Mobility and the Representation of African Dystopian Spaces in Film and Literature

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the use of mobility as a creative style used by writers and filmmakers to represent the deterioration in the socio-economic and political circumstances of post-independence Africa. It makes a scholarly contribution to the field of postcolonial studies by introducing mobility as a new method for understanding film and literature. Increasingly, scholars in the social sciences are finding it important to examine mobility and its relationship with power and powerlessness among groups of people. This dissertation expands on the current study by applying it to the arts. It demonstrates how filmmakers and writers use mobility as a creative style to address issues such as economic globalization, international migration, and underdevelopment.

Another significant contribution of this dissertation is that it introduces a new perspective to the debate on African migration. The current trend is for migrants to be seen in the light of vulnerability and powerlessness. This project presents the position that migration is also empowering in the sense that people sometimes can revolt against an unfavorable situation by leaving.

Theoretically, this study relies to a large extent on Cresswell’s (2006) argument that motion can be regarded as mobility, if it occurs physically and has a meaning to it. Thus, the dissertation seeks to find answers to two principal questions. First, how does mobility fit in with the creative styles commonly used by postcolonial artists? Since
mobility ensures fluidity in bodily displacement, its use in the creative arts offers a sense of narrative omnipresence through which postcolonial artists can present their audiences with an intimate knowledge of the socio-economic and political realities of a place (Africa). Secondly, this study examines what the selected filmmakers and writers consider as the challenges to African development. In addition, this project assesses how these artists differ in their use of mobility to represent the challenge to African development.

The research is divided into four main chapters. The first discusses Knudsen’s *Heart of Gold* (2006) in the context of globalization. It examines how the act of walking can expose the vulnerability of African economies with respect to their relationship with multinational mining companies. The second chapter examines how Abani’s *Song for Night* (2007) allegorizes walking to highlight the role of African peoples to the underdevelopment of the continent. The third chapter examines forced migration as a nonverbal expression of a state of ineffective leadership. It is based on the study of Somali migration to Yemen as visualized in Grandclement’s film *Journey Through Hell* (2011). The final chapter looks at VanOrden’s literary memoir, *Africa: Stranger than Fiction* (2008), to understand the underlining power relationship between Africa and the Western world as it relates to transnational mobility and the reinforcement of the geographies of stereotypes.
I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Lolita Kumbalonah, our son, Antiere Kumbalonah, my parents, Kingsley Kumbalonah and Bibiana Bakara, and my siblings, Godfred Williams-Nanyaa, Jonathan Kunwanie Williams, Cecilia Sunachebe Williams, and Vida Tang.
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INTRODUCTION

In this study, mobility is examined as a creative tool used in literature and film to deliver to the audience what the artist considers as the failure of Africa’s independence. Africans responded to the end of colonial rule with optimism for the future. However, soon to follow the euphoria was a long lasting sense of disillusionment. The story of African independence is best described as dystopian in view of the fact that the present reality contradicts the pre-independence expectations. In using mobility, the artists featured in this research take the audience on a journey through specific African locales to expose this contradiction between the utopian hopes of African independence and the dystopian reality of today.

The study will investigate how mobility is used in four artworks—two films and literary pieces. They include Heart of Gold by the prolific filmmaker Erik Knudsen. He currently has over fifteen productions to his credit. Among his most recent works includes The Raven on the Jetty (2014), The Silent Accomplice (2010), Vainilla Chip (2009), and Veil (2008). His film mode falls within the genre of transnational cinema. He does not restrict his film practice to any specific geographic/cultural space. He comes from a mixed parental heritage—Ghana and Denmark. In addition, he has for a long time lived in England. This diversity of backgrounds translates into his work. His films deal with African as well as non-African issues. In Heart of Gold, he attempts to bring African and Western cultures into conversation on the subject of gold mining. With funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK, Knudsen made Heart of Gold to show cinematically the differences in cultural attitudes to gold. He demonstrates that while the
Westerner regards gold as an economic resource which must be exploited, the African (Ghanaian) considers it as both economic and spiritual piece. In October 2006, *Heart of Gold* received a major international boost when it premiered at the Sao Paulo International Film Festival, Brazil.

The next piece of artwork to be analyzed is Chris Abani’s novel, *Song for Night* (2007); a story about an unidentified war-torn African country. Like Knudsen, Abani regards his work as transnational. But he qualifies his form of transnationalism as one concerned with the quest for human rights. Consequently, his novels have often dealt with issues such as war, child soldiers, and poverty. Aside from *Song for Night*, his other well-acclaimed work is *GraceLand* (2004), which concerns attempts by the teenage protagonist, Elvis Oke, to leave his country in order to escape poverty.

Next to be examined is Daniel Grandclement’s documentary *Journey Through Hell* (2011). It tells the tragic story of Somali migration to Yemen. This documentary was made initially for television broadcast. But the success of the broadcast caused it to be converted into a commercial documentary. Grandclement has established himself as an important documentary filmmaker having made three successful films so far. The other two are *Lost Children of Senegal* (2009) and *Black Spring Christians of Egypt* (2013). His documentaries deal with current social and economic issues related to Africa.

The last work to be analyzed in this research is VanOrden’s literary memoir *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction: Memoirs of a Humanitarian Worker* (2008). This piece is the writer’s first attempt at literary artistry. He is primarily a humanitarian worker, not a writer. Based on his experience working in southern Africa, he decided to write a memoir.
This book is yet to make any major impact on the African literary scene. Notwithstanding, it presents an eyewitness account of Africa and therefore fits the objective of this research.

All the artworks identified above will be analyzed looking at how mobility is used to narrate the failure of independence to bring about social justice. Colonialism was not resisted simply because it was exploitative but also because it was an illegitimate authority. It is illegitimate in the sense that a country’s present and future circumstances were determined by a foreign authority. Independence was therefore to remove this incongruity in the exercise of power. From this colonial experience, independence was celebrated as the much-awaited historical moment, when the nationalization of political authority would ensure progress in all aspects of postcolonial African life. This meant instituting political and economic reforms to minimize social injustice. This post-independence optimism of the African peoples has taken a nosedive into a state of dystopia. After approximately 54 years of political freedom, Africa is yet to free itself from widespread social injustice (Taylor 2013). It is still severely affected by poverty, armed conflict, political instability, and dependence on foreign organizations and nations, among other situations that perpetuate inequality.

An unsettling aspect of this state of affairs is that it is taking place under the “legitimate” leadership of Africans; it is no longer, at least directly, the cause of an illegitimate colonizing force. In this dissertation the term postcolonial dystopia will be used to describe this situation of unabated social injustice. Consequently, this study will examine how mobility is used in creative practice to explicate the occurrence of
postcolonial dystopia in specific African contexts. While this disappointing reality of postcolonial Africa has received substantial attention in the creative arts, the objective here is to further contribute to the discussion using mobility as a new frame of investigation.

**Methodology**

The research is grounded on two principal theories: mobility and postcolonialism. These choices reflect the dual nature of this project. On one hand, it looks at the use of mobility in the creative arts. Secondly, it is concerned with the political message behind the motion. In this regard, postcolonial theory serves as an ideal method for discussing issues of social injustice in Africa. The two chosen methods of analysis will thus be used concomitantly to understand how mobility is used in the selected films and literary works to show social and economic conditions that contribute to Africa’s postcolonial dystopia.

*Mobility Theory*

Mobility is commonly used to denote any activity which involves moving. A list of examples provided by Cresswell (2006) includes walking, dancing, running, immigration, attending conferences, among others. It is even claimed that the oxygen and food that move in and out of the human body can be considered as forms of mobility (Adey 2010). If so, then, as Cresswell remarks, “mobility is everywhere” (1). By this, “…mobility itself, and what it means, remains unspecified” (Cresswell 2006, 2). As Soderstrom & Crot (2010) note, mobility is assumed to be a norm and therefore “remains
under-theorized” (6). This notwithstanding, Cresswell (2006) has attempted to offer a more useful theorization of the concept. He describes it as the “act of moving between locations” along a map (Cresswell 2006, 2). This specifies mobility as “a fundamental geographical facet of existence and, as such, provides a rich terrain from which narratives—and indeed, ideologies—can be, and have been, constructed” (Cresswell 2006, 1). Mobility is to be understood in terms of actual movement of people and things from one definite point to another. To further specify what exactly is meant by mobility, he distinguishes between movement and mobility: While the former is “the dynamic equivalent of location in abstract space” the latter is the “dynamic equivalence of place” (Cresswell 2006, 2) where place refers to a location with meaning and power. Simply put, movement is “the act of displacement that allows people to move between locations” (Cresswell 2006, 2) and this is “devoid of meaning, history, and ideology” (Cresswell 2006, 3) relating to that change in location. “A place” however “is a center of meaning—we become attached to it, we fight over it and exclude people from it—we experience it” (Cresswell 2006, 3).

Cresswell (2006) again sets three criteria for mobility: One is that, in relation to human mobility, “it should be a brute fact—something that is potentially observable, a thing in the world, an empirical reality” (3). Also, he explains that there are ideas about mobility (freedom, transgression, creativity, and life) that are conveyed through various representational strategies ranging from film to law, medicine to photography, literature to philosophy. These representations of mobility capture and make sense of space through the reproductions of meanings that are frequently ideological. Finally, he states that
“mobility is practiced, it is experienced, it is embodied” (3). This means one must feel the act of moving. For example, a person may feel pain in the feet due to walking or be incapable of sleeping due to flight taken from one location to another.

Mobility, for the purpose of this study is framed in terms of Cresswell’s definition. In this regard, it will involve an assessment of the use of actual acts of movement (or displacement) as a narrative technique in the selected films and literary works. In following Cresswell’s model, this project will attempt to determine how post-independent Africa can be understood through movements. It will be focused on the ideological significance of motion which Cresswell argues to be the narrative force of mobility, whether used in literature, film, painting and photography.

With respect to mobility theory, there is a stylistic commonality used in all the artworks analyzed here; physical movements are examined to tell the story of Africa’s post-independence dystopia. Drawing on Cresswell’s theorization of mobility, the object is to understand how these artists use different forms of spatial displacement to illustrate the wasted dream of Africa’s political freedom. The forms of movements used by the artists either show spaces of dystopia or reveal how Africa’s current predicament is causing people to move. Whichever the case may be, the fact is that mobility can be used in narratives.

Adey (2010) proposes two forms of mobility: little mobilities and big mobilities. He argues that immobility is practically impossible. Even for a person who is motionless, s/he continues to survive because there are internal movements and interactions in the person’s body. They include blood circulation, nerve function, hormone activity, etc.
Again, this individual will cease to live if oxygen does not move into his/her lungs or if food does not make its way into one’s stomach. Adey therefore concludes that nothing is static—humans survive because they are internally and externally mobile and the environment around them is also mobile. These are what he calls little mobilities.

In explaining big mobilities, Adey uses the phenomenon of food transportation to show spatial interconnection through movement. “Thus, the food on one’s plate,” he elucidates, “is simply a point on a journey of vectors of food-flow from fields, farms and vineyards, from a kaleidoscope of places, some very close and others thousands of miles away” (9). Such a chain of movement, he argues, “speaks to economic transformations and social reorganization of towns, cities and the countryside” (3). On the general level, Adey is using big mobilities to refer to large-scale movements which connect places far and near. An example of such movement is what is described as globalization—defined by K. Robins (2003) as a form of “growing mobility across frontiers—mobility of goods and commodities, mobility of information and communication products and services, and mobility of people” (239). This concept of big mobilities connects to the discussion of globalization in the first chapter of this dissertation. Focusing on *Heart of Gold*, this study looks at economic globalization as an outcome of mobility and then discusses the meaning (effect) of this international movement in trade on the postcolonial experience of Africa.

Ideally, economic globalization allows for the “free” movement of goods and services across near and far away frontiers. It integrates individual national economies into larger, global-scale, trade platforms. Thus, Africa, owing to its natural resource
endowment, is expected to fully benefit from this global economic order. Africa’s participation in this big mobility has been far from yielding any substantial benefit, going by the fact that, statistically, about one out of every two Africans lives in extreme poverty (Kaplan 2013). This emphasizes Africa’s postcolonial state of dystopia. Adey’s concept of big mobilities will also be important to the discussion on how economic globalization undermines state sovereignty. The ineffectiveness of economic globalization to bring about social justice in terms of reducing poverty is partly due to the increasing global weakness of African countries. This has allowed the stronger countries and their proxies to dominate global trade. Tsing (2005) describes this as a form of friction arising from global economic mobility.

In her article “Narrating Instability,” Hercbergs (2012) undertakes a study which demonstrates the aesthetic power of mobility. Using the ethnographic method of guided tour, she examines the use of mobility for advocacy in politically contested spaces in Jerusalem. Her article is based on the work of Palestinian tour guides in Jerusalem, who “strategically employ both discourse and movement to convince tourists of the injustice of the Israeli occupation” (415). They take tourists to places that offer evidence of Israeli injustice. Also, sightseers are led to sections of the city which have been designated as Jewish areas. This has been termed political detouring. By this walking-tour experience, tourists learn about restrictions in mobility, as in the case of the Palestinians within the cityscape of Jerusalem. This method is intended to present “the guided tour genre as a potentially transformative encounter” for those who get to experience it (415). Ultimately, the desired result is to draw the attention of the world to the discrimination
Palestinians are being subjected to in Jerusalem. This concept will be essential to the analysis of *Heart of Gold*. Mobility in the film will be examined in relation to political detour. Similarly, it will be applied to the analysis of *Song for Night*. In both *Heart of Gold* and *Song for Night*, the artists present a story about Africa through narrators who function as tour-guides.

The discussion in Chapter 3 examines current Somali migration to Yemen. It utilizes the concept of protest migration as discussed by Ifekwunigwe (2013). In the article “Voting with their Feet,” Ifekwunigwe discusses illegal migration by Senegalese youth to Europe as a form of protest against the state. He contends that considering what they endure in the process of mobility, the trend should have subsided under normal circumstances. However, considering that the conditions they face at home are not normal, they find it necessary to leave their country even if the process of moving is dangerous. In her article “Mobility,” Sheller (2011) provides a related opinion. She argues that global mobility at some moments turns into immobility. This means that while the world seems to be getting increasingly interconnected through enhanced mobility, this system of global flow at times comes to a halt or becomes heavily restricted by factors such as natural disasters, breakdown of transport systems, political unrest, immigration regulations, and poverty. In analyzing the film *A Journey Through Hell*, this dissertation relies on Ifekwunigwe’s position on migration out of Africa. Sheller’s ideas of restricted mobility will be important in discussing the pattern of illegal emigration embarked upon by Africans. When it comes to the physical dangers involved in the exodus, Sheller’s view will be important as well.
The objective here is to use the film *Journey Through Hell* to examine the feeling of hopelessness which many Africans have about their nations. The study will also look at how these disappointed individuals show their desperation to the point of risking their lives to break through situations which may be acting as hindrances to them moving out of Africa. The underlying statement which these movements make is that African governments have failed to provide opportunities for economic fulfillment; hence, citizens look elsewhere for better prospects. The spatial displacement they seek becomes synonymous with a search for progress—economic mobility—which they have discovered to be non-existent in their various African places of origin.

*Postcolonial Theory*

In the original publication of the *Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (1989), offer what has become the standard definition of postcolonialism. They use it to refer to all cultural productions (film, literature, painting, etc.) that reflect the colonial history of a place. This definition was broadened in the later edition of the book. In the revised conceptualization, Ashcroft et al described postcolonialism as;

all that cultural production which engages, in one way or another, with the enduring reality of colonial power (including its newer manifestations), ‘post-colonial’ is still best employed, as it was in the first edition, to refer to post-*colonization*. This is a process in which colonized societies participate over a long period, through different phases and modes of engagement with the colonizing power, during and after the actual period of direct colonial rule (2002, 195).
Postcolonialism concerns issues of marginalization, inequality, and the injustice of colonialism which formerly colonized people had to endure. Using cultural productions such as literature and film, they examine the social injustice of their history while at the same time looking out for contemporary manifestations of the unjust past. This theoretical frame will guide the analysis of all the artworks featured in this study. It will be used to understand the social injustices still confronting postcolonial Africa.

In the article, “Bondage of Boundaries,” Marzrui (1994) blames the current predicaments of Africa on the colonial division of the continent. The arbitrariness of the partition has resulted in the creation of nations that have become dysfunctional. This is because the nation-state has tended to force diverse groups of people to live under one national identity. The experience of civil and ethnic wars in Africa proves that the notion of the nation does not always work.

In a related position, Nunn (2003) contends that colonialism underdeveloped Africa in three ways. It resulted in the depopulation of the continent through slavery. Secondly, it caused a permanent rent-seeking behavior. This means people were forced to abandon their economic activities rather than work for the colonist. Finally, it resulted in the weakening of property rights causing Africans to lose their property wealth. Rodney (2005) in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* observes that development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending on the age in which one lives, one’s class origins, and one’s personal code of
what is right and what is wrong. However, what is indispensable is that the achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole. Rodney further argues that relations which develop within a society determine one’s understanding of that society. In this respect, development indicators such as “freedom, responsibility, skill, etc, have real meaning only in terms of the relations of men in the society” (2). At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations. Rodney's conceptualization of development is relevant to appreciating the disparity between development as understood by the postcolonial African governments and development as expected by their citizens. It is also be important in assessing the relationship between the material well-being of citizens and national harmony.

Postcolonial theory has often been used in the context of protest against former colonizers or the West at large. Consequently, African literature is said to be dominated by themes of protest (Boyd 2013). In practice, however, this theory is applicable to the (formerly) colonized subject as well. This dissertation will be focused more on how African states have dominated their citizens by denying the majority of them opportunities of economic and social survival. Notwithstanding, there are instances where external contributions to Africa’s postcolonial dystopia will be discussed. This approach is intended to give a diversified frame for examining the failures of the continent. It moves away from the common practice where colonialism overshadows almost every discussion on Africa’s underdevelopment.
In terms of the role of Africa in its own predicaments, the work of two theorists will be essential to this dissertation. The first is Fanon (2004), who opines that African independence has benefited the middle class. He argues that the masses contributed more to anti-colonial campaigns than the politicians. He contends that the masses sacrificed more for the cause of independence because they were poor and therefore had nothing to lose in confronting the brutal power of colonialism. But the educated elites—who were business owners and middleclass professionals—half-heartedly supported anti-colonial struggle because they feared that it would get violent and they might lose all that they have. Ironically, since the end of the struggle, it is the middle class that has benefited most from independence. They now hold positions of economic and political power while the rest of the population remains disenfranchised. This fits into the overall argument of this project; which is that independence has resulted in the legitimatization of social injustice.

Another author whose work is essential here is Mbembe (2001). In his book, *On the Postcolony*, he theorizes about the constituting structure and function of what he calls the commandement—the authority of the post-independent state. He identifies four "main properties" of commandement that still remain in post-independence Africa. First, the authority of the state is a régime d’exception. As he explains, it is always a "departure from the principle of a single law for all." Second, it confers "privileges and immunities" on multinational companies and agencies, privileged groups and individuals. Next, it conceives of itself "on the basis of an imaginary of the state [as] the organizer of public happiness" (Mbembe 20). Based on these identified attributes of the commandement,
Mbembe asserts that its instruments and institutions are hardly designed to "attain any public good." The failure of civil society and the ascendance of anomie in national life arise from this lopsidedness in the relations of power and hasten the process of decomposition of postcolonial African states. He characterizes postcolonial African governments as being under a type of political authority which is constituted mainly on the economic interests of the state and its representative units and less on the promotion of general public welfare. Mbembe's ideas concerning the formation of postcolonial governmentality will inform the discussion postcolonial dystopia. It will provide the theoretical foundation for understanding why the social contract between African states and their citizens seems to have broken in many cases.

Relationship between Film and Literature in the African Context

Literature and film are the focus of this dissertation because in African arts, filmmakers and writers more than any other artistic group have engaged with the issues concerning the continent’s dystopian state. Commenting on his novel A Man of the People (1967), Achebe described the book as “a rather serious indictment of post independent Africa” (Duerden & Pieterse 1972, 13). Prior to independence, writers were motivated by anticolonial ideology. In the present, they are focusing more on perusing social, economic, and political wellbeing.

The cinema of Africa is closely connected to its literature in the sense that both attempt to pursue issues of social justice associated with the dystopian experience of the continent. Just as Achebe espouses for the African writer, Ousmane Sembene, the
founder of African cinema, also places “educational emphasis on cinema” by referring to it as “a night school” (Ukadike 1994, 97). In choosing to base this dissertation on film and literature, this author is guided by the fact that postcolonial African literature and cinema are motivated by a sense of duty to remind African leaders of the unachieved dreams that accompanied independence. This broader frame of dystopia will be utilized to determine how the individual artworks narrate the sense of postcolonial hopelessness.

\textit{Why Postcolonial Theory and Mobility?}

The proposal to use postcolonial theory and mobility to analyze these works of art is motivated by the dual objective of this research. This dissertation looks at how artists use motion to tell the story of Africa’s post-independence failure. The use of mobility theory is to account for the style of storytelling, while postcolonial theory is used to examine the message of the narrative. In the current century, African literary and film productions have seen significant ideological transformations. Beginning in the colonial era, artists have used postcolonial theory as an ideological framework for their works. This is understandable as the interest of artists in that period was to resist colonial domination. Postcolonial theory thus served as an ideal frame for art practice, since it represented a voice of opposition to colonial narratives about Africa.

Considering the widespread dissatisfaction with post-independent Africa, contemporary artists, unlike those of the older generation, are skeptical of the “conceptual accuracy and practical-analytical utility of postcolonial theory and practice” (Frohne, Negash, & Azado 2014, xi). But these new artists do not abandon postcolonial theory
entirely. They deemphasize “the binary between the local (margin) and the global (the center/the metropolis)” (Frohne, Negash, & Azado 2014, xi). For artists, who are motivated by the need to tell the story of Africa’s independence fiasco, they look within the local instead of the metropolis (colonizers) to determine what accounts for the continent’s failure to fulfill its pre-independence promise. The decision to use postcolonial theory to analyze the artworks in this research is guided by the fact that they all belong to this new generation of artistic expression, which holds Africa responsible for its present predicaments. Exception is made, however, for Erik Knudsen’s *Heart of Gold*, which attributes Africa’s economic dystopia to globalization. Even in this case, the filmmaker still blames African countries participating in neoliberal practices without first determining how they will make this economic engagement benefit their economies.

Literature Review

*Mobility as a Narrative Method*

Tuck-Po (2008) reveals the creative use of mobility in her discussion of fieldwork experience with the Batek people, a nomadic group in Malaysia. She states that while on site, she observed amongst the people that walking was used as a way to give a narrative about the place they lived. She explains that walking creates paths and “[P]aths are social phenomena, and are remembered by social events” (26). She concludes from this that walking has a social meaning which requires paying attention to the people who make and use the paths. This experience shows that mobility is not simply a geographical or
sociological concept but can also be literary. It is this sense of literariness (and film-ness) of motion which this dissertation is attempting to investigate.

In an observation similar to Lye’s, Legate (2008) suggests that among the Dene people of Canada, children’s stories are created based on the group’s pattern of mobility. The stories show the link between the community and the pathways which their daily movements have created on the ground. Walking therefore plays a role in the socialization of Dene children. It forms the basis for the creation of narratives about the community and their relationship with the physical space they inhabit. Through this, children get to learn about themselves and the group as a whole. Walking therefore creates “the experience that binds narrative to the acquisition of…knowledge” (Legate 2008, 35). Ethnographic engagement with mobility such as this is investigated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Drawing on Legat’s experience, this dissertation will examine the ethnographical methods employed in Journey Through Hell to understand how mobility binds narrative with knowledge of illegal migration.

According to Sheller (2011), emerging studies on mobility ought to be distinguished from their previous use in sociological terms. In sociology, the term is “equated with the idea of ‘social mobility’, referring to an individual’s categorical movement up or down the scale of socioeconomic classes” (1). The new theoretical paradigm looks at “the spatial mobility of humans, non-humans and objects; the circulation of information, images and capital; as well as the study of the physical means for movement such as infrastructures, vehicles and software systems that enable travel and communication to take place” (1-2). The current study on mobility, however,
“encompasses both the embodied practice of movement and representations, ideologies and meanings attached to both movement and stillness” (1). She proposes mobility as a methodological frame which should be considered in social science studies, such as globalization, communication, migration, border studies, tourism, geography, and anthropology. This position falls in line with Cresswell’s definition, which is being used to structure the research.

Sheller’s call for the use of mobility as a system of inquiry is reiterated by Urry (2007), who argues that mobility provides a new method for studying society. He proposes that the study of a place which is clearly mobile requires that “research methods also…be ‘on the move’” (39). In relation to this, he advocates observation of moving bodies. Secondly, there is the need for participation in the movement of people (40). This point relates more specifically to the discussion on the documentary *Journey Through Hell*. Considering that the filmmaker’s subjects are migrants and therefore mobile, he uses an ethnographical film method in order to be part of the process of mobility and to observe the moving bodies from a personal point of view.

