reasons. Muller's documentary attempts to investigate

black male sexuality in South Africa beyond the label of 'gay' or 'homosexual'. Poverty in

townships has lead to a recent but growing phenomenon of 'rent boys' having sex for money,

and the four men Muller interviews are forthcoming and direct about the fact that the

economic situation has led them to male prostitution. One respondent states that he has

never had sex with a woman, and relates the myth that sex with a woman leads to weakness and brings bad luck, whereas as if you sleep with a man, you gain strength. It becomes clear that for some of the respondents in the documentary same-sex practices have spiritual significance. The male sangoma in the documentary believes that he receives a spiritual exchange of male energy through sleeping with men, and consults with his bones before he has sex with a man. The scenes in the film depicting the sangoma are colourful and stylised, attempting to visually express the mysticism surrounding the practices of these traditional healers. All the interviewees are remarkably articulate and very open about their dreams and desires, resulting in a fascinating portrait of gay practices amongst black South African men.

In addition to the two films discussed above which deal with same-sexuality amongst South African sangomas, a small number of South African films deal with lesbianism in modern, black, urban South Africa. Lodi Matsetela's film *BFF* (Best Friends Forever, 2008) is a fictional short depicting the relationship between two modern black South African women. The film opens with an intimate and affectionate bedroom scene between the two partners, Puleng and Diphuka, as Diphuka gets ready to go to work. Puleng smiles as she pulls out a rubber glove from under the duvet after Diphuka has left the bedroom. The compact narrative centres around Puleng's desire to invite her best friend Chabi, whom she has not seen for years, for dinner, despite Diphuka's reluctance. At the dinner Chabi feels out of place, as Puleng has changed – due to Diphuka's influence she has become a vegetarian and stopped smoking. The limits between friendships and romantic relationships become blurred as Chabi tries to kiss Puleng after Diphuka has gone to bed, with Puleng pulling away. "I'm not lesbian, I'm dating a girl," Puleng tells her friend, indicating that the close friendships between women, which are often sensual and affectionate in nature, do not necessarily conform to clear-cut and monolithic sexual identities. In the film Diphuka is clearly fulfilling the dominant role, with Puleng taking on a more submissive role which leads to her friend Chabi accusing her of letting Diphuka controlling her. According to Kheswa (in Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 199) butch-femme (masculine and feminine) roles are striking amongst black South African lesbians, but she states that these roles could also switch, a phenomenon which poses

interesting questions regarding the relationships between gender roles and sexual identities. The film is audacious in its intimate depiction of the various forms of love and affection between women, but it should be framed within the context of middle-class urban black women in South Africa. These women are not subjected to the same levels of discrimination that lesbian women in rural or lower-class environments experience, and they certainly have more freedom to express their sexuality.

Hate crimes against black lesbians, in particular 'corrective' rape, is a shockingly common occurrence in South Africa, in particular in the townships. Channel 4 News in the UK featured a story on this phenomenon on 12 March 2009, citing a report by the NGO Action Aid, backed by the South African Human Rights Commission. The head of the Human Rights Commission stated in the news story that while contemporary South Africa is celebrating the rainbow nation the country is still battling to deal with difference. Two short documentaries, *Beyond Hate Crimes* by Musa Ngubane (2008) and *Rape for Who I Am* by Lovinsa Kavuma (2005) deal with this issue. Kavuma's film tells the stories of five black lesbian women in the township Alexandra on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and opens with the statement: "This film reflects the voices of African lesbians who have been brave enough to share their experience of hate crimes." The intolerance towards lesbians and the internalised homophobic attitudes of black South African men are clearly depicted in the film, and emphasised through statements such as: "Maybe the white can be lesbians. Because this thing comes from whites, not from black people – you are just adopting it." Another male respondent states: "I don't think it's good for our culture as Africans. But culture is changing. I can tolerate that change." The women tell of their struggles to be accepted not only by their community but also by their families, as two of the women were raped, one of them by her father when she was 15 years old. A male attitude towards the rape of lesbians is shockingly revealed as a male respondent in the film states: "How can a lesbian be raped? She's a man." The women are reluctant to lay charges, as they also experience harassment from the police, and even from doctors who would report that no forcible penetration has taken place. These women not only experience abuse by the men in their community, but also by women,

such as the mothers of their girlfriends and other women who physically attack them. Even within their relationships, where love and control are often closely related, violence can occur which can lead to a cycle of abuse. The hand-held camerawork in the film gives it an immediacy which, together with the haunting and pulsing soundtrack, results in an emotionally charged documentary. One woman in the film, Zanele, is a photographer and has put together a controversial black and white photo exhibition of intimate close-ups of black lesbians. The documentary is interspersed with still photographs of the women interviewed and concludes with a pan across the exhibition. What becomes clear in the film is that despite South Africa's liberal and all-inclusive anti-discrimination constitution, public attitudes towards lesbianism are still severely discriminatory.

The documentary *Tina Machida in Zimbabwe: Gays and Lesbians*, produced and directed by Robbie Hart and Luc Cote (1999) deals with a similar theme. The documentary is part of the series *Rainmakers*, which tells the stories of young activists around the world who are making a difference to their communities. Although directed by two non-African males, the documentary is remarkable in its depiction of Tina Machida, a courageous young Zimbabwean lesbian who is fighting for the rights of gays and lesbians despite death threats and a president who calls homosexuals "worse than dogs and pigs". At 18, Tina's parents had her raped to "change her ways", but she has continued her struggle to be recognised as a full citizen of Zimbabwe deserving of human rights and tolerance. On Human Rights Day, Tina led a march proclaiming the slogans "All human rights for all" and "Out and Proud in Zimbabwe". The documentary contains footage of Mugabe's infamous speech in 1995 in which he called homosexuals an "association of sodomites and sexual perverts" who pose a threat to the moral fibre of Zimbabwean society. Denouncing homosexuality not only in Africa, but also globally, Mugabe stated: "I find it outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations like those of homosexuals, who offend both agents of the law of nature, and the morals and religious beliefs of our society, should have any advocates in our midst or even elsewhere in the world." The lesbian association that Tina belongs to attend women's meetings and campaign at church meetings

and book fairs to inform and educate people on homosexuality in a country where it is regarded as satanic and evil by the majority of the population. Tina's parents took her to a traditional healer after they found out about her sexuality, thinking and believing it is an evil spirit, but after various visits to healers and psychologists she thought they had given up. She was wrong, as they then arranged for her to be raped by a male family friend, an incident which is depicted in the film as a stylised and dramatised dream sequence. The films end with Tina addressing a women's churches council meeting, in an attempt to address the silence around sexual minorities and to ensure that the issue is placed on the agenda of churches. She ends her poignant speech with the statement: "Silence is also violence". As piercing and hard-hitting as this documentary is, it is unlikely that it was seen widely in Zimbabwe, or in Africa, at all, as it was not made specifically for African audiences being part of a series of films from all over the world, and likely seen mostly by liberal Western audiences who need no convincing as to the natural occurrence of homosexuality. More relevant for local audiences is the docu-drama *Forbidden Fruit* by Sue Maluwa Bruce, Beate Kunath, and Yvonne Zuckmantel (2000), a Zimbabwean-made film which attempted to break long-held taboos about sexual identity and lesbian love in Zimbabwe. The film looks at rural life and village politics in Zimbabwe through documenting the relationship between two women.

The filmic depictions and representations of lesbians in African cultures are important documents for change and tolerance, and despite their scarcity, the above-mentioned films are ground-breaking in their audacity of addressing one of the largest taboos within African societies.

Motherhood

It is often stated that all African women are mothers; even if they do not have their own biological children, the communal nature of African societies leads to women, and men, taking on parental roles which can also be non-biological. The emphasis on motherhood in African cultures could be regarded as problematic, as African feminist Obioma Nnaemeka

(1997a: 5) points out that motherhood has become equated with victimhood in Africa as a result of conflating motherhood as an *institution* and motherhood as an *experience*, the difference being that patriarchy constructs the institution of motherhood while women experience it. However, Nnaemeka states that African feminist theorising about motherhood has shifted in the past decade in terms of articulating the affirmative aspects of motherhood, and separating motherhood from victimhood. Thus, motherhood can also be seen as a choice and an experience, with its pain and rewards, and in the same way the abandonment of motherhood can be an act of freedom and self-determination for African women.

Female relationships are explored in film in the intimate and often complex bond between mother and daughter, a thematic choice related to the fact that female filmmakers frequently fulfil other roles as well, with the role of mother often informing their work. This relationship is depicted for example in Burkinabe director Apolline Traoré's *Sous la Clarté de la lune* (discussed below), and in the work of South African female filmmaker Zulfah Otto-Sallies, whose documentary *Through the Eyes of My Daughter* (2004), her fictional short film *Raya* (2000) and her debut feature fiction film *Don't Touch* (2006) all explore the problematics of generational difference (Otto-Sallies's films will be discussed further in the next chapter). In the documentary *Shouting Silent* (2002) female South African director Xoliswa Sithole, who lost her mother to HIV/AIDS, explores how young female AIDS orphans are coping without their mothers. Her film becomes another journey of self-discovery, as the film's opening maxim, a Shona proverb, affirms: "Know where you come from for a bird's spirit is in its nest." Zimbabwean director Tsitsi Dangarembga's feature film *Everyone's Child* (1996) deals with a similar theme, as the film explores the plight of AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe. Both films will be further discussed in the next section on health issues.

The mother/daughter relationship often involves a transference of knowledge from the old to the young, although this process does not necessarily take place only in a relationship of kin. Safi Faye's feature film *Mossane* (1996), which tells the tragic story of a beautiful young girl desired by all, was inspired by her own daughter. As depicted in *Mossane*, the

mother/daughter relationship often entails instruction about sexuality and the body from older to younger women. Namibian director and producer Bridget Pickering's short film *Red Dress* (1994) also depicts this transferral of knowledge from mother to daughter, but in this instance as a warning: A woman on her deathbed attempting to come to terms with her life retells to her daughter the story of a life dedicated to serving her husband, as she is yearning for a different life for her daughter. "A woman should not just live to give", she tells her daughter, and recounts the event of how she bought a beautiful red dress and wore it to surprise her husband, who was furious and forbade her to ever wear the dress again.

Mossane is, like Faye's earlier work, also set in the rural Serer area of Faye's own upbringing, and similar to many of her previous docu-fiction works the film focuses primarily on women, through putting the young protagonist Mossane at the centre of the narrative. Faye has said of the film: "I wanted to place the accent on the ephemeral beauty of adolescence, to sing this confusing time when the body changes and the teenager is unsure of him/herself…I wanted the most beautiful girl in the world to be African, and I sung her praises because I am a mother" (quoted in Thackway, 2003: 155). Mossane's beauty affects everyone, even her own brother and the Pangool ancestral spirits. The film depicts a sensual love-making scene between Mossane's mother Dibor and her husband Daouda, which represents Dibor to be fully in control of her own body and sexuality, as well as intimate scenes between Dibor and Mossane, who are always shot together in the same frame. Thackway (2003: 155) states that the way in which these scenes are depicted, as well as the scenes of Mossane and Dibor together, subverts the potentially objectifying male gaze. Ellerson (2004: 189) confirms this point as she states that *Mossane* projects a female subjectivity in the way the female characters are assigned agency. The close bond between mother and daughter as depicted in the film is exemplified by the fact that Faye declared that she made Mossane for herself and her daughter.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's short film *Kare Kare Zvako* (*Mother's Day*) deals with issues of motherhood and the female body in a most provocative way. The film is based on a Shona

folk tale, and "Kare Kare Zvako" is the preamble used to introduce a story, similar to "Once upon a time". The film is a fable about motherhood and hunger and is set in a rural, pre-colonial Zimbabwe. It opens with a young mother feeding live termites to her four children in a time of extreme drought. Her inability to feed her baby with her own breast milk angers her husband, and she is left with the task of feeding their four children by herself; the role of provider falling on the mother. While giving them handfuls of termites she starts to tell them a story of how the ancestors survived in an even greater drought. At this point, the film becomes a story within a story, although this is deliberately ambiguous until the end. The father returns home and tries to take the children's food for himself, but his wife tells him that a proper husband and father should provide food for his family. The father leaves and returns during the night, waking up his wife and telling her to follow him as he wants to show her something remarkable that he has found. The father leads the mother into a trap, and she is impaled by stakes he has placed in a hole. He takes her body home to make her into a stew, with the children looking on in horror. However, the mother's body refuses to be cut up and cooked by the husband, and every time he encounters her resistance, he turns to the children who start singing, imploring the mother to allow the father to cut up and cook her body. A vision of the mother as a beautiful woman repeatedly emerges, surrounded by ample food to provide for her family, and with her singing about love and marital union. In between these visions the narrative returns to the father attempting to butcher and cook the woman's body. He eventually succeeds and when he eats her, his stomach swells bigger and bigger and explodes. The mother emerges from his dust to embrace her shocked but delighted children. The camera then zooms in on the mother's face and we hear her children telling her: "Mama, mama, tell us again that story about how the famine ends."

Kare Kare Zvako won the International Short Film Competition at the Zimbabwe International Film Festival in 2005, and has since won many accolades and has been shown at numerous film festivals the world over. Audiences in Zimbabwe and elsewhere perceived it as something completely new, a film very difficult to categorise. Dangarembga attempted to create a new genre in Zimbabwean cinema with the film. The film blurs the lines between

reality and fantasy, and the grotesque scenes of the mother being impaled and the father consuming the mother's body make it surreal and fantastical. In fact, it is exactly the fantasy aspects of the film which make the grotesque scenes of murder and cannibalism palatable. The film is based on a folk tale she was told when she was eight years old, and Dangarembga has stated that she wanted to go back to myth and folktale and intentionally set the film in pre-colonial Africa, as she did not want the film to be burdened by colonial baggage. As is a common feature of African oral culture, she incorporated song and dance in the film – in addition to the songs of the mother and children, a group of dancing and singing termites occasionally appear. Music becomes a dynamic force and is more than merely incidental or supplementary to the narrative, since the children's and termites' songs in fact drive the narrative forward as the mother is repeatedly revived by the music. Dangarembga attempted to experiment with filmic structure in applying to the film the structure of Shona storytelling, in which a song is often repeated with slight variations at different parts in the narrative.

Flora Veit-Wild (2005: 132) describes the film as "of great relevance to the issue of the fragmented, mutilated female body as a battlefield for gender discourse," and it becomes clear that the fascination with the female body served as an inspiration for the film. The mother's body continuously resists appropriation by the father, and though he does eventually succeed in consuming her body, it proves fatal for him as the mother bursts through his stomach to reappear at the end of the film. The theme of cannibalism is treated in a way which certainly does not reinforce any stale stereotypes about Africa, and Dangarembga commented that: "the film indicates that the gruesome murder was taboo and in our culture such acts are seen as taboo" (quoted by Veit-Wild, 2005: 137). The film deals with the negotiation of gender relations fought over and through the woman's body; an issue highly applicable to this entire chapter, namely women's attempts to regain ownership of their bodies in all its physical, symbolic and mythical significance.

Burkinabe director Apolline Traoré's feature *Sous la Clarté de la Lune* also deals with

motherhood, and in particular the mother/daughter relationship. It is a dramatic tale of betrayal and redemption, shot digitally on a low budget. *Sous la Clarté de la Lune* is set in rural southern Burkina Faso and the story revolves around Kaya, whose baby daughter was snatched away from the hut of the midwife by the father just after she has given birth. The father, Patrick, is a French engineer who came to the village to dig a borehole and install a water pump. When Patrick flees to Europe with their child, the psychological impact of the trauma is so great that Kaya loses her ability to speak. Nine years later the water pump breaks down and Patrick comes back to repair it, bringing with him his daughter, Martine, to introduce her to Africa and the part of her heritage she was alienated from. The arrival of Patrick and Martine is foretold by Kollo, the blind diviner of the village (played by the popular Burkinabe actor Rasmane Ouedraogo). Throughout the course of the narrative Kollo's extraordinary talent for divination denotes key junctures in the film and he serves as a source of wisdom and insight to the villagers and to Kaya in particular. He tells her to embrace her ordeal with strength and at various points in the film he contemplates the nature of human destiny, justice and forgiveness.