The value of using mobility as a method of inquiry is further stated by Certeau (2011). In his view, cities are planned and built with a design in mind. To look into the city from a skyscraper will only provide a totalizing view of the space below. What this detached viewer sees is a block gaze of the design of the place below. But to be able to make meaning of the city, the viewing ought to be active—it should involve walking. According to him, there is a rhetorical effect to walking, which allows the pedestrian to read the text of the city design. It provides the freedom to navigate through the urban
space, allowing the walker to make meaning of place beyond the specter of the visual design.

Adey (2010) agrees that mobility is “a way of having relation to, engaging with, and understanding the world analytically” (xviii). He contends that mobility enacts the politics of place. It identifies power and powerlessness in the context of movement. This dissertation is focused on mobility for the reasons that have been articulated by Adey and Certeau. Mobility is used to study all the selected works because it provides the opportunity to analytically engage with the fictional space of the artworks. In this endeavor, this dissertation will use motion to understand the artist’s message regarding the postcolonial conditions of Africa. Aside from *Journey Through Hell*, all the other artworks featured in this project involve walking subjects. Mobility in *Journey Through Hell* is primarily either in cars or boats. As Certeau argues, walking is the best way to make meaning of space, in this case, the African space.

Tourism is one area where place tends to be presented in a visually appealing manner. There is the conscious effort to give a certain kind of experience to the touring individual. For this to be possible, a tourist is taken (whether driving or walking) through areas that will create the best impression of the tour site. As a result of this, Crang (2011) argues that tourism is a form of mobility practice. He describes it as a type of movement “which is perhaps constrained and less free roving” (205). This speaks to the theory of political detour which will be used to analyze *Heart of Gold* and *Song for Night*. The comments prove that political detour is what is needed in order to have a total experience
(knowledge) of a place. It provides the tourist with the opportunity to see what has been hidden from the tour gaze.

In film space, the emerging popularity of mobility theory has caused some scholars to reexamine the cinematic usefulness of motion. As a motion picture idiom, film is defined by mobility. However, the relationship between the two is yet to receive any substantial attention. This dissertation will make an academic contribution in this regard. Notwithstanding, there are currently a few scholars and scholarly organizations that have engaged this subject. The European Network for Cinema Studies (2013) notes that there is a new cinema mode which is interested in connecting physical (film) spaces with movement through it. This new cinematic method seeks to break away from the current style, which seems to privilege acting over setting. Network for Cinema Studies contends that this new aesthetic would make film capable of dealing with topics (for example migration) that necessarily must involve mobility. Lewis (2013) observes that Japanese silent cinema utilizes mobility as a way of representing the suffering of women in Japan. Here, filmmakers highlight the constraints of physical mobility which women encounter as a way of communicating the idea of male domination to the audience without being explicit about it.

Attention therefore ought to be paid to the power of mobility to both hide and show. Hubbard, O’Neill, Radley & Pink (2010) still wonder why walking is not being studied as a storytelling style in film. To them it seems reasonable to understand walking in filmic representations as a means by which viewers might be invited to engage with film via movement forward through an environment rather than merely by watching or
observing from a distance. The opinions expressed by these authors affirm the methodological value of mobility in film. Drawing on this in, this dissertation analyzes Heart of Gold and even Song for Night as a relationship between the moving body and the audience. This has aesthetic as well as practical effects. Aesthetically, the narrative cannot be told without the motions of the protagonist. Practically, the moving persona takes the audience on the journey. In this regard, the viewer needs to pay close attention to the body in motion in order to comprehend the narrative. Mobility will thus ensure that the audience engages more critically with the space within which the film or literary character is roving.

_Utopia, Dystopia, and Postcolonialism in Africa_

According to Eliav-Feldon (1982) utopia is an invitation to perceive the distance between things as they are and things as they should be. It is a presentation of a positive and possible alternative to current social realities, and is intended as a model to be emulated. Since it is an appeal to perfect the social environment, it expresses explicit and implicit criticism of the things as they are. Utopian writers and artists seek to expose aspects of the present society that are considered to be causing major “major evils” (1). By this, the writers and artists use utopia to shape the society in ways that will present “hopes and the beliefs in the possibilities open to contemporary society” (1). This conceptualization offers a guide to the study of social injustice in postcolonial Africa. The works of art will be analyzed as representations of the distance between how things
(independence) should be and how things really are in the present. The study will argue that there is a wide distance between the two, breeding major evils of social injustice.

Zizek (2005) argues that utopian ideals exist between the present and the future. It is a quest for a perfect life which is not fully in the present but “already at hand, just there to be grabbed” (247). By this, utopia is unattainable. Utopian philosophers did not advocate for a literal application of their ideas. But rather, “They merely hoped that discussion of possibilities for improvements might create a climate of opinion that would permit reforms” (xi). Concerning inequality in, the artworks examined here do not simply point to what they consider to be wrong in Africa, but hope the exposure will lead to the recognition that something will have to be done to improve the living conditions of people. In this case, then, utopia is attainable as long as it causes the state to institute “a wide range of social services, and guarantees for all its citizens a certain standard of living” (Buah 1978, 122).

Given the postcolonial decline—dystopia—of Africa, its writers and artists have used their creative skills to address the problems of the continent. In his assessment of contemporary African literature, Booker (1995) observes that “actual experience in the [African] postcolonial world has been anything but utopian” (58). According to Ogunmola (2014) the novel has been an appropriate form for the African writers to reflect on the realities of post-independent Africa with social, political and economic disillusionment. He argues that many African writers who view the contemporary political order in the continent as desperately in need of social change have put into
writing the ideas, words and images that relate to the contemporary power system in
order to construct an alternative utopian society that is desired.

The African Nobel Prize Laureate for literature, Soyinka (1967), has also argued
that contemporary African literature is at a stage where writers will have to engage with
the widespread state of disillusionment in the continent. He contends that African writers
will have to measure their success by how well they are able to represent the postcolonial
predicaments of their various countries. Thus, the responsibility of the African writer is to
“rescue for his people their beautiful destiny” (Ogungbesan 1979, 6). A number of writers
are discussed by scholars as using their craft to expose the ills of the continent in order to
“rescue the beautiful” from collapsing into dystopia.

In his essay on the novels of Rachid Mimouni, Aresu (1999) asserts that they
represent a dystopic examination of democracy which centralizes power and is corrupted.
Mimouni therefore uses literature to explore the failures of the democratic system in
Algeria. Of concern to Mimouni is the social injustice which continues to persist in a
democratic era. As far as the entire continent is concerned, Kehinde (2004) states that
writers are motivated by the need to tell the stories of their people. As he puts it, “African
writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment. Their texts
mostly reflect and refract the socio-political events in their societies” (229). But
considering that the current circumstance of Africa is that of dystopia, Kehinde continues
that “Presently it [literature] is being employed as a veritable weapon for depicting the
postcolonial disillusionment in African nations” (229).
Dunia (2012) articulates a similar opinion about East African literature. He argues first that dystopia is a depiction of the dreams of impoverishment or a developmental expectation which has remained at the stage of illusion. He explains further that dystopia emerges out of plans for a better future (utopia). It is a journey in search of social justice which ends in the realization of a dystopian reality of oppression and inequality in the nation. However, dystopia does not necessarily have to refer to an actual place (Harvey 2000). For this reason, East African writers use the theme of dystopia to disguise their criticism of national living conditions. As he puts it, the writers “present social disharmony and chaos in highly symbolical landscapes detached from any real-time chronology or topography” (Yao 2012, para. 4). Consequently, “these novels-as-parables…the highly symbolical and allegorical scenery hints at problems and contradictions facing the African continent” (parag. 4). Writing on Nigerian literature, Afolayan (2011) examines the African novel as a realist representation of dystopia. Referring to the novels of Biyi Bandele-Thomas and Lekan Oyegoke, the author contends that postcolonial literature captures all that is despicable in modern Nigerian society.

In *The Blackman's Burden*, Davidson (1992), attempts to determine why, contrary to expectations, after the attainment of independence by African countries, the gap between the “state” and the “people” continues to widen. He concludes that postcolonial governments in Africa are responsible for the situation because they have subordinated social imperatives—capital distribution, resources, and services—in favor of the interest of the elites. Davidson presents an idea of the effect on the lives of the “Third World” poor. The observations put forward by Davidson and Lazarus will be important in
historicizing globalization and examining its effects on the social, political and economic order of “Third World” countries.

Achebe (2012) in *There Was a Country* argues that the cause of the frequent social unrest in Nigeria is attributable to inequity in the distribution of the resources of the nation. He further observes that the relative success of the Igbo people in accessing the resources of Nigeria has resulted in a situation where they are hated by other ethnic groups. He cites the continuous hatred of Igbo people by other ethnic groups as the reason for the Biafra War, which followed attempts by the people of Biafra to secede from the federal system of Nigeria. Similarly, Mamdani (1996) observes in *Citizens and Subjects* that colonial legal reformation in the colonies of Africa, though claimed to give legal authority to the customary laws of the controlled territories, in effect aims to achieve a set of local traditions that could be relied upon for the successful administration of the colony. With particular reference to land accessibility, Mamdani argues that colonial authorities carried out customary alteration to suit their resource controlling schemes. The assertion, for example, that indigenous African land tenure systems prescribed communal ownership and abhorred private claim is a distortion of the customary law. This was intended to be exploited by the colonists for the appropriation of land on the basis of the claim that it has no individual owner.

*Film: National Cinema, African Cinema*

In *Cinema at the Periphery* (2010), D. Iordanovan, D. Martin-Jones & B. Vidal claim that globalization is making the idea of a national cinema less significant. From the
production level to the point of distribution, the focus of the filmmaker is the global film market and this reflects in the theme and the aesthetics of the film productions.

Consequently, the common attribute of national cinema to represent or defend a national ideal is no longer expected in the artistic productions of periphery cinema. So, an African filmmaker may choose to focus his/her production on an issue unrelated to Africa. Similarly, filmmakers from the well-developed cinema traditions (of the West) may focus on Africa, for example, and not on an issue of interest to the filmmaker's home country.

Saks (2010) expresses a similar opinion in *Cinema in Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation*. She claims that many of the leading filmmakers in Africa are rejecting the designation of “African filmmaker,” because they wish “to reject being co-opted under the name of state nationalism, of being seen as important only in terms of one's contribution to the nation or the continent at large” (80). This view on national cinema will be important in the discussion on *Heart of Gold*, a film made by Knudsen, a Danish-Ghanaian. It will inform the attempt to justify the inclusion of this film in a discussion which may be seen as prevalent in national cinemas.

In *Black African Cinema* (1994), Ukadike traces the dynamism of African cinematic practices in Sub-Saharan Africa and critically examines the themes and cinematic techniques of a selected set of films. The author uses an interdisciplinary approach to assess the art of African cinema and its ideology. Ukadike views African cinema as a social, political, and cultural force that is engaged in reflecting on Africa's sociopolitical and economic life. This view tasks African cinema with the responsibility of addressing socio-cultural and political issues apart from providing entertainment to the
masses whose image on the screen has suffered negative representation since the
invention of the film apparatus. With this didactic function, African cinema has to deal
with the projection of a wide range of issues in order to educate the masses. Among the
issues that African cinema has critically addressed is the general tendency of African
states under globalization to seek direct foreign investment. However, these investments
over the years have failed to produce the expected benefits that they are supposed to
promise.

Elsewhere, Ukadike (1995) contends that the documentary is a film style well-
suited for dealing with issues of resistance ideology and struggle in Africa. In “African
Cinematic Reality: The Documentary Tradition as an Emerging Trend” (1995), Ukadike
examines “new African documentary practices and the strategies utilized in the
construction of the cinematic ‘reality’ of Africa” (88). He considers documentary as an
emerging alternative genre in the attempt to “redefine the relationship between the
dominant (Western) and oppositional cinematic representations of Africa” (88). The
author emphasizes the role of documentary as social arts that seek to interrogate the
African experience in an extended geographical dimension. This project will rely partly
on this idea to examine the documentary genre and how it depicts the predicaments of
those Africans both in the context of globalization and migration. The discussion will
look at how the two documentary films used here represent African dystopian reality
through the depiction of globalization and migration.

This project will also look at the rift between governments and their citizens as a
violent effect of the disappointment many Africans feel about their leaders. In this
respect, Dovey's work *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (2009) will be important. In this book, she views the depiction of violence as an aspect of African cinema. In her analysis of the way in which African films represent and critique violence on the screen, she calls for the need to address forms of violence other than armed conflicts. She mentions, for example, that attempts by Western businesses or organizations to dominate African economies can be considered as a form of violence. She further argues that African filmmakers do not reproduce political, economic, social and military violence as depicted in the works they adapt but rather twist them to reproduce the possibility of encouraging such forms of violence.

Similarly, Harrow (2007) contends that it is time for African cinema aesthetics to shift from the overwhelming engagement with the continent’s colonial history. He argues that this kind of practice suggests that Africans know themselves in relation to others (former colonizers). What should be happening instead is for film to be used to engage with African issues devoid of linkages to the colonial paradigm. Also, Okome (2010) holds the opinion that the new role of African cinema should be that of coding conditions of the post-colony rather than concentrating on the relationship with its external dominator(s). These augments justify the concentration of this research on the postcolonial life conditions of Africans and less about neocolonialism in Africa.
Chapter Outline

Introduction

In the introduction, the theoretical framework of mobility will be set up. It will specify how mobility is to be understood and used in this research work. This section will also provide a general introduction to the idea of mobility. It will again involve an introduction to the scholarly debates which have emerged around the idea and practice of mobility. Through this process, the different aspects of mobility relevant to this work will be identified and discussed to frame how those ideas will be used in this project. In this regard, the two important concepts in to be discussed will be social and economic mobility. This discussion will involve an introductory look at national cinema, postcolonial cinema, and postcolonial literature. This will lay out the specific stylistic as well as content features commonly used or expressed in postcolonial films and literatures. After this, a brief discussion of African postcolonial cinema and literature will be undertaken. In this regard, the discussion will look at how they have incorporated mobility into their aesthetics and how it has been used as a tool for critiquing the political, social, and economic state of the continent.

Chapter One

This chapter will examine the documentary film Heart of Gold, looking at how it uses mobility to highlight the adverse effects of globalization. Here, the discussion will examine globalization as a contributory factor to the postcolonial dystopia of Africa. The analysis will also examine how documentary style could combine with mobility to
illustrate the contemporary challenges of Africa. The narrative follows the path of Kwasi Akufo, the main character of the film, as he walks through areas connected with mining activities. Content analysis of this film will focus on how this journey critiques globalization and its contribution to the economic situation of Africa. The theory of political detour, the journey of the protagonist will be examined in the form of alternative tourism which is intended to deviate from a given pathway in order to experience the side of a place that people want to hide from public view. It is argued that the detour is intended to offer a commentary on globalization which counters the popular narrative that free trade promotes development.

Chapter Two

In this chapter analyzes Abani’s novel Song for Night as an allegory of African postcolonial dystopia. This novel is focused on a child-soldier’s long walk in search of his fellow fighters. In interpreting the journey, this author argues that, thought the novel deals with the subject of war, the novelist used the mobility of the child as an allegory to illustrate structural defects that are contributing to social injustice on the continent of Africa. Here, armed conflict is discussed alongside issues such as corruption, ethnic and religious hatred, and paternalistic politics. In order to capture all of these conditions afflicting the continent, this author argues that mobility in this novel is used in the same way as it was used in chapter 1. This is to say that it uses political detour. In this respect, Song for Night is also examined as a textual political detour. The narrator thus detours
from his route in order to show readers the causal agents of Africa’s post-independence dilemma.

Chapter Three

This section will focus on Grandclement’s documentary *A Journey Through Hell* looking at it as an artistic representation of protest migration. The documentary captures African mostly Somalis and some Ethiopians attempting to cross the Red Sea into Yemen and then, for some, move on to the West. This section of the dissertation will examine the voyage as a form necessary mobility which affirms Africa’s economic crisis. By this, the filmmaker is presenting a story which indict the pre-independent hopes. This chapter will also feature a discussion on restrictions to mobility in relation to Africans trying to flee economic hardships using “irregular” methods/routes. Similarly, despite the threat of death, the filmmaker takes part in the illegal migration in order to capture at firsthand, the experiences of the migrating group. Part of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the ethnographical style he used in the film.

Chapter Four

Here, the project shall deal with VanOrden’s literary memoir *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction* looking at how a volunteer tourist’s journey to Mozambique and South Africa offers an insight into the postcolonial state of both countries. First of all, this author argues that the political implication of receiving aid or international volunteer services is that the receiving country has acknowledged that it is in a precarious
condition. Therefore since Mozambique accepted the protagonist, the country has admitted to its postcolonial dystopic experience for which reason it needs help. But once the narrator arrives in Mozambique, his mobility does not end. Under takes extensive tour of the country. His experience of Mozambique based on the tours affirms the argument that Mozambique is in postcolonial crisis. Though he did not does volunteer work in South Africa, the narrator undertook sightseeing trips to the country. These trips expose the existence of apartheid-style social injustice. The discussion will examine contemporary South Africa as a continuation of apartheid policies.
CHAPTER 1: HEART OF GOLD: MOBILITY AND GLOBALIZATION

Heart of Gold (Knudsen, 2006), a documentary about mining in Akim Abuakwa, Ghana, might appear as a visualization of the cultural significance of gold. However, careful study will reveal that it is an examination of globalization in the context of Ghana’s mining economy. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to look at how this cinematic production acts as a visual commentary on globalization. Staying true to the general framework of this dissertation, the analysis will seek to determine how the filmmaker utilizes mobility to divulge the film’s globalization content. In this manner, the concept of political detouring will be applied to the film analysis.

Political Detouring

The popular view of tourism is leisure. Among academics, interest in the subject has focused largely on the economic value of tourism (Brown 2006; Honey and Gilpin 2009; Neto 2003). However, a small, but growing core of scholars has taken tourism beyond the orthodox paradigm, looking into the politics of place narrative. Tourism functions on the projection of a good and exclusive image of a place. The images that will create the best global impression of a place get to be shown to the rest of the world. Based on this, some have concluded that no tourism policy is apolitical (Gunn 1997).

In response to this, a movement of counter-tourism (also referred to in broad terms as alternative tourism) is emerging. It uses sightseeing as a way of showing aspects of a place that have undergone official erasure because of their potential to dent the marketed image of the location. It is a way to expose the illegitimacy of dominant
national narratives constructed through tourism (Butler 1990; Christou 2012; Stronza 2001). One of those who have studied tourism in relation to political dynamics is Dana Hercbergs (2012). In her examination of tourism in Israel and Palestine, she provides a theoretical framework on counter-tourism, which forms the basis of the analysis to be conducted in this chapter.

Hercbergs (2012) first used political detouring to describe the rhetorical significance of the physical routes that Palestinian tour guides use to draw the attention of tourists to Israeli-orchestrated injustices on Palestinians. In the author’s own words, political detouring refers to the “practice of redirecting tourists’ attention from the nominal focus of the tour…to the political conditions that impinge upon the tour itself and the world it narrates” (415). Palestinians tour guides in the contested city of Jerusalem have to work in submission to “The Israeli authorities” who “have been in charge of international tourism in Jerusalem since 1967 and...execute their policies in such a way as to be the only franchised power” (Isaac 2010, 27). It is intended to “help you to understand the conflict a bit better and witness firsthand the devastating consequences of the occupation” (Carole 2013, para. 2). The operating principle here is that the standard tour route cannot provide tourists with an accurate narrative of Palestine; hence the detour. This brings to the fore the close connection tourism has with mobility. A tourist’s quest to see “the wonders of the world” in person requires him/her to move freely through the visited site. In the case of Palestine, however, territorial contestation has resulted in the imposition of mobile-restrictive measures by Israel on Palestinians who may have to cross into these contested spaces. In political detouring,
tour guides utilize these points of temporal limits for the purpose of leading tourists to
discover the life experiences of Palestinians. As Hercbergs points out, “This practice
consists of disrupting the course of the tour to draw attention to Palestinians’
vulnerability in the city; situating Palestinian and Israeli spaces as two different and
unequal worlds; and appealing to tourists’ sense of justice to promote their solidarity with
the Palestinians” (415). Simply put, political detouring embodies three essential qualities:
mobility across space, engagement with the prevailing politics of the place, and the
targeting of a foreign audience. These qualities are used to highlight the injustices of
globalization in relation to gold production in the Akim Abuakwa area of Ghana. Since
the film engages with issues related to globalization, it is necessary that a common
ground be established.

Recent discussions seem to view globalization as a contemporary development.
This obliterates the extended historical trajectory of the concept (Appiah 2007, xix). It is
however irrefutable that the unprecedented level of technological development in the
modern era has expanded the scope and processes of global interaction. Also, the
contemporary world has seen more organizational structures operating across national
borders. Examples include the United Nations, World Trade Organization, African
Union, European Union, and the interconnection of the banking system across the world.
The effect is that globalization is now occurring not only in great measure, but also in a
highly diversified and systematic manner. Therefore, its effects—positive or negative—
affect a wider scale of people. It is for this reason that globalization needs to be studied
within its contemporary context.
Due to its multifaceted nature, globalization remains an enigma. Generally, the term is used to denote a state of “greater interaction across national boundaries” (Merino 2010, 7). It pursues global harmonization and thereby sees differences as obstacles to integration. Consequently, globalization calls for a reconfiguration of cultural, economic, political, legal, communicational, and technological systems to ensure the denationalization and integration into a worldwide order. This dissertation is concerned primarily with economic globalization—the increasing expansion of the capital market across the national boundaries. Two things are implied here: national governments are limited in the level of control they can exercise on trade within their borders. On the other hand, entrepreneurs are provided with a business environment which guarantees unimpeded capital mobility. Proponents of this economic idea hold that the market performs best when it is allowed to regulate itself, without government intervention. To some, globalization “will ultimately bring economic growth and stability to nations and a better life to the peoples of the world” (Goldstein 2012, 53) whilst others skeptically look at the argued benefits of globalization as “a political conceit” (Rappa 2011, 18). In fact, Hebron & Stack, Jr. (2011) describe it as “a curse that must be exorcized from the globe” (5). In the quest to exorcise globalization from the world, different methods and platforms are being used to expose the negativity of the phenomenon. In the arts, creative minds that are skeptical of globalization are using their skills to generate public criticisms of it. A close analysis of *Heart of Gold* would suggest that the filmmaker, Knudsen belongs to this group of artists. He uses the medium of cinema to express his position on
the continuing debate on globalization. The following discussion will examine how he exposes the negative effects of neoliberalism.

The Aesthetics of Political Detouring

*Heart of Gold* tells the story of a thirteen-year old boy, Kwasi Akufo, who finds a lump of gold in the Birim, a river located in Ghana’s gold mining town of Akim Abuakwa. After the find, he is unsure of what to do with the gold. In an attempt to learn more about it, he undertakes a journey on foot to places connected with gold mining. This trip takes him to minefields and other places where he meets people from his community who are knowledgeable in gold and are willing to share their experiences regarding the economic, social, and cultural significance of the precious metal. He ends the journey by returning to the river from which he found the gold. At this point, he drops it back into the water body and then walks away. Tracing the charted path of Akufo and considering how this is used as a globalization visualizing method, one could argue that the journey is an example of political detouring.

In *Heart of Gold*, the filmmaker utilizes the concept of political detouring as a method for visualizing globalization. In the opening scene, the theme is visualized by a human hand showing a piece of gold to the camera, the audience. Accompanying this is a voice-over specifying the context of the film to Ghana. The male-sounding voice declares, as part of his narration, that: “Gold now accounts for the biggest export commodity by value [in Ghana]. And in some parts of the country, large-scale opencast mining is carried out by large multinational companies.” This statement directly reveals
globalization as a central theme. It complements the image of the human hand displaying the piece of gold to the camera. As a non-diegetic sequence, the visual and the voice-over function as a hint to the audience to expect the film to engage with the politics of globalization in the context of gold mining in Ghana.

Soon after, the voice-over concludes, and the film begins with the introduction of Kwesi Akufo walking in the woods. After wandering around for a while, he calls out: “White Man! White Man! White Man!” He then runs in the direction of the camera and opens his palm to show a piece of gold to the viewers in a close-up shot. The history of European contacts with Africa has not been in the favor of the continent. It has resulted in centuries of material exploitation. Colonialism became the common method through which Europe exploited the resources of the world. In Africa, the image of the White Man does represents not only this history relationship, but also the permanent changes colonialism made to the economy of the continent (Settles 1996). The imagery of the White Man presented at the beginning of Heart of Gold acts as a reminder of the contemporary impact of the colonial relationship Africa has with Europe (or the West in general). Though the White Man is not visually represented, the scene suggests that he is being used as a symbol of globalization, which is cinematically treated as a new phase of colonialism. Though these contemporary worldwide economic interactions have taken deep root in various parts of the world, it began and still remains a major defining feature of Western economic ideology. Scholte (2005) for example identifies westernization as one of the attributes of globalization. The use of White Man in the opening scene
appropriately describes the situation in Ghana’s mining economy which is dominated almost entirely by Western corporations and their local alliances.

Relating the discussion to Hercbergs’ theory, the case can be made that the “White Man” is being represented in the film as the foreign audience—tourist—who is to be guided through political detouring to experience the impact of globalization on the social and economic situation of Ghana. The filmmaker’s focus on a foreign audience (tourist) is motivated by his conviction that Ghana’s mining sector is controlled by Western capitalists who are visualized as exploiting the mineral resources of the land leaving the rest of the country remains impoverished. By this, he is directing the vision of the tourist to the effect of foreign participation in the extraction of gold in the area. At the end of the exercise, it is expected that the opinion of the tourist regarding globalization will be changed by the experience. The tourist is reinforced in what Akufo does soon after he shows the piece of gold to the audience. He runs over a short distance, turns back, and calls “White man! White man! Come! Come!” This encounter constitutes an invitation; Akufo, acting as the tour guide, is offering to the unseen white tourist so he can take him on a journey which “redefines and redirects the tour’s focus to the political [and economic] conditions [of globalization] affecting the narrated world” (Hercbergs 419). Every detour Akufo takes represents a commentary on some specific aspect of gold mining in the context of globalization.
Environmental Degradation

The first detour by Kwasi Akufo occurs while walking through a cocoa farm. He observes two pits covered in weeds and dry leaves. He continues with his journey and soon encounters another deep hole. But this time, it is neither covered in weeds nor dry leaves. Therefore he takes a detour to go take a closer look at the open pit. Up to this point, it is not clear what the trenches represent until the following sequence where he meets a group of four men engaging in artisanal mining, also known in Ghanaian local parlance as *galamsey*. Upon seeing them digging for gold ore, he realizes that the pits he saw earlier were dug for gold and left uncovered after the operation. In the scene that follows immediately, Akufo continues his journey to a mining concessional area operated by a large-scale multinational mining company, Goldfields Ghana Limited. He stands for a while to observe the environment of the area. His view is presented to the audience in a montage of shots depicting different conditions of the physical surroundings.

The purpose of these visual sequences is to present an argument on the environmental effect of gold mining in Ghana. While studies on mining are dominated by those who think small-scale local miners are the main culprits of environmental destruction (Tom-Dery, Dagben & Cobbina 2012), Erik Knudsen uses *Heart of Gold* to visually document the contribution of large-scale, multinational, mining companies to the problem. While the environmental impact of artisanal mining is highlighted in the visual narrative described above, the four local miners are portrayed as victims of capitalist encroachment on their land. In the shots depicting the mining concession owned by Goldfields Ghana Limited, the film documents the removal of the vegetation cover. No
agro-based economic activity is therefore being carried out on the land. This contrasts with the *galamsey* operators, whose activities are presented as having less harmful effect on the vegetation. As a matter of fact the four small-scale miners are prospecting for gold on a cocoa farm without destroying it. Prior to meeting these men, Akufo had encountered two other mine trenches on a cocoa farm. This suggests that while the objective is to extract gold from beneath the surface of the earth, this quest is not being pursued to the detriment of the farm owner, indicating a relative harmony between the surface and underground use of land in artisanal mining. On the other hand, large-scale mining is shown to have a higher destructive effect on the vegetation due to the mechanical intensity of their operations. For example, the shot of Goldfields Ghana Limited mine site shows the tracks of vehicles used in what appears to be opencast mining operations. The difference in environmental responsiveness depicted in the film can be explained by the disparity in land ownership.

Considering that artisanal miners cannot compete with large-commercial companies for mining concessions, local people end up losing access to their land to these gold prospecting companies. The effect is that those who hitherto depended on the land for survival in terms of farming or mining would have to look elsewhere to sustain their lives. As mining companies expand their operational areas by acquiring more land, entire communities are left with considerably smaller useful land for the economic livelihood of their residents. The multipurpose use of land is a norm for survival. Dumett (2013) relying on Basel Missionary records, notes that traditional mining in Akim Abuakwa prior to colonialism was a seasonal occupation, “concentrated in three to four
months at the very end of the dry season and the first part of the rainy season (approximately December through April)” (108). It could be explained that mining did not occur year round due to the need to accommodate other possible uses of the land, like farming. Indeed, Dumett adds that “December-March mining had the additional advantage of falling between the harvesting and planting seasons for what were the staple food crops in most areas (maize, yams)” (109). This explains why in both the active and abandoned galamsey mining lands pictured in the film, there is minimal damage to the cocoa farms, except for the uncovered trenches. The scene stages a situation which is consistent with the precolonial tradition of the people which ensures diversified land utilization.

This idea of multiple purpose land usage does not exist in the operations of large-scale commercial mining, because they have to themselves large areas of land for the sole purpose of gold extraction. They are not constrained by an insufficiency of land and therefore do not find it important to protect it for other possible uses. This is visualized in the scene where Akufo is standing on a Goldfields Ghana Limited mine observing both the vastness of the concession and the ongoing degradation of the place. The land is first presented in a long shot as a boundless, plush forest area. This is then juxtaposed with shots of active mining sections of the land, where no significant vegetation cover survives. This does not only document, in visual images, the transformed face of the land, but also draws attention to the environmental destruction of large-scale mining. Understanding this relationship is key to appreciating the purpose of the juxtaposed shots of the forested and deforested landscape. It presents the view that, as the mine operation
of Goldfields Ghana Limited expands into the rest of its concession the environment will suffer mightily. This fear has developed into a full-blown catastrophe as far as the water bodies of the area are concerned.

In this same scene, viewers are presented with a long shot of the area showing the River Birim. Immediately following this is another shot, a close-up, focused on a signboard planted close to the water body and bearing the statement of warning: “Do not drink in this water, do not swim in this water because of mercury poisoning.” This is an important moment in the film, as it demonstrates how the practices of Goldfields Ghana Limited have negatively affected the life of the community. Mercury, “a classic poison,” has the capacity to cause neurological degeneration (Barbour & Shaw, 2000, 72). The magnitude of poisoning can best be appreciated by the viewer when s/he recalls the words of the voice-over in the opening scene: “In the Akim Abuakwa area, the River Birim passes through almost every town and village.” Not only is the community losing its most valuable land to multinational mining companies, but also it is at the risk of mercury poisoning. The threat is further demonstrated in the prior encounter Akufo has with the group of four local gold miners. After showing the gold nugget to them, one of the miners, Yaw, asks where he found it. He responds that he found it lying in the bottom of the river from which he had gone to drink water. This suggests that the river is an important source of drinking water for the entire community; hence, its pollution represents a large-scale health hazard.

Differences in attitudes towards the environment are partly affected by the difference in mobility between large-scale and artisanal mining. The majority of big
companies that dominate the mining sector of Ghana are of foreign origin. Hence, they are not socially attached to the communities in which they work. The only interest they have to a place is the commercial prospects it holds. This is where the huge capital investments made on their mining operations results in a form of attachment to the area but only in relation to anticipated economic gain. Considering that gold is a nonrenewable resource, the attachment they have exists only for as long as gold is still available in commercial quantity. Also, since the government grants mining authorization, or licensing, for a limited duration, the attachment they have to the community is time-bound. It is only for the period within which their licenses remain valid. This points to one attribute of multinational mining companies: they are inherently mobile. Essentially, economic globalization functions in an economic order whose ultimate aim is to remove any obstacle (s) to the free movement of goods, services, and capital.

Thus, by its very nature, globalization strives on its mobile capacity. It is constantly in profit-driven motion. Mobility in the context of globalization should be understood as not given but acquired through the process of competition. The capacity to move around in the global economy is defined in relation to one’s financial capital base. The more financial resources one holds, the more mobile he/she is in the frame of globalization. This situation is seen playing out in *Heart of Gold*. The artisanal miners are, in economic terms, completely immobilized by their monetary weakness in relation to large-scale foreign companies who can easily beat off any competition in acquiring mining rights. Economically speaking, therefore, large-scale mining companies have a
greater degree of mobility, which thwarts any form of attachment to the physical space within which they work. Consequently, they do not feel the need to be environmentally responsible in their operations, since they know their presence is temporary and will not be affected by the degraded quality of the physical space.

For the artisanal miners, who are both economically and socially fixed to the place of production, there is no alternative to being environmentally cautious. This is because if they destroy it in the pursuit of this nonrenewable metal, the entire community will be thrown into a state of post-gold boom wretchedness, having depleted the resource and degraded the environment. They are aware that moving elsewhere to escape the damage to the environment will be difficult, due to the social capital they have built in the place. As David, Janiak & Wasmer (2008) argue, “local social capital is systematically negative for mobility” (1). The more of it one has, in terms of the individual’s physical proximity to family, neighbors, friends, and other social networks, “the less likely [they are] to move to another region in the short-run” (5). Looking at this in the context of artisanal miners, due to the fact that they are indigenes of the community in which they mine, they must have greater social capital than the foreign operators. The relative physical immobility of the locals due to social capital is enough reason for them to show greater environmental concern.

Closely connected to the issue of mobility is the question of profitability. Understanding that they are in temporary operation, the attention of multinational corporations is fixed on short-term profitability. To them, this is a rational business decision considering the fact that their operations involve heavy machinery and a team of
skilled and unskilled labor, all of which combine to make mining an expensive investment. The interest of the investor in this circumstance is to recover his/her money and make a profit.

In the *galamsey* scene, the four men are shown using a traditional method of gold lifting. They use just two implements in the extraction process—pans, in which they put the dugout rocks, and a long stick, which they use to lower the pots into the hole and pull it up, after filling it with the ore. As revealed in the assessment of Pardie & Hilson (2006), traditional mining, especially in West Africa, is “characterized by rudimentary implements, and apart from the occasional pump and crusher, is virtually devoid of machinery” (59). On the basis of this, even though the mining scene does not explicitly show the exact tools used for digging, it is most likely to be other simple tools, like a pickaxe or shovel. Owing to the fact that the miners depend less on machinery, the operational cost they record is exceedingly minimal in comparison to the large-scale prospectors. *Galamsey* miners also rely exclusively on their traditional knowledge of gold mining; hence, they forego the cost of hiring skilled labor. At the end of the scene currently under discussion, Akufo tells the group of miners that he was going to wait on them, so they could go home together. Granted that the miners still had some work to do and therefore could not go with Akufo, the parting moment of their encounter suggests a kind of affinity between them, or at least a form of acquaintance based on living in the same community. The significance of this point in relation to *galamsey* mining is that, by being residents of the place in which they operate, they usually do not require a government license to mine. All of these contribute to the substantially low cost of
production. Consequently, while multinational corporations show less regard for the environment due to the need to recover production cost and make profits, artisanal miners are under less investment pressure. It is therefore not surprising that they are visualized in *Heart of Gold* to be environmentally friendlier.

The foreign investor can also use his/her mobility to intimidate and paralyze governmental business regulation. The aim of every country is either to develop or maintain the level of advancement it has already attained. Among nations of the global south, the need for accelerated growth is almost a desperate quest. Large multinational enterprises take advantage of this to force their interests on host nation governments. Aware that these investors are highly mobile, these leaders are more than likely to yield to the demands of these businesses. They are consequently accorded enormous privileges, sometimes making them feel superior to local authorities. Mbembe (2001) terms this state of affair as “*regime d’exception*”—that is, a regime that departs from common law,” manifesting in “the delegation of private rights to individuals and companies” (29). He explains that it offers these persons and businesses a form of sovereign power. While everyone is subject to the laws and administrative powers of the state, some individuals and companies are regarded as exceptional to the law. This is because they have been delegated powers comparable to those of the state. The effect is that *commandement*—his term for state power—“has recently fallen from the hands of those supposed to be exercising it, paving the way for…a situation of extreme material scarcity, uncertainty and inertia” (Mbembe 2001, 24). This diagnosis applies to the situation in Ghana, and is depicted in *Heart of Gold*. 
Multinational mining corporations seem to consider their business holdings as exceptional to the laws of Ghana. Globalization permits private ownership of national resources. This is why mining companies seek licenses that will grant them exclusive operational rights over an area of land. Some miners misconstrue license to mean they have the right to protect and exploit the minerals deposits of the place without regard to any national regulations. It is, for example, noted in a report by the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana (2008) that not only do these businesses use private security, but also “deploy state security personnel (especially police and military) to protect their property/concessions” (21). This is a sure demonstration of the delegation of sovereign rights to these companies. It is therefore not surprising that the report further notes that “issues of excess force against individuals and of livelihood deprivation are more endemic in large-scale mining areas” (19). The feeling of possessing sovereign rights over a stretch of territory causes large-scale gold prospectors to feel unaccountable to any authority because they equally hold authoritarian powers. A government’s inability to curb or regulate such company powers makes the company feel unaccountable to any lawful authority. In the end, it influences how multinational companies manage the environmental impact of their operations. They are sure local regulatory agencies will be reluctant to hold them accountable, due to the capital inflow their investments supposedly bring into the host economy.
Cultural Detouring

Akufo’s conversation with the *galamsey* miners also brings out a different purpose for his detouring beyond showing the process of mining and its resulting environmental issues. There is what could be appropriately described as cultural detouring. With this, Akufo intends to afford his audience the opportunity to understand how gold is perceived in the cosmic imagination of his people. Globalization is then subtly introduced as an economic system operating on an ideology of gold, which perceptibly conflicts with the cultural value held by the indigenes of Akim Abuakwa.

After confirming that what Akufo had found is gold, Yaw goes on to explain the spiritual dimension of gold. He points to the pit they have dug out and narrates that when they are in it, they can hear the clucking sound of a hen and its chicks. He explains that the noise is that of the spirit of gold which can only be transformed into the physical ore by sacrificing a hen. In the absence of that, he continues, a miner can draw a little bit of his/her own blood to perform the ritual. He explains also that in a neighboring town called Asiakwa, the spirit manifests itself to miners in the form of an eel fish carrying a piece of gold. If the gold falls off from its head, then one can pick it up. But whoever kills it for the gold on its head will also die. He ends his rendition on the spirituality of gold by cautioning Akufo that, in order to avoid having nightmares, a ritual needs to be performed on his gold find. Consequently, on getting home, he has to give it to his father so he can complete the necessary rites.

The dialogue in this scene displays an interaction between tradition and modernity in the area of mining. Yaw’s delivery might be received by some as a case of superstition.
Yet, whether it is true or not, it defines how the local people relate to gold. They do not only regard it in terms of its economic value but also for the spirituality it represents. The story about the gold-carrying eel fish for example cautions people not to be greedy to the point of losing their lives in the process of pursuing gold. Similarly, the story about the clucking sound of a hen and its chicks demonstrates awareness of the fact that the earth is a life supporting medium which should not be destroyed for the sake of prospecting for gold. The clucking sound metaphorically represents all the forms of life, human and non-human, that survive on the earth. The moral of the story therefore is that in mining for gold, one ought to account for the other lives that depend on the physical environment for survival. Similarly, the sacrifice of a hen or one’s own blood to the gold spirit is intended to ensure that the bloody scene created by the sacrifice performed in the pit compels miners to cover it up after their operation. If this interpretation is right then one might wonder why Akufo’s journey takes him to three abandoned mine trenches that remain uncovered.

The answer is given in the next cultural detour which Akufo undertakes: when he goes to show the gold to Nana Kofi, a local goldsmith. While talking to the jeweler, a non-diegetic voice is heard talking about the strong attachment Africans have with the world which makes them see God in everything in their universe. The sound is revealed in the next scene to be emanating from a radio set to which Nana Kofi is listening. The speaker reveals that “The African again is also losing this close touch with life.” He explains that the mind of the African has become too restless and therefore has become unresponsive to the world around him/her. This observation applies to the galamsey
miners Akufo encounters in the previous scene. Their removal from the mineral wealth of their ancestral land through the award of concessions to large-scale multinational gold companies has made their minds restless, as they try to find alternative ways of benefiting from the wealth they are being denied. And since they stand no chance of out-competing the rich mining companies for mining rights, the only option available to them is to mine illegally. Thus, artisanal miners are always watching out for law enforcement officers who may try to arrest them. Consequently, they are always in panic operation, extracting as many rocks as they can before running away and abandoning the open pitch they have dug. Here, one will notice a situation where globalization is being represented as an agent of modernity which carries in its way a negative change to traditional ways of doing things. It is causing the local people to give up on the close, sacred touch they once had with their environment. The effect is that, as the voice on the radio later confirms, Africans are still holding on to their belief systems, “but the depth of that knowledge—the mystical depth—is lost to him [or her].” To this extent, although the miners display knowledge of the cultural narrative of gold, the associated responsibility which that knowledge teaches is not strictly followed.

Economic Detour: Globalization and Postcolonial Governmentality

In this scene, Akufo turns on the television set as soon as he gets home. Dr. Yao Graham, the President of the Third World Network—Africa, a social and economic research institution, is seen on the screen talking about the mismanagement of gold resources by the government of Ghana. He declares that the country’s resources have not
been of any substantial benefit to its people. He blames the phenomenon on the Structural Adjustment Program which the International Monetary Fund and World Bank introduced into many developing countries beginning in the mid-1980s. He explains that the program caused Ghana to liberalize its mining sector, arguing that this move opened the country up for economic colonization. It became the entry point for foreign companies who came to take control of the mineral economy, culminating in the “most violent fall of the economy” (Elizaga 2011, 53). While he is arguing out his case against the government’s lack of control over the natural wealth of the country, the image of what appears to be a minefield is screened on the television set. In one of these images, a woman with a baby wrapped behind her back is seen carrying out what seems likely to be illegal surface mining. By this technique, the scene is not only verbalizing the problems of gold mining but also visualizing the effect of those problems, one being the emergence of illegal small-scale mining by the local people.

What Knudsen is attempting to do with this scene is expose the ineffectiveness of the government of Ghana in ensuring that the mineral wealth of the country benefits its people. This comes up when Graham compares Ghana and the United States in terms of how both countries have managed their natural resources. He makes two principal observations about the American case. First, he notes that revenue from the extractive sector is reinvested in the local economy. Also, Graham argues that mineral exploration has produced millionaires and billionaires in America. He laments that the opposite is the reality in Ghana where not a single millionaire has been made. In addition to that, unlike the United States, the bulk of proceeds from gold mining are repatriated to the mother
countries of the multinational firms. Ultimately, Ghana loses out on its participation in the global economy of gold.

Based on the findings of the 2013 edition of the *Africa Progress Report*, one can assert that Dr. Yao Graham’s conclusions reflect a continent-wide trend. The former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan and his team of experts sought, in the report, to identify the reasons for this state of affairs. In their conclusion, they contended that most African governments lack the necessary knowledge on the production, marketing, and global market price of their natural resources. They are consequently ill-equipped to deal with foreign investors in the way that will ensure full benefits to their national economies (Annan et al 2013, 6).

The result is that multinationals take the financial benefits of mining away from the countries within which they operate. By exposing the intricate imbalances in commercial relationships, *Heart of Gold* is cautioning Ghana to be wary of the rhetoric of globalization, which creates the impression of “free” trade “equated with modernity and efficiency, as if politics, military interests, class hegemonies, and corruption did not play any role in the new world order” (Xavier 1997, 11). The nation should be aware that “financial globalization is usually disastrous for developing countries” (Pereira 2010, 20). Therefore, for Ghana to have its interests served, it should exercise some level of local control over the mining industry. Samir Amin (2012) argues that:

The global system has an asymmetric structure: the centers are inward looking (autocentered) and simultaneously integrated in the global system in an active way (i.e. they shape the global structure). The peripheries are not inward looking
(not autocentered) and therefore integrated in the global system in a passive way
(they “adjust” to the system, without playing any significant role in shaping it)

(42)

As a country situated on the margins of globalization, *Heart of Gold* is encouraging
Ghana to participate in the global market in an active way. This means keeping an
economy that is open to external opportunities and closed to outside exploitation. To
achieve this, as the *Africa progress report* points out, governments should have accurate
information regarding their mineral deposits in order to be able to engage with
multinational companies without surrendering the bulk of their national wealth to foreign
investors, as is the current reality. But it seems like no one is listening to the advice being
offered by the film. In that specific scene, Akufo leaves immediately after turning on the
television set. At this point the camera is focused on Dr. Graham presenting his ideas.
This is framed in such a way that the absence of an audience becomes obvious to the
viewer and thus emphasizes the lack of attention to the speaker’s diagnosis. Notice also,
that after getting home, Akufo calls his mother twice, but there is no response,
confirming once again the nonexistence of an audience to Dr. Graham’s presentation. The
boy, however, returns into the scene later as the lone listener. The camera at this point
establishes a relationship between the two by presenting alternating shots of the child and
the television set. In the middle of this, the boy’s attention is interrupted by the entry of
someone who is only heard but never seen. Shortly after this, Akufo walks to the door
and exits. The camera, however, remains fixed on the doorway for the rest of the scene.
At the same time, the voice of Dr. Graham is heard in the background, continuing with
his assessment of Ghana’s mining sector. No one enters to watch him. It would be expected that with the exit of Akufo, the individual who interrupted him earlier on would have appeared in the frame and possibly engaged with the television set either by turning it off or watching it. But none of this happens; the television continues to play without an audience.

This could be interpreted to mean that the scene is meant as a direct address to government. For this reason, the filmmaker deliberately removes the audience in order to forestall the possibility of the film’s viewers regarding someone else but the government as the addressee in the scene. The person who pays some attention to the speaker is Akufo. His persona works well for the filmmaker’s purpose in the sequence. As a child, he is not expected to be concerned about the politics of gold mining. The fact that he walks away soon after turning on the television confirms, to some degree, his lack of motivation. This is further emphasized when, soon after returning to watch, he leaves the house. From the foregoing, the viewer would understand that, though he is presented as a single-person audience, Akufo cannot be the intended recipient of Dr. Graham’s message. This would be the most logical conclusion, if one were also to consider the fact that the speaker assumes an expert position on the issue. The intellectual depth of the assessment will be ordinarily perceived to be above the full comprehension of a child-character. Apart from eliminating Akufo as a potential target, the use of an expert on mining is intended to force the government’s attention to the message. In addressing the leadership structures of Ghana, the filmmaker is aware that the lesson in the scene is most likely to
be disregarded unless it emanates from an authority on the subject. Dr. Graham is therefore used in the film to authenticate the visual message.

Mobility of the Child: Silence, Invisibility, and Innocence

The immediately preceding discussion hints at the significance of Akufo’s persona in *Heart of Gold*. Consequently, there is the need to examine, in detail, how the filmmaker exploits some attributes of the child character and mixes them with other cinematic techniques in order to enhance his mobility. In the article “Cinema of Poverty,” Knudsen (2010) writes about his “discovery of sound as a narrative element that goes beyond the role of cementing the verisimilitude of the image” (8). Putting this into practice, he does not use sound to make his film seem true or real to the audience. Rather, he blends it with other film elements in a way to give it a narrative diegetic role. In *Heart of Gold*, silence is creatively used to aid the mobility of Akufo and stimulate the viewer’s reaction to the film.

In the opening scene, following the introductory comments from the voiceover, an extended sequence is focused on Akufo walking in the forest. In these series of shots, the camera is focused on only the moving legs of Akufo. There is no sound except that made as he walks, as well as intermittent sounds from elements of the physical environment. This style of showing the physical displacement of Akufo amidst silence draws attention to the actual movement of the boy through a mine space while at the same time directing the gaze of the audience to the effect of mining on that space. This interpretation is given a clearer illustration in the sequence leading to Akufo’s encounter with the artisanal
miners. The camera alternates between a medium shot focused on Akufo’s face and a close up image of the environment through which he is walking. The frame features the direction of Akufo’s gaze and then the following shots of the environment tell the audience exactly what is attracting the boy’s optical attention.