Patrick's return sets the story in motion as Kaya 'kidnaps' the little girl and takes her into the bush in a desperate attempt to build a relationship with her estranged daughter. A journey of discovery begins between mother and daughter who get to know each other and learn ways to communicate, despite their disparate cultural backgrounds and Kaya's muteness. In the meantime Patrick has enlisted the help of some men from the village to track them down. The arguments and conflict that occur between the men during their search contrast greatly with the growing companionship between mother and daughter. Patrick eventually reveals the main reason behind his anxiety to find his daughter as soon as possible: Martine is critically ill and will die if she does not take her medicine at prescribed times. In fact, her terminal condition is the impetus behind Patrick's return to the village. Martine, having lost her medicine in the bush, dies in Kaya's arms just before Patrick finds them and the death of her daughter serves as a catharsis for Kaya to regain her speech. The men concur that Kollo is the only one who can resolve the situation and Kollo decrees that Patrick has to carry both

Kaya and the body of Martine back to the village as a sacrificial ritual symbolic of taking responsibility for his actions. If he is unable to carry them back to the village, he will be cursed until his death, Kollo tells him. The scene of Patrick carrying Kaya and the body of his daughter back to the village is depicted in slow motion, with the soundtrack featuring a song about repentance. The viewer learns through flashbacks that the village chief has accepted a bribe from Patrick to enable him to leave with the baby nine years earlier, and he is also compelled to recognise his mistake and ask for forgiveness. Indeed, the title of the film refers to the selfish, ill-conceived and concealed wrongdoings of adults, which in this case have serious repercussions on an innocent child. Kollo states that they have to wait for the villagers to decide whether they will forgive Patrick and receive Martine's body and soul within their spiritual community. If they do not agree, Kaya will go alone to her mother's village to bury her child. Just as they are about to give up, the villagers approach them and this enables reconciliation within the village and also between Patrick and Kaya.

The mother/daughter relationship is an important theme in the film not only through the relationship between Kaya and Martine, but also in the relationship between Kaya and her own mother. It becomes apparent through the course of the film's narrative that Kaya's distress at losing her daughter at birth should be understood against the backdrop of her failed relationship with her own mother. Kaya explains to Martine through gestures that her parents separated when she was young, with Kaya subsequently also being separated from her mother. In fact, she and Martine are on their way to her mother's village. This information prompts Martine, who is still unaware of Kaya's true identity, to tell Kaya that she has often asked her dad whether her mother was beautiful, and whether she looked or talked like her.

Martine gradually moves from being a spoilt, obstinate and headstrong child, who initially insists on only drinking mineral water and refuses to eat the food that Kaya prepares for her, to embracing the African part of her identity. As the bond between Martine and Kaya grows, the little girl transforms in appearance from being European to becoming African; she allows Kaya to dress her in a traditional pagne and to rub a substance into her skin to make it

appear darker. This relationship of trust and care also becomes reciprocal: when Martine gets tired, Kaya carries her, and when Kaya falls and cuts herself, it is Martine who insists that they visit a pharmacy in a nearby village to get medicine, who bandages her wound, and who ensures that she takes the prescribed medication. The interplay between tradition and modernity, and Western versus African traditional values and customs, results in points of conflict which drive the narrative forward, and these are ultimately resolved in Martine's mixed-race identity. Crucially, since there is no verbal communication between Kaya and Martine, they learn to communicate in other ways, with communication thus moving beyond verbal language. One of the most challenging issues that female African film-makers deal with is the problematics around the representation of women, the issue of how a woman acquires agency and becomes an active subject in film. The depiction of Kaya as mute, and the ways in which the mother/daughter relationship evolves, thus become important representational strategies that afford subjectivity to the female characters in the film. When Martine dies in Kaya's arms, Kaya's first words in nine years are a call to her own mother, and after Martine's funeral she leaves the village to finally go and see her. The thematic prominence of motherhood is, in fact, already visible in the film's opening, as Apolline Traoré dedicated the film 'to my own mother and all mothers'.

Women and health

HIV/AIDS

The AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has been exacerbated by the stigma around it as well as strict taboos in African societies around openly discussing sexuality and sexual relations. In many African countries there has been a very slow response to the pandemic, and a myriad of problems surrounding the implementation of infrastructures for the provision and use of anti-retrovirals. In religious contexts, in Christian and Islamic regions, contracting HIV is often regarded as a punishment and HIV positive people are reluctant to disclose their status in fear of being ostracised by their communities. Much silence, ignorance and denial exist around HIV/AIDS in large parts of Africa, and are often perpetuated by African leaders and institutions. Many Catholic Churches in Africa maintain that there should be no sex

education and that the responsibility for combating AIDS rests on the promotion of family values and abstinence. The argument of human rights workers, AIDS activists and feminists in Africa is that by treating HIV/AIDS as a medical problem to be solved by health specialists, the broader issues of the relationship between medicine, sex, sexuality, health, gender and poverty are obscured (Campbell, 2003: 170).

Examining the pandemic from the perspective of African women, Fuller (2008: 2) argues that African women have unique vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS by interlinking issues such as the patriarchal social ordering of African societies, homophobia, and biomedical, educational and financial vulnerabilities in African societies which effect women in particular. Women are vulnerable because of their lack of access to information about health care and treatment, because they are often less educated than men, because they are expected to be married and have children and act as caretakers for the aged and the ill, and because they have limited options for employment which leads to economic dependency on men who are often migratory, unfaithful, violent or dismissive (Fuller, 2008: 2).

Issues surrounding HIV/AIDS are increasingly explored in African cinema, mostly incorporating both male and female gender roles, and often focussing on the particular vulnerabilities of African women. South African director Darrell Roodt made one of the first internationally acclaimed films about the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa with his feature film *Yesterday* (2003), which tells the story of a young HIV positive Zulu woman whose only wish is to see her daughter go to school. As the first feature film made entirely in the Zulu language, Roodt clearly had a local audience in mind, although the film's nomination for an Academy Award for best foreign film in 2004 demonstrated its international appeal.

The Steps for the Future series, produced in 2001, documents experiences of HIV/AIDS in seven Southern African countries. Many female directors took part in the project and the films display the complexities around the issue of disclosure and the stigma which is attached to HIV/AIDS in most African countries. Funded wholly by European development agencies, the

project could easily have become one of 'developmentalism', where documentaries produced display more the concerns of Western donors than the preoccupations and lived experiences of the subjects themselves. However, by giving the directors freedom in choosing how they want to approach the theme of HIV/AIDS, the series resulted in insightful look into the effects of HIV/AIDS on contemporary Southern African cultures, without being overly didactic. South African director Lizo Kalipa's film *Dispel your Attitudes* follows the quest of Philiswa, an HIV positive woman and an activist to raise awareness and change attitudes around HIV/AIDS. She fearlessly discusses the subject with others in her community, helping people to overcome the taboo of talking about the disease. Sithunyiwe Gece explores the same issue in *Let's Talk About it*, a film that reflects the prevailing attitudes towards HIV/AIDS in the townships of Cape Town, where the filmmaker lives. Gece's interviews expose the pattern, transferred from generation to generation, which prevents young people from discussing sex with their parents and perpetuates the shocking misperceptions and false information that exist regarding the virus. Her enquiries even show that some churches regard the disease as a sin, and that many church leaders feel a discussion of the issue does not belong in the church. Portia Rankoane's film *A Red Ribbon Around my House* tells the story of Pinky, a flamboyant and outspoken woman, and her daughter Ntombi, whose relationship is in crisis because of their different responses to AIDS. Pinky is HIV positive and has decided to disclose her status, travelling all over the country to educate people about the virus. Her daughter Ntombi is distraught about Pinky's openness, and fears the rejection that it may bring, but Pinky is unapologetic, stating that she wants "a red ribbon around my house – right through the night." Namibian director Bridget Pickering brought together a group of HIV positive women to talk about their hopes and aspirations in her film *Dreams of a Good Life*. Mozambican director Karen Boswall explored the role of African tradition in shaping gender roles in *Dancing on the Edge*. The film follows an initiation ceremony for young Mozambican girls, in which the girls are taught by the older women how to keep their husbands satisfied. The women are aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS on male/female relationships in Africa, but the documentary displays a conflict between possible ways of HIV/AIDS prevention, and the focus on women being passive and giving sexual pleasure to their husbands when they

demand it, as is required by tradition. *Master Positive* by Namibian director Kelly Kowaliski is a wonderfully life-affirming documentary which tells the story of a HIV positive man who starts his own business making coffins for the poor from paper-mâché. The optimistic protagonist of the film calls himself a master of positive living, and proclaims that he has beaten 'Master Aids'. Also from Namibia, Carla Hoffman's *Not Afraid* is another inspirational documentary which deals with a woman, Cathy, who found out during her fourth pregnancy that she is HIV positive. Similar to the protagonists in many of the films in the Steps for the Future series, it is Cathy's positive attitude that is carrying her, and prompts her to start working as a counsellor for HIV positive people as a way of dealing with her own status. As a religious woman, she is not afraid of dying and she states at the end of the film: "I'm still a human being. I'm a woman, I'm a mother, I'm myself." Another Namibian documentary in the series, *House of Love*, directed by Cécil Moller, focuses on women in the harbour town of Walvis Bay who make a living as sex-workers dependent on the business of men from foreign shipping trawlers which stop briefly at the harbour. The women in the documentary are articulate and remarkably self-reflexive as they speak about their ordeals with foreign fishermen that often turn to brutality and abuse, and share their feelings of guilt and desperation and their desires to find true love and companionship. The threat of HIV infection hangs ominously in the background in all the women's stories. The starkly contrasting Namibian landscapes, in particular at Walvis Bay where the desert borders the ocean, are evocatively incorporated in the cinematography of the film.

Fanta Nacro has been actively involved in various projects using short films to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention in West Africa, and made a number of short fiction films and documentaries on the subject, including *Vivre Positivement* (1993), *Le Truc de Konaté* (1998), *La voix de la raison* (2001), *Une volonté de fer* (2001) and *En parler ça aide* (2002), The fictional short film *Le Truc de Konaté* deals with a woman's refusal to have sexual intercourse with her husband without a condom, and the film is an overt attempt to raise consciousness about HIV/AIDS prevention. It is a comic film, depicting the hapless Konaté searching for his "thing" – a condom tree which he saw in a vision. Nacro states that

she got the idea for the film while thinking about her role as an African woman working in the audiovisual field, and wanted to make a film which raised awareness about HIV/ADIS and contributed to reflection and prevention (quoted in an interview with Bernard Verschueren, 2002). Melissa Thackway (2003: 164) states that "[u]ltimately, in spite of its humour, the film [...] offers a serious, positive image of both women's solidarity and a crushing indictment of the weakness of men. Nacro's female characters clearly take their destinies in hand, relying on their own resources and one another, liberating themselves from the image of the passive victim." Given the stigma and silence around HIV/AIDS in Africa, Nacro's films are important educational tools directed at grassroots audiences. Her films address the issue, and in particular the ways in which it affects women, in a direct and culturally relevant way while her use of humour ensures that her films are enjoyable and accessible to audiences rather than being overly didactic.

Tsitsi Dangarembga explored the issue of AIDS orphans in African societies in the film *Everyone's Child* (1996), the first feature fiction film by a black Zimbabwean woman. The film tells the tragic story of four young siblings struggling for survival in rural Zimbabwe after losing both their parents to AIDS. The film was produced by Media for Development Trust, and, as the postscript of the film informs the viewer, it was produced in direct response to the prediction that there will be over 10 millions AIDS orphans in Africa by the end of the century. After the death of their mother, the four orphans are ostracised by their community due to the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. The family member who should be their guardian, Uncle Ozias, a businessman, also shuns them and sells the family's plough and oxen to pay off their father's debts. Much of the narrative centres on Tamari, the oldest girl, who is left to care for her younger brother and sister after the oldest brother Itai leaves for Harare in the hope of finding work. The film alternates between scenes of Tamari trying to make a living in the village in order to look after her two younger siblings and find the school fees to ensure her younger sister can continue her education, and Itai, who becomes part of a gang of homeless boys after a number of unsuccessful attempts at finding employment in the city. The rural and urban scenes are contrasted by a change in pace and soundtrack. Unable to

provide sufficiently for her younger siblings, Tamari falls victim to the womanising shopkeeper who lures her into providing him with sexual favours in return for food for her younger siblings and pretty clothes for herself. (The womanising and predatory village shopkeeper seems to a recurring character type in African cinema, and has also been employed by Sembene and Nacro – this is probably because the position of the shopkeeper in a village society as a fulfiller of desires could be said to fall without the normative roles of village life and community.) Tamari's relations with the shopkeeper exacerbate the rejection she experiences from the other villagers. When he forces her one evening to abandon the two younger children in order to accompany him to a night club, her hut catches fire in her absence and the younger brother burns to death. This tragedy finally leads to Uncle Ozias and the other villagers' realisation that it is their responsibility to help the three remaining children to rebuild their lives. Their uncle states after the death of the youngest brother: "He was also everyone's child. We were also his mother and father." The villagers come together in a combined effort to build a new house for the children, and the film ends on a hopeful and optimistic note, as Itai also returns from Harare to rejoin his two sisters. Although somewhat didactic in its straight-forward narrative, the film is a poignant and urgent plea for community care and support in African societies, in particular in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Dangarembga returned to the theme of HIV/AIDS in a recent documentary *Growing Stronger* (2006), which is about a high-profile model in Zimbabwe, Tendayi Westerhof, who decided to disclose her HIV positive status and started an AIDS awareness organisation and trust, actively campaigning to change attitudes surrounding the virus.

South African director Xoliswa Sithole's documentary *Shouting Silence* (2002) deals with a similar subject matter as Sithole, who lost her own mother to AIDS, and explores the impact of the epidemic through the testimonials of young girls who have also lost their mothers to HIV/AIDS and are struggling to raise themselves and their siblings on their own. The documentary is stylised, meditative and lyrical as Sithole interweaves her own painful memories of her mother with the life stories of the girls she encounters. The film opens with a highly emotional scene as Sithole visits her mother's grave, something she always does

before embarking on a new project, and directly addresses her mother, with whom she had, as she states, a very 'cantankerous' relationship at times. Her mother only told her a month before her death that she had AIDS, and Sithole relates how only seven people attended her mother's funeral due to the stigma attached to the disease. Sithole embarks on an emotionally charged journey as she meets a young homeless girl in a squatter camp outside Johannesburg who gets by on the kindness of strangers, and a group of young siblings in rural Kwazulu-Natal who live with their grandparents in desperate poverty after the death of their parents. This is indicative of a new style of family consisting of the very old and the very young, families without breadwinners, which is a consequence of the AIDS pandemic. The two young girls are holding the family together, acting as parents to their young brothers and sisters. At the end of Sithole's nine-month journey, the film concludes with her re-visiting her mother's grave and stating that her experiences have brought her closer to her mother and more at peace with her death. Similarly to *Everyone's Child*, the documentary has a postscript which informs the viewer that 12.1 million African children have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS (the prediction made in *Everyone's Child*, which was made six years earlier, thus proving correct), and predicts that by 2010 two million South African children will be orphans. Sithole's documentary beautifully explores the importance of the mother/daughter relationship and the tragedy when this relationship is untimely severed, but it goes no further to explore the relationship between gender, race and class in the context of the South African HIV/ADIS pandemic. Although the film avoids the didacticism of *Everyone's Child*, it results in a personal journey which is rather insufficiently linked to broader societal issues.

Female circumcision

The well-known Ivorian actress Naky Sy Savane, who has acted in many francophone West African films, amongst others in Fanta Nacro's *La Nuit de la Vérité*, states of female circumcision:

> the fight against excision, we cannot talk about it, we must each fight in our own way, and as best we can. For many years, I have been fighting against this practice for my daughter, because she risks being excised. [...] The fact is that I fight each year for

my daughter because it is a continuous battle. You are vulnerable to this practice

right up until marriage. However, most people are not ready to listen to this

opposition, it is still part of our tradition. I think the best solution is that each woman

in her own work, in her own society, fights to protect her daughter. (Ellerson, 2000:

293)

The cultural issues surrounding female circumcision are particularly complex and

contentious, with African theorists and feminists often being critical of the approach of

Western feminists to the subject, who have taken it up as a major cause of feminist struggle

in a way that resembles the earlier attempts of Western feminism to universalise

womanhood. This approach has often reinforced the conception that Western women are

much more 'liberated' than African women, and that African women need the assistance of

their Western 'sisters' to overcome this form of oppression. Patriarchy definitely contributes

to the perpetuation of genital mutilation, since, in cultures where this is still practised widely, a

man would often not consider marital relations with a woman who has not undergone the

ritual. However, a simplistic approach to the subject as another example of male domination

over women becomes problematic when one considers the fact that it is also African women

who sustain the tradition, since the operations are usually carried out by older women. The

issue of older women maintaining traditions which are oppressive to women, as well as the

issue of women-on-women violence is a phenomenon which needs much deeper exploration

by cultural theorists. Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998: 10) state that it is difficult to

understand why women sometimes collude in their oppression and are even complicit in the

oppression of other women, beyond the fact that many are politically or economically unable

to resist. African feminist Obioma Nnaemeka (1997a: 19) writes of the "pain and betrayal of

woman-on-woman abuse" and states that the oppression of women is not simply a

masculinist flaw as some feminist analyses claim but that it also entails woman-on-woman

violence that is often the outcome of institutionalised, hierarchical female spaces that make

women victims and collaborators in patriarchal violence. The older African women who carry

out and contribute to maintaining the tradition of female circumcision are often tied to this

position out of economic need and a reluquish the societal status that the position brings, as they simply have no access to other roles to replace their role as circumciser. Societal violence should indeed not be regarded as solely patriarchal, and education is proposed as the key to resist and avert exploitation. A plethora of films, mostly by filmmakers from outside of Africa, have addressed the issue through films intended primarily to raise awareness about the issue, however, it is the films made by African filmmakers on the issue which are the main focus of this study.