Through this camera technique, the filmmaker is able to capture a visual reality experienced in motion. However, the sense of movement which the camera captures is brought to a temporary halt when Akufo sees the third open-pit mine. Unlike the previous two which he takes a close look yet still walking, this time he steps closer to the pit and stands there for a while to observe the mine hole. This moment illuminates the filmmaker’s manipulative use of silence. As he watches the pit, the absence of sound sets a calm reflective mood to the scene. This is then utilized to place the viewer in a condition where s/he will wonder about what might be going through Akufo’s head as he stares at the trench. This attempt to gain access into the sub-conscience of the boy draws the audience into a moment of reflection focused on the environmental harm of mining. Thus, the filmmaker is able to engage with the emotions of the audience using silence (Knudsen 2012). It is an invitation to the viewer to participate in the film narrative. The same function of sound is utilized in the scene where Akufo stands on Goldfields Ghana Limited minefield, observing the degradation of the place. Silence is once again used to set up the audience to confront introspectively the effect of mining. Sound is expected in film; therefore, the absence of it immediately unsettles the audience and moves him/her to engage much more actively with the sequence.
Silence is also given cinematic manipulation to grant an invisible persona to the child character. Two scenes are particularly important to this point. The first is the scene in which Akufo goes into a compound house to listen to someone narrating his encounter with a gold-spirit which appeared to him in the form of light. In this scene, Akufo enters and silently tours around the compound without getting noticed. He even stops for a while to observe some of the residents of the place cooking yet he still attracts no attention from them. This suggests the invisibility of his persona, which is further enhanced by his silence.

Silence is an “enriching emptiness” (Sontag 1969, 5). It creates a form of absence—invisibility—which can be used to a narrative effect. In the case of Akufo, the quality of being invisible grants him unlimited access to the physical space, as there is no hindrance to his mobility. It also works to his advantage in the sense that his invisibility grants him an aura of an omniscient narrator. He is thus able to move, observe and listen without interrupting the flow of events. For example, as part of his tour of the compound, he goes to stand by the door to the room in which the security guard is narrating his experience with the gold-spirit, who appeared to him in the form of a light. He listens to the story for as long as he wants and then finally leaves the compound without getting noticed. In a scene which follows this, he goes to quietly observe a traditional priestess holding a consultation session for some people. One of these individuals indicates to the priestess that he is a miner who wants to seek her help with the performance of the necessary rituals related to gold extraction. Akufo stands by the window to observe and listen to the man, after which he leaves without attracting any form of attention. This
once again, is a demonstration of the utilization of Akufo’s invisibility as a mobility tool. Silence acts like the absence of light, which provides cover for Akufo to play his role without being noticed.

Akufo’s mobility is also aided by his innocence. The whole film narrative is based on Akufo’s journey, which is set in motion by the piece of gold he has found. In an attempt to understand the value of his find, he walks around showing it to people and also going to places where he could learn more about gold. What is intriguing is how he is able to undertake all these interconnected journeys without any of the adult “characters” attempting to dispossess him of the mineral. This works in opposition to the expectations of the viewer whose only knowledge of gold is its economic value. To such an audience, the child’s journey is risky in the sense that he is exposing himself to people who might be tempted by the economic value of his gold to take it from him. Considering that Akufo goes ahead with the journey and even shows the gold to some of the people he meets, one can argue that he felt no risk with what he was doing. This feeling emanates from the innocence that his child character represents. Innocence here refers to both his lack of knowledge and purity of his mind, which remains uncorrupted by the monetization of gold. Consequently, though he might be aware of the economic value of what he has, he clearly underestimates it. This is given visual illustration, when he expresses surprise after Yaw tells him the gold will earn him in excess of two million cedis (about 220 US dollars). Yaw refuses to give an exact monetary value because, as he explains, if Akufo gains knowledge of the precise worth, he might not be satisfied with the amount his father will give him from selling the gold. This indicates Yaw’s acknowledgement of
Akufo’s innocence. By withholding information from Akufo, he is attempting to protect him from getting corrupted by the monetization of gold which has become the primary feature of the neoliberal capitalist order. His innocence saves him from the fear of losing something of commercial valuable. He does not feel the need to keep his gold find a secret. Consequently, he innocently walks around with the nugget and shows it to people. For those who know the commercial value of gold, this will be a risky behavior considering that everyone who sees it will want to have it. But, Akufo’s innocence of the economic value of gold causes him to, without hesitation, walk to people and show them his find. This risky move is what drives forward the narrative arc of the film in view of the fact that the encounters he has with people end up initiating conversations about mining and globalization.

**Staging Political Detour in the Documentary Genre**

An anonymous peer-reviewer’s assessment of the film rejects the use of “documentary” to describe *Heart of Gold*. He/she contends that unless the notion of documentary is extended, the work “doesn’t ‘feel’ like a documentary at all” (Knudsen n.d., para. 2). This evaluation conflicts with the genre the filmmaker intended for the film. In an essay explaining the purpose of the film, Knudsen (2007) describes the piece as a “documentary project” (1). His designation of the work as a “project” confirms what he argues later as the aim of the production:

- To research alternatives to the empirical and factually based classic documentary narrative's approach to storytelling.
To examine how such alternatives can reveal different aspects of human experience not generally revealed by these classic approaches; in particular, to explore the relationship between fact and mysticism. (2)

This reveals the filmmaker’s intention to break away from the “conventional” style of documentary cinema. He finds the current documentary style to be aesthetically insufficient in telling the kind of story he hopes to convey in *Heart of Gold*, hence, his urgent desire to “shape a new approach to documentary forms” (Knudsen 2007, 1).

A major deviation he takes from traditional documentary form is his reliance on reenactment, or acting, which is generally considered to belong to the genre of fictional films. Defining the documentary has continued to pose significant challenge to scholars “because the genre is founded on [aesthetic] shifting sands” (Jane Chapman 2009, 14). Nonetheless, it is generally expected, in the opinion of B. Nichols (2010), that the nonfiction film should “speak about actual situations or events and honor known facts; they do not introduce new, unverifiable ones” (7). They are also thought to be “about real people who do not play or perform roles” (Nichols 2010, 8). This means they do not mask their real personalities in order to perform a role assigned to them by the filmmaker. Consequently, the life conditions depicted in documentary films are authenticated by the fact that they are captured from people who have actually lived or are still enduring those experiences. Applying this to *Heart of Gold* will reveal Erik Knudsen’s attempt to work outside of this documentary frame by opting to use “actors,” instead of simply capturing the experiences of people as they occur in real life situations.
One can argue that the filmmaker went for the reenactment option as a way of allocating to himself the aesthetic freedom needed to provide a reconstructed representation of the lives of the people of Akim Abuakwa, using the style of political detouring. Consider for example the path along which Akufo travels. In the traditional documentary mode, this journey would be expected to represent a real-life, self-motivated, event. In *Heart of Gold*, however, the audience is presented with an action which is constructed to fulfil the filmmaker’s purpose of using mobility to a cinematic effect. This manipulation of Akufo’s wandering offers some complication to a reading of the film using the concept of political detouring.

In detouring, the traveler is presumed to know the route of his/her movement. Additionally, the journey’s terminus should be foreknown to the rover. In *Heart of Gold*, Akufo might be misread as a wanderer, embarking on a journey with no predetermined destination in mind. In this case one might argue that what is visualized to the audience through the boy’s route does not constitute a detour. A closer examination of the film will, however, reveal that this kind of position is induced by an erroneous linear impression some have about mobility. For those who operate within this mind frame, the point of commencement and the destination ought to be different and mutually exclusive. *Heart of Gold* however demonstrates that in mobility the endpoint can be the same as the starting spot. Akufo’s journey starts from where he finds a piece of gold in the river. He then takes the viewer on a tour of Akim Abuakwa. In the end, he goes to the same waterway whence he picked the gold and then drops it back into the water. The fact that the origin and destination of the journey is the same place contributes to the seeming
random movement of Akufo. This is because he has the freedom to walk anywhere he wants as long as he returns to the exact spot where his trip began. Therefore, as long as his movement does not follow a fixed route, one cannot describe it as an example of detouring. Since there is no predetermined course, there cannot be a deviation (detour) from it.

Here again, a careful study of the film shows that Akufo’s movement occurs on a cinematically framed route. In the first place, considering the fact that the film incorporates reenactments, any assessment of it which does not account for the manipulative role of the filmmaker is bound to make incomplete judgments. It will be incorrect to claim that Akufo is placed on a geographical point and then asked to walk about freely, followed by the camera. Due to the brevity of the production (40 minutes), the filmmaker is compelled to make extensive use of editing which takes out whatever the boy may have experienced on the fixed route. Ultimately, what remains are the detours he undertakes because they are most important to the filmmaker’s purpose.

It is no coincidence that every single shot shows Akufo walking to a place with some kind of relevance to either the practice of mining or the local mythology of gold. This will lead the critical viewer to wonder why s/he is not, even once, shown a different experience of the boy aside what is related to gold. The answer is that what he encounters along the predetermined course is not of any major consequence to the filmmaker’s objective. Rather, it is the detours he is interested in, because of his desire to use them to cinematically engage with the politics around mining in Akim Abuakwa.
Another feature of the film which reveals the editing out of a fixed route is that in almost every scene, after Akufo goes to interact with or observe people, he does not continue walking forward. He turns and walks back to where he has come from. This happens in his encounter with the local miners. It is also the case after he talks with Nana Kofi, the goldsmith. The turnaround suggests a return to the fixed course after intentionally veering off it. In the scene where a security guard talks about his experience with a gold spirit, Akufo enters the compound silently, walks around, stands for short while to listen to the security man’s story, and then leaves. Similarly, in the sequence involving the priestess, the lad walks silently, observes and exits the house. In both instances, the quiet manner in which he sneaks in and makes his way out suggests entry into a foreign space—a place not on his foreknown pathway—hence its description as a detour.

Mobility, as Creswell (2006) points out, should satisfy two conditions: physical movement and meaning springing out of that spatial displacement of body. These two requirements are employed by Erik Knudsen in a way which gives additional interpretation to the idea of political detouring. In the context of *Heart of Gold*, detouring does not always follow a physical course. It is also constructed to reflect the filmmaker’s ideological point of view. At the beginning of the film, Knudsen uses the gold find to create a scene of spectacle by showing the nugget to the camera. The purpose is to attract the viewers’ interest. As argued previously, the film targets Western audiences. Once it successfully captures attention, the film narrative proceeds on the path of detour by exploiting the Westerner’s conception of gold in relation to that of the local people.
Gold, from the Western lens, is viewed primarily as an economic material. To bring this into the context of the free-market regime, ownership of a sizable piece of gold is equated to wealth. At least some kind of material gain is expected to accrue to the individual who exchanges his/her possession for money. In effect, gold is regarded as a material capable of propelling an individual’s, or even a country’s, economic mobility. Consequently, the Westerner who sees Akufo with gold is placed in a state of suspense even at the beginning of the film. The viewer’s perception of him is that of a rich boy.

The interest of the audience in the film beyond this point is to find out how the child is finally going to convert his gold find into actual money. So this is the path along which the film narrative is expected to progress. *Heart of Gold* takes a detour from this preconceived materialistic interpretation of gold. The film rather visualizes how mining companies operating on similar capitalist perceptions of the metallic resource are degrading the quality of life of the people of Akim Abuakwa. In the last scene, Akufo returns his find into the river as a symbol of his refusal to partake in the neo-liberal economic exploitation of gold. He comes to this conclusion based on what he sees and hears about mining as part of his tour experience. This statement reflects the filmmaker’s attempt to offer alternative viewpoints on gold in a manner which compels the Western viewer to deviate from the linear frame of equating gold to wealth and development. In this case, the detour enables the audience to perceive gold in relation to other competing realities, like poverty, underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and even the extermination of the spiritual dimensions of gold.
The orthodox nature of the documentary style requires the visualization of verifiable information about real people or situations. One of the intriguing qualities of *Heart of Gold* is its ability to combine seamlessly facts with fiction. This is the result of Knudsen’s conviction that the Western storytelling tradition cannot fully account for an African reality. Consequently, the documentary filmmaker feels that focusing on an African situation requires a new mode of visualization which is not limited in what it can and cannot represent. For the reason that *Heart of Gold* is based on an African locale, the filmmaker finds it necessary to “explore African modes of storytelling” (Knudsen 2010, 2) which treat “mythology as equally factual as the observed empirical world” (Knudsen 2010, 1). He finds this indigenous narrative style necessary to “create a [new] documentary practice outcome, whose form and approach can shed new light on the plight of aspects of African life (Knudsen 2010, 2). The adaptation of traditional storytelling features into the documentary is meant to advance further the ideology and aesthetics of political detouring. Indeed, Erik Knudsen states that the story told in *Heart of Gold* is

…loosely based on a number of stories I had been told about children finding gold. There is a narrative motivation, but it is as simple as I could muster: a boy finds a lump of gold in the river Brim and doesn’t know what to do with it. As a consequence of this, he goes to see a number of people, who tell him stories about gold, and he has a number of experiences with the gold. (9)

The filmmaker’s statement suggests a close relationship between the African oral tradition and political detouring. One may observe that the simplicity of the original
structure of the story makes provision for anyone to introduce his/her own detours to the
narrative. Knudsen takes cinematic advantage of this to construct detours that connect the
boy’s discovery of gold to the journey he undertakes to learn more about it. In the
cinematization of this folktale, the filmmaker finds it necessary to remain faithful to the
original story and the oral tradition to which it belongs. Consequently, *Heart of Gold* not
only cinematizes a folk narrative but also utilizes the aesthetics of that cultural tradition.

In the preliterate past, African societies transmitted knowledge orally from one
generation to another. The African therefore learned about his/her community through
enculturation, which goes with the process of socializing within one’s group. In this way,
members of the society learned and shared common knowledge about their heritage.
While this experience does not apply exclusively to Africa, this continent seems to be
among the few societies that are still resisting the dissolving effect of modernity on local
cultures. Consequently, for those who desire to know about Africa’s cosmic realities
ought to make the oral tradition one of their sources of knowledge. Not only will it serve
as a socio-cultural entrée, but it will also offer “deep artistic and aesthetic insights which
reflect the prevalent principles and canons of criticism, evaluation, creativity, etc” of a
people (Abusabib 1995, 30). Despite being half Ghanaian and born in Ghana, Knudsen
identifies himself as “culturally European” and therefore able to “only partially immerse
himself into the mindset of the Akan” (7). In documentary style, this limitation in the
knowledge of his film subject(s) does not matter, since the filmmaker only seeks to
capture what is observable and verifiable. But in the case of *Heart of Gold*, this style does
not work, for the relationship the people of Akim Abuakwa have with gold is not only
expressed materially but also spiritually. Under this situation, a filmmaker whose reliance solely on fact will have partial insight into the lives of the people s/he tries to cinematize. This is because the transcendental dimension of the community will be inaccessible to the traditional documentary style. In *Heart of Gold*, the oral tradition of the Akim Abuakwa people is incorporated into the film narrative to weave the observable into what is unobservable yet part of the reality of the community’s relationship with gold.

In identifying the factual aspects of *Heart of Gold*, one can point to environmental degradation and foreign control of the mine resource. They can both be considered empirical information for the reason that they can be verified though they are visualized through reenactments. Without the invocation of the mystical through the tales of, for example, the local miners and the goldsmith, the audience would have seen the destroyed environment without understanding that to the people of Akim Abuakwa everything in the environment has life; they are all living. Therefore its destruction by multinational companies amounts to both physical and spiritual loss to the local people. In the same way, viewers would have watched Dr. Yao Graham give empirically based arguments about the surrender of the gold resources of Ghana to foreign interests without understanding that the resulting poverty is causing the community to lose its transcendental attachment to the mineral. The mineral law of Ghana commits all minerals discovered in the country into the custody of the state. Hence, owning a land does not grant one the right to mine any resources that may be found on it (Minerals and Mining Act 2006). As a result, though the people of Akim Abuakwa own the land they reside on, they have no legal right to exploit the embedded minerals.
Feeling removed from the wealth of the mining economy, they begin to grow the material relationship they have with gold over and above the cultural value. The effect is a cultural death which causes them to no longer acknowledge elements of the environment as living. With the introduction of this non-empirical aspect of gold, the audience is invited to see aspects of the film which show the damage local miners cause the environment from not only the physical point of view. They are placed in a situation where they are to evaluate the actions of the people in relation to their spiritual detachment from gold caused by global capital inroads. Here again, a conventional documentary style would have been limited to going beyond Dr. Graham’s interview and visualizing the role of artisanal miners in the destruction of the physical space. The filmmaker therefore employed elements of oral tradition to enable him blend the empirical with the mystical. By doing this in documentary, he factualizes what will hitherto be described as unverifiable. This unconventional style might attract criticism from fellow documentary filmmakers and critics. In a preemptive defense of his creative choice, Knudsen (2007) argues that in African folklore “no distinction is made between what we in the developed world may consider fact and fiction, reality and fantasy or real and unreal. Listeners of the story consider everything to be fact” (6). Therefore in telling a story which is only factually complete with the introduction of fiction, Knudsen finds it appropriate to employ elements of the African storytelling mode even if the end product is to be described as less of a documentary.

Beyond their representational and aesthetic functions, Knudsen utilizes the folk-narrative genre in *Heart of Gold* to achieve the purpose of his art. The aim of political
detouring in cinema is to show suppressed images of a place, so viewers can reassess the dominant narrative of those visualized locations in its rightful context. It is expected that the experience of seeing a film of this kind will change the viewer’s prior relationship with the place, if the film is successful at “appealing to tourists’ [viewers’] sense of justice to promote their solidarity” with the visualized place (Hercberg 2012, 415). The filmmaker’s ultimate objective is to induce the viewer’s sense of moral judgment to support the cause of the victim and, by so doing, condemn the culprit.

The element of morality which Knudsen promotes in *Heart of Gold* is another reason for his adaptation of African folklore aesthetics into the documentary. The traditional mode of documentary cinema may feature moral messages but only as part of a narrative based on factual information and real situations. In the context of *Heart of Gold*, where oral narratives are used to bring together the empirical and the mythological, this would be artistically restrictive. To overcome this limitation, the filmmaker employs African orality. This is not only because it allows aesthetic flexibility for the articulation of moral messages, but also for the reason that morality is inherently a part of the tradition.

I have tried to incorporate a sense of moral purpose into the form of the film, as this seems to be a feature of almost every story I was told about gold; in other words, not merely that the subject matter or the story reveals a moral purpose, but that the storytelling mode – the form – itself reflects a morality. (Knudsen 2010, 9)
The overarching message in *Heart of Gold* is that the people of Akim Abuakwa are victims rather than beneficiaries of foreign capital investment in the gold resource of their land. The appeal to the viewer therefore is to show empathy to the people of the area by denouncing the operational practices of large-scale mining companies. This lesson is effectively articulated in the film by presenting the empirical evidence of environmental destruction as well as interviewing experts like Dr. Yao Graham. These are traditional documentary narrative styles which are limited in the presentation of non-fact based lessons. Here, reference is made to Yaw’s story about the gold-carrying eel fish. As has been previously interpreted, this tale teaches moderation and consideration in the quest for gold. This could not have been expressed effectively in *Heart of Gold* without the employment of the oral tradition.

When this transcendentally-derived moral is extended into globalization, it reveals that Knudsen is not completely against foreign participation in the gold economy of Ghana. His critique is the insatiability of capitalist taste for wealth accumulation pursued in disregard to the welfare of the people of the mining community or country. The message to the viewer is therefore not one of utter condemnation of globalization but the excesses of those who control it. This includes labor exploitation, land appropriation, monopolization of resources, and environmental irresponsibility, among others.

In sum, the film style employed in *Heart of Gold* gives the filmmaker the leeway to experiment cinematically with the subject of globalization. Political detour is given an interpretation in cinema which presents a counter-narrative to the impact of foreign investment in the mineral economy of Ghana. The filmmaker, utilizing mobility, gives
the viewers the opportunity to tour and experience for themselves issues of exploitation by this extractive industry of Ghana. Thus, Knudsen is successful at pointing out different aspects of national life which are affected by large-scale commercial mining. Based on the evidence gathered from this tour, viewers are put in a situation to reconsider some common conceptions of economic globalization. They get to learn that free trade does not necessarily translate into development. Sometimes, it can be the reason for underdevelopment. The suitability of political detour to this subject is the ability to add visual evidence to the general narrative of *Heart of Gold*. Then, the film does not just criticize the negative impact of global capitalism; it gives empirical evidence of this effect.
CHAPTER 2: SONG FOR NIGHT: TOURING THE WARSCAPE

This section of the research sets out to undertake two tasks. First, it examines Chris Abani’s *Song for Night* (2007) as an allegorical narrative about Africa. Also, it will attempt to examine ways in which political detour is used in this novel to illustrate Africa’s contribution to its own underdevelopment. Since its publication, this work has received two important international recognitions. First, it won the PEN Open Book Award in 2008. It also won the New York Times Editor’s Choice award in 2007. The book has received enthusiastic reception due, in part, to the subject of child soldiers about which the story is told. There is a seeming fascination with sold soldiers which has created a large audience for creative works that are based on them. But ultimately, it is his highly refined artistic skill which captivates his readership.

By reading *Song for Night* as an allegory, the study will pay close attention to how the issues raised in the novel reflect a wider African problem. The novel follows the journey of My Luck, a child-soldier, who, after a landmine explosion, is abandoned by his platoon who thought he was dead. He however regains consciousness later and begins a journey to rejoin his colleagues. In this process, My Luck takes readers on a walk through an unknown war-ravaged scene described as “the topography of a nightmarish [war] landscape” (Luburic-Cvijanovic 2011, 481). Through this tour, My Luck, the protagonist, detours to places that remind him of his war experiences. The story is told by My Luck from the first person point of view. As he travels through the war scenes, he remembers and tells stories about every place he goes. The novel puts mobility to a geo-mnemonic narrative function where My Luck’s memory of the past is prompted by
geographic landmarks. As Warner (1998) notes, geographic cues facilitate mobility by guiding the movement of people from one point to another. To him, conspicuous environmental features such as buildings and other architectural edifices “help to locate, guide, or orient a person” as s/he moves through an unfamiliar space (Warner 1998, 303).

In the case of *Song for Night*, My Luck is familiar with the landscape. However, he uses environmental features to mark his journey in order to avoid veering into an enemy’s territory. But in terms of narrative function, he relies on environmental cues to construct a linear plot. It is this linearity of the narrative which makes it possible for political detour to be used to interpret *Song for Night*. My Luck’s journey is characterized by frequent deviations from the story. These detours reveal how Africans have contributed to their own economic underdevelopment.

In the previous chapter the theory of political detour was used to reveal the exploitative role that foreign investors are playing in Ghana’s mineral extraction industry. It was argued that globalization is one reason why African economies have remained largely underdeveloped despite the abundance of natural resources. There are some scholars who do not agree that globalization is the cause of Africa’s underdevelopment. They argue that Africa is not innocent of its present circumstances. Bearing this in mind, the current chapter attempts to extend political detour to address an alternative viewpoint, one which considers the role Africa has played in its economic stagnation.
Mobility, Detour and the Allegory of Post-Independence African Economic Underdevelopment

*Song for Night* has often been read as either war or human rights literature. In an interview with Goyal (2014) Abani declares that his artistic intention for writing *Song for Night* was not to concern himself with “the simple politics of war” (236). Rather, he aimed to create a narrative that could stand as an allegory. In this interview, he does not explicitly identify what he is allegorizing. It will be argued here that it is postcolonial Africa which is being represented. Allegory is defined as “a ‘symbolic narrative’ in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2013, 10). Unlike other narrative styles, allegorical writing is best understood by identifying the symbolic references contained in the story. To interpret such a works one needs to go beyond what is literally presented in the story. The critic will have to interpret the metaphors in order to get to the meaning that is obscurely placed in the story.

There is a growing tradition of allegorical writing in Africa. Some representative works include Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Death on the Cross*, Ayi Kwei Armah’s short story “An African Fable,” Benjamin Kwakye’s *The Clothes of Nakedness*, Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, and Kapano Matlwa’s *Coconut*. In all of these, characters or objects are used as symbols of African situations which the writers want to critique. Some have attributed the emergence of this narrative style to colonial representation of colonized subjects. Postcolonial writers found allegory to be a useful counter-narrative writing style. It is deployed to “disrupt notions of orthodox history,
classical realism and imperial representation in general (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2013, 10). African writers are said to have appropriated allegory to destroy (disrupt) imperial representations of the postcolonial subject. For this reason, some scholars have described modern African literature as allegorical.

According to Jameson (1986) all postcolonial literatures are intrinsically allegorical. Explaining his often cited argument, he claims that postcolonial literatures “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (69). In such narratives there is no character that truly represents himself/herself. Rather, a character’s “private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third-world [postcolonial] culture and society” (Jameson 1986, 69, italicized in the original). This means that in allegory, there is always a relationship between the experiences of individual characters and what is in fact happening in the writer’s society. Jameson’s position is supported by Jaide’s (2009) arguments that in order to gain internal access into an African literary piece, the reader must approach it as an “extra-literary” (5) text. This means that the broader interpretation of the narrative exists outside of what is literally presented. There is always a socio-political dimension which will require the reader to connect what s/he reads to a real world experience. Jaide further explains that extra-literary reading is necessary because “African literature tends to be functional and not just art for art’s sake” (6). Creative writers are thus expected to use their skills not only to entertain their readers, but also to engage with real social and political issues.

Indeed, there are those who argue that African writers have become fond of allegory, because it is “associated with conditions of censorship or political oppression”
(Thurman 2010, 92). For scholars of such orientation, allegory is a way for writers to deal discreetly with political subjects. Despite recent improvements, many countries in Africa are yet to embrace freedom of expression. This is especially the case when the views expressed are critical of authority. African writers have become increasingly critical of their leaders’ inability or unwillingness to serve the interests of their citizens. In response, the leaders have tried to curtail authorial freedom by censoring what they write. In some instances, writers have had to suffer incarceration for the views they express. Famous instances include Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Kenya), Kofi Awoonor (Ghana), Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), and Jack Mapanje (Malawi). Ken Saro Wiwa (Nigeria) even died defending his ideals of social justice. Abani did not suffer death, but he is among those who were frequently caged in prison.

As a human rights activist, his creative works led to his imprisonment in his native Nigeria on three occasions. He was first incarcerated in 1985 at the age of sixteen. It followed the publication of his first novel, Masters of the Board. The story was thought to be calling for the overthrow of the Nigerian government. A year after the release of his second novel, Sirocco (1987), he was once again imprisoned. He intensified his criticism of the government through his literature after his second release. When the government could no longer tolerate him, he was arrested for a third time and sentenced to death. He was however able to escape from prison in 1991 and fled to the United Kingdom. He lived there until 1999 when he decided to relocate to the United States. Considering these violent circumstances, it is understandable how a writer like Abani uses an allegorical writing style to hide meaning from the literal (Coundouriotis 2010).
This way he could engage with political issues, while avoiding further persecution or revenge attacks on his family in Nigeria.

Allegory has always been a part of African folklore. Take for example the *ananse* (spider) storytelling tradition among the Akan people of West Africa. Their stories often involve animal characters. In reality, however, these tales simply use such characters to reflect on human situations. This intervention complicates the claim that allegorical writing is essentially a Western literary aesthetic, which has been appropriated by Third-world literatures (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2013). It means that if African (written) literatures are essentially national allegorical, as claimed by Jameson, then it is possible that writers adopted the skill from folktales. Secondly, it suggests that allegory is a cultural narrative aesthetic which developed independent of the Western literary tradition.

Rightly so, the opinion that postcolonial literatures are necessarily allegorical has been criticized as either an overgeneralization (Ahmad 1992) or a Euro-centric view (Slemon 1987) of Third-world national literatures. Yet, there is still some value in Jameson’s comment. Though he might be overgeneralizing, his observation shows how common allegory is in postcolonial literatures. *Song for Night* therefore belongs to an established tradition of allegorical writing in Africa. However, the employment of mobility (political detour) in *Song for Night* sets it apart from other allegorical texts in the African literary canon.

My Luck provides the clearest hint of how mobility is important to the story when he says: “This trek of mine is getting more and more ridiculous, I think. I am mostly moving from one scene of past trauma to another, the distances between them, though
vast, have collapsed to a span of thought, and my platoon is ever elusive” (Abani 2007, 147). This statement connects the protagonist’s motion to the experience of (war) trauma recounted in the novel. If the concept of political detour is to apply to Song for Night, then My Luck’s movement from one place to another should not just highlight past trauma. The experience should also make a political statement about the physical spaces that he traverses. As an allegory, the physical space along which My Luck travels is a fictional representation of the African continental landmass. And the political commentary associated with the narrator’s mobility is in reference to the economic downfall of post-independence Africa.

Commenting on the explosion which struck him unconscious, My Luck suggests that Nebu, a fellow child-soldier, was either careless or unlucky to have stepped on the mine. Because he is an experienced mine defuser, Nebu should have known where it is safe to walk. The explosion therefore occurred as a result of a detour from the path on which the platoon was supposed to be taking. In this instance, there is a collective rather than an individual detour. Since the platoon is travelling as a group, should even one person deviate from the prescribed route, everyone else is affected. As in this case, the careless or ill-fated detour caused the explosion which struck My Luck. Though My Luck did not personally take the detour, Abani uses the effect on him to make an allegorical political statement about Africa.

Firstly, Abani uses the spectacle of explosion to allude to African independence. When My Luck regains consciousness, he notices that he is alone—he has been abandoned by his group. This can be interpreted as a moment of emancipation from the
rebel army. My Luck had mixed feelings about being a child-soldier. He thought he was participating in a “senseless war,” yet he and his colleagues “will continue to fight until we are ordered to stop” (Abani 2007, 19). This is an indication of the fact that he is operating within a controlled environment, akin to colonialism. He acts on the orders of someone with superior powers over him. My Luck is therefore subordinated to the dominating force of his commanding officers. This binary of power illustrated in his relationship with his officers can be extended into a colonial discourse where Africa is powerless. This author is by this interpretation recognizing the experiences of My Luck not as private but as an allegory of the embattled postcolonial African life. My Luck is thus representing, not himself but the state forms. And his character bears “features of a political organization” (Mbembe 2003, 32). He can therefore stand in as the symbol of the state or the continent of Africa in this case. Consequently, one can connect his experiences as a child-soldier to the African colonial experience.

However, Luck, waking up, changes the order of things. At this point, he finds himself alone—abandoned by his platoon. He is therefore no longer under the control of his officers. He has the freedom now to decide for himself what he wants to do. The freedom of My Luck represents the wave of political independence which moved through Africa after the Second World War. Considering that the mine explosion is what culminated in My Luck’s freedom, it illustrates the violence which characterized decolonization campaigns across Africa. Anticolonial efforts were for the most part repressed, often with violence. Nonetheless, Africans were encouraged to intensify the struggle for freedom. They believed that they would have a better life under an African
leadership. Today, opinions across the continent weigh heavily against post-independence rulers. *Song for Night* interrogates this experience through My Luck’s mobility across the fictive African war scene. The commentary being made by the protagonist’s movement concerns the whole of the continent.

This interpretation is strengthened by an important feature of Abani’s narrative: the setting. In the entire story, My Luck never names the rebel army of which he is a member. Neither does he identify the country with whose government they are fighting. By this, Abani is setting up the novel as a narrative on Africa. He leaves room for the story to be read in a Pan African context, that is, to make it fit the experience of any given African nation. It should be qualified that this interpretation is not intended to reach a homogeneous conclusion about postcolonial Africa through *Song for Night*. To read the text in a Pan-African context means that the writer is narrating some common issues that affect African economic development. Therefore, regardless of the different experiences of individual nations on the continent, African readers can relate to the text considering that economic downfall seems to be a continent-wide phenomenon.

This general feeling of disappointment in the outcome of African independence is alluded to in the beginning of *Song for Night*. My Luck’s recovered consciousness does not only symbolize freedom but also a sense of awakening, a renaissance, if you will, which goes with emancipation. It signals the new postcolonial order where African states realized the need to take charge of their own affairs. This moment of awakening came with the general expectation that if Africans are leading Africa, then they are more likely to pursue the interests of the continent. Colonialism, after all, was simply about resource
exploitation; hence, the end of it meant that the resources of the continent would now be
used to the benefit of its peoples. Chris Abani provides a subtle criticism of post-
independence African leadership for its failure to meet the expectations of its citizens.

Upon waking up from the blast, My Luck realizes that his group is gone. He is left
alone and he struggles to catch up with them. Considering that the platoon comprises
similarly young soldiers, it could be said that while My Luck is stagnated (immobilized),
his contemporaries are mobile. In the context of African reality, My Luck’s awakening is,
as Moynagh (2011) puts it, a “symbolic enactment of the social and political
contradictions” being witnessed within the continent since independence (40).

Independence was for progress, but for African nations it is yet to result in significant
advancement. They are behind their contemporaries when it comes to the level of social,
economic, and political progress attained since becoming independent nations. Africa is
not the only continent to have been colonized by Western powers. The experience of
most parts of Southeast Asia, for example, has been similar to Africa. Yet, if one
compares the two, there is a “widening income gap relative to East Asia” (Bodea and
Elbadawi 2008, 1). Take, for example, Ghana and Malaysia. Both became independent
countries in the year 1957. It might be expected that they would be largely parallel when
it comes to economic conditions. However, a comparative economic analysis conducted
by Z. Yusof (2010) will show that Ghana has consistently been stagnating, while
Malaysia has been upwardly mobile. In a study of the economies of Ghana and Malaysia,
he shows that since independence, the Malaysian economy has outgrown that of Ghana
by between three to fifteen times. Even Singapore, a country that gained independence in
1965, is at least statistically speaking, ahead of many African countries that attained political freedom earlier than 1965. The economy of Singapore, as Soludo (2006) notes, “remains a clear example of a nation that moved from hopelessness to an example of modernity” (13). Chris Abani wants to show this level of disparity between African nations and their contemporaries in other continents.

**Time, Mobility, Detour and African Development**

In his assessment of postcolonial Africa, Abani uses the idea of time in relation to development to measure the progress made or being made on the continent. The story told in *Song for Night* is narrated through detours. These detours take time off My Luck’s search for his platoon. Essentially, he is performing two assignments with his mobility. One is the search for his comrades and the other is a (de)tour of (from) the war scene. To perform effectively these tasks simultaneously, he needs to find a way of allocating time to both assignments. As a result, My Luck carries a watch with him throughout his journey. He looks at it whenever he makes a detour.

According to Evans-Pritchard (2007), time refers to “successions of events which are of sufficient interest to a community for them to be noted and related to each other conceptually” (193). It records the passage of seasons, events, days, weeks, months, year, etc. Consequently, everyone in the community is aware of the expected time things like working, cooking, eating, sleeping, festival celebrations, planting, and harvesting, have to take place. At the same time, it affords members of the community, a way of measuring their progress. Thus, time, as noted by Rundle (2009) is what “measures and what is
measured” (2). For example if one begins planting after the farming season, s/he will be regarded as a late starter. “Late” because s/he is behind on the communal farming time. Mobility is measured in relation to distance covered in time. Mobility therefore transforms time into temporal space and place (Rundle 2009). Time is what rates a person’s swiftness or slowness in movement across a given space. Distance covered in time affects one’s experience of the traveled space. A tourist, for example, can only experience what time would allow him/her to see. The experience could be good or bad, but motion is the essential element required for either of the outcomes. For any two tourists who visit the same place, it is the one who is able to cover more space in time that will have an extensive knowledge of the space; the knowledge of what is beautiful and/or ugly. Abani uses this relationship between mobility and time to construct a timeless narrative of postcolonial Africa. Timeless is used here to refer to the lack of progress recorded in My Luck’s mobility across the fictional African space.

My Luck is used in the novel as a symbol of Africa, and his mobility is a mirror of the sluggish advance made so far in the economic development of the continent. My Luck undertakes his journey with a broken old Timex watch to time his progress. Even though “it reveals nothing about the time” (Abani 2007, 84), since it is faulty, My Luck continues to carry the old watch to tell time during his journey. While this behavior is most certainly absurd, it hints at an indirect statement Abani intends to make with the character of My Luck. The writer is first of all using the broken watch to establish the implication of My Luck’s journey to post-independence Africa.
In this context, mobility is being measured from the period of independence to the present. My Luck reveals that he inherited the once gold-plated Timex watch from his uncle. However it was “Already broken when he [the uncle] died” (Abani 2007, 53). In other words, by the time he took possession of the watch, it already needed repairs. This relates to the starting point of the national/continental building process. Political independence was fought for and won because Africans felt exploited by their European rulers. The colonial situation where foreign occupiers were the direct beneficiaries of African resources was seen as a broken system which needed to be corrected. Essentially, all governments that took over immediately after independence inherited a broken system. The performance of these governments was to be measured by how they are able to repair what is broken.

Abani, uses the character of My Luck to suggest that African leaders have failed to undertake the expected repairs. This is represented in My Luck’s statement: “Since I’ve had it, the second and hour hands have fallen off, both nestling like tired armatures in the bottom of the cracked glass case” (Abani 2007, 53). Not only is he unable to improve the state of the watch he has inherited, but he oversees further deterioration of it. This tells the story of African leaders from independence to date. They have recorded minimal progress in the state of affairs they inherited. If one is to see development as occurring in time, then this stagnation occurring since independence is an affirmation of My Luck’s declaration that “Time is standing still—literally” (Abani 2007, 53).
Detour and the Highlight of Economic Underdevelopment

On recovering from the blast, My Luck wonders which method of travel he should use to rejoin his unit. He debates between using the forest pathway to his right or taking the river route to his left. After a while, he opts for the latter. This suggests that My Luck has reached a decision to use the river as his predetermined route. However, when he actually begins the journey, he does not stay on the river. He frequently moves onto the forest road and then back to the waterway. This demonstrates the use of political detour. Each of the two routes serves different purposes. Explaining the rationale behind his decision to travel on the river, My Luck opines that rivers are the “fastest means of travel” (Abani 2007, 23). Here, the traveler is taking advantage of the fast-moving currents of the river to hasten his mobility. But, for the trip to have a political effect, My Luck detours for the purpose of taking readers on a road trip through the land about which the story is told. While it is faster to canoe on water, walking on land brings My Luck closer to habitation. As a result, readers can have an immediate experience of how people are living through war.

However, as argued earlier, the journey takes place on a landscape that is fictionally representative of the African continent. Therefore, My Luck’s detours are intended to have the allegorical effect of highlighting aspects of African postcolonial life. The part of African life which Song for Night allegorically explores is the slow-paced economic progress made since the continent attained political independence. Through this journey, Abani uses My Luck’s mobility on the road to diagnose some factors that are working against the economic development of the continent.
The most obvious of all the factors that Abani identifies as inhibiting the advancement of Africa is armed conflict. In the course of My Luck’s journey, he abandons his boat and makes a detour to the road. Soon after disembarking, he meets a woman who “uses a hook to pull [dead] bodies onto the shore and robs them of their valuables” (Abani 2007, 83). Here, Abani is treating war as a manifestation of the grotesque as a way of representing the abnormality of armed conflicts. The grotesque is a term used to describe images of distorted, exaggerated, incongruous, or dismembered bodies for the purpose of creating shock and/or (carnivalesque) humor (Bakhtin 1968). They are used to “challenge established [naturalized] realities or construct new ones” (Connelly 2003, 2). This way, the grotesque denaturalizes “what was taken for granted and open it to change” (Halfmann and Young 2010, 5). The grotesque is a social deconstructing method used to cause a change in the order of things. As Wolfgang Kayser (1963) asserts, it is “AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECT OF THE WORLD” (188, capitalized in the original).

Even though there is no distortion of body, the scene under consideration still qualifies as a form of the grotesque, because the woman’s conduct distorts the sense of honor which dead people are culturally accorded. Her action “is in direct opposition to whatever is regarded as classical, eternal [ideals]” (Remshardt 2004, 17) in the society. This is why readers are shocked by its abnormality—it goes against their sensibilities. Abani utilizes his readers’ disgust at the woman’s conduct to show that war has a degenerating effect on humanity.
What is portrayed in the scene may be improbable or exaggerated, but in the grotesque, plausibility is of less consequence. What is important is the message which is being communicated. In this case, for example, it sounds unbelievable that a person trapped in a warzone can go to a place alone to steal from dead bodies. Nonetheless, the most important thing to consider is what it contributes to the overall meaning of the text which is to guide readers to imagine the unimaginable defects of a fictionalized African world afflicted with war. It enacts war as an “aberration from ideal form” (Connelly 2003, 2). In this case, what is being referenced is Africa’s deviation from the economic ideals due to frequent violent disruptions in the political growth of the continent. Envisioning an end to turmoil as a prerequisite for accelerated development, the writer uses the grotesque to appeal to human sensibility to stand against the perpetuation of folly. He attempts to provoke the conscience of Africans to see in these images of war a sense of disgust at human degradation and destruction. Through this, it is expected that readers will come to the conclusion that the absence of war is a necessary condition for sustainable economic development in Africa.

Exaggeration and distortion makes humor an essential part of the grotesque. It transforms the familiar into a strange form. In this regard, the grotesque is cast in the mode of a satire, communicating ideas through the exaggeration of characters to the point where they become comical. The disfigurement or exaggeration of form is seen in the light of both metaphor and humor. Abani’s treatment of the woman’s behavior falls in line with this double feature of the grotesque. He tries to package her loathsome act in the form of humor. He does this by the way he describes the woman’s eyes as “cold and hard
and dark like onyx,” and “Her gaze takes in my torn clothes, my haggard face, and the
gun, and also the scapular that has come loose” (Abani 83). The eyes are caricatured to
give a humorous and at the same time powerful imagination of the woman. McNeil
(1990) argues that in the grotesque, when laughter is used to describe a war situation, it
becomes an “unconscious outlet” (20) to the anxieties of war. This means that humor is
used to alleviate the effect of horror associated with war. The reader is thus presented
with a mixed experience of disgust and amusement. In presenting the evils of war in a
humorous fashion, Abani is using the satirical elements of the grotesque to expose acts of
“incorrigible human folly” (McNeil 1990, 21) associated with war. Though the writer
uses humor to try to reduce the graphic effect of someone collecting dead bodies and
stealing from them, in the end the reader’s amusement further affirms the act as a mark of
foolishness. Laughter therefore becomes a non-verbal expression of disapproval rather
than an indication of excitement.

The broader implication of this is in relation to contemporary Africa is that the
grotesque image created for the woman is an allegorical way of condemning war for its
contribution to African underdevelopment. Armed conflicts have occurred across
different locations in the world. However, a study of the phenomenon would “show that
sub-Saharan Africa has been disproportionately affected by civil war, which explains a
substantial share of economic decline” (Bodea & Elbadawi 2008, 3). Abani is using the
grotesque to expose the dire result of war on the economic progress of Africa. He is
making a symbolic proof of the fact that “political violence, civil war, has a robust and
negative effect on [economic] growth” (Bodea & Elbadawi 2008, 3).
As an allegory which relies on the grotesque, the image of the woman stealing from corpses is intended to shock and at the same time mock the human folly which ensues as a result of war. It results in the abandonment of the standards of behavior which a society upholds. It ushers in a period in which survival is only for the strongest. People’s actions are motivated by survival instincts, not what is (socially) right or ethical. This is similar to the pilfering of the properties of cadavers. In such circumstance, war becomes anti-developmental because there is no collective will to advance the developmental interests of the larger community. In times of war, private will (the will to survive) takes precedence over the public good. It results in the collapse of the communal spirit, thereby obstructing the pursuit of the public good in terms of economic or any other form of development.

Abani’s use of the grotesque image is to refer allegorically to this break in the connection between the private and the public as a result of war in Africa. He uses the woman’s daring act of stealing from the dead to indicate a situation where war has resulted in the death of both the body and the soul of the continent. For Africans, death does not necessarily end one’s existence on earth. Rather, the deceased transitions into the world of the supernatural, where s/he obtains transcendental powers to guide the living. For some Africans groups, it is traditionally common for them to consult with dead members of their family or society for help whenever they are faced with difficulties that require supernatural intervention. This means that although a person’s mortal body may be dead, to the African, the soul remains alive and connected with the physical world. The important role ancestors play in the lives of Africans is demonstrated in the
reverence the living show to the dead. It is this background which makes the act of stealing from the dead even more grotesque in an African milieu.

This sacrilegious behavior displays a break in the hitherto strong relationship between the dead and the living. Bakhtin (1968) argues that “In the grotesque body...death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation” (322). In this context however, the prevalence of war has made it possible for death to bring everything to an end. The action of the woman shows the lack of recognition for the new life which springs from death: ancestors. She seems to be suggesting through her conduct that life exists only in the mortal body and it is not reproduced in the transcendental, following the demise of the corporeal being.

With this, the writer is advancing the argument that that war results in the death of the national spirit—that which motivates people to seek qualitative and quantitative improvements in the national life. Death, sometimes on the large scale, is almost inevitable in armed conflicts. Images of those who have fallen are constant reminders of the proximity of the corporeal being to death. Under the circumstances, the behavior of the living are motivated by the private interest to remain alive; they are never concerned with promoting public good. Consequently, any public interest—national spirit—which may have existed prior to war, dies naturally. The story of Song for Night identifies this as the reason why African nations cannot achieve their post-independence national economic goals.

One of the means of pursuing private survival goals in a war context is mobility. But while one may be able to postpone or completely escape death by fleeing the hot
spots of violence, mobility prompted by war creates a social void which then fetters development. Social void is used here to refer to the dispersal of people due to the fear of death. This process leaves in its place geographic spaces that are socially dead—devoid of inhabitants. My Luck’s detours recount narratives of violence, some of which illustrate social void.

While observing the woman stealing items from the dead bodies, My Luck’s initial reaction is that of shock. But this visual experience of the detour reminds him of his own wartime atrocities, acts that bred fear in people and caused them to flee their communities. He recalls the terror his group once brought on a village they attacked: “There were villagers running in panic. There were houses and huts burning. Also granaries. Bullets from indiscriminate guns cut down plants, animals, and people” (Abani 2007, 84-85). This war scene paints a picture of wanton human destruction. It demonstrates how war sets human folly in action, igniting feelings of fright among people. Out of this arises the private urge to flee, which then creates spaces of social void.

As part of the same detour which prompted him to recall his terrorist acts against the villagers, My Luck visits a town where he observes pictorial evidence of social void. On entering the city, he walks for a while without seeing inhabitants. My Luck concludes that they have fled the dangers of war but not with their children. He narrates:

Here, children, naked, many sporting sores attended by tomb flies, run through the narrow alleys screaming in play, unafraid of bombing raids. There are no adults in
sight except for a pregnant woman who lounges in one of the open doorways, cooling herself down with a raffia fan. (102)

The above account reflects a situation where the void resulting from the mobility of adults has had a negative effect on the most vulnerable members of the family unit: the children. They have no one to take care of them. Even the pregnant woman who is near them does not seem to be paying any attention to them. She is simply “cooling herself down” while the children ignorantly expose themselves to possible bombing. Her demeanor suggests that she has abandoned any responsibility she might have had towards the children. In other words, she is more concerned about her private interest (comfort) than public safety as regards the children. An alternative reading of her posture is that the social void has overburdened her with a situation which requires the collective input of the larger society to deal with. But in this case, the mobility of the adults has left her as the sole caregiver of the children, a situation which has worn her out and rendered her unable to continue performing the motherly role.

In line with the allegorical interpretation of this text, one can argue that the children represent the individual countries of Africa. It is the second time that Africa is being represented in *Song for Night* by a child figure. This motif of childhood is presented as a metaphorical reference to Africa’s stunted economic growth. For proper development, children need care and attention from society’s adult population. Here, Abani shows that the metaphorically infant Africa is unable to grow due to the fact that she has been abandoned by the adults. This situation is the result of war which has created a social void on the continent. As seen in My Luck’s detour into the city devoid
of adult residents, the children who are figuratively Africa are “screaming in play, unafraid of bombing raids” (102). This is indicative of a situation where children have been compelled to manage a seemingly normal life on their own amidst neglect by the society. As the story is told, these children play “happily” even though they have been abandoned to face the dangers of war on their own. Despite this apparent normal life for these children, the departure of the adults has a palpable effect on them. They are described as “naked, many sporting sores attended by tomb flies” (Abani 2007, 102). This suggests that even though the lives of the children might appear normal, in reality they bear signs of bodily deterioration.

Abani uses this image of deterioration to hint at how war-induced mobility is contributing to the economic breakdown of Africa. War causes people to move from one place to another in such of safer grounds. This mass movement creates social void; meaning that no adults stay behind to pursue broader national interests. Abani warns, with the case of the abandoned children, that the persistence of armed conflicts in Africa means a perpetual sacrifice of the continent’s future. As McGowan (2005) observes, armed conflicts in Africa “have been a massive humanitarian and developmental disaster” (6). This point is reiterated by Frances Stewart (1993) who contends that “civil wars are known to be one of the most potent causes of human suffering and underdevelopment” (357). The humanitarian cost raised by both scholars relates to the idea of social void which then leads to economic collapse.
Ethnic and Religious Intolerance

Attention will be paid now to the detour which brought My Luck into contact with the woman stealing from dead bodies. This is because his mobility in this instance explores issues of ethnic and religious intolerance both of which are among the factors responsible for Africa’s underdevelopment. After making his way past the woman, My Luck goes into a nearby town. Here, he meets a group of officers from the rebel army, who are eating, drinking, and socializing. One of the officers tells a joke which uncovers ethnic division. He begins his joke by saying “There are three construction workers, one of them is Igbo, one is Yoruba, and the other Hausa…” (Abani 90) Immediately after identifying the ethnic origins of the construction workers, a colleague soldier exclaims: “enemy!” (Abani 2007, 90). After this interruption, the storyteller continues with his joke about these three people who committed suicide because they were tired of their wives cooking them the same type of food all the time. When their wives were informed, that of the Yoruba and the Igbo said if their husbands had told them, they would have changed the diet. The wife of the Hausa is however “completely confused,” because her husband cooks his own meal (Abani 2007, 90).