Even the terminology used to describe the practice of female circumcision indicates the complexity around the subject. Umbrella terms used for the various forms and types of female circumcision are: female excision, female genital mutilation, female genital cutting, female genital surgeries, female genital operations and even female genital torture. The term female circumcision has been criticised because of the fact that it equates the practices performed on women with the much less invasive and severe practice of male circumcision. The World Health Organisation defines female genital mutilation as a surgical procedure "involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons" (http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/index.html). The four main types of female circumcision, as described in a report by Minority Rights Group International (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, 1996: 7) are: circumcision, which involves the cutting of the hood of the clitoris; excision, meaning the cutting of the clitoris and of all or part of the labia minora; infibulation, which entails the cutting of the clitoris, labia minora, and parts or the whole of the labia majora; and intermediate mutilation, which involves the removal of the clitoris and some parts of the labia minora or the whole of it. The practices and methods used are culturally specific and vary across different regions of the continent. The statistics given of women who have been subjected to some form of female circumcision also vary greatly according to how and by whom the statistics were obtained, but all researchers on the subject agree that the practice affects the lives of millions of African women and are still widely performed in West Africa, North Africa (in particular in Egypt), the horn of Africa, and some parts of East Africa.

This section is concerned with how audio-visual works, in particular those produced by African women, deal with the subject, and rather than opting for a specific term to use, I will generally adopt the terms that these female film practitioners choose to use.

The first major female African voice to emerge regarding circumcision was that of Senegalese sociologist Awa Thiam, who published *Black Sisters, Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* in 1978. Thiam dispels the myth that the practice of excision originated with Islam and emphasises that there is no allusion to this in the Koran, which can be verified by referring to the Arabic text or to the translations into different foreign languages (1978: 58). She points out that, at the time of the prophet, excision was already a current practice which was neither forbidden nor advocated by him. According to Thiam, infibulation constitutes the most eloquent expression of the control exercised by the phallocratic system over female sexuality. Her book contains interviews with various African women, some who are outraged by the practice, some who want to stop it and some who support it. From some interviews she gained the knowledge that women have a manifest desire to absolve their elders on the grounds of their ignorance of scientific information about practices such as clitoridectomy, but "[t]his is to underestimate them" she states (1978: 68). The motive for the practice most frequently evoked was the control and influence it has on the sexual life of girls, based on a notion, she maintains, that a woman must be made solely into an instrument of reproduction. What should not be underestimated, Thiam states, is that excision and circumcision in many African countries is a purification ceremony, a rite of passage and a coming of age for the young, male and female, of African societies such as the Dogon in Mali. Excision, where the clitoris is removed, is viewed as the purification of the feminine element, whereas the primary function of infibulation is to curb the sexuality of women. Infibulation, which is the most drastic type of female genital mutilation, is intended to make the girl into a desirable bride, and to ensure that she will be chaste and virginal until marriage and faithful after marriage. Infibulation is, furthermore, associated with beauty, fertility and health.

As Thiam points out, female circumcision operations can also form part of initiation ceremonies and an entry intro adulthood and integration into the community, and critiques of the practice should not lose sight of this or underestimate the cultural value of these practices. James (2005: 91) describes how Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first postcolonial leader, regarded Gikuyu circumcision for girls and boys as a critical aspect of sacred rites of passage. It is regarded as a ritual embedded in a series of activities that symbolises the rebirth of a child as part of the entire tribe which culminates in the acceptance of the child as an adult member of the society. Kenyatta argued that the tradition was critical to the identity of the Gikuyu and ultimately to the survival of the society. Most communities who practise clitoridectomy in the context of puberty rites also practice male circumcision (James, 2005: 91). Excising the clitoris is seen as removing the male principle from females, whereas male circumcision is regarded as removing the female principle from males. Elders deem these rites necessary to establish gender identity and induct the youth into adulthood.

Nigerian feminist scholar Obioma Nnaemeka is one of the strongest female African voices on female genital mutilation to emerge in contemporary critical theory. As an African feminist, Nnaemeka's work often positions itself in opposition to certain tenets of Western feminism, and her work on female genital mutilation critiques the ways in which Western feminists have dealt with the issue. In the introduction to the collection of writings *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge* (2005), edited by Nnaemeka, she states that the contributors to the volume engage from '"the other side" the hot-button issue of female circumcision' (2005b: 3), with 'female circumcision' Nnaemeka's preferred term, used throughout the volume. Nnaemeka's purpose with the collection, with all authors being African and mostly female, is to engage with the issue of female circumcision and in the process to expose and assess the long lineage of imperialist and colonial discourses on the subject. She maintains that there is a relationship between knowledge, politics and history – the politics of knowledge and the history of gender, race and class in shaping imperialism. Since racism, ethnocentrism and ignorance about other cultures often colour feminist and human rights struggles, Nnaemeka maintains that the feminist-led insurgency against female circumcision in Africa has more to

do with what is happening to Western feminists and to their countries and less to do with the African women themselves, resulting in objectifying and inferiorising African women. Nnaemeka's volume ultimately creates a prominent space for Africans to participate in the debates as active agents and producers of knowledge. Women from outside of Africa who write about female circumcision and make films about the subject, are often mimicking the imperial arrogance of white explorers, imperialist and colonisers, and it is the complex and multi-layered hierarchy on which the imperialist project rests which is exposed and assessed in the volume. In its interrogation of foreign and Western modus operandi and interventions in the Third World, the volume shows how the resistance that these projects from the outside often generates, can impede development work and undermine true collaboration and partnership. Nnaemeka (2005c: 29) states that the contested terrain of female circumcision is not a disagreement about the urgent need to put an end to a harmful practice: it is against the strategies and methods, and in particular their imperialistic underpinnings, used to bring about this desired goal. The resistance of African women is not against the campaigns to end the practice, but against their dehumanisation and the lack of respect and dignity shown to women in the process. Ultimately the debate around female circumcision becomes part of constructing the African woman as 'Other'. Vicky Kirby (2005: 81) states in her contribution to Nnaemeka's volume that it is the complicity of ethnocentrism and phallogocentrism in the production of the abject female body that is at the centre of debates about female circumcision.

In a volume by Western writers attempting to create transnational feminist bonds, *Genital Cutting and Transnational Sisterhood*, editors James and Robertson (2005: 5) state that popular Western perceptions reduce Africa and African women in three distinct ways – the reduction of Africa's 54 countries and hundreds of cultures into an uncivilised, "traditional" place outside of history; the reduction of Africans and African women in particular, to the status of their genitals, to being malicious torturers or hapless victims; and finally, uniform descriptions reduce all cutting of female genitals to the most severe practice of infibulation. The cumulative effect of these reductions is that all African women are represented as having

been infibulated due to irrational adherence to tradition and/or ignorance. The exaggeration, overgeneralisation, stereotyping, inaccuracy, voyeurism, or misplaced militancy of the West, and the US media in particular, has led to African women being seen as victims of sensationalised female genital mutilation in a manner that ignores historical context, contemporary experiences and the agency of African women themselves, James and Robertson claim (2005: 5). The voyeurism from outside which has become part of the militancy of the West, in particular Western feminists, fighting against the practice on behalf of their African counterparts, has lead to African women losing agency. The positions of the West range from cultural relativism to a militant stance which would, for example, propose the termination of aid to countries which still adhere to the practice. The approach proposed by James and Robertson is that the practice should be contextualised rather than addressed as isolated phenomena. The militant and relativistic approaches have sometimes demonised and victimised African women in a way that has been detrimental to attempts to construct the bonds of a transnational sisterhood. Challenging Western perceptions and misrepresentations around the issue requires careful examination of overgeneralisations. One critical and frequent area which should be address is that of terminology, which, as stated above, is loaded with theoretical and political implications.

A plethora of films, mostly documentaries, have dealt with issues surrounding female circumcision, though they have mostly been directed by non-Africans. As with the scholarship and activism around this issue, this is problematic as it ignores the voices of African women who are directly affected by these practices. Relatively few female African directors have made films addressing female genital mutilation, indicative perhaps of the reluctance of African women to take up subject matters in their films which fulfil outside expectations of the kind of themes female African directors should address. Fanta Nacro, for example, has stated in an interview with Bernard Verschueren (2000) that she has received numerous invitations to make documentaries on the subject, but that she wants to make her own decisions in how she wants to partake in the struggle for gender equality and which subjects she wants to tackle. Female African directors are also aware of the dangers of voyeurism

and sensationalism which such films could be subjected to, as well as the ethical implications in making films on this subject. Two important francophone West African fiction feature films, directed by male filmmakers, have been made on the subject: Malian director Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *Finzan* (1989) and Sembene's *Moolaadé* (2004) deal with the subject in much more complexity and depth, while both these films condemn the practice through an elaborate fictional narrative negotiation with agency from an exclusively African point of view.

One of the prime examples of a flawed and problematic Western-made film on the subject is Alice Walker and Pratima Parmar's film *Warrior Marks* (1993), which has been praised and criticised in equal measure. The film is a poetic and political deliberation of female genital mutilation constructed through interviews with women from Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, the US and Britain who have been affected by genital mutilation, intercut with Walker's own personal reflections on the subject (www.wmm.com). James (in James and Robertson, 2005: 88) states that Walker interviewed the circumcisers in a manner that fails to articulate or even recognise that such practices have provided women with opportunities to attain status, respect and income in societies where there are often very few avenues available to women to attain these. James further claims that the film is marred by a not-very-subtle form of cultural imperialism, which is disappointing given Walker's womanist writings which are typically characterised by sophisticated analyses of concepts of multiple oppressions (2005: 92). Nnaemeka (2005c: 36) states that Walker and Parmar came in search of Africa, and had their documentary already made in an ideological sense before they even set foot on African soil. African women see and live their lives in ways that are much more complex than the obsessive one-dimensional and one-issue-oriented depictions that appear in books and films about female circumcision, states Nnaemeka (2005c: 36). Brière (2005: 170) states in her criticism of *Warrior Marks* that Walker's viewers are given a simplistic key to understanding Africa as it is implicitly suggested in the film that excision is the only tool we need for understanding poverty, underdevelopment, postcolonial dictators, neo-colonial dependency, disease, and so on. The ways in which Walker inscribes herself in the film leads to narrative and visual strategies that mute the voices of the women that she interviews. While they start

out as speaking subjects in the film, they are continually interrupted either by Walker's voice-over, shots of Walker herself, or by sequences of an African American dancer. African women are silenced and relegated to the role of 'native informant' (Brière, 2005: 171). In the end the film constructs images of incomplete African women in impoverished situations whose experience becomes secondary under the Western gaze.

A documentary made by an African woman which engages with the issue of female genital mutilation in a much more successful and complex way is Togolese director Anne-Laure Folly's *Femmes aux Yeux Ouverts* (Women with Open Eyes, 1994). In contrast to Walker's film, Folly provides in her film a forum where women speak for themselves and address the camera directly. Folly focuses on three categories of women: activists, excisers and the women who are victims of tradition, but African women are not denied the process of self-definition. The film was intended for African audiences, and has been screened to enthusiastic female audiences across West Africa, according to Brière (2005: 166). Folly's film does not focus on a single issue, but on various issues affecting African women since the film is divided into different titled sections including: female circumcision, forced marriage, AIDS, the struggle, survival, the economy, and politics, thus giving a greater sense of balance and a recognition that the emancipation of African women is tied to a myriad of interconnected issues. In Folly's film women are given the opportunity to define themselves, and they occupy the entire visual space and speak for themselves in the absence of an authoritative voice-over. On the subject of female circumcision, the women talk about the problems inherent in sex being a taboo subject, and the necessity of putting an end to the taboo of silence. One female subject states: "Why can't a woman control her own body?", and interestingly, the women fighting against the practice frame it in relation to health issues as opposed to women's rights issues, as they are aware of the necessity of taking the social environment into account. *Women with Open Eyes* depicts women as organising at a grassroots level though positioning themselves as what Brière (2005: 172) terms 'natural feminists'. The variety of powerful female images in this film provides a much fuller spectrum of African womanhood than in films such as *Warrior Marks*.

The biggest problem with regard to representing female circumcision on screen seems to be the problem of who is speaking to whom. Critical issues are: Who are creating the images, what information do they have, what is their agenda, their intentions and their intended audience? This can be a problem even for African women making films on the subject, as they could be encouraged by outside donors to take on the subject in their work, and their films run the risk of perpetuating exoticised images of the victimised African woman when they are seen outside of Africa. Nnaemeka (2005c: 37) maintains that tradition should not be seen as a reified past, but as a dynamic present into which the past is projected and to which traditions are linked. She claims that much of the credit for what has been achieved against the practice must go to African women, and men, and Africa-based NGOs that actually do the work. Africa-based NGO's which campaign against female circumcision do so mostly as part of an overall campaign for and against other myriad issues (Nnaemeka, 2005c: 40-41). African women do not lack agency, and film can be a way in which their agency is affirmed and demonstrated.

Conclusion

With the historical exoticisation and eroticisation of the female body in the colonial imaginary, it remains crucial for African women to subvert the Western and patriarchal gaze which continues to objectify the female African body. The quest for regaining ownership of the female body has been taken on by a number of West and Southern African filmmakers on different levels, as the discussions in this chapter prove. Films are being made by women which celebrate the black female body in order to reinstate a confidence in women to regard their bodies as beautiful, through countering historical perspectives which focused on the female African body as being 'anomalous'. Films dealing with female sexuality and desire often do so from an individualist perspective, such as Boni-Claverie's *Pour la Nuit*. As the section on lesbianism argued, same-sex relationships are not un-African, despite the public statements of a number of African presidents, and a handful of women have addressed this topic in their films. When considering these representations on female sexuality and desire,

Gwendolyn Mikell's definition of African feminism being "distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal and concerned with 'bread, butter and power' issues" (1997: 4), as outlined in chapter 1, seems too limiting as it does not allow for alternative visions of African womanhood to be explored. It would appear as if this definition of African feminism needs to be expanded to allow for alternative visions of African womanhood to be accepted as part of a plural perspective of female African identity. The films dealing with motherhood depicts this experience as affirmative, though complex, with a transference of knowledge from mother to daughter often being an important part of the experience. These depictions also emphasise the strength that women could inhabit in times of adversity, as in the symbolic tale of Dangarembga's *Kare Kare Zvako*. The activist and awareness-raising dimensions of film are particularly utilised in films dealing with female health, including issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation.

There are difficulties inherent in the process of dealing with the female African body in film, as the expectations imposed on female directors to tackle 'body' issues such as female genital mutilation, domestic abuse and polygamy in their work, could lead to them unknowingly contributing to the objectification of their own bodies. These expectations are often enforced from the outside, through for example donor funding or Western feminist movements, and some filmmakers reject these pressures. For female African filmmakers the process of subverting the male and Western gaze and reclaiming their subjectivity remains a challenge, as they strive to create ways in which the female body could be depicted on screen in an affirmative, multi-dimensional and complex fashion.

As shown in the examples of films in this chapter, female African filmmakers have found innovative ways, thematically and stylistically, of resisting objectification and putting emancipated and self-aware female subjects at the centre of their films. Female African filmmakers are (re)claiming their agency and subjectivity in creating and representing their own images of themselves. They are creating important representations aimed at enabling African women to own their bodies.

Chapter 5: Performing Female Identities through Film

Introduction

Sub-Saharan African filmmaking has since its inception in the 1960s been used as a tool in the process of negotiating African identity. The violent confrontation with the Other – the oppressive systems of colonisation, imperialism and apartheid – have made the process of negotiating and defining identity imperative for postcolonial Africa, including post-apartheid South Africa. This process has become even more critical and complex under the conditions of continuing cultural and economic imperialism imposed on Africa by the West, unequal globalisation, and questions of the place and positioning of modern Africa within the contemporary world. Negotiating identity and delineating subjectivity is a collective as well as individual or personal experience, since the concept of identity subsumes various elements such as culture, nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. The intersection of these elements in forging an individual and social identity in modern Africa means that identity is always layered, multiple, fragmented, hybrid and even contradictory. However, the conflicts which often ensue from the internal or external contradictions and confrontations when defining and interrogating one's identity are often a productive force which can lead to growth and maturation, of an individual and a society. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996: 4) describes identities as "never unified, [but rather] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicisation, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation."