The humor in this “racist” joke is in the irony that the Hausa man killed himself, even though he cooks his own meals (Abani 2007, 91). Therefore if he wanted a change in diet, he could have prepared a different food for himself. The clear intention of the story is to mock Hausa people as unintelligent. But Abani presents it in such a way that all the ethnic groups involved are ridiculed. Readers are not made aware of the ethnic affiliation of the soldier telling the joke. This is a creative choice by Abani to present
ethnic hatred as a multidirectional phenomenon. Here the ethnically unidentified rebel soldier is expressing a demeaning opinion about the Hausa people especially, but also about the Igbo and the Yoruba peoples. If the Igbo and the Yoruba really did not want to eat the same kind of meal, they should have told their wives. To not do so and to commit suicide afterwards is as preposterous as what the Hausa man did. My Luck reveals that such “racist” jokes are in high circulation, a situation which makes him “tired of all this [ethnic] hate” (Abani 2007, 91) propagated through jests.

This further explains why Abani does not ethnically identify the joke-telling soldier. By that, he makes everyone a victim and a perpetrator of ethnic hatred at the same time. Thus, anyone can fit in the position of the culturally unidentified soldier as an agent of ethnic hatred. At the same time, since the joke fails to clearly identify a specific target, then the three groups and, by extension, all ethnic divisions in the country (or on the continent of Africa) become victims. In the end, every form of development is forestalled because social unity is lacking.

The implication of this state of affairs to national/continental development is illustrated in the fact that the three victims of ethnic bigotry are identified as construction workers. They are allegorical representations of the continent’s developers. As the story goes, they all died during their lunch break because they hated their food. This means that the work they had done prior to taking the break will remain unfinished. The process of building the nation or the continent at large is terminated because of the death of the builders. And they died as a result of a deep-seated unreasonable hatred for the food they had to eat for lunch. If a person can be so moved by the dislike of food to commit suicide,
then Abani wonders what will happen if the food is substituted for a human. Instead of suicide, it is the human substitute that will be killed. This is not a case of mere deductive reasoning without factual backing. “Africa” according to Daniel (2012) “is ethnically a conflict-ridden continent” (4). My Luck brings this into the narrative when he recalls an instance prior to the outbreak of war where group hatred escalated into a situation where “Anyone who had even the slightest resemblance to the Bantu Igbo was killed” (Abani 93) by a group of Hausa people. Such ethnic hatred creates mutual suspicion which tends to work against social unity and cooperation in all aspects of nation building. The effect, ultimately, is that bigotry has an adverse effect on development.

The Religious Factor

Thinking about the joke he heard during the detour into the city, My Luck recalls an experience he had with religious discrimination and violence in a place he only refers to as the north. According to this account, the city was segregated into two groups based on religious affiliation. As he describes it, “The city was split into two distinct parts. The Old city…was home only to the [Muslim] Fulani” while “The new city…called Sabon Gari—the infidel’s quarter” was reserved for the habitation of “all the non-Muslims” (Abani 2007, 96). Religious pluralism is, in this case, used to create artificial social othering (Abdu-Raheem 2013; Dowd 2014) based on mutual suspicion and fear (Bello and Fawole 2011; Salawu 2010). This division spatially identifies insiders and outsiders. Within this binary scheme of things, an insider is to be a Muslim while an outsider is a Christian. The division provides a geographical manifestation to religious contempt. It
forbids mobility across quarters and therefore prevents any chance of inter-religious interactions and co-existence. The two are set up as diametrically opposed groups of people where the Christian is a natural enemy of the Muslim and vice versa. As My Luck affirms, “In fact, an infidel [Christian] who so much as walked through” the Muslim quarter “was courting death” (Abani 2007, 96). Mobility here is regarded as an invasion by religious outsiders who should be kept away lest they contaminate the purity of Islam with their infidel ways. Once a religious group reckons another as an invading outsider, co-existence ceases to become a considerable option in the circumstance. Rather, every possible means is explored to stop the perceived infiltration. Abani identifies this religious intolerance as one reason why Postcolonial Africa seems not to be making any significant progress towards development.

Several African countries have had to deal with religious conflicts of varying degrees of violence. Nigeria is one example of an African country that has seen successive conflicts between Christians and Muslims. The current militant campaign by the group Boko Haram to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria has attracted local and international attention for the bloody nature of their modus operandi. Similarly, Tuareg rebels in Mali are fighting to establish an Islamic state. In 2011, after several years of civil war, the predominantly Christian southern region of Sudan seceded from the Muslim north to form the Republic of South Sudan. Religious conflicts like these, apart from the massive number human casualties, have negatively affected the development of the countries involved.
Nonetheless, it is not always the case that ethnic and/or religious discrimination is operative between two different groups. At times, it is directed at a sub-division within the same religion or ethnicity. For example, although the ethnic identity of My Luck’s father is Igbo, “most of whom are catholic” (Abani 2007, 92), he chooses to be a Muslim. He even becomes an Imam, a leader of the mosque. Regardless of his demonstrated commitment to Islam, he is still treated as an outsider by the Fulani Muslims in the north because he is an Igbo. He is not allowed to lead any Mosque in the Old city, the Muslim quarter. He is rather assigned to a “dark and silent mosque that no one in Sabon Gari [the new city] stepped foot in” (Abani 2007, 110). This demonstrates an ethnic and religious discrimination which seems to suggest that an Igbo Muslim proclaims an inferior faith in Islam compared to a Fulani Muslim. For that reason, My Luck’s father remains an outsider to Islam, and when violence breaks out between the Muslim Fulani and the Catholic Igbo, he is one of the Igbos who gets killed.

Abani uses My Luck’s family to show that it is possible for people of different religious backgrounds to live together peacefully. Though the father is a Muslim, his mother is a Catholic. The matrimonial union has the allegorical intent to collapse the line of division between Muslims and Christians. This will ensure that mobility across settlements is not seen as an invasion or contamination of religious ideals. Despite belonging to two different religions, not even once does My Luck indicate that his parents disrespected each other’s faith. In fact they never forced My Luck to either become a Muslim or a Christian. His choice to remain religiously “undecided” was respected by both parents (Abani 2007, 110). It is the kind of religious tolerance Abani is
advocating as a condition for the developmental plans of Africa to succeed. In the historical novel *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah (1979) artistically presents the case that the coming into Africa of foreign religions—Christianity and Islam—have contributed to the dismemberment—social divisions—of the continent. Similarly, Irobi (2005) argues that ethnic conflicts in Africa today are the residual effect of the colonial method of divide and conquer—a system which sought to favor and empower one group of people over another. This situation has created a postcolonial condition in which Africans have double loyalties—one to the state and the other to their ethnic group (Orji (2010). This means that at every moment, the citizenry is divided. If one examines the novel within this context, then it can be argued that Abani is making a contribution to this debate. He is showing how Africa has worsened its postcolonial circumstances by its inability to free itself from the history of domination. Here, his focus is on Africans themselves; criticizing their seeming incapacity to reorient themselves socially into a unified group. The writer’s point therefore is that colonialism cannot always be blamed for the ethnic and religious conflicts that are setting back the progress of the continent. Africans would have to recognize that by perpetuating colonial partition, they are contributing to their own underdevelopment.

Regarding the violent aspect of religious and ethnic intolerance, Abani demonstrates its absurdity by showing how it is based on perception rather than any rational consideration. My Luck remembers being stopped in the heat of the violence in the north by a Fulani mob. They identified him as a target simply because they felt he “definitely looked like an infidel” (Abani 2007, 97). They were right as My Luck is an
Igbo and a non-Muslim. However, they had no way of verifying their suspicion except through language and a Koran knowledge test. Therefore when My Luck speaks in the language of the Fulani mob, Hausa, and is also able to “recite obscure sura from the Koran” (Abani 93), he is spared death even though he is one of those the mob is looking to kill. By this method, a Muslim may be killed if s/he failed the spontaneous test of obscure Koranic verses. Also, a person who does not “look” Fulani enough may be put to death even if in reality s/he is one of them. The division is based purely on perception rather than any logical consideration. For example My Luck who identifies himself as religiously neutral is able to save his life by successfully presenting himself as a Fulani and Muslim. But his father who is actually a Muslim gets killed.

Similarly, My Luck recalls a close encounter with death upon arriving in an Igbo town as he fled the targeted killing in the north. He escapes on a train and arrives at the Igbo community to a mob filled with the desire to avenge the massacre of its people. As soon as the train stops, the Fulani driver is beaten to death. He suffers retaliatory death despite the fact that he saved many Igbo people by helping them get out of danger in the north. His assistance does not matter to the Igbos, because the crowd, filled with hatred and anger, do not look beyond the man’s ethnic and religious identity. They see a Muslim Fulani and that is enough for the mob to kill him.

After this murder the angry Igbos, looking to carry out more revenge attacks, approach My Luck. Perceiving him to be a Fulani, they want to kill him as well. The crowd maintain that “They [Fulani] have murdered our children, so we must murder theirs” (Abani 99). But in this case, My Luck is not a Fulani child. Had he not “found his
voice and screamed repeatedly. ‘I am Igbo!’” he would have been lynched for the mere fact that he “looked” Fulani. The arbitrariness of human perception when it comes to identity construction puts everyone at the risk of religious and ethnic hatred (Omaka 2014).

My Luck is specifically dismayed by the irrationality of religious bigotry between Christians and Muslims. He is surprised because, as he says, “nothing I know of the world came from my Catholic mother or my Muslim father” (Abani 109). Religion is an irrational belief, or at least without any physically verifiable foundation. Followers are therefore susceptible to unreasonable behavior, like what happens between Igbo Christians and Fulani Muslims, depending on the way they (are taught to) interpret their beliefs. To encourage peaceful co-existence, My Luck suggests that there is the need for some level of rationality to be brought into religious practice by establishing a link between the spiritual and the physical. That is to say, it is of no immediate practical benefit for a spiritual group to preach its doctrines without teaching its followers how they could use it to build the corporeal society in which they live. The practice of religion should therefore not be concerned only with the spiritual life of their faithfuls but also consider their physical wellbeing. If religion is interpreted in this pragmatic fashion, then all groups will shun acts that might create unsafe living conditions. Then, instead of dividing and destroying nations, people will begin to express their religious beliefs in ways that promote development of the physical world. Abani is using My Luck’s religious neutrality to present a model African persona who does not allow religion to divide up his/her social space.
Scholars like Tunca (2013) have interpreted *Song for Night* as a historical novel that is based on the Biafran War. This war began in 1967 when the predominantly Igbo-dominated southeastern region of Nigeria declared independence and named the new nation the Republic of Biafra. Efforts by Nigeria to repossess this breakaway territory resulted in civil war. The secession was in response to the massacre of Igbo people living in the Hausa-Fulani territories of northern Nigeria. For those who interpret *Song for Night* as a historical novel, the current reading as an allegory of Africa might be criticized as downplaying one of the darkest episodes in the history of Nigeria. But, as Slemon (1988) argues, allegory does not take away the historical essence of a work. He states that “awareness of the passage of time is at the heart of allegory, and because of this, all allegorical writing is thought to be inherently involved with questions of history and tradition” (158). Therefore, rather than suppressing the historical context applicable to *Song for Night*, reading the text as allegorical suggests that Abani is using the event of the Biafran War to illustrate how religious and ethnic hatred affected the growth of Nigeria and Africa soon after it attained independence in 1960.

Utilizing this allegorical interpretation, one can argue that the post-independence experience of Nigeria is being used as a guide to other African nations so they too do not fall into the grips of ethnic and religious wars, because it only leads to economic stagnation. This treatment of history is noted by Slemon, when he argues that “allegorical modes of reading and writing are concerned with redeeming or recuperating the past” (Slemon 1988, 158). Abani uses detour here as an epistemological inquest into the subject of religious and ethnic conflicts. By choosing to go into the city instead of
continuing on his search for his lost comrades, he is able to invite readers to share in his walking experience, while using these encounters to provide an allegorical understanding of Africa’s postcolonial problems. Ultimately, the author hopes that the challenges of the continent as revealed in his detours will serve as a guide to the whole of Africa. In this case, Abani is turning a moment of failure in Nigeria’s past into something good (Haskill 2014), a reminder to others Africans about the destructive impact of ethnic and religious bigotry.

Corrupted Citizens

Africa’s underdevelopment has often been blamed on corruption by African leaders. While this is true to a large extent, Abani shows how the corrupt practices of ordinary people have also hampered the development of Africa. After narrating his experience with religious and ethnic hatred in the north, My Luck returns to the river once again. Before this, he comes across a man called Peter, who happens to be “the catechist of the church in the next town” (Abani 2007, 111). My Luck explains to him the reason for his wandering detours. The catechist helps him with a boat to facilitate his mobility on the river and to get him closer to his goal. My Luck boards the boat and immediately goes to sleep. When he wakes up, he realizes that he has drifted downriver to “large plains bordering each side” (Abani 2007, 114) of the river. Although My Luck has a political statement to make about the landscape, he does not physically leave the river to tour the land as he does in other detours. The reason he does not do this is
because he is very familiar with the place and, for that matter, does not need to detour in order to talk about it.

Sitting on his boat, he begins to recount his knowledge of the plains. He explains that, before the outbreak of war, the government came up with a policy to boost animal husbandry. To this end, it gave out grants to sheep farmers. The amount depended on the number of sheep a keeper had. So, the more sheep one had, the more money s/he was given. Therefore, to get more money from the government, the farmers provided authorities with falsified information regarding the number of sheep they actually owned. When state authorities visited the farms to verify the information, farmers borrowed sheep from one another to stock their own. This way, they were “always one step ahead of the inspectors” (Abani 115).

In this instance, My Luck’s mobility down the river has a double function: to look for his comrades as well as to inspect the farms. As he is not a government official, his presence on the plains will not cause farmers to increase their sheep with their friends’ livestock. What he will observe will therefore be the real situation on the ground. During his inspection however, My Luck meets an empty, deserted field, which in itself is a testament to the effect of the dishonest ways the farmers engaged with government. It shows that no sustainable development can take place when the very people who stand to benefit directly from a development policy rather sabotage it with corrupt practices. This is a profound statement as it questions the intentions for which certain economic and social groups ask for government support. As My Luck asserts, “This was never really about farming at all. It was about a lifestyle” (Abani 2007, 115). In this example, it is
clear that the assistance the farmers sought from the government was from the onset intended for personal benefit rather than using it to expand their farms. It was about farmers trying to have an easy life by using deception to receive money from the government. But eventually these “Pretty ingenious” acts became “tragic” (Abani 2007, 115) because the farms never grew. Once the few livestock were sold, eaten, or died, the industry ended.

As the inspection reveals, the farmers are out of operation and “all that’s left is a barren forest, and a few abandoned structures, built like American ranches” (Abani 2007, 115). The advisory message My Luck’s mobility gives here is that African peoples should see themselves as part of the process of development. They will have to recognize that their actions (and inactions) impact either negatively or positively on the development of the continent. While they expect government to lead the way towards economic progress, without genuine support and participation by citizens, the postcolonial African dystopia will not soon come to an end.

Mobility, Exploitation and the Allegory of the “Big Man”

If not for My Luck’s mobility, the story of Song for Night would not have been possible. Similar, in the rebel army, his mobility is considered paramount to the performance of his job as a mine defuser. In this regard, mobility goes beyond the physical ability to move one’s body from one point to another. It also takes into consideration the body weight of the soldier. Heavier fighters are not assigned mine defusing roles because their weight will set off the explosives should they step on them.
Consequently, lighter soldiers are recruited for this purpose. The result is that children are targeted for recruitment into the landmine clearing platoon. My Luck discloses:

We were chosen simply because we were small, slight even, and looked like we wouldn’t grow much in the nutrition-lacking environment of the battlefield. We were chosen because our lightweight would protect us from setting off the deadly mines even when we stepped on them. (Abani 2007, 20)

But the army was wrong in thinking that children would not be able to cause a land mine to blow up. As My Luck comments later, “Even a guinea fowl sets off the mine” (Abani 20). A human being, regardless of his/her age or weight will certainly cause a mine to go off. This notwithstanding, the light weight of children is still exploited by placing them in the frontline to remove explosives. In effect, these children are being used to serve the interests of the adult members of the army since the work of the children removes any risk the adults may face as they move.

This relationship between the platoon of child-soldiers and the adult members of the army is being used as an allegorical representation of the “purely African phenomenon” (Watson n. d. 1) of “big man” politics. This term defines the type of rule in which all forms of state power are concentrated in the hands of the leader (Posner & Young 2007). The leader thus rules according to his/her personal will or interest without regard to existing laws or other authorities of the country. This concept has become very well adapted to the political landscape of Africa (Okumu 2002; Kerr, Kimbugwe, Perdikis & Yeung 2012). Leadership in the continent is for the most part elite-serving. This means that the more “weight” one carries in the nation, the more likely s/he will
have safe, unimpeded, mobility within the social, political, and economic landscape of
the country. The inability of African nations to develop, equip and make their institutions
functional has caused power concentration in many nations of the continent. The
institutions put in place to either complement the functions of leaders or balance their
authority are often not performing as expected. To this end, official administrators
become autocratic as they extend their powers beyond what is legally mandated. This
illegitimate authority is then used to advance any kind of personal (economic, political, or
social) interests. This is what big man politics implies. To be a big man means that one
has the power (or the weight) of upward mobility.

On the other hand, the mobility of those who are powerless (that is light in
weight) is characterized by latent risk and uncertainties. Abani illustrates by the three
explosions that occur in the story. One kills Nebu while the other kills Ijeoma, both of
whom were members of the mine defusion unit. The irony is that the risk that the light-
weighted take actually goes to benefit the heavy-weighted, as in the case of My Luck’s
platoon, which had to bear the brunt of explosions in order for the rest of the troops to
make a safe advance.

Moss (2011) contends that though big men are characterized by “power
concentration [and] personal rule” (41), the system also functions when there are people
who support it. Hence, this kind of politics involves the process of enticing a segment of
the population to the center of power. However, when it comes to being a part of the
center of power, leaders are looking for citizens who can be exploited to hold the
illegitimate authority in place. To do this, big men target the powerless in the society and
offer them (financial) favors in return for their support of the proscribed rule. Hence there are invited into a system of “pervasive patronage” (Moss 2011, 41). This mass mobilization strategy is “absolutely crucial for his power and standing…and upward mobility occur[s] when he connects other men and their families to his faction” (Utas 2012, 6). Thus, the big man exploits the powerless to consolidate power and allow for his/her upward mobility.

This discussion on My Luck’s body weight extends into the subject of patronage which big men use as a force of coercion. Patronage cultivates a network of clientele which benefits from the big man’s abuse of power. The big man buys the loyalty of his clients by using his authority to provide them with generous favors in the form of “gifts” or services. Relating this to My Luck and his fellow child-soldiers, the argument could be made that they fall into the clientele system of the rebel army authority. Should the military campaign against the government become successful, the child-fighters will have no benefit from the victory. It is the adults, the big men, who will end up taking up leadership positions in the new regime. Yet this does not deter the children from fighting for their patron rebel officers. In a classic system of patronage, the children support the rebel quest for power. For this they get “rewarded with extra food and money” (Abani 2007, 22). A relationship is thus created in which there is the mutual need for each other. In the context of war, where My Luck and his platoon are starving, it will seem that the child-fighters are in desperate need of the officers’ patronage rewards. Their survival depends on their patrons continuing to be “generous” to them.
In the context of postcolonial Africa, what seems to be holding the big man leadership style in place is the patronage system. Citizens are made completely dependent on their leaders since “enrichment in Africa is primarily based on politics” (Daloz 2003, 271). In this regard, those who are connected to the “right” people stand the chance of having their material needs (and wants) satisfied. This means that for people to have economic, social, or political mobility, they ought to show undivided loyalty to politically influential political figures—big men of the country. In effect, the big man remains relevant for as long as he is able to keep the broad mass of people impoverished. Then, for them to survive, economically, the populace will have to join his network of clients (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung & Kerr 2012). This leads to the creation of a mass of exploitable people who will be used to advance the political or economic aspirations of their patron.

What this means, in relation to the allegorical reading of Song for Night, is that Africans, in part, contribute to their own economic impoverishment. If they are willing to carry out the biddings of their patron leaders in exchange for favors, then they are equally blamable and therefore cannot hold their big men accountable for what they do. In a way, one can look at it as trading off their voice for the illegitimate benefits they receive. They lose the moral justification to criticize their government even in the face of palpable misadministration. This point is further illustrated in the fact that all the child-soldiers have their vocal chords severed. They are therefore unable to talk. Abani contends that he chose to make the child soldiers speechless because he wants “to force the reader into a visceral journey with him [My Luck]” (Goyal 2014, 231). But the lack of voice plays an
additional role. It represents a guilt-induced silence. Though the under-aged soldiers might have been directed to commit all kinds of atrocities, they have no voice to explain their actions and possibly win sympathy or forgiveness. This seals off any chance they might have to claim innocence or even take the position of the victim on the grounds of coercion. Thus, the client and the patron are equally guilty of the crimes committed at war.

Hope for the Future

Despite the gloomy picture of Africa recounted in *Song for Night*, Abani never loses hope in the capacity of the continent to chart a different course than what it is following right now. While travelling on the river at night, My Luck spots light and interprets that to mean the presence of humans. He consequently detours from the river and makes his way towards the direction of the light. He realizes upon getting closer that it is a market that seems to operate only at night because of the fear of daytime bombing. The market is surprisingly filled with many traders and buyers. They are all taking advantage of the night to do business because “There is no nighttime bombing or strafing” (Abani 2007, 89).

One of the businesses operating here is called Die Hard Motel and Eatery. This name points to the endurance and the hopefulness of the traders present at the night market. In a war situation where law and order has broken down, it would be expected that the city would be completely deserted. On the contrary, the market is a point of convergence for business people from within and outside the city in which it is located.
These people are determined not to give in to the threat of violence and the proximity of death. Rather, they want to get the most out of the period of relative tranquility—night—no matter how short it lasts. This reinforces the idea that peace is a prerequisite for development; hence African countries will have to earnestly seek it before the fortunes of the continent can be improved. The market scene shows the “die-hard” nature of African peoples. In the face of all that hinder the development of the continent, there are those who refuse to give up. Abani uses these people to restore hope in those who may have lost hope in the continent after reading the story of *Song for Night*.

The clearest expression of hope in an African future is made when My Luck tries to enter the Die Hard Motel and Eatery. He hesitates to move for a moment because a lizard is lying in front of the entrance. Explaining his hesitation, My Luck states that “Lizards are sometimes seen as symbols of rebirth, but every rebirth requires a death” (Abani 2007, 90). He fears he might die for someone else’s rebirth if he jumps over the animal. He finally gathers courage and hovers over it. An old man who observes his initial hesitation says to him, “Faith is not a gift. It is earned” (Abani 2007, 90).

Abani is using the symbol of the lizard to paint a hopeful picture of the future of Africa. If *Song for Night* is to be read as an allegory, then the narrative presents a dark image of Africa. Even the narrator is overwhelmed by the story. He complains that the journey he is undertaking seems to be taking him from one past trauma to another. Africa seems to be virtually dead. The symbol of the lizard henceforth applies to the situation of the continent; since there has already been an African death, it is time for an African rebirth. However, rebuilding cannot occur unless pragmatic steps are taken in that regard.
It has to be earned and not to be expected as a gift. *Song for Night* highlights issues that Abani sees as contributing to Africa’s underdevelopment. By identifying these factors, the text serves as a road map to a renaissance.
CHAPTER 3: JOURNEY THROUGH HELL: MIGRATION AND PROTEST

The study here will attempt to examine the use of mobility as a political voice in Daniel Grandclement’s observational documentary Journey Through Hell (2011). In this film Grandclement follows a group of mostly Somalis, but also Ethiopians, as they try to leave their countries for Yemen. The film uses observational cinema style to document the tribulations of migration in the Horn of Africa. The analysis that will follow will examine the cinematic images as portraying a state of post-independence dystopia in Somalia and Ethiopia. The filmmaker presents migration in the Horn of Africa as part of forced mobility. He shows them as people who have been forced by the social and economic challenges of Africa to migrate. The discussion of the movie will be guided by the central argument that forced migration non-verbally communicates ideas about the political, social and/or economic state of a place.