Roy Armes (2006) states that the question of African cultural identity has been and remains a major concern in African filmmaking. Armes uses Stuart Hall's article "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" (1996) as an analytical framework for examining the construction of cultural identity in African film. Within this framework, identity should not be seen as an already accomplished historical fact which new cinematic discourses then represent, but should instead be viewed as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process and

always constituted within, and not outside of representation. "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past," states Hall (quoted by Armes, 2006: 111). When viewed as an instrument in mediating identity, filmmaking thus becomes a means of self-definition, which is closely connected to self-determination. Defining and asserting one's own identity is a way towards emancipation, and the representation of women in African film, in particular in films by female directors, confirms this notion. Olivier Barlet (1996: 106) asserts this when he states: "It is by opening up the cracks in their identity, the fissures they sense within, the contradictions between the essential values of their origins and the possible perversion of those values which tradition forces upon them, that women themselves advance, and also bring about social progress."

This chapter will look at how African women produce and "perform" different identities through film and otherwise, in the sense that the concept of performance has been used by theorist Judith Butler, in particular in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990). For Butler performativity is "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993: 2). Butler uses the term in her analysis of gender development and applies the concept to place emphasis on the ways in which identity is brought to life through discourse, with film being one such discourse. Butler sees gender as an act that has been learned, rehearsed and is performed, much like a script, and we, as the actors make this script a reality over and over again by performing these actions. "For Butler, the distinction between the personal and the political or between private and public is itself a fiction designed to support an oppressive status quo: our most personal acts are, in fact, continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies" (Felluga, 2006). Butler sees gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does. As described in chapter 1, I am using Butler's theories here as an example of where and how it could be useful for African feminism to engage with Western feminism, and how certain Western feminist frameworks can usefully be applied to a discussion of African texts. This study attempts to resist the setting up a binary between so-called African versus

Western thought, and asserts that Africa is part of the transnational, globalised world. African feminism should also be seen as an evolving and changing mode of thought as the roles and positions of women change in contemporary Africa.

In this thesis, the concept of performativity is applied on different levels – there is the performance itself, for example in how gender roles are learned and performed, and there is the representation of performance as it occurs in film. Both these layers can be seen to interact in the representation of African women by female filmmakers, with the potential to lead to new identities. These created and performed identities are always changing, fluid, multiple and hybrid, can be collective or singular, and most often are both. Collective female identity is important in an African context, as is clear from many of the films included in this study, but at times African women might also prefer a focus on an individual identity, for example women who function outside of the village community or are part of the African diaspora. The question of individual as opposed to communal identity is crucial in an African context, since African cultures are often described as more communal in nature, as opposed to the emphasis placed in Western cultures on the importance of individual identity. However, what becomes clear when viewing female representation in African film is that individual and communal identity always intersect, and furthermore, there is a danger in overemphasising the communal nature of African culture, especially in the case of women since this can lead to stifling attempts to gain female emancipation. The emphasis placed on the role of the African woman in relation to her various community ties (e.g. mother, wife, daughter), can in some cases even reinforce the oppression of women, for example through justifying polygamy because of the benefits of companionship it brings to women. Thus it becomes necessary for women to explore alternative visions which sometimes entails an emphasis on individual emancipation and expression.

In many African films female characters are presented as multifaceted and even flawed characters who respond individually to their surroundings and circumstances. The importance of societal relationships in establishing an identity remains important, however,

since our identities are always partly made up of our interactions with others and how they view us. Thus, female filmmakers often explore relationships in their work, which includes male/female relationships – in particular themes such as marriage, divorce, polygamy, domestic violence, rape, widowhood and forced marriage – as well as female/female relationships which could focus on the interaction between wives in a polygamous marriage, the friendships or sisterhoods that exist between women, as well as mother/daughter relationships. Burkinabe director Fanta Nacro discerningly explores male/female relationships in her short films *Puk Nini* (1996), *Le Truc de Konate* (1998) and *A Close-up on Bintou* (2001), employing humour to comment on traditional gender roles which keep women trapped in oppressive marital relationships, and to present her suggestions for possible modifications of these roles. A closer analysis study of *A Close-up on Bintou* follows later in this chapter.

According to Armes (2006: 111) there has been a dominant and continuous strand over the past 40 years of social realist African films that accepts identity as a given and is based on a sense of a common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. It could be argued that the social realist tradition of African cinema, broadly speaking, has not experimented extensively with style and form. However, even within the social realist genre of African film, African identity has never been treated unproblematically by filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene and Safi Faye, who have always paid close attention to postcolonial Africa's conflicting dualities such as the rural versus the urban, tradition versus modernity, and the political or economic elite versus the marginalised and the dispossessed. Many African filmmakers almost inevitably depict identities as multiple and complex in their films, as this is necessitated by contemporary experiences such as urban migration, emigration, and exile. Certain strands of Francophone West African filmmaking are increasingly dealing thematically with diasporic relations, with an emphasis on individual experiences and desires which could often lead to multiple and even conflicting subject positionings. In South Africa the post-apartheid era has necessitated a re-evaluation of previously imposed categories of identity, a process which is ongoing and continuous in filmmaking too. Female African identity

in contemporary African cinema is often depicted in film as multiple and hybrid, as women fulfil a varied and diverse range of roles in African societies and with concepts of race, class and gender being more complexly intertwined than in capitalist Western societies. Female identity in African filmmaking is depicted as being negotiated and performed on various levels.

This chapter will explore the social, cultural and religious identities, affiliations and associations between African women as depicted through film, and will also focus on the importance of female bonding, solidarity and collectivity as part of female emancipation. This discussion of identity negotiation in the films of female directors will attempt to show how this process is imperative in defining postcolonial (and post-apartheid) African societies, but also how this process can take place from a communal *and* individual perspective. The interconnectedness of race, class and gender positioning in identity formation is regarded as crucial, particularly in the work of female directors.

Racial identities

Race and ethnicity are contentious notions in South Africa, due to the country's history of enforced racial classification and segregation. South African society was veraciously and fully 'racialised', in the sense that the term is used by Appiah (1992), creating a society characterised by racism and racial discrimination – one of the destructive legacies of South Africa's past which has to be dealt with in the post-apartheid era. The two broadest racial categories created under apartheid were those of 'white' and 'non-white', with 'non-white' sometimes used interchangeably with 'black', and constituted black Africans, Asians as well as people of mixed-race origin. The category of 'black' attempted but failed to mask the many divergent ethnicities that make up the black South African population, and cannot constitute a unified category. However, these categories have all but disappeared in the new South Africa, and are often emphasised and reinforced through continuing white economic dominance, as well as through the consequences of affirmative action and black empowerment. White Afrikaners constitute a particularly problematic category in the new

South Africa, because, although European by origin, members of this group of people increasingly define themselves as 'white African', and do not hold citizenship of any European country. English-speaking white South Africans are also part of this melting pot, and with black South Africans, the Asian and European diaspora and people of mixed-race origin, many diverse groups of people have South African citizenship and form part of the nation of South Africa. Intertwined with the issue of race is that of class, where class differences are still to a large degree demarcated along racial lines, but also with modifications taking place in the economic disenfranchisement of some sectors of the white population, and a growing upcoming black middleclass.

The post-apartheid South African milieu is inspiring a multiplicity of filmmaking practices that challenge in particular the categories of racial identity imposed under apartheid. The previous emphasis on race has often curtailed or suppressed gender issues, but the new South Africa is allowing a space for other identity issues, including those of gender, to be explored (2003: 5). Although post-apartheid film is opening up a space for the exploration of the diversity of South African identities, racial identity remains important, as the brutal legacy of apartheid's racial divisions continues to inform filmmakers in the new South Africa. 'Coloured' (mixed-race) identity is interrogated in a number of South African films, since this is a very complex ethnic and racial category. The place of 'coloured' people in the old and the new South Africa is particularly problematic because they have always inhabited an in-between space – being 'too black' during apartheid to be allowed access to privileged white spheres, and 'too white' in the new South Africa to benefit from affirmative action policies and adjustments to power structures to the same extent as black South Africans. Being 'coloured' in the new South Africa is explored by a number of female filmmakers, not least in Kali van der Merwe's documentary *Brown* (2004). The documentary traces the personal journey of a female singer, Ernestine (Ernie) Deane, who calls herself 'brown', as she attempts to recover her family's history in order to reclaim a space for herself and her unborn child. Ernie's heritage is mixed, she is part Zulu, Khoi and Dutch, and her partner is part Irish and German. In an attempt to explore this diverse ethnic and racial identity and heritage, Ernie embarks on an enquiry into

her own background. In the 1960s under the infamous Group Areas Act, her grandparents were evicted from their farm in Constantia in Cape Town and relocated to the urban suburb of Grassy Park. More than 10,000 people were forcibly removed from the Constantia area, their houses were demolished but in many cases nothing was done with the land. The move from a rural to urban environment made them feel like trapped animals, and her grandfather continues to yearn for his lost land which remains unused. Under post-apartheid repatriation, those who were evicted are entitled to get their land back, but ironically most people cannot afford to build houses in and move back to what is today one of the most exclusive suburbs of Cape Town. Ernie revisits the farm with her family, including her grandparents, and the visit unleashes the suppressed emotion of years of marginalisation and loss. Ernie's music becomes an integral part of the narrative, and her journey of exploration entails talking to family members and old friends, visiting places where she grew up, and looking through old photographs. By exploring her past and her present, the search carries Ernie from emotional remembrance to musical celebration, culminating in the song 'Brown', with which the documentary concludes. *Brown* depicts poignantly how racial identity is examined and performed by a young coloured South African woman in the new South Africa, with Ernie's female identity and being an expectant mother being important parts of her identity.

The exploration of mixed-race identity also informs the work of West African female filmmakers. French/Ivorian filmmaker Isabelle Boni-Claverie, who lives and works in Paris and is of mixed-race heritage, explores individual female identity in her short film *Pour la Nuit*; a film which, through its intimate portrayal of female sexuality and personal choice, is quite atypical as an 'African film'. Boni-Claverie said in a personal interview conducted at FESPACO 2005, where the film was screened in the competition for short films, that her chosen subject matters are very close to her own individual desires and experiences. The main female character in *Pour La Nuit* is of mixed-race heritage, and Boni-Claverie explained this decision as brought about by the fact that she was not permitted to shoot the film in Abidjan due to the political situation and thus set it in Marseille. Her own positioning as part of the African diaspora is certainly embedded in the style and subject matter of the film. As

discussed in the analysis of the film in chapter 4, the focus on individual female longing and desire, and the intimate camerawork and framing contribute to the film's feel of a personal journey which incorporates how racial and female identity is performed by a mixed-race woman from the African diaspora. Burkinabe director Apolline Traoré also explores mixed-race identity in her feature film *Sous la Clarté de la Lune* (2004), which is discussed in detail in chapter 4. The film exposes the complexity of mediating contemporary African identity, a process which has to regard modernity as unavoidably and irreversibly linked to traditional Africa. Welsh/Nigerian filmmaker Branwen Okpako, who lives and works in Germany, presented her feature film *Valley of the Innocent* (2003) at the 2005 FESPACO; a film set in Germany, and which, like the films mentioned above, tells the story of a woman of mixed-race looking for her origins. Having grown up in an orphanage, the adult Eva longs to find her real father, who is black, and starts her journey of discovery through searching for information in the archives of East Germany. This uncovers a convoluted plot to hide her birth and protect the family name - secrets which metaphorically mirror Germany's suppressed history and a story which was undoubtedly inspired by Okpako's own hybrid, mixed-race identity. As becomes clear from these examples, racial identity continues to inform female filmmaking in contemporary African cinema, and is treated as intertwined and intersecting with other identity markers such as gender and class. Racial identity is not regarded as a static set category, but as a fluid and adaptable part of one's identity which could be performed in different ways.

From farmers to politicians: Leadership and emancipation

As discussed in chapter 3, the optimism that existed during African countries' liberation struggles, which for women included the hope that life after independence would result in fuller gender equality and increased opportunities for female emancipation, did not fully deliver in the postcolonial era. Laray Denzer (2005: 217) analyses this issue as follows: "When it came time for the distribution of rewards for loyalty, sacrifice and hard work, however, women found their male colleagues surprisingly obdurate and chauvinistic." The patriarchal structures of traditional African societies were reinforced by the constraints of

patriarchal colonial policies with the result that women's indigenous and grassroots political institutions were rapidly stripped of their former authority and status after independence. Male African political leaders adopted policies which accelerated this decline, but these male leaders did not succeed in their attempts to erase women's influence because strong-minded and independent women continued fighting against corruption and chauvinism and gradually started to win elections and gain appointments to high office. The number of African women in parliaments and governments serves as proof of the resoluteness and determination of these women.

Black South African women have played a dominant role in the popular democratic movement in South Africa, while building a culture of resistance that kept black communities going by sustaining their political identity through an emphasis on awareness and education (McQuiston, 1997: 193). Commenting on the research he carried out in South Africa for his film *Waati* (1995), Malian director Souleymane Cissé states (quoted in Thackway, 2003: 174): "Everywhere I went, I gathered unanimous accounts that said that the real resistance in this country came mainly from the women. Moreover, the Afrikaners feared black women more than they did the men." These forms of resistance did not, however, only come from black South African women in positions of political or social power, for example women affiliated with political organisations such as the ANC, but also came from black women who were not necessarily politically active or affiliated. One example of the 'smaller', less visible forms of resistance, is the image of the 'shebeen queen'; black women who refused to become nannies and domestic workers for white households, and who engineered economic independence for themselves by illegally brewing beer and selling liquor in makeshift townships bars. Johan Blignaut depicted such a shebeen queen in his film *Mamza* (1985), the first film to address the realities of the coloured communities in South Africa.

Community projects and alternative media played an important role in the fight against apartheid, and this critical role continues today, with, for example Mediaworks (formed out of the Community Arts Project in Cape Town), which is dedicated to the long-term process of

democratising the media by establishing independent projects in marginalised (rural and peri-urban) communities. Mediaworks also operates the Women's Project, which runs courses on gender awareness in relation to the media and operates a Media Watch Group which addresses issues of women's representation in the media and women's lack of access to channels of communication. The importance and necessity of alternative media is in ensuring that a democratic future for South Africa consists of spaces in which a diversity of voices can be heard.

Women's collective action remains important socially and politically. Aili Mari Tripp (2005: 235-236) identifies some general patterns and trends in women's mobilisation in the context of political liberalisation. Tripp argues that women's organisations during the earlier post-independence period tended to be focused around religious, welfare and domestic concerns, but that new types of organisations have emerged from the 1990s onwards, organisations which focus on women's socio-economic emancipation and promote the use of information and communication technologies. The expansion of media coverage of women's issues provided the mainstream media outlets alternative coverage of women to counter the often demeaning and sexist portrayal of women in the media. These representations include depictions of African women who are increasingly taking positions of leadership in areas where they have historically been excluded from power. Women's campaigns, not only on government but also on grassroots levels, continue to promote the socio-political and -economic emancipation of women and fight against traditional and Islamic customs which are perpetuating women's oppression. They tirelessly lobby for causes such as reforms to marriage and divorce laws, improved health facilities and education for girls.

Female leadership should not be measured only by highly visible positions of leadership such as examples of female members of parliament, because it also includes other forms such as spiritual leadership, rural women's localised collectives, economic emancipation through small-scale entrepreneurship, and individual emancipation within the domestic sphere. The emancipation of women does not necessarily lead to a disruption of traditional

societal structures, since African women often negotiate power through their traditional roles such as mother and carer. The nurturing roles of African women are not regarded as problematic in the way that these roles are often critiqued by Western feminist activists. The oft-cited axiom that, when it comes to female liberation, the personal is always political, is very true in the case of African women. It is imperative to address women's advancement in the public realm while simultaneously tackling obstacles on the domestic front and vice versa. Many female filmmakers are also taking part in this struggle, and use their films as a way of raising female consciousness, documenting oppression as well as examples of emancipated women, and putting forward their vision of improved gender equality and agendas for change.

The documentation and creation of examples of female emancipation and leadership by female African directors are often directed to African women at grassroots levels, as representations of how leadership is performed in various spheres. A programme of documentaries from West Africa made for local television, entitled *Fighting Women*, directed by women and telling the stories of women, was screened during FESPACO 2007. *Messenger of Hope* (Florentine Yameogo, Burkina Faso) tells the story of Lucy Kaboré, who after becoming a widow was shocked when she understood the implications of her new status which, according to tradition, allowed her husband's family to take all her possessions and expected her to become the wife of one of her late husband's brothers. She created an organisation working for the defence of widows and orphans and fighting against unjust customary practices. *Bolide* (Binta Diallo, Ivory Coast) is about Kady Angelbert Karamoko, a woman unimpressed with the custom which demands that women should stay at home, who became a car rally driver and eventually one of only a handful of female members of the worldwide Federation of Automobile Sports. *The Bird Woman* (Adama Denise Diaby, Guinea) tells the story of Binta Diallou, an aeroplane pilot and commander of the air force of Guinea, who was the personal pilot of President Sékou Touré. Togolese director Adjike Assouma's film, *Lovisa Kope*, focuses on the work of Marie-Claude Lovisa, who started a farm in order to aid the development of Togolese villages in the area. It is significant that this documentary

series of the achievements of West African women was directed specifically at African communities and screened on television locally. The series chronicles the lives of ordinary African women who transform themselves into extraordinary role models for other African women, thus providing examples of how female emancipation is achievable and attainable in different ways.

When exploring the socio-economic empowerment of African women, it is important to recognise the urban/rural divide which exists in Africa since rural women are still the poorest and least literate and educated groups in Africa. Urban migration has a prevalent impact on male/female relationships, as depicted in Safi Faye's *Selbe: One Among Many* (1983) – a documentary that portrays the lives of women in a contemporary Senegalese village. Faye's documentary, made over 25 years ago, shows the impact that labour migration has had on gender relations in African societies, which still continues today. Her work shows an awareness and examination of changes in set gender roles, a theme which many female African filmmakers continue to explore. In *Selbe: One Among Many*, Faye focuses on the personal struggle of one woman whose story has a collective social significance, as indicated in the title of the film. It depicts the roles of women in bearing the economic burden of caring for their families, as men leave temporarily for the urban centres in search of jobs. According to Melissa Thackway (2003: 153) Faye's foregrounding of rural women, in particular allowing them opportunities to express themselves, could be regarded as progressive, because her films are set in a context where women are rarely given a public voice, as can be seen in the exclusively male village palavers in *Selbe*. Selbe, a 39-year old mother of eight, is representative of many other women who are forced to take on the full economic burden of caring for their children as their husbands leave temporarily for the urban centres in search of jobs. Faye documents the continuous domestic activities and farm work of Selbe, with Selbe discussing her challenging circumstances with an off-screen Faye while she goes about her daily tasks. Faye is never actually seen on-screen though she provides a voice-over on several occasions to expand on certain details of Selbe's life. Her presence is acknowledged by her characters, but Faye never intervenes in the narrative flow or adopts a strong

authorial voice. Unlike Western-made documentaries about African cultures, in particular Western ethnographic and anthropological filmmaking, Faye as filmmaker is not an outsider to the culture she documents, which is clear from the way in which her subjects effortlessly trust and confide in her. A strong sense of collective femininity and female solidarity is conveyed in the depictions of the ways in which the women support each other physically and psychologically. In contrast to the women's punishing workload, the men of the village are often shown sitting around complaining, not contributing much or sharing the women's burden. However, despite the hardship of village life documented in both *Kaddu Beykat* and *Selbe*, Faye's films depict Senegalese peasants, in particular the women, as articulate and socially conscious, and displaying strength of character and robustness.

As is displayed in Faye's docu-fiction *Kaddu Beykat* (1975), 20th century colonial export crop and labour policies have brought about shifts in the gendered division of labour, in some cases reinforcing a feminised subsistence in the food economy (Jane Guyer in Cornwall, 2005). Writing from a feminist anthropological view, Guyer states: "For the 1970s feminists, Africa's female farmers seemed living proof – analogous to woman-the-gatherer – of women's original and massive contribution to the productive economy, of the possibility of integrating childcare with independent work, and of the historically late and derivative nature of women's regulation to the 'domestic domain'" (Guyer, 2005: 103). Thus, the fact of female farming threw light on a range of feminist concerns such as the historical bases of patriarchy, the social status of women, and the effects of state policies. However, as is depicted in Faye's films, this viewpoint is not so clear when regarded from an African ethnographic perspective which sees African farming not as an example of a primitive stage but as a system of knowledge and practice with its own history, innovations and prospects. Female farming is often a role women adopt due to labour migration and changes in the traditional gendered division of labour, but this role is always combined with other roles such as wifehood and motherhood. Faye's documentary focuses acutely on the different roles that the main subject, Selbe, performs in the village and in the absence of her husband, through the film being dominated by Selbe's work and social interactions and her voiceover

commenting on her life. Although the documentary clearly points out the burden put on Selbe and other women like her who are at times the sole providers for their families, it does not depict Selbe as a victim of her circumstances, but rather displays her tenacity and strength.

The depiction of women in positions of spiritual leadership in film is often a reference to the positions of power women held in pre-colonial Africa. The South African documentary *Mosebetho: The Myth of the Rain Goddess* (2000), directed by Pamela Mdingi, tries to unravel the myths surrounding the rituals of the traditional rainmaking ceremonies of Modjadji V, Queen of the BaLovedu people in an area of the Northern Province of South Africa. The film includes footage of official rainmaking ceremonies which were shot by special invitation from the Queen. At the turn of the 18th Century the BaLovedu people were a tribe in turmoil and a Queen was elected to replace the longstanding patriarchy. The rainmaking powers of Queen Modjadji have been passed from generation to generation through oral legends. The Queen leads the rainmaking ceremony, directs the process and conducts the ceremony. The local people believe unequivocally in Queen Modjaji's powers, while scientists interviewed in the film speculate that Modjadji has knowledge of the local weather patterns. Indeed, as she states: "We think we are not scientific, we are, but we use different methods."

Spirits of the Uhadi (2003), a South African documentary directed by Lauren Groenewald, tracks the journey of a young Xhosa woman, Thandiswa Mazwai, as she searches for her roots and reclaims her traditional heritage. Thandiswa is a pop star and represents a growing section of South African youth, brought up after the end of apartheid, with a desire to explore their cultural roots within a modern, post-apartheid society. Her search takes her out of Johannesburg to the rural valleys of the Transkei, where she meets Madosini Manqina – a custodian of the music of the amaXhosa. Thandiswa's desire is to reconnect with her own cultural heritage through learning the secrets of her ancestors' traditional music. The film opens with a quote by Madosini: "Our presence on this earth is reflected by the past while at the same time guiding the future," and this aphorism becomes the guiding principle of Thandiswa's physical and spiritual journey in the film. Thandiswa, who lives in Johannesburg,

a melting pot of peoples, calls her own music a "mixed masala" of genres and regards herself as a cosmopolitan South African. Her young child speaks Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and English, and is thus inheriting her mother's eclectic identity. Her parents made her very conscious of the struggle, how it displaced them and disconnected them from their traditional lifestyle, and thus she takes her music very seriously, aware of the importance of her role as a social commentator and role model to other young people who are looking back to the past in order to forge their identities in the new South Africa. Aware of the danger of romanticising the 'African spirit', Thandiswa asks Madosini to teach her how to play the Xhosa harp, and she is given her first lesson on a cliff overlooking the lush landscape of the Transkei. The instrument is played only by women, with instruction traditionally being passed on from the older to the younger female generation. The documentary is essentially a musical dialogue between the young, modern and educated Thandiswa, and the older, traditional and wise Madosini. Madosini, who is illiterate, calls herself a "person from the past", but she has a deeply embedded morality and wisdom and is wholly dedicated to the empowerment of women. The film focuses almost exclusively on women and almost no male characters are filmed – Madosini does not have a husband and Thandiswa as a single mother makes no reference to the father of her child. Thandiswa finds her journey rewarding and eye-opening, and invites Madosini to visit her in Johannesburg. Two months later it is Madosini who undertakes a journey to Johannesburg, to make a recording with Thandiswa, and the film ends with the two of them together in a music studio. The documentary astutely captures the dualities of contemporary South African identities – negotiated through a constant fluctuation between tradition and modernity, the old and the new, the rural and the urban – but in a complementary rather than oppositional way. The interplay between modernity and tradition is symbolically represented by the different musical conventions and genres depicted in the film. The fact that Madosini – an older, rural woman whose music is part of the traditional heritage of the amaXhosa's musical legacy, and Thandiswa – a young, modern and urban woman who works in contemporary musical genres, are able to combine their musical styles in creating something new and unique, is indicative of the productive ways in which modernity and tradition can interact in contemporary South African society.

A Senegalese documentary with thematic parallels to *Spirits of the Uhadi* is Angèle Diabang Brener's *Yande Codou: The Griot of Senghor* (2008) which explores the legacy of the female griot of Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Yande Coudou is a remarkable woman and griot of high status, the only person who was able to interrupt Senghor's speeches by breaking spontaneously into song and praise. She had a unique relationship with Senghor and is described as his alter ego: "a unique encounter of two amazing destinies." The role of polyphonic and praise poetry in Serere tradition is strongly embedded in the culture, which developed out of a court tradition intended to consolidate royal and local power. The performance of Serere poetry holds political and poetic power and has an aesthetic and constructive role as the griot functions as the echo of the people. Senghor, as a Western-educated intellectual and professor of French grammar, reconnected with his Serere roots through the poetry of Yande Coudou, and she would praise all his different sides as president, Serere son and scholar, in her songs. The caste of griot is described as part of the identity of the Serere people, integrated into their past and their future. The film is an attempt to document this tradition, through the relationship and interaction between the young female Senegalese filmmaker and Yande Coudou. The filmmaker herself appears in the documentary as she visits Yande Coudou and the griot composes and sings a song for Angèle: "You are my favourite filmmaker of all." Yande Coudou confides in Angèle that she thinks her daughters have too many children, and husbands who do not look after her daughter and grandchildren well enough. We observe many intimate scenes of Angèle and Yande Coudou together in the griot's bedroom; Angèle, as an outsider to the family is not subjected to the same harsh criticism Yande Coudou has against her own family, but at the same time, as a young Senegalese woman, Yande Coudou trusts her enough to share personal details of her life and thoughts with the filmmaker. When a musicologist is introduced to Yande Coudou and performs a reinterpretation of one of her songs accompanied by guitar, the griot is outraged and antagonistically tells the scholar never to touch her repertoire again. Angèle has to physically step away from behind the camera and intervene in the scene in order to appease Yande Coudou.

For Yande Coudou, tradition is the foundation of everything; she states that if you do not really know who you are and where you come from, you are lost. Yande Coudou has made it her task to keep traditional values alive and her family and friends describe how her songs and poetry take them back to their roots and traditions. Her songs are a vocal memory of Serere traditions which she hopes would serve as a solid cultural grounding for following generations. Her resistance to her heritage being reinterpreted and reworked is problematic, as she is also aware that values are changing and the role of the griot is diminishing in modern Senegalese society, and thus she feels at times out of place and unsure as to how to incorporate traditional values into the modern world. As a performer of traditional Serere poetry, Yande Coudou is an example of an emancipated African woman of high social status, with her identity being tied up with her role as a griot. The survival of the tradition appears to lie in the transfer of generational knowledge as described below in the analysis of the documentary *Traces: Women's Imprints*.

Fanta Nacro's short film *A Close-up on Bintou* is a humorous and playful take on female emancipation within the domestic sphere and focuses on the experiences of women in rural Burkina Faso through informing the viewer about the roles and positions of women in these societies. It tells the story of Bintou, an oppressed housewife, who fights tirelessly against patriarchal institutions and the domestic abuse she suffers under her husband, by starting a business sprouting millet for beer-making in order to earn money to send her daughter to school. Bintou's husband, Abel, is threatened by her entrepreneurial endeavour and attempts to ruin her chances of success through breaking the pots she uses for sprouting the millet. He succeeds once, but fails the second time when Bintou casts a spell which traps him as he bends over her pots with a hammer, keeping him frozen in an uncomfortable position throughout the night. Abel's skepticism towards Bintou's real reason for wanting to become financially independent leads him to falsely believe that she is having an affair, only to find out that her absences during the day are not to visit her lover, but to attend the gatherings of a women's support group. Through sheer determination and the support of other women,

Bintou ultimately succeeds in starting up a successful business and sending her daughter to school. The ending of *Bintou* reinstates marital harmony as Bintou and her husband reconcile, with him promising to cease the domestic abuse he has subjected her to. The ending also emphasizes the importance of gender complementarity, as the sharing of duties within a marriage is represented through both parents paying for their children's schooling.

Bintou is an example of a film which undertakes to break down the stereotypical representations of African women, in particular in the Western imaginary, which often frames the African woman as one of two polar opposites: on the one hand the African woman is often portrayed as passive victim requiring intervention – in particular rural African women – and on the other end of the scale is the image of the African woman as self-reliant heroine, goddess or exotic being (Cornwall 2005: 1). However, in-between these two opposites there are a multitude of subject positions which African women occupy, and it is often the day-to-day struggles and victories of African women – the everyday lives of ordinary women – which are ignored in discourses on African women. *Bintou* focuses not on the passive silent victim, or the mythical African heroine, but on ordinary women. Bintou is one such ordinary woman, although she is also quite extraordinary in her quest for economic independence and emancipation. She is not unusual or atypical though, as self-reliant and entrepreneurial women who find innovative ways of improving their living conditions abound in African societies.

Bintou's desire to provide a proper education for her daughter is inspired by the awareness of her own lack of education – she volunteers at the local medical centre, but cannot get a paid job as she does not have a diploma. This awareness and desire set in motion her entrepreneurial plan to gain her own income to send her daughter to school. It is significant that Bintou is encouraged by the nurse at the medical centre to identify her own skills and talents and to use this as a way of becoming economically independent – she might not have a diploma, but she has learnt from her mother how to sprout millet for beer-making. A skill acquired through generational and gendered knowledge thus becomes the skill she employs

to become financially independent.

In *Bintou*, the traditional attitudes towards female emancipation of particularly the men in the village become clear when Abel says: 'A girl must learn to look after her husband and work', implying that there is no need for a girl to be educated, and when Abel's friend warns him that once Bintou starts her own business he will not be the master of his house any longer. Abel's traditional gender role is threatened as a result of Bintou starting up a business, and Abel chooses rather to underestimate her drive and determination when he says to his friend 'it will only be for a few days'. However, it is important to note that these conservative beliefs are not deemed to be held solely by men, as Abel's mother is also prejudiced against Bintou's quest for independence when she states that women with too much freedom and financial independence end up as whores. The use of humour for comical effect runs throughout the film, for example in the way that Bintou uses her female cunning to get the shop owner to give her credit, claiming that he impregnated her and then refused to take responsibility, and in her placing a spell on Abel – a humorous comment on traditional believes in African societies. The character of Abel should be viewed alongside an awareness of Fanta Nacro's use of satire – he is represented as somewhat of a hapless fool, perhaps almost caricature-like, but his character certainly helps to convey the film's main message of female emancipation.

Shaping identity through collective female traditions: The documentaries of Katy Léna N'diaye

The visually stunning and stylised documentaries about traditions of female wall-painting by Senegalese director Katy Léna N'diaye are fascinating examples of how women perform and recreate their gendered identities. N'diaye has made two films on the subject, *Traces: Empreintes de Femmes* (Traces: Women's Imprints, 2003) on the tradition of wall paintings by the Kassena women in southern Burkina Faso, followed by *En Attendant Les Hommes* (Waiting for Men, 2007) about the traditional wall painting by women in the Mauritanian town of Oualata on the edge of the Sahara desert. Both the documentaries are composed of

interviews and classically framed shots. The performative elements of these documentaries are very interesting, as the women are encouraged within the safe and intimate space of being filmed, and through the trust that clearly exists between the filmmaker and her female subjects, to reveal a lot about themselves. Thus, the making of the documentaries allows them a space in which to "perform" their gender subjectivity differently than they might in other situations.

The skill of wall painting in *Traces: Empreintes de Femmes* is shown to be a legacy handed down through the female lineage, from mother to daughter, generation after generation – thus focusing on motherhood and the mother/daughter relationship as a central feature of the community. Whereas wall art is the domain of the women, the men make the bricks and construct the mud buildings. Thus there exists a gendered division of labour and a clear stratification of gender roles within Kassena society, which is a common element of rural African societies and indicative of the importance attached to gender complementarity. This division of gender roles, however, should not be seen as a static and rigid system, but something that is changing and transforming in contemporary Africa – as depicted in *Bintou*. Four female characters are introduced to the viewer in the opening of the film: a young girl Anetina and her three grandmothers – Anmea, Akoune and Anouyere. The film opens without any dialogue or narration, with only a silent focus on the women's work and close-ups on their faces and hands. Anetina's three grandmothers are introduced through static, frontal close-ups; the way in which women are framed by the camera is significant as they occupy the entire frame-space which results in conveying a dominant female subjectivity in the film.