In his film practice, Grandclement uses the camera as a journalistic tool; he tries to capture situations that are of current news value. Consequently, all of his works are made first for television broadcast before being turned into commercial films. In addition to Journey Through Hell, he has made two other films all of which deal with African issues. His most recent production, Le Printemps Noir des Chrétiens d'Égypte (2013), looks at how religious differences are disrupting progress of the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Before this, he made the documentary film Les Enfants Perdus du Sénégal (2009). Some are made to beg for money on the streets while others are put to work on the teacher’s farm. What established Grandclement’s craft in documentary filmmaking is Journey Through Hell (2011). Originally titled The Martyrs of the Gulf of Aden, it was
part of a 2008 broadcast series on the French television channel France 3. In 2008, the series won the prestigious FIGRA (Le Festival International du Grand Reportage d'Actualité et du Documentaire de Société) award in documentary film. This established Grandclement as an important artist within the canon of African documentary cinema. Despite this achievement, his films have received virtually no scholarly attention. This makes the study of his works even more necessary. In this project, Grandclement’s award-winning Journey Through Hell will be analyzed in relation to its visualization of forced migration.

The recurrent movement of people out of a particular space can be an indication of a form of disorder in that place. By the same argument, the destination of these migrations could be said to be a place of hope for the travelers. One migrates when s/he perceives the possibility of a better life elsewhere other than his/her present location. The person therefore moves to a new place where utopia appears to be achievable.

The ability of migration to identify places of utopia and dystopia will be important to the discussion of Journey Through Hell. The exodus of Somalis and Ethiopians means that they see their lives in the two countries within the context of post-independence African dystopia. This is what leads them to leave the continent entirely for Yemen. It shall be argued here that migration such as the one depicted in the film is a way of resisting entrapment within a dystopian society. A nation is a space defined by boundaries that restrain mobility in and/or out of it. Ideally, a citizen is one who “permanently” belongs within these restricted borders. This explains Majumber’s position that nations function by arresting the mobility of their citizens. In this regard, the
movement of Somalis and Ethiopians out of their countries can be conceptualized as a process which resists the arrest of their mobility. Their determination to emigrate is motivated by the feeling of being trapped within a state of dystopia. Migration, in this context, serves two purposes. It is a way of defying the limitation placed on people’s mobility by the state system. Secondly, migrants use the freedom from arrested mobility to search for a place of utopia. Based on this attribute of migration, the argument here is that the Somalis and Ethiopians are using mobility to protest against the postcolonial conditions they face at home. The term protest migration will hence be deployed to analyze *Journey Through Hell*.

Their migration is an encounter between citizenry and authority in which the former shows his/her resentment of the latter by simply utilizing his/her capacity to move. This analysis falls within the postcolonial discourse of subalternity. This subfield of postcolonialism is concerned with empowering those marginalized within national culture. Subalternity gives representation to those who have, until this time, been marginalized in national history (Spivak 1992; Maggio 2007).

Mobility is represented in *Journey Through Hell*, as one of the ways through which the Somali and the Ethiopian migrants articulate concerns about their marginalized conditions. This shows that even where the voices of people are suppressed, they do not simply remain silent. They rather find alternative ways of speaking aside from the verbal (Cronin 2008). This tradition of African cinema which seeks to provide a platform for the underprivileged in the society to dialogue with state authority began soon after the wave of independence blew across the continent. Colonial domination which was previously a
popular subject in African films gave way to a new cinema of “protest against African elites, leaders, and state corruption” (Harrow 1999, xiv). Of all film genres, the documentary has played the most significantly role in protest cinema. This is due to the fact documentary, more than any other film style, has establishes a relationship between the public and the private, the state and the citizenry. Journey Through Hell shows how a person can engage in protest against the dystopian public through mobility.

Scholarly interest in the use of mobility to make political statements is lacking; there is only a scanty body of literature produced so far in this area of study. The earliest attempt came from A. Asiwaji (1976), who defined protest migration as “a series of unarmed but effective expressions of resentment” (578) against state authority. While his definition remains relevant today, his study dealt mainly with migration as a protest against colonial rule. Similarly, Herbst (1990) observes protest migration as something which frequently occurred in colonial Africa. He opines that “there is good reason to believe that in large parts of Africa, circumstances have overwhelmingly favoured exit in the form of migration as appropriate response for people faced with deteriorating economic and/or political fortunes” (184). Cooper (1985) notes a similar situation in Jamaica in the 1970s. Among all these scholars, J. Ifekunigwe (2013) emerges as the one whose ideas are most closely related to the discussion planned for this chapter. This is because Ifekunigwe’s contribution focuses on Africa. Secondly, her perspective on protest migration brings a contemporary outlook to the phenomenon. She examines a very current migratory pattern similar to what is visualized in A Journey Through Hell.
Recent studies on migration out of Africa have concentrated on conflict and economic survival as the two root causes (Styan 2007; Sabar 2013). While this is true in many instances, no scholar before Ifekwunigwe has discussed the political dimension of these movements. Basing her position on the surge in cross-border displacement involving Senegalese youths trying to reach Europe, she “suggest[s] that rather than being mere economic migrations, these movements are also migrations of protest” (Ifekwunigwe 2013, 223). It is not the case that poverty and security concerns are completely ruled out as possible reasons for people deciding to leave. Ifekwunigwe is rather drawing attention to a worsening situation which is causing an unprecedented large-scale reaction by the population. It becomes clear to citizens that their government is either unable or unwilling to improve their living situations. The mass mobility is therefore “in direct response to the perceived political and economic failings of the colonial independence project” (Ifekwunigwe 2013, 223). Here, mobility is intended to compel a government to act on the deteriorating postcolonial state of affairs. Hence, in protest migration, it is not the poverty per se but the inertia of government which occasions extreme dissatisfaction and prompts the desire to emigrate. By leaving for another country, these migrants are demonstrating a strong conviction that the conditions they face at home are irreversible. From this frame of thought, they determine that the only way out of the dystopia is to exit the socioeconomically troubled home. It should be acknowledged however that it is not all the time that people resort to migration to protest social, economic or political degeneration. In some instances, people have used civil disobedience to challenge authority. An example is the Arab Spring. Beginning in the
year 2010, a wave of mass public demonstrations shook several Arab countries. By the time it subsided in 2012, the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen had lost power. But popular insurrections do not happen often, neither are they always successful. Therefore, for some people, migration remains a preferred option.

Like refugees, they cross national borders as people who are experiencing a “deterioration of the civil and political liberties and…material wellbeing” (Bah 2012, 72). When internal protests do not result in desired reforms, emigration becomes the next option. This constructs an adverse image of their governments to the international community. Mobility in this sense proves “an existential threat for which they [migrants] have no access to a domestic remedy or resolution” (Betts 2013, 4-5). In a way, what protest migration intends to achieve is to create an external spectacle which will shock or overwhelm the outside world. The effectiveness of protest migration is underscored by Crisp (1999) as he writes;

Few states like to acknowledge that their citizens have been obliged to ‘vote with their own feet’ by leaving their country of origin, even if that state has deliberately engineered their departure. In some situations, governments address this issue by claiming that the ‘refugees’ who have left the country are not refugees at all, or that they are not even citizens of that state. (8)

This comment illustrates the effectiveness of protest migration in putting international pressure on a non-performing government.

In Grandclement’s Journey Through Hell, viewers are presented with a cinematic perspective on protest migration. In this documentary, the Grandclement chronicles the
experiences of prospective migrants who converge in the Somali port city of Bosaso (also Bossaso or Boosaaso) every year to cross the Gulf of Aden into Yemen. It is a sea journey which has for long characterized the economic and political life of Somalia (Hammond 2013). It is both a trade route and an exit point for Somalis seeking to escape from political turmoil. In recent years, it has become more of a stage for political protest. The filmmaker cinematically exposes details of this dangerous and recurrent migratory wave. Attention will be paid to both the style of representation and the content of the visualized protest.

Visualizing Protest Migration in Journey Through Hell

As Grandclement declares in the beginning of the film, his aim is to "film the journey of the migrants to show what happens here, in this desert, and also to show the tragedies further down the line which casts a dark shadow on the sea." This declaration hints at the dangers which migrants face as they attempt to cross into Yemen. It is estimated that about 30,000 people migrate to Yemen from Somalia. Due to the dangerous nature of these voyages, not much is known about what actually occurs on the boats. What is known by the world about this migratory pattern is based on the accounts given by the migrants. A remarkable feature of Journey Through Hell, is that the filmmaker participates in an actual journey from Somalia to Yemen, despite the reported dangers. He joins a group of Somalis and Ethiopians who are crossing the Gulf of Aden into Yemen. The filmmaker puts himself in an environment where he would be an eyewitness to what happens in the course of the voyage. His style of documentary is
observational—the mode of filmmaking which “stresses the nonintervention of the filmmaker” (Nichols 1991, 38). This requires the filmmaker to become a neutral (invisible) observer of events. In this documentary style, “The viewer senses that the image is not just an indexical representation of some part of the historical world but also an indexical record of the actual encounter between filmmaker and subject” (Nichols 2010, 157). The observational mode is often equated to a passive invisible filmmaker who does not interfere with the sequence of event. In using observational mode, the filmmaker does not intend to be entirely a neutral spectator. S/he is an observer and a participant in the film world at the same time. This means the filmmaker “goes into the field, participates in the lives of others, gains a corporeal or visceral feel for what life in a given context is like” (Nichols 2010, 181).

In Journey Through Hell, Grandclement learns about the migrants not as a distant observing filmmaker, but as a participant in the entire experience of the voyage. The documentary represents what Grandclement saw and experienced as a participant in the voyage. Thus viewers get to know the perilous world of ocean travel through the lens of “someone who actively engages, rather than obtrusively observes, poetically reconfigures, or argumentatively assembles that world” (Nichols 2010, 182). In this regard, the filmmaker places himself in a context where he can guide viewers’ attention to both the physical and psycho-emotive aspects of a protest migrant’s experiences.

Bonebjerg (2002) identifies two characteristics of observational documentary. First, it is a socially engaging mode of documentary. As he puts it, “observational form takes up matters of general human interest with a social and human perspective from
which problems and political and social issues can be drawn by the viewer” (168). In *Journey Through Hell*, the filmmaker uses the observational mode to visualize the socio-economic and political reasons causing the Somalis and Ethiopian migrants to leave their countries. Also, he uses this film style to reveal the near-tragic experience of irregular migration. The documentary engages with the issue of migration which has become a common social feature of Africa. Another feature of observational mode is that “it provides evidence not by explaining or telling, but by showing fragments and slices of an unfolding institutional world of everyday life” (Jacobson & Larsen 2014, 168). It presents stories by focusing on “the structure of a work, how the parts relate to one another to produce a whole” (Jacobson & Larsen 2014, 184). The filmmaker carries the responsibility of finding ways to construct a “truthful” story by assembling fragmented experiences into a complete narrative. As Leggo (2004) argues “Any story we tell will always be a fragment of the complex and wide ranging experiences” of life (98). Based on this, it seems critical to begin any extensive discussion on *Journey Through Hell* by looking at how the filmmaker makes a link between the different parts of the film.

Observational cinema describes a kind of motion picture in which the filmmaker acts as a researcher and “goes into the field, participates in the lives of others, gains a corporeal or visceral feel for what life in a given context is like” (Nichols 2010, 181). It is a process of knowing one’s film (or study) subject(s) by experiencing their lives. In *Journey Through Hell*, Grandclement learns about the migrants not as a distant-observing filmmaker, but as a participant in the entire experience of the voyage. Thus viewers get to know the perilous world of ocean travel through the lens of “someone who actively
engages, rather than obtrusively observes, poetically reconfigures, or argumentatively assembles that world” (Nichols 2010, 182). In this respect, the filmmaker places himself in a context where he can guide the viewers’ attention to both the physical and psycho-emotive aspects of a protest migrant’s experiences.

For someone using a documentary style which places the filmmaker in the light of a researcher, Grandclement relies on observational film approach to tell a story which is a “holistic and accurate interpretation of the subject matter” from the perspective of the migrants (Mathew 2013, 19). In their discussion of ethnographic fiction writing, Jacobson & Larsen (2014), express the need for a blend of aesthetics and factual information. Citing Richardson & Lockridge (1998), they explain aesthetics as relating to “the structure of a work, how the parts relate to one another to produce a whole” (184). It is the domain of creativity even if the writer is writing about a known event. Thus, the creative artist carries the responsibility of finding ways to present fragmented information in a way that they become coherent to the reader or viewer of the work. Based on this, it seems critical to begin any extensive discussion on Journey Through Hell by looking at how the filmmaker links the different parts of the film.

There are two main divisions in the film. Each represents varying issues related to protest migration. The first part starts from when the film begins and ends at the point where the migrants begin the boat journey to Yemen. The second unit stretches from this point to when they arrive at their intended destination. This discussion will follow the sequence of the movie looking at the peculiar issues visualized in the two main units identified.
It will be argued that the filmmaker uses initial fragments of the film to situate the audience in the requisite socio-political context of the movie. This way the viewer is provided with information to explain why many Somalis have joined the wave of protest migration. The opening scene, as already indicated, marks the beginning of this portion of the film. In this sequence, a group of migrants are shown heading to the Somali port city of Bosaso where they hope to cross the Gulf of Aden into Yemen. In this scene, taken from a moving vehicle, the audience first observes two individuals walking on the desert.

Then as the car passes them, the desert is brought under closer focus. Finally, the camera is directed at the occupants of the car. Here the filmmaker is using what William Rothman (1997) describes as the “one take/one sequence method of filming” in observational cinema (102). It is an extended shot captured in a single frame. This method is considered appropriate for the purpose of observation. It grants the filmmaker the freedom to observe rather than getting involved in the nuances of the camera (Film Reference 2015). S/he does not have to alter the camera angle or distance. In the opening scene of Journey Through Hell, the camera is set on the landscape and, without interruption, records (observes) everything on the dessert as the car moves. The camera is not in fixed position and the reasons for this are provided by Rothman (1997). He contends that in observational documentary, “the incessant movements of the camera indicate that the camera is hand-held, that is an extension of the filmmaker’s body” (90). Secondly, “these movements…indicate that this is not a scripted film, that the filmmaker is an embodied human being, not an omniscient ‘author’” (90). Through this style, the filmmaker presents himself as an observer and a participant in the filmmaking process.
Aside from this, Rothman contends that the “[camera] movements have no significance” to the film (90). However, an analysis of Journey Through Hell will show that it has a significant effect on the film narrate.

The opening visuals lend credence to the argument that the cross-border movement is an expression of protest. The desert can be interpreted as a metaphor for the insolvency of the Somali state. It also suggests the idea of an abandoned—deserted—space situated outside the ambit of law and order. It is an allusion to the decades of Somalia’s failed state system (Young 2012). Since 1991 civil war has made it impossible for an effective and generally recognized central government to be established in Somalia (Bakonyi & Abdullahi 2006, 36). After this long period of statelessness, a form of national government was established in 2005. However, it still remains “chronically weak” (Pham 2011, 155) and incapable of exercising its authority over all parts of the country. The nation continues to be referred to as a failed state system par excellence.

Political volatility in Somalia still persists as the government is not recognized by all Somali warring groups. The metaphor of the desert is therefore being used in the film as an allusion to this lack of control over the entire territory of Somalia. Under this persistent condition of insecurity Somalis feel the urgent need to flee their home country. By so doing, they are protesting the inability or the unwillingness of their government to offer them protection from violence.

Beyond security concerns, the desert is additionally used to project an image of nothingness—deprivation—which could be said to be also pushing people out of Somalia. Clearly, the nonexistence of recognized authority for several years has resulted
in protracted economic stagnation. The individuals observed walking on the wilderness illustrate the two ways people are dealing with the economic hardships. One group, represented by the two individuals seen on the desert, belongs to those who are, for whatever reason, either unwilling or incapable of leaving the country. Capacity here refers to the ability to bear the financial cost and physical strain of the journey. This group is condemned to remain within the territorial jurisdiction of a government which shows no concern for its citizens. They are contrasted with a second group—those on the moving vehicle—who have reached their limits of tolerance and thus decided to leave. In the scene under consideration, the second group, consisting of ten, outnumbers the first which is visualized to have just two members. This is a demonstration of the scale of exodus out of Somalia. It shows that more people feel the urgent need to leave in protest at the difficult economic situation and the government’s lack of action in resolving the problems of the country. As R. Rotberg (2003) says about states that do not provide for the basic survival needs of their people: “Their governments lose legitimacy, and the very nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens” (1). The effectiveness of any form of protest has a lot to do with numbers. More people getting involved will indicate a vibrant campaign. The large number of people depicted in the scene as protest migrants affirm the illegitimacy of the Somali administration.

Ifekwunigwe argues that widespread unemployment and “social disarticulation” (223) breed discontent which, if not resolved, results in citizens resorting to external mobility as a form of protest. He defines social disarticulation as the situation where
people are silenced, or even if they speak to authority, their views are disregarded. Where citizens are economically disempowered and politically sidelined through the system of social disarticulation, they hold government in contempt. Protest migration, as observed by Laycock, (2009) “is often a last resort in response to illegitimate treatment” (31). Therefore, at the point where citizens decide to leave, they have lost any confidence they might have ever had in their government’s competence.

Thus, not only have protest migrants lost hope in the precarious economic circumstances confronting them, they also do not foresee any genuine internal source of assistance. The silence of government to their concerns suggests an exclusionary attitude towards the citizenry. They are regarded in the light of an outlawed group—enemies of the state—who deserve no attention from government. Under this circumstance, the “constitutional imperative of priority of people in respect of authorities” is “eliminated and public interests are ignored” (Ponkin 2014, 84). The result is that, the symbiotic relationship expected between a national authority and its citizenry is broken in the process. And since a government only exists in the presence of a population of citizens, the economically marginalized and socially disarticulated find cross-border mobility as a way of protesting against their isolation from government functions. At the same time, their exodus implies a withdrawal of the legitimacy reposed in state authority by the citizenry. Protest migration may therefore be considered as an alternative articulation. It is a process through which the oppressed finds a way to speak to the oppressor (Minh-ha 2010). Participants use it to voice their concerns but this time, instead of words, they use the power to express themselves through mobility.
Grandclement does not only use symbolism in his commentary on protest migration. Observational documentary is criticized “for not providing a historical or other context to the events they show” (Barbash & Taylor 1997, 30). In response to these criticisms observational filmmakers are increasingly using interviews. This allows the social actors captured in the film to provide context to the issue being visualized (30). Grandclement uses interviews to create a context for his film. This “assists the spectator in gaining a deeper or more critical understanding of the character[s]” (Luciano 2002, 80). During these interactions, Grandclement asks the simple question: “Why did you leave your country.” Everyone who responded to the question cited poverty as the reason for intending to migrate. It would be expected that the Somalis will mention the protracted civil unrest as the motivation for leaving but none used it as a justification (Jureidini 2010). This is an important point because in war situations, people are forced to involuntarily leave their homes or countries in order to escape bodily harm or death. However the situation is different when it comes to people who leave for economic reasons. For these individuals, the decision to leave is voluntary and considered to be the rational thing to do.

It is such people that could be said to be undertaking purposeful migration protest. It emerges from Grandclement’s interviews that all the migrants belong to this latter group. They all lament the lack of jobs and therefore no money on which to survive. The urgency of the situation resonates in a remark by one of the interviewees. She says “I have to leave, I have to get going”. But when asked where she wants to go, she replies: “I don’t care. To any country.” This conversation demonstrates the desperate circumstances
of the migrants. Life has become too unbearable in their home country to the point where they do not care where they might end up; they simply want to get out of it just to survive. This kind of mobility has the effect of painting a negative image of their government to the international community. The most precise description of the cross border mobility as protest migration comes from the concluding sequence. In an interview upon arrival in Yemen, this migrant laments:

When you no longer have a house, or work or anything to survive, why stay when life is so hard? I have a wife and children. When you don’t have anything with which to live decently and when the government is corrupt, you have to leave.

This statement describes someone who is fed up with the corrupt practices of government in the face of economic hardship. He presents the political leadership of his home country as self-centered. For him migration becomes a way of severing any ties he has with the political elites. The underlying statement he is making is that if the government does not care about him, then he will leave so that the government can rule over those that it cares about. In doing so, however, Grandclement shows that exiting is not necessarily an easy option as many might think. He provides viewers with situations that impede the mobility of protest migrants.

Commercialization of Protest Mobility

Another purpose of the first part of the film is to expose some of the obstacles fleeing Somalis face before they even get to board the boat. Principally, this section is dedicated to obstacles arising out of the commercial exploitation of the migrants. When
the filmmaker arrives in Bosaso with the other migrants, they are immediately confronted with visual images of a border town economy which is established to exploit the mobility of the migrants. The first thing they see upon arrival in Bosaso is a city characterized by conspicuously heavy vehicular traffic. This experience informs the narrator’s description of Bosaso as a “chaotic city, resembling a transit camp.” The statement describes not only the high volume of cars leaving and entering the city. It reaffirms the scale of the migratory pattern. The audience gets to know that the ten voyagers with whom the filmmaker is travelling are not the only people frustrated by their government. It is a point of exodus which attracts potential economic and political refugees from all over Somalia as well as people from other parts of East Africa, especially Ethiopia. The high number of people who congregate in Bosaso contributes to the frenzied nature of the town. But for the businessmen of the area, chaos means business is booming as the arrival of migrants signals the appearance of potential clients.

Among those who have commercial interests in protest migration are those in the forex business. Among the early experiences for migrants of Bosaso, upon getting off the truck, is the view of a street with people engaged in the money-changing business. It can be interpreted as a test of their financial wherewithal to undertake the voyage to Yemen. The camera in this scene is focused on one of the traders holding a few dollar bills ready to exchange them. Next to him is a paper box with several bundles of local currency in it. This juxtaposition makes a statement about the economic fall of Somalia especially but also of Ethiopia. It creates a visual impression of the lack of value of their national legal tenders. The scene suggests that the bundles of money in the paper box are worth just a
few dollar notes. This commentary is consistent with the long period of Somali
statelessness where the American dollar became, and is still, the most preferred means of
payment. The fallen value of the local currency is presented as a visual affirmation of the
economic difficulties against which the people are protesting by migrating.

The monetary exchange also brings into question the common notion that money
expedites mobility. It shows that it is not just about having money but the kind of
currency one possesses is what is most important in determining mobility. Perhaps, it can
be restated that money boosts one’s mobility. Therefore the more one has the more
mobile s/he is expected to be. However, the kind of money determines how far one can
go. It is assumed that the migrants could not have made the trip to Bosaso from their
various locations if they did not have money to pay the fare. Unless they decide not to
continue into Yemen, Bosaso will be the last point where the local currency can take
them. Beyond here, they would have to convert what they have into a currency with
transnational value—the American dollar. However the depreciated local currency makes
the acquisition of the US dollar difficult—it becomes too expensive for them.
Consequently, as depicted in later scenes, some of the migrants are unable to continue the
journey because they do not have enough money which they could exchange for dollars
and pay the traffickers who are to take them to Yemen. Thus, Bosaso becomes the
endpoint of their protest migration. For those in this situation, some of them have to work
at the port of Bosaso to raise money. Others, as the narrator explains, are never able to
continue the journey.
Also, the mass of people constantly arriving at Bosaso has created a successful business for people who rent out shacks. These are easy-to-make shelters constructed from cardboard and any material which can be recycled for that purpose (see figure 5). Despite the poor quality, the narrator estimates that these makeshift houses provide accommodation for 25,000 migrants. This means their owners never lack clients. In addition, they are charged for using the bathroom and toilet. There are also those who sell water and (low quality) food at inflated prices to the migrants. Such commercial exploitation has the effect of impeding the mobility of the migrants. As it is unknown when the boat which is to make the voyage to Yemen will arrive, the high cost of living puts migrants at the risk of not being able to undertake the voyage eventually. While the exploitation might be worse than what they face in normal life, the migrants are prepared to indulge the businessmen only because they know their presence in Bosaso is temporary. However the longer they remain due to delays in the arrival of the boats, the more likely they are to lose their money to the commercial exploiters. The effect is that they will be left with nothing to pay for the voyage to Yemen. Thus, the protest migration will be impossible to achieve.

The difficult life conditions in Bosaso also benefit those engaged in human trafficking on the Gulf of Aden. In the scene where smugglers are transporting people into Yemen, viewers are presented with a glimpse of an overloaded ferry. Dangerous as it may be, the migrants are still determined to embark on the journey. One reason for this situation is that they cannot wait for another boat to come get them. If they did that, it would mean they would have to continue to live in Bosaso for as long as it takes for the
next boat to arrive. With their experience of the border town economy, they would rather choose to risk their lives on an overcrowded boat than wait for the next voyage. For the boat operators, this condition works in their favor. The availability of desperate passengers means they will continue to remain in business and the willingness of the travelers to risk their lives means the traffickers can make more money per trip by overloading the boats. Finally, when the boat takes off, the audience is presented with stark images of terrible forms of exploitation.