The interplay between tradition and modernity is clearly depicted through detailing the tradition of wall painting through the portraits of women from different generations. There are references to the importance of knowing your cultural heritage and traditions, and the young Anetina values this, as she states that the region's unique architecture and murals form an important cultural patrimony. References to the generational differences between Anetina and her three grandmothers, and the movement from a traditional to a modern society

abound in the film. Her grandmothers state that women previously had to marry, as 'that was the way it was'. They state that Anetina is a 'woman of her times': 'Now you follow your own path. It's the modern age, our time is gone', one grandmother says. Although Anetina's grandmothers state that they as old women have nothing left to do but sit around, it is interesting to note that, in fact, they do not only sit around, as the viewer learns that they collect stalks to sell them – thus, even in their old age, they employ an entrepreneurial approach to female economic emancipation also encountered in some of the examples discussed above. Anetina states that modern children are more outgoing and more mobile, and that being a modern woman is about choice. Although she has a child, she is not married yet, as she wants to make her own decision about marriage and find the right person. She also states that marriage is about respect. 'Being a woman is difficult, particularly in a traditional society', Anetina states. She says the mentality is that woman was created to serve man: 'Women must resign and submit, and are not allowed to speak up or react.' When we consider this silencing of women in traditional West African societies, this film is a hugely significant example of women gaining their own voices, of women becoming subjects and expressing their own female subjectivities.

Whereas her grandmothers did not go to school, Anetina did have this opportunity. Even though Anetina did not finish her schooling, her grandmothers nonetheless feel that she came out 'smarter and brighter'. Although Anetina can be regarded as an unconventional young woman within the society that she lives in, her grandmothers accept her, and accept that times have changed: 'Times change, things are different now. Today is today. And that's a good thing', one of her grandmother's states. Anetina is in the process of forging her own identity within her society – she is very modern, as she went to school, travels a lot and plays football, but she is also very aware of the importance of preserving her cultural heritage and she is very proud of it. Thus, the film represents a merging of the traditional and the modern which converge not in conflict, but in harmony. One of the only things that her grandmothers regret, is that it is difficult to find the opportunity to teach Anetina the techniques of wall painting, as a more mobile society means that Anetina travels a lot. 'Every old woman wants

to hand over what she knows', one grandmother states, but it is not certain whether they will get the opportunity to teach her the technique of wall painting. This statement introduces the theme of a disruption of the previously stable and unchanging nature of traditional village life, a change which could ultimately threaten the continuation and preservation of the legacy of female wall painting. The imprints of women's work on the walls can be read symbolically as the importance of hereditary knowledge, of handing over knowledge and skill from mother to daughter, and these imprints could thus be regarded as palimpsests, carrying the traces of consecutive generations. The imprints are the traces of previous female generations which the title of the documentary refers to. The women's imprints bear the marks of a society in flux – a society changing, adapting and transforming to modern times.

Themes of female communal support, solidarity and collective action are pertinent in *Traces*. Women collectively work on creating the murals, with female solidarity having become increasingly formalised and institutionalised through the formation of women's groups. One of Anetina's grandmothers states that there was no such thing as women's groups when they were younger. Women also collectively guard the tradition of decorating the walls of Kassena households, and although they do this together, it is significant to note that each woman decorates her home to her own taste – there is thus individualism within the collective and collaborative activity of painting the murals. The ending of the film is particularly evocative and beautiful – the camera meticulously focuses on the preparation of the walls and the paint, and the ways in which the decorative paintings are constructed by the women. This is portrayed as a very organic process and a collaborative female task. The film has a sensual richness focusing on texture, colour and touch; the focus on the women's hands as they decorate the walls gives the film an almost tactile quality. *Traces* ends with the same shot as the opening scene of the film – whereas at the end of the film the compound is now decorated – thus a complete narrative structure occurs within the filmic time of the documentary.

Although Africa has embraced the modern medium of film in the postcolonial era, the activity

of filmmaking in African societies is an issue particularly precarious in rural societies. *Traces* is to some extent an observational documentary, but it becomes clear that the subjects in the film are very aware of the presence of the filmmaker, as there is interaction between the people being filmed and the filmmaker in some scenes, which draws attention to some of the ethical considerations inherent in the act of making a film. The interviewer prompts the grandmothers with questions at one point – asking them to repeat what they have said, off-camera, earlier. Some conversations should not be filmed, but should remain private, as Anetina asks at one point for the camera to be switched off. The viewer comes to assume that is was Anetina's idea to get the documentary made in the first place, which would suggest that she persuaded her three grandmothers to take part in the project. In fact, there is a direct intervention of the making of the documentary with the lives of the women in the village, as the viewer learns that the documentary is the reason why Anetina's one grandmother agreed to renovate and redecorate her house – she states that she would not have done it if it was not for the film. With regard to the positive aspects of filmmaking in rural Africa, the process of making a film could thus become a way of documenting tradition, a record for future generations – another way to preserve tradition and perhaps also a means of transferring knowledge. It is often mentioned in African film scholarship that the modern medium of film is a perfect extension of the tradition of storytelling and orality in African cultures with film in Africa having become a contemporary medium for telling stories. While the purpose of filmmaking in Africa could thus be to document and reflect on cultural traditions and changes, film could also be a tool in imagining change and progress. Films as modern documents could thus fulfill a role which has become more difficult for traditional oral structures to do, but it should be kept in mind that cinema does this within a very different structure and register than the way this process takes place within the domestic space. Furthermore, there certainly is a limit to the possible role cinema could play in preserving tradition and educating audiences, as access to films for local audiences is a prevalent issue for African cinema, and nowhere more so than in rural areas.

Waiting for Men is very similar in style to *Traces*, with formally framed shots of women being

interviewed, relating intimate details about their lives, including their views on economic emancipation, relationships, sexuality and desire. The title of the documentary, which refers to women waiting for men to return home after long absences due to labour migration, is subverted in the documentary itself, as the three women being interviewed do much more than only waiting for their men to return. The title also refers to women waiting to get married, and staying respectable until marriage, an issue which is discussed by the three women. The viewer is alternately introduced to the three female subjects, with close-ups of their faces being intercut with scenes of making, pouring and serving tea. The viewer is in effect being invited to have tea with the women, and what follows are intimate portrayals of the lives of the three Mauritanian women. Static close-ups form, as in *Traces*, an important part of conveying the beauty of the environment, with long shots of the village and surrounding landscape, and evocative close-ups of doors, decorated walls and alleyways. While the film is partially about female economic emancipation of which the tradition of painting tarkhas, or decorative patterns on the walls of the buildings, is part, it is much more an exploration of the personal lives of the women. The tradition of wall painting becomes a catalyst for the women to talk about their lives.

Although there is never more than one woman in a shot and the women do not speak directly to each other, they interact through the camera and are in effect having a dialogue with each other, as one presumes that the filmmaker posed the same question, off camera, to all three of them. As they talk about relationships and marriages, fascinating insights are revealed: "My body belongs to Sidi Mohamed, he bought it", says one woman, while another does not agree that the woman's body belongs to her husband. One of the women states that it is suitable for the first marriage to be decided by the parents as dictated by religion and tradition, and also to be married young in order to avoid temptation. Two of the women have been married more than once; one of them has been divorced five times. One states that marriage is about children, and declares: "Does marriage without children matter? The meaning of womanhood is marriage." The women emphasise the importance of tradition and custom, and one of the women states that she would never go against their customs. She

states that their customs prevent women from expressing intimate thoughts and feelings freely, although the documentary does succeed in providing a space for these women to express themselves intimately. At one point a question is too personal for one of the women and she refuses to answer, stating: "That's enough."

The subtle gender power plays we find in *Traces* are also present in *Waiting for Men*, as men prepare the clay and walls while women paint the decorative patterns or tharkas. There is very little camera movement as we observe the women creating the decorations with silent close-ups on their hands and the intricate patterns of the tharka designs. One of the women in the film paints tharkas for an income, the second is a nurse, and the third one runs a small shop and dreams of becoming a wealthy business woman. The tharkas are painted in the village at a celebration, at the end of Ramadan, and when someone is returning to the village. The imagery of the tharkas all have symbolic and female-centred meanings, such as a baby bird flying, a little virgin, a bride, and ample female hips. The three women who form the main focus of the documentary have all created their own livelihood while their husbands are away. There are scenes of groups of women drinking tea together and playing owari in the sand (a common West African game played with beads or seeds), thus emphasising the importance of female companionship. In a beautifully evocative scene, one woman is creating a henna tattoo on another woman's hand, while they talk about their relationships with their husbands.

By learning about the tradition of wall painting through the portraits of the women in *Traces* and *Waiting for Men*, these documentaries become important documents of and testimonies to the central role that West African women play in their societies. The films position the role of West African women in two seemingly opposite but ultimately complementary ways – women as simultaneously the custodians of positive and affirmative African traditions *and* as progressive forces in changing societies. The opposition between tradition and modernity in African cultures should thus not be seen as a conflict or polarity, but rather, as described by African philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992: 120), as a form of syncretism. The film

should thus be contextualised within an African ontology, where the enactment and perpetuation of traditional rituals and beliefs exist alongside an embracing of modernity. The performance of gendered identity as in the tradition of female wall painting in these two films is depicted as changing and modifying in the contemporary era.

Islam in South Africa: Forging female Muslim identities

This section will deal with three films made by female Muslim directors in South Africa, specifically in Cape Town, and through a discussion of these films I will engage with some of the processes through which female Muslim identity is negotiated in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa. A documentary, *Through the Eyes of My Daughter*, by director Zulfah Otto-Sallies will be discussed, as well as a feature fiction film by Rayda Jacobs, entitled *Confessions of a Gambler*. Both Zulfah Otto-Sallies and Rayda Jacobs are based in the Bo-Kaap, which directly translates as "Upper Cape", a Malay district of Cape Town, and all three of the films are set in this area too. The films imagine an Islamic modernity in South Africa, a seemingly oppositional or dichotomous process, but which can lead to the performance of an integrated female identity which is both Islamic and modern. The intended audiences of these films have a respect and understanding of Islam while also recognising the pressures of modernity, in particular in multi-cultural contemporary South Africa.

These two directors are part of a loose affiliation of Muslim female filmmakers in South Africa which started to emerge in the early 2000s, and the films are particularly interesting because the directors draw directly on their experiences of being Muslim women in a secular society to present quite progressive and very thoughtful interpretations of Muslim identity and specifically on the role of women in Muslim society in post-apartheid South Africa. Their films are generally funded and supported by national funding agencies in South Africa, which is indicative of the importance that the South African government and other cultural players attach to promoting diversity and giving a voice to the previously marginalised. Although both the films have been screened in film festivals internationally, it has to be kept in mind that these types of films generally do not draw large audiences in South Africa itself, although the

documentary under discussion was made for and broadcast on national South African television. Thus, even though these films are reflecting on Muslim society in contemporary South Africa and representing progressive alternatives for change, their direct impact might not necessarily be that great in South Africa itself, and their importance lies rather in their power of imagining possibilities of a more gender-just Muslim society in South Africa. These films are also part of national narratives, which are often sexualised and gendered, as discussed in chapter 3. Identity is performed by the female characters on different levels and within different interconnected spheres – religion, feminism, modernity and the national all form part of making up the context within which Muslim women in South Africa and the female characters in the films negotiate their identities.

In order to fully appreciate the context of the films, it is necessary to consider the historical roots of Islam and how it became embedded in South African society, as well as ideas postulated by Islamic feminism, specifically in the South African context. Islam in South Africa predates the colonial period, and initially took the form of isolated contact with Arab and East African traders. According to South African Muslim scholar Abdulkader Tayob (1999: 21) conflict between the indigenous Khoi San communities and the Dutch settlers constituted the context in which the first Muslims arrived in South Africa. The Dutch East India Company relied heavily on slaves, brought from all over Africa and Asia, but especially from Madagascar, India, and the Southeast Asian Islands – all having significant Muslim populations. The Dutch East India Company also used the Cape as a place of exile for political prisoners from the Southeast Asian Islands. From 1667 onwards, some of these exiles were prominent Muslim leaders. Islam was a popular religion among the slaves – its tradition of teaching enabled literate slaves to gain better positions in their masters' households, and the religion taught its followers to treat their own slaves well.

The modern Muslim tradition in South Africa dates from the arrival of Sheikh Abdurahman Matebe Shah, a Malay sheikh from Sumatra, in 1668 (library.thinkquest.org). Sheikh Abdurahman Matebe Shah was exiled to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company

following his resistance to the Dutch occupation of the East Indies. The sheikh used his exile to consolidate the teaching of Islam among slaves in the Cape, many of whom came from Muslim backgrounds in Malaysia and Bengal. Islam also attracted runaway slaves who converted to the religion, and represented a symbol of resistance to European colonialism, and later a resistance against apartheid. Under apartheid's racial classifications, many South African Muslims were described as Coloureds (or mixed-race), notably in the Western Cape, including those whose ancestors came as slaves from the Indonesian Islands. Others have Indian ancestry, and are today based mainly in Kwazulu-Natal, including those whose ancestors came as traders from South Asia. Apartheid ideology ensured that most Muslims escaped the brunt of the worst forms of discrimination but they were nevertheless treated as second-class citizens. Although Muslims were granted freedom to practise their religion in 1804, the social and political inequalities prevailing in South Africa until 1994 prevented this from having full legal effect (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002).

Since South Africa became a democracy, there have been a growing number of Muslim migrants from South Asia and North Africa, and a high conversion rate especially amongst Black communities. According to the *Christian Science Monitor* (Itano, 2002), the biggest reason for the dramatic rise in Islam is that the religion is a refuge from AIDS, alcoholism, and domestic violence that is rampant in the black townships, where the highest rates of conversions are seen. It is estimated that Islam is the largest religion of conversion in South Africa and it grew sixfold in thirteen years from 1991 to 2004. According to Michael Mumisa (quoted by Itano, 2002), a researcher and writer on African Islam, there has been an increase in the number of black South Africans converting to Islam particularly among women and young people. He believes that for some of these groups who were schooled in the politics of South African resistance and confrontation with the security forces of the former apartheid state, the acceptance of Islam has become part of a radical rejection of a society based on Christian principles which are seen to have been responsible for establishing and promoting the apartheid doctrine through the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. When the first democratic elections took place in April 1994 two Muslim parties

emerged, the Africa Muslim Party and the Islamic Party, and on the eve of the elections Muslims in Cape Town turned out in their thousands to celebrate three hundred years in South Africa. The new constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantees freedom of religion and belief, and also makes provision for the enactment of legislation recognising religious personal law and Muslim marriages. It is interesting that the Islamic legacy in South Africa is one of activism and resistance against oppression – this might serve as a partial explanation for the communal and cultural coherence which still exists amongst Muslim communities in South Africa today.

Prominent Muslims are found in many spheres of contemporary South African life, notably in politics where they are represented in all levels of government. The historical context of Islam in South Africa has given birth to a new group of progressive Muslim theologians and thinkers who have been advocating a radical reinterpretation of Islam. This has led to serious conflict between traditionalist and fundamentalist Muslims and the young scholars branded as "modernists". The term "modernist" is used in South African Islamic discourse by the traditional Muslim establishment against anyone calling for the reinterpretation of Islam. The influences of Latin American liberation theology, pluralism, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory are clearly evident in the writings and theories of this new group of Muslim theorists. Some of the most prominent South African Muslim scholars are Professor Ebrahim Moosa at Duke University; Professor Abdulkader Tayob of the University of Cape Town; Professor Farid Esack, visiting professor at the Harvard Divinity School; the late Islamic feminist activist Shamima Shaikh; Na'eem Jeenah, affiliated with a number of South African Muslim organisations as well as the University of the Witwatersrand; and Drs Sa'diyyah Shaikh and Shamil Jeppie, both lecturers at the University of Cape Town. Within this reformist intellectual milieu it is not that surprising that we also find a number of progressive writers and artists in South African Muslim society, including the two filmmakers whose work is discussed in this section. Some of these scholars, notably Shamima Shaikh and Sa'diyyah Shaikh, are proponents of Islamic feminism, and are thus part of the affiliation of world-wide Islamic feminists which includes such prominent scholars as Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi,

Egyptian professor of Women's Studies Leila Ahmed, and professor of modern Arabic literature Miriam Cooke.

Third World feminisms see notions of gender, class, ethnicity and nationality as intertwined, and with Islamic feminism, religious identity adds another important, and perhaps the most important layer, as is clearly demonstrated in the films. Religion as a primary identity which is then mediated through a number of secondary identities certainly becomes clear in these films, as most of the female characters regard their religious affiliation as fundamental to their world-view and ideological beliefs. Although the Cape Malays of the Bo-Kaap or Upper Cape community have preserved their cultural identity to a significant extent it would be fair to say that most of the members of this community could be regarded as culturally Western though religiously Muslim. The films deal with contentious and provocative issues and symbols of moral dangers such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS, crime, gambling and addiction, which is indicative of the boldness and courage of these female filmmakers to propose their own interpretations and representations of their social realities. It is also indicative of the fact that the films do not shy away from the realities of a multi-cultural and diverse South African society but fully engage with the growing pains of a young democracy in which many injustices and oppressive structures are not yet resolved. Shamima Shaikh sees one of the causes of patriarchal oppression in Muslim communities in the fact that men have written women into their experiences and written *about* women, and thus men have been doing the interpretation (shams.za.org). Through the emergence of filmmaking by Muslim women we now have the opportunity to gain female perspectives on being a Muslim woman in South Africa. It is interesting to note that the previous political struggle against apartheid, in which Muslim communities played a crucial role as pointed out earlier, is not overtly addressed in the two films, as they seek instead to explore the struggle to define Muslim female identity in the new South Africa.

Zulfah Otto-Sallies' documentary *Through the Eyes of My Daughter* was made as part of the Project 10 series of films, commissioned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation and

completed in 2004. Otto-Sallies's contribution to the Project 10 series adds another dimension to the kaleidoscope of representation in a multi-cultural society, that of generational relationships within an Islamic cultural context. Otto-Sallies established a successful career as a playwright and novelist before she turned to filmmaking. She has written and directed numerous documentaries and fiction films for local and international television, mostly through her own production company called O'Dacity Films.

The establishing shot introduces us to the Bo-Kaap with a sequence of shots of the colourful houses of this suburb with breath-taking views onto a misty Table Mountain – we encounter similar shots of the Bo-Kaap in Jacobs's film. The opening shots are followed by a number of audio-visual references to the religious and cultural context in which this Muslim community is enmeshed. The disembodied voice of a prayer caller rises through the mist, luring the faithful to prayer. The film is temporally set during Ramadan 2002, and we are first introduced to Zulfah and Muneera in a traditional religious context. This scene cuts to the family meeting Zulfah's father at the airport on his return from Mecca, where he has been on a pilgrimage for the seventh time. Then, the atmosphere of the film changes completely as the setting switches to Zulfah and Muneera bickering at home, a complete contrast to the previous religious references. Zulfah made the film as an attempt to understand her daughter better at a time when she felt there was very little communication between them. Muneera is clearly a typical 15-year old teenager – opinionated, argumentative, emotionally distant from her parents and very critical towards them. We witness intimate household scenes of the family eating and playing games together. Zulfah, being an ambitious filmmaker with her own production company, works and travels a lot, and it is her husband who carries out many of the domestic duties such as cooking and washing dishes.

We see Zulfah direct a theatre workshop at Muneera's school, with Muneera becoming increasingly interested and involved in it through taking an acting role in the play. When Muneera still refuses to communicate directly with her mother on camera, Zulfah gives her the camera to film a video diary in private, and Muneera finds it easier to express herself

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through the video diary as well as through the character she portrays in the workshop. Just as she starts to open up to her mother through participating in the workshop and a growing appreciation of the work that her mother does as a filmmaker, Muneera loses interest in acting and takes up touch rugby for girls. The second half of the film revolves around Muneera's progress in touch rugby and her attempts to get into the national team. Towards the end of the film she is appointed vice captain of her regional team and the film ends with the school's gala evening where Muneera wins an award for touch rugby player of the year.

Generational strife is depicted through the arguments between Muneera and Zulfah, as Muneera views her parents as old-fashioned and behind-the-times. Zulfah feels that the Bo-Kaap in which Muneera is growing up is not the same as it was when she grew up. Zulfah relates to the viewer that she grew up very aware of the history of the Bo-Kaap and their Malay ancestry, and that she only found out there is more to life when she got older and met people from other cultures, for example Christians in high school, unlike Muneera who is growing up in a multi-cultural and middle-class community. Muneera accuses her father of living in the past, because he is always repeating the phrase much dreaded by teenagers – "When I was a child…" – and she describes her mother as split into three parts – the past, present and future. Through the generational conflict with her parents, Muneera is attempting to find and articulate her own identity. In her video diaries, she talks about peer pressure coupled with the expectations of her mother and her need for approval from her mother, as well as the difficulties of being a Muslim teenager which means that she is often not allowed to do certain things that her friends from other cultures are allowed to do. But she is optimistic about the future of South Africa, and states: "I see South Africa as a growing country", and proclaims that she wants to live in South Africa, with its many different cultures and attractions. Zulfah appreciates the qualities that she sees in her daughter and in Muneera's friends, and positively acknowledges their courage to speak their minds, to disagree, to be critical. The film ends a year later with Ramadan 2003, and Muneera states towards the end of the film: "I've always had a good relationship with my parents, but this year it has really grown." These observations lead to the film closing on an affirmative tone: "I

think she's finding her own way, she'll be okay", says Zulfah at the end of the film, representing hope and positive expectations for Muneera. If Muneera is seen as representative of the society in which she lives, this also bodes well for racial, cultural and religious understanding and tolerance within South Africa as a whole.

Diversity and change are at the heart of this film, in which these concepts represent productive and dynamic forces in a society still going through a radical transition. Broader societal and cultural changes impact on the lives of individuals, as is shown through the microcosm of a family in the film. Zulfah states very clearly that she grew up in a different Bo-Kaap than Muneera, who lives in a middle-class society and clearly has the freedom of choice in terms of what she wants to do with her life. These class-based changes imply a more privileged society, with other cultural and societal changes occurring alongside these economic changes. Representations of cultural and racial integration are abundant in the film, for example in scenes at school and of Muneera and her friends, and this is accepted by the film's principal subjects in a constructive and all-embracing fashion. The journey towards the recognition and acceptance of change is marked by points of conflict and friction, but this tension creates a vibrant milieu, fertile for self-reflection and growth. This process is depicted in the film through the intimate relationships between the members of a family, with the role negotiation taking place through their interactions becoming indicative of broader societal and cultural positionings, including those of gender, race, nationality and religious belief. Muneera, as a young South African girl growing up in a Muslim household, is performing and negotiating her identity on different levels, and is constantly seeking ways in which to integrate her religious background with her identity as a modern teenager. The optimistic ending of the film indicates that she is productively engaging in this continuous and sometimes conflicting process.

Otto-Sallies is clearly fascinated by the theme of Muslim youth culture and rebellion against authority; she addresses this theme in the short film *Raya* (2000) as well as in her first feature fiction film *Don't Touch* (2006). Both these films also deal with how the Muslim youth

attempt to find ways of reconciling their religious tradition with a modern, secular and Western society. Otto-Sallies has stated in an interview (www.agenda.org.za) that through her films she hopes to tell stories from a female perspective. She sees herself as an activist for women in her Muslim community with her films highlighting the issues that women struggle with but also indicating how women can be their own worst enemy. Significantly, she believes that films can be effective in changing perspectives on women's rights and their roles in society, thus leading to new forms of identity.

The feature film *Confessions of a Gambler*, completed in 2007, is based on a novel by Rayda Jacobs, who then converted her book into a screenplay, acted the leading role, and co-directed the film. The film was shot on a shoe-string budget with a simple realist visual style, except for some stylised sequences of her in the casino and black and white flashbacks to her youth. Though dramatic for the most part, it also includes many lighter and comical moments. The film opens with a first-person narrative voice-over in which the viewer is introduced to Abeeda, the main protagonist, a single mother with two sons: "The first thing I have to confess is that I'm a Muslim woman. I'm forty-nine. I wear two scarves, an under scarf and a medorah. I've raised both my sons with the Word of God. When you pass me on the street, you won't even glance my way. I'm one of those robed women who appear to be going nowhere." As the scene changes from Abeeda conducting her prayers to an outside scene of her buying vegetables, the voice-over continues: "The second thing I have to confess is that I like risk. I don't know where it started."

Thus, the viewer is immediately introduced to Abeeda as a character with internal conflicts and desires. It is certainly her love of risk which incites Abeeda, a pious Muslim and respected member of her society, to visit the casino for the first time at the invitation of her friend Garaati. Abeeda tries out the slot machines and when she wins on this first visit, she is hooked: "That first hit was my undoing", she states. At first her gambling is innocent enough, but as her life gets more complicated, with her youngest son Reza dying of AIDS, her gambling starts to take over her life. It is her oldest son, Zane's, spiteful and malicious wife

who informs Abeeda that people are saying Reza has AIDS. Abeeda has always suspected that he is homosexual, and the news of his illness comes as a huge shock to her and she struggles with God in an emotional prayer scene. The scene is filmed from above as Abeeda rolls out her prayer mat with the camera moving down and lingering in close-up on her outstretched palms and tear-stained cheeks. "If he is your creation God, why did you create him like this?" she implores. She visits Reza at the house he shares with his partner Patrick, and she invites both Reza and Patrick to move in with her. Patrick chooses not to, and Abeeda and Zane come to pick up a very frail and weak Reza to take him home, where he spends his last few weeks. Abeeda is forgiving and magnanimous: "What they did was wrong in God's eyes, but who am I to judge?" she states. When Reza passes away, his funeral is conducted according to Islamic codes: His covered body is washed and then wrapped in a simple white cotton cloth. The community gathers around the body and the men carry it to the grave. In Islamic law, women are generally discouraged from participating in the funeral procession and as the men leave the house with Reza's body, Patrick, a non-Muslim, is seen standing at a distance, not participating but still present and silently mourning the death of his beloved partner. The men place the body in the grave without a casket, with the head facing towards Mecca. After the burial the community gathers to pay their respects to the dead and collectively pray for the forgiveness of the dead. In Islam, loved ones and relatives are required to observe a three-day mourning period which entails increased devotion, receiving visitors and condolences, and avoiding decorative clothing and jewellery. However, Abeeda visits the casino on the night of her son's funeral, as a way to overcome her emotional anguish, and this marks the beginning of a downward spiral of addiction. She chastises herself for dishonouring her son's memory in this way, but is unable to resist her addiction. Strongly engrained in a Muslim societal framework, the film displays many instances of set traditional gender roles as outlined by Muslim traditions, such as in the funeral sequence, but these traditional roles are also questioned in the film, and in particular through the character of Adeeba. As a single mother struggling to overcome her son's death, Abeeda is re-evaluating and negotiating her role and identity as a Muslim woman in contemporary South African society, even though her choices are sometimes flawed.

The film also deals with various male-female relationships, as we learn through flashbacks that Abeeda was in love with her sister's husband, Imran, when she was young, and he was evidently in love with her too, but nonetheless chose to marry her sister, Zulpha, who announces to Abeeda shortly after Reza's death that she is finally pregnant. Her best friend Garaati is married to a womaniser, Mahmoud, who wants to take a younger wife, and here the theme of polygamy is introduced, which is permissible under Islamic law in South Africa. In fact, Mahmoud marries a younger girl with Garaati only finding out about it afterwards, and when she visits Abeeda to convey the shocking news, Abeeda's advice to her friend is clear and succinct – she has to choose whether she can accept Mahmoud being married to another wife, and if not, she should not stay with him just because she is afraid of being alone. Abeeda's self-determination and independent spirit prompt her to tell her friend that she should seek happiness and fulfillment within herself, and not look for it in a relationship. Abeeda herself was abandoned by her husband when she was pregnant with her second son, and she has been single ever since. Despite Abeeda's heartache due to her untenable love for Imran, there is a close companionship between Abeeda and her sister Zulpha, and with their two other friends Garaati and Rhoda. Through multiple scenes of the close-knit group of women we come to understand the importance of female companionship in this society. In a provocative sequence of scenes, the four women are alternately in the jacuzzi together, and also praying and gambling together. Their identities as Muslim women are constantly re-negotiated on different levels, as they simultaneously perform and fulfill many diverse roles such as believers, mothers, friends, lovers and wives. At times their actions and behaviour might appear at odds with traditional gender frameworks within Islam, but rather than rejecting religion, they attempt to find ways through which to incorporate their faith within the many different aspects of their identities.

It is essentially these contrasts in Abeeda's life which constitute the core of the film – the ways in which Abeeda, an independent, sensual and headstrong woman, negotiates her womanhood within a conservative, prejudiced and deeply religious community, become a

microcosm for the negotiation and performance of female Muslim identity in South African society at large. Abeeda is a multi-faceted and fallible woman and as the extent of her gambling addiction intensifies, the viewer's sympathies lie strongly with her. Here I refer to an intended liberal viewer, as it is likely that a conservative and traditionalist Muslim viewer would strongly condemn these representations. The film's imagined and intended audience is clearly one that would contemplate and accept the progressive representations of Islamic womanhood. We observe Abeeda in the casino losing all her cash, and then getting more money from her credit card at an ATM. We see her counting out her remaining small change and asking the woman at the slot machine next to her to exchange it for a R10 note. With her actions throughout the film accompanied by her self-aware and articulate voice-over, she states at this point: "When it comes down to the change, you know who you are." She lies to her son to give her money supposedly for a dress for a fundraiser for the new mosque, and then goes straight back to the casino with the R1,000 he gives her, and loses everything. Eventually she loses all her money; she is stranded as her car runs out of petrol, her electricity is cut off, and there is one slice of bread and a single egg left in her fridge. There are repeated scenes of Abeeda in the casino, inserting note after note in the slot machines. The stylised cinematography of these scenes emphasises how Abeeda finds a solace of sorts in the numbingly repetitive motion of feeding money into the slots, and how she is spiraling further down the vacuum of addiction.

Abeeda's addiction finally compels her to commit a crime – she arranges with a second hand car dealer to have her car "stolen", by selling it to him far below its real value for cash, and then being able to claim the insurance money later as well. This final desperate deed is the dreadful climax of her addiction and she confesses to Garaati and makes a promise to herself, to God and to her Imam that she will seek rehabilitation and get her religious life back on track. The ending of the film ties various narrative strands together in a bittersweet conclusion. Zulpha dies of cancer shortly after the birth of her baby daughter and Abeeda discovers after her death that Zulpha knew all along Imran was in love with her. On her sister's death, she states: "I wasn't angry this time. It was the way of things." She revisits the

casino one last time to get herself banned, and at the conclusion of the film she can finally confirm: "Thank you God, thank you for the peace in my heart, for the clarity." The final scene sees Abeeda standing peacefully by a light tower gazing out over the ocean, a scene which contrasts the flashy temptations of the casino with the soothing serenity of the solitary Cape Town shoreline. The difficult process of overcoming her son's death and the destructive consequences of her gambling addition have been a painful journey of self-discovery for Abeeda, with the ending of the film indicating that she has, at least to a certain extent, managed to resolve conflicting and destructive desires into a more productive process of identity formation.

The female characters we encounter in the two films are all emotionally and economically independent Muslim women – Zulfah Otto-Sallies is a successful writer and filmmaker and a crucial role model for her daughter Muneera, and Abeeda is likewise a single mother and divorcee who bakes and sells pies for a living. These representations of emancipation and single motherhood stand in stark contrast to stereotypical notions of the oppressed Muslim female subjected to polygamy and other forms of patriarchal control, as well as to traditionalist notions of the appropriate conduct and cultural fate of divorced and widowed Muslim women. Muslim family structures and the role and position of women in Muslim society are certainly changing in contemporary South Africa, but for these women this does not mean a rejection but rather a reinterpretation of their faith. The versions of Muslim womanhood espoused in the films adhere to the descriptions of Islamic feminism proposed by scholars such as Shamima Shaikh and Sa'diyya Shaikh, who view Islam essentially as an egalitarian, non-patriarchal religion and see a feminist commitment as integral to Islam and responsive to the core Quranic call for justice. The female characters in the films are flawed and multi-faceted human beings and agents of their own destinies, with dynamic and multi-layered subjectivities.

Their religious orientation and identities are prominent in the films, with many of the female characters choosing to adhere to Muslim principles and precepts, such as the call to prayer,

visits to the mosque and the Imam, observing Ramadan and wearing head scarves, since they see their faith as integral to their identities. However, Western capitalism and modernity are also ingrained in the films, thus modifying traditional religious identities. South Africa is a modern, secular and capitalist state, and the female characters represented in the films do not function outside of these societal frameworks. The religious and the secular domains of the women's lives are not depicted as being segregated, but rather as overlapping spheres within which the women negotiate their positions and roles as modern Muslims. Through the generational differences encountered in the films it can be observed how Islam is changing and modernising itself in contemporary South Africa, and thus, as Islamic feminists maintain, it is not a static and rigid religion as it often appears in its more fundamentalist manifestations. The films embrace a progressive interpretation of Islam which does not see Muslim identity and being an emancipated woman as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show how female African identity can be performed on various different levels in film, in line with Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of identity as not being something that we inherently are, but rather something that we do. This means that identity should not be regarded as something rigid, but as a changeable and multiple construct, existing on many different levels such as social, racial, traditional, collective, individual and religious. Female identity is negotiated in African cinema in ways that emphasise the multi-dimensionality and fluidity of identity, in depicting women as complex, multi-faceted and sometimes flawed beings. In film, the examples of how female identity is performed in a variety of spheres could lead to questioning set and archaic categories of identity in the ways that they exist within tradition or patriarchy, and the formation of new forms of identity. The films discussed in this chapter are examples of how the performance of identity on different levels, also previously unexplored levels, could be an emancipatory process for African women.

Female identity is not defined solely on a communal level, but also on an individual level, and in some cases female filmmakers choose to focus in particular on the performance of an identity which prioritises individual choice and expression, as in Boni-Claverie's short *Pour la Nuit*, discussed in chapter 4. Here it is important to recognise how form and content are related as the intimate camerawork of her film results in a style which is very different from the earlier social realist tradition of West African filmmaking, and closer to a style of European arthouse filmmaking. This individual performance of identity can be observed particularly in women who are part of the African diaspora and thus do not live within the traditional communal structures of African societies. Different forms are used to develop different types of identities in film, for example in the stylised documentaries of Katy Léna N'diaye, which provide a space for women to perform an articulated and confident female identity which might be more difficult for them to do in other spaces.

The multiple ways in which women negotiate their emancipation are also depicted in film through examples of women in positions of leadership and women's collective action on grassroots levels. Often it is the everyday narratives of ordinary women who have emancipated themselves in innovative ways, which provide the most striking examples of the performance of an emancipated female identity, which could serve as important visions of female emancipation to other African women.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Researching women in African cinema

When I started my research into the role of women in African cinema, it immediately became clear that female directors are underrepresented in African film industries, as they are across the world. As a result, a lot more work is done critically and theoretically on the work of male directors. The main purpose of this study is thus to address an imbalance in the academic work done on female directors since, despite their underrepresentation in numbers, African women have contributed greatly to the film industries in Africa and their work deserved to be acknowledged and studied in depth. I attempted through this study to provide a sustained critical analysis of women's films in order to give their work a place within mainstream criticism. The study is by no means exhaustive, but I attempted to include a wide range of films in order to provide a representative sample of the work of female directors from West and South Africa. I attempted to be as inclusive as possible, through not excluding the work of white women (in particular from South Africa and Zimbabwe) and women from the African diaspora. In building on the work of film theorists and historians who have written on the work of female directors, I included films not analysed in-depth before, incorporated new themes, added to existing scholarship on films which have been studied theoretically before, and attempted to provide new critical models for analysing the work of female directors. I thus attempted to go beyond the theoretical canon through expanding on existing academic work on female African directors. The decision to include both West and Southern Africa in the study also provided the potential for developing new approaches in bringing films from these regions together, and contributing to the ongoing process of incorporating South African cinema into the history of African cinema as a whole.

An African feminist aesthetics in film?

The starting point of the study was an assumption that gender is a useful interpretative framework for studying cultural products such as films in postcolonial Africa. I wanted to interrogate what the notion of a female sensibility and aesthetics in film entails and whether there is a relationship between the manifestations of female sensibility and subjectivity in film

and the development of the theoretical field of African feminism. Postcolonial theory and African feminism appeared to be the two most useful critical fields in which to situate the study, as indigenous filmmaking in Africa is a primarily postcolonial activity (expect in the case of South Africa), and it became clear through my research that the work of female African filmmakers, whether they refer to themselves as feminists or not, do indeed broadly correspond to the main preoccupations and characteristics of African feminism. My study included feature fiction films, short films and documentaries, as women work within all these genres, and the thematic approach to analysing the films proved that female directors most often deal with 'female themes' in their work, and used their work to document female issues and propose visions for changes and progression in the roles of women in African societies.

The tension between modernity and tradition is a major impetus for the thematic choices in African cinema, and incorporates most of the themes addressed in this chapter. How these tensions are integrated is crucial to the emancipation of women in Africa, and some of the films discussed point towards possible solutions in this regard. The tension between modernity and tradition should not necessarily be seen as a 'conflict' in modern Africa, and certainly not as a binary opposition, but should be seen rather as a continuum since manifestations of the traditional and modern exist side by side in contemporary Africa. The 'modern' should not be simplistically regarded as a Western construct or influence which is necessarily detrimental to Africans' attempts to define their own identities. Likewise, traditional pre-colonial cultural traditions should not be romantically or nostalgically invoked as the only place where an 'authentic' Africa might be found. Traditions have to be reinterpreted and reassessed within modern Africa, which requires a process of constant negotiation as is displayed in films which transcend the tradition-versus-modernity binary and reinforce the complexity of specific cultural practices.

According to Roy Armes (2006) the depiction of time is very distinctive in those African films which respond creatively to the lived, everyday fact that modernity and tradition are not successive temporal states, but co-existing and inter-related contemporary situations. Olivier

Barlet (1996) agrees that 'modernity versus tradition' is not a fixed certainty, but a dynamic space – doubting one's origins is to escape a fixation on those origins, while not denying them, in a process which propels a move forward towards social change. Many filmmakers attempt to escape the dualism between modernity and tradition through placing divisions such as town/village, past/present, individualism/solidarity, and Western/African in a relationship of complementarity rather than opposition. Nnaemeka (2002: 6) suggests that this complementary rather than oppositional approach is crucial in the creative practices of African women, because treated as such, these dualities "give life, vibrancy and meaning". For Beatrice Wanjiku Mukora (2003: 219) meaning then comes to represent the complexities and multiplicity of postcolonial subjects. The themes explored by female African directors in this study certainly indicate this multiplicity of subject positionings through a multi-layered representation of womanhood in contemporary Africa.

In considering and analysing the aesthetic and stylistic approaches of female filmmakers, my research showed that there are certainly thematic and stylistic continuity and cohesion in some instances, but there is also discontinuity in places which makes it impossible to pinpoint one aesthetic framework. The work of female African directors certainly addresses multiple themes and stylistic approaches, and some of these approaches do not neatly fit into the theoretical framework of African feminism. What this indicates is that the discourses of African film and African feminism are ongoing debates with many voices taking part.

In focusing on a wide range of filmmaking practices and styles, and a specific preoccupation with contemporary films, it also became clear that the hybrid and interstitial spaces that some African women occupy, for example mixed-race women and women from the African diaspora, require a reassessment of some of the tenets of African feminism. African feminism is not necessarily always "pro-natal, heterosexual and to do with 'bread, butter and power' issues", as this assumption would seem to limit women's choices with regard to motherhood, marriage, sexuality, and economic emancipation. African women are not a homogenous collective, and all the postcolonial manifestations and diasporic discourses which refuse to

essentialise the 'home country' form part of the ways in which African women conduct their lives and gain agency and subjectivity. Films by women from the African diaspora, such as the work of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, are often marginalised but are in fact progressive representations of African womanhood which should be regarded as part and parcel of contemporary African cinema. What becomes clear is that modes of emancipation are culture-specific rather than universal, and that these also include a focus on individual emancipation and self-determination, and not only emancipated public participation. This also means a further expansion of the definition of "African feminism", which should be understood in the plural, and it is the reason why it might be productive to look at African feminism not only as an oppositional discourse to Western feminism, but also to consider where elements of Western feminism might usefully be applied to an analysis of African women's films, as in my use of Butler's work.

A crucial discovery of this study is that the subaltern can indeed find a voice through the work of female African filmmakers. In some of the documentaries discussed in this study, such as the work of Senegalese directors Katy Léna N'diaye and Angèle Diabang Brener, and through the South African Project 10 documentary series, a space is opened up for the subaltern and marginalised to make their voices heard. This is particularly true for documentary filmmaking, where women are active agents in the film and where the relationship of trust that often develops between the female filmmakers and her female subjects results in a style of intimacy in their filmmaking that blurs the lines between director and subject, particularly in cases where the director inserts herself as subject in the film.

As opposed to preserving emancipating female traditions and documenting the experiences and livelihoods of real-life women which provide examples to other African women of female liberation, fiction filmmaking offers opportunities for creating visions for female emancipation and change, even if a society still has a long way to go in reaching these goals. Thus, both documentary and fiction filmmaking could inhabit an activist dimension which could propel forward the liberation of African women in resisting persistent patriarchal traditions which

continue to oppress women. Female filmmaking consists of documentation, storytelling and myth-making in which women take on the challenge of creating representational frameworks that transform women from being objects to become active subjects. Whereas the propensity of women to work on 'development themes', in particular in Southern African documentary filmmaking, could be limiting in the sense that women are not always in control of the images they create, this study showed that even within these developmental frameworks of documentaries commissioned by outside donors, women often find innovative ways of still bringing across what is most important to them, as in the Southern African Steps for the Future documentary series.

When Spivak argued that the subaltern cannot speak, this was particularly true of African women who were doubly oppressed through colonialism and patriarchy. Twenty years on from Spivak's essay, there has been a significant rise in the visibility and vocal power of African women and they have become an important part of African cinema, as actors, festival organisers, academics, writers and filmmakers. The films included in this study provide an opportunity for the subaltern to speak and offer a new space for renegotiating female African identities and reclaiming female subjectivity and agency, with all these representations contributing to the development of a diverse and plural female African film aesthetics. As explained in previous chapters, I regard 'female' as a more useful term in this context than 'feminist', as some female filmmakers resist the label of feminist which indicates that African feminism is an evolving endeavour with it own epistemology based within an African context and worldview.

The question of audiences

The question of audiences is a perennial issue for African filmmakers, male and female, and in the case of female filmmaking it becomes particularly crucial as the power of their films in raising awareness of female issues relies on getting African audiences to see the films. This study did no allow scope to address the issue of audiences, but it would be fair to say that in some cases the power of the work remains latent and unrealised due to the massive

distribution and exhibition barriers faced by African cinema.

The production boom that South African cinema has undergone recently, as well as the international success and recognition that South African films are increasingly enjoying is certainly something to celebrate, but South African films generally do not do very well at the local box office. Despite the massive growth in local production over the last few years, only a fraction of the South African public attends cinema regularly, and they see mostly mainstream Hollywood films. The commercial realities of the film industry in South Africa are shaped by the difficulties in establishing an economically viable indigenous national industry amongst audiences who have for decades been fed on overseas imports and who regarded local films as rare oddities mostly inferior to international products. To view films as crucial forms of cultural and artistic expression as well as an educational tool often conflicts with the economic considerations of distributors and broadcasters. As in the case of francophone West Africa cinema, it is important, in this regard, to distinguish the purpose of alternative, artistically innovative or even 'radical' filmmaking, intended to raise social awareness, educate and celebrate creative and artistic expression, from the commercial model of cinema concerned primarily with financial return. The main film distributors in South Africa are generally not very keen to take a chance on local films or to commit to developing new audiences for local products, which would disrupt income streams and inevitably result in a time period during which profits would be low or non-existent. South African films are released in local cinemas with varied box office success, and, as is echoed all over the continent, many players in the South African film industry also feel that to improve this situation local distributors have to start believing in local films. It is suggested that quotas for local film exhibition in cinemas should be set up and enforced, and a substantial percentage of the box office return from foreign film exhibition should be fed back into the local industry.

The situation is somewhat more optimistic in francophone West Africa since limited local audiences do exist as a result of FESPACO. Locals flock to the screenings of francophone African films at the festival, and the filmmakers are treated as national heroes and celebrities.

However, francophone West African film industries are by no means economically viable or self-sustainable and continue to rely on international co-productions and foreign funding. Historically, two French companies controlled the distribution, exhibition and film programming of most of francophone Africa and when some countries nationalised their cinema industries after independence, the two companies refused to distribute films to these countries. Furthermore, the practice of block bookings meant that directors could not show their films in their own countries and filmmakers reacted by putting pressure on their governments to nationalise distribution and film screening. Outside of FESPACO, West African filmmakers are still struggling to make their work available to their own people; most West African audiences have for years been fed on a film diet of Hollywood, Bollywood, Westerns and kung fu films, much cheaper for distributors to acquire than African films. It is generally felt that African films should firstly find audiences in their own countries, then on the whole continent, and finally target international audiences. However, in reality this process often takes place the other way around, with African films firstly gaining international recognition at film festivals such as Cannes and Berlin, and often finding no local audiences at all.

Many players in the African film industries proclaim digital filmmaking as the future of African cinema, as per Nigeria's Nollywood model. Nollywood is currently the only economically self-sustainable film industry in Africa and the third largest film industry in the world after Hollywood and Bollywood. African filmmakers from all over the continent are increasingly making use of this new technology, a low-cost, viable alternative to traditional filmmaking practices and a crucial development which might just signify a major shift towards the expansion of African film production and distribution. In terms of content and style, Nollywood films are often criticised for their low production values and poor scripts. It would thus appear that the economic future of the film industries in francophone West Africa and lusophone and anglophone Southern Africa would lie in exploring ways in which the artistic and creative prerogatives of these industries could be consolidated with economically viable production and distribution models.

The future of women in African cinema

In retrospect, female filmmaking from francophone West Africa seems to have been at the crest of a wave at the 2005 FESPACO. In 2007 and 2009 no films by women from sub-Saharan Africa were included in the competition for feature films and thus it would appear that female filmmaking from this region is on the decline. However, through interviews and informal discussion with female directors from francophone West Africa I have learned that most of the women included in this study are currently working on new productions, including feature films. As is true all over the continent, the process of producing a feature film could often take many years and some of the most famous African directors produce only a handful of films throughout their careers and a fraction of the number of films produced by their American or European counterparts.

In South Africa female filmmaking is certainly increasing. When I commenced this study in 2005 only one black woman has produced a feature film, and was only the fourth women in South Africa to direct a feature film, but this situation has changed with four more female directors emerging in the past four years with feature film productions. It should also be kept in mind that many women work independently from state-funded film initiatives, and a lot more African women work in video and television than in film, and direct documentaries rather than feature films. If only the feature film output by female directors is considered in a study on female filmmaking in Africa, the picture that would emerge would be skewed.

The work discussed in this study indicate that female African filmmaking depicts female identity as consisting of multiple categories, with a hybridity present in their themes and styles that is one of the key concepts of postcolonial theory. Gender identities are seen as transformative and fluid. Whereas a lot of the work done by female directors are intended to be activist in nature, to raise awareness of female issues and to educate African women, there is certainly also a close engagement with aesthetics, such as in the highly stylised and visually stunning work of Katy Léna N'diaye and Isabelle Boni-Claverie, as well as a

preoccupation with style such as in the humorous and satirical work of Fanta Regina Nacro and the dramatic style of Rayda Jacobs' *Confessions of a Gambler*. Female filmmakers are likely to continue working within a multiplicity of themes, genres and styles.

The 1991 FESPACO gathering of female African film practitioners was certainly a positive step forward in assessing the presence of women in the audio-visual industries in Africa and devising strategies to encourage more women to become part of the industry, but a lot of work remains to be done. Distribution and exhibition remain problematic and challenging, in ensuring that the films actually reach the audiences they were intended for. Cinema is important because of its accessibility as a medium of mass consumption, and this study has shown that women have contributed to this process and will continue to do so, despite the enormous challenges that they face. The films created by African women can actually have significance on a global scale as they encourage and promote a more equal and gender-just society.

The films directed by African women show the multiplicity of views and subject positions available to African women, which result in films which might not necessarily embody an overt 'feminist' aesthetics, but merely allude to a female subjectivity and sensibility. Ellerson (1997) states that African Women Cinema Studies should provide critical perspectives that consider how African women's contributions in the cinema through pedagogy for mass communication and consciousness-raising are directly related to African development. In addition, African women's cinemas potentially become an 'alternative discourse', a way of experiencing cinema outside Western, masculinist and patriarchal hegemony. The films directed by African women provide opportunities for seeing through a woman's eyes – a vision that transcends geographies and locations, in which boundaries are blurred and positioning goes beyond nationality, ethnicity and race. Representations of identity and subjectivity become multiple, fragmented and evolving, as female filmmakers deal with the effects of societal changes forged by the influences of modernity, globalisation, migration and immigration in their films. These films become a counter and supplement to Western

representations of Africa, and essential additions to the films created by male African directors, ultimately a reclamation of women's right to create and control their own images.

Further research

This study lends itself to further research and development in the future in a number of ways. Comparative studies with other regions would be necessary as there is also a rise in female directors in East Africa, for example, as well as a tradition of female filmmaking in North Africa. The question of audiences would need to be addressed in further detail as this is such a crucial part in determining the reach and success of women's films. As this study was not specifically concerned with male filmmaking, feminist interpretations of the work of male directors who address women's themes in their films would provide interesting additional insights into the question of what a 'female sensibility' or a 'female African film aesthetics' entails, and whether male directors could contribute to and be part of this endeavour.

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Raya (Zulfah Otto-Sallies, South Africa, 2000)

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