The Middle Passage to Yemen

The second part of the documentary deals with the actual voyage into Yemen. It records the tribulations of the protest migrants at the hands of the human traffickers. The experiences involved in this stage of the journey cast the likeness of enslavement on the sojourners. This observation draws on the parallels Ifekwunigwe sees between Senegalese youth protest migration and the transatlantic slave trade. Ifekwunigwe states that she is not claiming border-crossing by Africans to be equal to transatlantic slavery. She is rather attempting to provoke her readers to “consider the limits of volition, the degree of risk, and the material conditions” of protest migration “in order to think about historical continuities, in particular, the persistent devaluation of African life and the looming possibility of death” (229-230). Going along with this point of view, the following discussion will seek to examine how Journey Through Hell visualizes the extreme form of exploitation—the devaluation of human life in the Somali-Yemeni
border crossing. The discussion will be merged with an examination of how protest migrants appropriate the imagery of human devaluation into a voice of critique.

More than three weeks after arriving in Bosaso, the filmmaker is finally able to establish contact with a trafficker who agrees to add him to the refugees to be shipped to Yemen. The boat is loaded with 128 people and begins the journey at dawn. The first shot of life on the boat shows the refugees in conditions that are comparable to slavery (Garajova 2002). They are crammed on the deck with some on the bow. They are all sitting, as the number of passengers on board will make any kind of movement almost impossible. In subsequent scenes, viewers get to know that there are more people than those visible on the deck and bow. Some are placed inside the hold, a space meant for carrying cargo. This invokes historical images of Transatlantic Slavery which devalued Africans by commoditizing them in a profit-driven enterprise (Mallipeddi 2014). The filmmaker uses his camera to show a form of historical continuity in the exploitation and devaluation of African peoples. Images on the boat display the incarnation of an event thought to have passed centuries ago. Grandclement offers cinematic proof of the fact that this is a modern form of devaluation of and profiteering from African humanity. The difference in the modern manifestation is that the protest migrant willingly offers himself/herself to be commoditized. It must be added however that volition is being assumed here and may not necessarily apply to, for example, children traveling with their parents (De Haan & Yaqub 2009).

Yet still this near-slavery scene turns into an opportunity for the disarticulated migrants to express themselves, to protest against authority. The statement they seem to
be making is that their lives are already devalued by their home political administration which is unresponsive to its citizenry. Under such a circumstance, to be in a slave-like environment will not be a new experience to them. It in fact emphasizes the loss of humanity at home and the need to reclaim it elsewhere. It is an experience they are willing to endure because remaining at home will imply being stuck with a regime which is equally dehumanizing. Consequently, despite being aware of the awaiting humiliation, they still prefer the freedom of outward mobility regardless of the consequence. The migrants understand that the sea journey has a foreseeable end. The period of dehumanization is equally not going to last; it ends when the voyage ends. Indirectly, the choice of protest migration is a way of chastising the administration back home as a permanently incapacitated authority which cannot, in the foreseeable future, revive the collapsed state. Hence, the protestors will prefer the time-bound enslaving experience of migration to being in an eternal state of degradation at home.

Similarly, the violence they are subjected to on the boat serves as yet another appropriation of slave imagery to criticize the migrants’ home governments. As the narrator recounts, the traffickers beat the migrants with belts for several hours. They use violence to ensure complete discipline on the boat. The narrator makes it known that the sailors beat up the migrants specifically to weaken and frighten them. The eight-member crew does this out of the fear of losing control over the migrants. They know that conditions on the boat are discomforting. There will be disastrous consequence should the passengers decide not to tolerate those conditions any longer. They could potentially be attacked by the migrants, or, in the worst scenario, get killed. Or, they could demand
their fares back. To avoid this, the traffickers resort to the use of brute force to restrain and prohibit “bad” behavior while obligating “good” behaviors. It is a process through which a person in position of power shapes the behavior of the powerless. If this is successful, the disciplined body would become useful (utility) to authority because s/he can easily be made to do as the master wishes.

In the case of *Journey Through Hell*, the violence seems to have worked in rendering the migrants submissive. In an interview with one of the migrants, the filmmaker seeks his impression of the trip. In response, he says he is suffocating because of overcrowding. When asked why he did not resist being beaten by the crew, the migrant retorts: “Because I am afraid [of] them. They want to kill me.” Like on a slave ship, the traffickers possess the power to punish, torture, and even kill, if they wish. The power of the human smugglers is given a vivid demonstration when, approaching the shores of Yemen, they throw all the migrants, including the filmmaker, into the sea. At this point, whether one survives or perishes depends on the individual’s capacity to swim ashore.

Given the foreknowledge of violent control and the high potential of death, one might be tempted to describe as reckless the decision of people to still embark on the voyage. This kind of assessment may seem valid to the extent that the migrants are demonstrating a voluntary choice of death over life, or, at the very least, consent to be endangered. By this, it would seem as though given the choice between remaining in Somalia and even dying at sea, they will choose death. One migrant sums up this point when he declares: “We have seen our brothers and sisters die at sea, but in spite of that, we want to cross it.” While this statement might in itself be outrageously suicidal, what
he is trying to achieve is to induce and direct that audience’s outrage to events in his nation of origin. They consider life at home to be akin to death. There are no economic opportunities to survive on and at the same time they are disarticulated. Consequently, it can be argued that in the eyes of government, these people do not exist—they are dead—at least socially (Ifekwunigwe 230). If they were considered alive, the state would have found it necessary to listen to their voice. Perceiving themselves to be already dead, the fear of being maltreated or even killed in the course of the journey evaporates. The hope is to survive the journey and reclaim the humanity they have been denied at home.

Even if they should perish, they paradoxically see life in death. A pattern has been established that the issue of migration in general receives the needed attention only when large-scale human deaths occur. A recent example is the shipwreck off the Italian coastal city of Lampedusa in which over 300 migrants from several African countries drowned. This quickly became global news followed by pledges of support for African refugees trying to reach Europe. The reaction of the world to the disaster validates this author’s assertion that there is life in death for the protest migrants. It demonstrates that help is more likely to go to the dead than the living. Thus, compared to being alive, death has a living voice which is given hearing attention. In effect, therefore, the dead protest migrant is likely to have a wider audience for his/her concerns.

Using the interview method in documentary filmmaking, Grandclement is able to determine that the scale of death is the main factor which drew the attention of the United Nations and other organizations to the life conditions of the migrants. An interview with an official from the United Nations visiting Bosaso paints a horrifying image of the sea
journey. The interviewee confirms receiving reports from migrants about smugglers throwing some people into the sea, if they felt the boat was dangerously overcrowded. In one particular year, he reveals that his organization (UN) recorded 1700 migrant deaths. It is in response to this continuing disaster that the International Organization for Migration, with the support of the United Nations, visited Bosaso to offer assistance. First, they persuaded the people not to cross the sea. Related to this, they promised free airlifting to anyone who decided to return home. The returning migrants will in addition be given some money. But what appears to be the main concern is how to find lasting solutions to the wave of migration. To achieve this, the interviewee hints of a dialogue with the governments of all the countries involved—Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen.

Through this intervention, one can say that the death of migrants is what has boosted the cause of the protest. Through the sacrifice of their lives, help has reached an often marginalized group. Also, it has occasioned some form of external demand on their national authorities to show responsibility to their citizens. As part of the proposed discussion with stakeholders, both Somalia and Ethiopia will be forced to, at least, begin to present their plans for resolving the incidence of mass exodus. With the United Nations and the International Organization for Refugees acting as referees, whatever proposals these two countries will present could be considered a promise to the international community. Consequently, these governments will be holding themselves accountable not only to their people but to the world at large.
Concealment and Censorship in Protest Migration

In both the first and second parts of the film, there is visible presence of exploitation. Each division simply focuses on different, but still interconnected, aspects and levels of exploitation. As a documentary film, *Journey Through Hell* is expected to present “factual” information. But the culture of violence, illegality, and extortion causes some “actors” in the story to control the kind of information the filmmaker can capture and disseminate. The success of protest migration, as has been previously argued, is dependent on a large number of participants. It will be added here that the dissemination of information about the experiences of protest migrants is also critical to a successful outcome. Broad dissemination is required to make observational documentary what is supposed to be: “the conscience of a nation or humanity as a whole” (Svilicic & Vidackovic 2013, 1331). This means it disturbs the sensibilities of the viewer thereby causing humanity to acknowledge the suffering of others. In *Journey Throuh Hell*, Grandclement faces a challenge in his attempt to use observational documentary to represent the ghastly experience of the migrants. The challenge is caused by the fact that the smugglers do not want the filmmaker to record all that happens on the boat. They direct when he could and cannot record.

Observational documentaries prefer long (camera) takes (also referred to as the one take sequence) because it allows the camera to observe without the filmmaker manipulating the sequence. The viewer does not have to rely on edited sequence to understand a scene. In editing, shots are usually made shorter than they were originally taken. This means parts of it are taken away. Sometimes, two or more different shots may
even be edited into one frame. The end product is a sequence which has undergone creative manipulation. What is seen is therefore influenced by what the filmmaker wants to show and how s/he wants to reveal it. With observational documentaries, long takes present all that was recorded by the camera. In the context of *Journey Through Hell*, the camera is restricted by the smugglers. Consequently, long takes become impossible on the boat. The smugglers intend to conceal their activities by curtailing the freedom of the filmmaker to record every event he sees. In the following discussion, this author will attempt to assess instances of camera restrictions and also examine the method(s) used by the filmmaker to overcome the limitations placed on his camera.

Concealment is encountered soon after the filmmaker arrives in Bosaso for the trip to Yemen. Three weeks after arriving, Grandclement could not make contact with the smugglers even though there were people who knew them. It took the help of his Tunisian friend to finally to meet with them. The silence of people is a show of the concealed (clandestine) nature of the smuggling business. It could be inferred that but for his friendship with the Tunisian fellow, Grandclement’s attempt to meet the smugglers would have failed and so would have been his trip to Yemen as well. Even still, after the initial contact, the journey to the boat is equally secretive. They went for Grandclement from his hotel and took him to an obscure enclosure. In this scene, the place is shown but none of the smugglers appear on camera. This depicts the smugglers as faceless and without identities.

Unable to film them, viewers depend on voice-over narration for what could not be captured on camera. Arguing against the idea that observational documentary should
eschew voice-over narration. Observational documentaries made for television broadcast must have a speaking narrator. In *Journey Through Hell*, the filmmaker uses voice-over narration to explain situations that could potentially incomprehensible. For example, the torture of the migrants may not be understandable to the viewer. This is because the perpetrators do not allow the filmmaker to film all that happens on the boat. The clandestine environment under which the traffickers in *Journey Through Hell* meet the filmmaker foreshadows the calamity awaiting the protest migrants at sea. There seems to be a shared knowledge between the boat owners and the protest migrants regarding the power relations between them. The latter group knows that its relationship with the former is one of unavoidable exploitation, torture, and even the possibility of death. This being the recurrent practice, the traffickers see the presence of the camera as a device which is going to expose them as the culprits. The exposure could lead to them getting arrested by the Yemeni authorities hence the need to obscure their identities and practices by directing the camera view away from them. By doing so, they are in a way, censoring the filmmaker’s lens as he can only record what they will permit.

For instance, a view of the boat used to transport people shows one remarkable feature. The deck is fenced with materials like plastic bags. This is intended to make the migrants invisible to other ships, that is, to keep the world outside of the boat oblivious of the torture and exploitation being practiced on the voyagers. But all this will be ineffective if they do not control the camera within. It represents the eye of the world which they are trying to blindfold by the fencing the deck. Therefore, on the boat, the smugglers warn Grandclement not to use his camera. Here, Foucault’s idea of discipline
can be extended to the situation. In this context however, the target is the camera; to ensure that only permitted images are captured. This is a limitation to the work of the documentary filmmaker as he cannot film all that he might witness. It is the identity of the filmmaker which caused a change in the situation. As a white Frenchman, he is visibly different from the rest of the migrants. The smugglers are experienced transporting people into Yemen and they recognize that the filmmaker looks different from their regular clientele. The smugglers therefore face a subconscious dilemma. On one hand they see everyone on the boat as a migrant who should be controlled, with force, if need be. At the same time, they know from experience that white people have never been customers to their business. Therefore Grandclement cannot be treated as a migrant. Out of this dilemma comes a periodic relaxation in the crew’s control over him. They allow him limited use of his camera at three different times in the voyage. But the smugglers never forgot that Grandclement still remains a migrant over whom they have the power of life and death. They for example threatened to throw him into the sea should he, at any point, direct the lens at them. Thus, though Grandclement may have been allowed to film, how much and what he can capture for viewers are both subject to the censored control of the crew.

Notwithstanding the censorship, Grandclement is able to use some observational techniques to reveal what he has been asked not to disclose. The first shot on the boat seems like an attempt to reveal two things about the migrating group: the faces of the migrants by scanning their faces and their emotions and reactions to the discomforting environment in which they find themselves. To show this, the camera is moved around in
a long take to capture every part of the overcrowded boat. But the long take method is
abruptly replaced by a series of still shots. This variation in camera work is later
explained in a voice-over narration as a technique to circumvent restrictions in filming.
Grandclement discloses that he is not being allowed to film the smugglers and it is
because they frequently beat the passengers for several hours. His comment suggests that
had to stop moving his camera around because it was going to reveal the smugglers,
possibly abusing the passengers. It seems like some of the traffickers were within the
visual path of the camera and would have been inevitably captured had the filmmaker
continued to move the lens around. Changing to still shots was therefore meant to skip
the smugglers and avoid creating the suspicion that he is recording their obnoxious
conduct. At the same time, the change to montage enables the filmmaker to maintain a
“focus on the immediacy of the moment” (Cubero 2010, 29). Thus, he is taking
advantage of the restrictive orders of the smugglers to give extra attention to the present
life of the migrants. He is therefore able to capture for viewers, “exacting detail to instant
movements that are occurring ‘in the now’” (Cubero 2010, 29). The audience, at this
point gets to know more about the present conditions of the migrants on the boat. Yet, it
is not everything in the present that Grandclement is permitted to record.

To overcome this camera-view impairment, Grandclement also makes use of
voice-over narration to let viewers know what he is witnessing though he could not show.
Though voice-over narration is typically eschewed in observational documentaries, but
where necessary, it may be used sparingly to emphasis a point. Here, Grandclement is
combines visual effects and voice-over narration to ensure continuity in the narrative
structure despite the fact that his camera-view is impaired by censorship. Writing on camera work in documentary filmmaking, T. Asch, J. Marshall & P. Spier (1973) agree that the camera has the capacity to “record phenomena beyond the visible spectra and discover patterns of motion or land use that the unaided eye could never see” (179). In this comment, the authors are referring to the ability of the camera to manipulate the film setting and context in order to aid the viewer’s recognition of the connection between different elements within the frame. Kiener (2008) compares this power of the camera to “an installation, a performance that transforms the real-life space of the spectators” (407). In breaking through the walls of censorship and concealment, Grandclement uses this technique. In one scene, a loud laughter is heard on the boat. This amused individual exists outside the camera spectra. Nevertheless, Grandclement finds a way to bring the event into the film frame. He takes a shot of a migrant wounded on the eyebrow and then explains that “This mad laughter is that of one of the smugglers amused by the sight.” Straightaway, viewers are able to make a connection between the laughter and the physical abuse of the refugees. Though the audience never gets to see the torture, they are presented with a visual effect which proofs the act. By linking the abuse to the laughter, the filmmaker intends to emphasize the point that there is usually no reasonable cause for the maltreatment. Basically, it looks as though it has become a source of entertainment for the smugglers. Their behavior is qualified by the filmmaker as arbitrary, habitual, and sadistic. One would therefore understand why they exercise strict control over the camera.
Other times, when the smugglers turned their attention away from the camera, Grandclement seized the opportunity to secretly record the agony of the migrants. The emergence of observational documentary was aided by the portability and mobility of video and sound devices. Thus, mobile camera has become a powerful feature of observational documentary. In situations where the filmmaker’s freedom is restricted, the size of the camera could become an important asset. When Grandclement’s is prevented from filming on the boat, is still able to capture some scenes secretly. He is able to do this because his camera is small enough to be hidden from the view of the smugglers. In these surreptitiously recorded scenes the smugglers are captured beating some of the passengers with belts. The reason for this is not ascertainable. In one instance however, the trafficker seems to be asking his victim to move in order to create sitting space for another person. But the boat is already overcrowded and therefore inasmuch as he tries to obey the order, he still cannot move. This infuriates the smuggler who beats him with a belt and kicks him.

The scene is among the few moments on the boat in which the smugglers fall within the view of the camera making it possible to capture instances of abuse as they happen. What is achieved with the surreptitious recordings is that they uncover the abusers who have for long used strict control to elude the camera gaze. Also, these scenes complete the story of the migrants with the unmasking of both the victims and the culprits of the near-catastrophic sea journey. Coincidentally, soon after the faces of some of the traffickers are revealed, the journey ends with all the passengers being thrown into the sea to swim to the Yemeni coast.
(In)credible Informants: The Protest Migrants and the Narrator

Since observational documentaries purports to observe the truth as it occurs, it is expected that what they show must be believable. The concluding sequences of *Journey Through Hell* raises a conflict between voice-over commentary and interview. For the film to appear as a truthful representation, every scene should be credible.

A film audience is therefore not simply a passive observer but one who actively questions whether to believe or disbelieve what he/she sees on screen. For a political film, it will serve the interest of the filmmaker to present his/her narrative and visuals in a way that seem ‘true’ to the viewer. This way the message contained in the film is sure to achieve its intended effect on the audience. In *Journey Through Hell*, credibility of the visuals is critical in that absence of it will mean the claim of misrule against which the migrants are protesting may be dismissed by the audience as exaggerated, or outrightly false.

The ending of the film will confuse even the most attentive viewer due to the presence of contradictory narratives. At the point where the filmmaker is thrown into the water with the other migrants, his observational style of filmmaking reaches a dead end. Travelling with the group afforded him an exclusive sight into the concealed world of migration across the Gulf of Aden. By this, observational documentary “retains its aim to capture reality without distortion” (Svilicic & Vidackovic 2013, 1328). Considering that he is himself a participant in the entire voyage, even where he uses voice-over narration in place of visual imaging, the viewer regards his accounts as trustworthy. But this comes
to an end when he is pushed into the sea. At this point the need to survive takes precedence over storytelling. Consequently, he is unable to film the jilting scene and what happens afterwards. This leaves a gap in the viewer’s knowledge thereby putting him/her in suspense, wondering whether the passengers made it to the shore alive.

Luckily for the viewer, a team of television journalists are making a film on the Somali-Yemeni border crossing and they are able to record the end of the voyage. An interview session with the just arrived protest migrants produces inconsistencies in some aspects of Grandclement’s visuals and voice-over narration. The audience is therefore left to reconsider the level of trust he/she would want to attach to both the narrator voice and the travelers’ account.

In one such instance, a protest migrant claims in an interview with the new film crew that some people were beaten and thrown into the sea midway through the voyage. According to him these people died. This information is inconsistent with Grandclement’s story. In all of the visual sequences captured by the filmmaker on the boat, none supports the migrant’s claim. The only time Grandclement mentions people being thrown into the sea is when the boat approaches the shore and all passengers are forced out of it. Even with that incident, he confirms that no one drowned.

Amidst this controversy, both statements cannot be accepted in full. Grandclement ran away immediately after getting ashore because, according to him, the smugglers had threatened to either kill or rob him at the beach. If he exited the scene, then the accuracy of his claim that no one died is doubtful. He was not physically present when the migrants swam ashore and therefore could not comment on the incident as
though he were an eye-witness. In view of this, the migrant’s statement would be more reliable due to his physical presence. The migrant however loses his credibility to the narrator when he insists that some passengers were thrown into the sea in the middle of the voyage. In this instance the narrator’s comments are visually verifiable in the documentary. It is this visual evidence which exposes the contradiction in the migrant’s claim.

The credibility of both the narrator and the migrants has an important effect on the effectiveness of protest migration. The aim of this kind of border-crossing is to express social, economic, and political discontent with one’s country of origin. It is also to expose the failures of one’s country to the international community. For this to have the necessary result there should be reasonable cause to feel disgruntled. It should additionally be clear that the migrating individual’s government is either incapable or unwilling to resolve the concerns of its population (Betts 2013). If a protest migrant presents himself/herself in a questionable manner, his/her reason for leaving will not be trusted. This means the statement he/she aims to make about his/her home government through protest migration will also be met with doubt. In the context of *Journey Through Hell* some conditions emerge to mitigate the potentially damaging effect of the inconsistencies.

The use of the observational documentary method turns the viewer into a kind of camera mediated eye-witness. Events are shown as they occur throughout the journey. The narrator’s voice is therefore presented as complementary rather than supplanting the visual. Indeed the only time that the accuracy of his statement is called into question is
when he is thrown into the sea. This act separates him from the rest of the migrants and therefore he no longer has the advantage of reporting as a physically present observer. His utterances about events he did not see should however not be made to interfere with the reception of whatever else he presents in the cause of the journey as narrating witness. If even, for the sake of argument, the narrator’s claim that no one died is false, it may be excused as a mistake based on good faith.

For the inconsistency in the migrant’s account, it may also be excused on the basis of the fact that the journalists who met them at the shore had military escort from the Yemeni army. They must have been afraid to be approached by the guards. The sight of the security detail could mean going to prison, being returned home, or being allowed into the country. They had to win the sympathy of the journalists and their military escort in order to enhance their chances of being allowed entry into the country. At that point, the guards especially functioned as refugee claim assessors whom the migrants felt the need to tell compelling and, if need be, perilous stories about their life situations in order to be evaluated favorably (Macklin 1999). This strategy of emotional appeal has evolved from the fact that receiving countries often base decisions on refugee claims on whether the claimant’s story “sounds” believable or not. It could therefore be argued that excesses in statements offered by the protest migrants are excusable, on the account that they are using it to avoid being to the land from which they have fled. It is also noticeable from all the interviews that are consistently featured. Thus, claim of death could be regarded as only a single aberration to the generally consistent narratives recounted by the migrants.
The possible over-estimation of events on the boat should therefore not cause viewers to reject outright the validity of the protest migrant s’ stories.

Protest Migration: The Right and the Wrong Participants

The viewer of the film expects that the arrival of the migrants in Yemen will signal the end to the ordeal of protest migration. It comes to light in the concluding sequence that this will depend on an assigned status in the host country. Ifekwunigwe (2013) argues that protest migration destined for Europe has been characterized by race-based discrimination. While Eastern Europeans, for example are welcomed, Africans and Latin Americans are met with racial prejudice on arrival. This is an open identification of Whites as right immigrants to whom the border is always open but shut to Blacks and other non-Whites, considered as wrong, undesirable, kind of immigrants (Ifekwunigwe 2013). There is a clear division (discrimination) based on notions of admissibility and inadmissibility. Ifekwunigwe’s argument highlights inter-racial discrimination. A similar phenomenon occurs in Journey Through Hell.

From the beach of Yemen, the next shot of the migrants shows some Somalis who have been integrated into the country. They are recognized as refugees and are thus entitled to remain in Yemen. They are in a sense the right protest migrants who will be offered refuge from their reckless home government. For these people, the road to protest journey has finally come to an end. They are seen washing cars to survive. While it is valid to say that migrants provide cheap labor to their host countries, it remains to be said that some are able to take advantage of this to speak to their home governments
In the case of the Somalis, for example, car washing would clearly not earn them enough money. It is however not their main concern. What is of importance to them is to be able to make a visual statement to the effect that they never required from their government anything beyond the provision of basic means of livelihood. Yemen is among the poorest countries in the world. According to M. Albert (2009) Yemen has a variety of problems: “increasing dependence on external food supplies, which has only been intensified by climate change; dependence on a dwindling single commodity; threats of an intensifying secessionist rebel movement; and massive population growth” (73). These conditions reduce the chances of relief from either insecurity or poverty. In spite of this, the washing scene depicts the Yemeni government as being able to provide a decent life to its nationals and refuge to distressed non-citizens. Many have studied the lives of Somalis in Yemen as a dystopian reality to a utopian hope (Morris 2010; Mooney 2013). In the context of Journey Through Hell, the filmmaker offers an assessment deviant from the popular discourse. The car-washing scene amounts to the staging of Somali national shame. It is comparing Yemen and Somalia as co-equals distinguished by the presence of responsive leadership in the former and dysfunctional administration in the latter. To him having to perform such a job is a continuation of the demeaning treatment these migrants have been receiving all along.

The last scene might seem as though the Ethiopians have no chance of staging a similar message. This is because they are not recognized as refugees and consequently not welcomed to stay in Yemen. For these people are forced to remain in motion even upon arrival at their intended destination (Shapendonk 2012). The category of wrong,
unwanted, aliens will therefore explicitly apply to them (Slavnic 2014). However, a closer examination of the scene will reveal that they are able to send a similar message but in a different way.

The scene captures groups of Ethiopians walking on the desert, fleeing possible arrest by the Yemeni authorities. At their new abode, they exist in a state of exception (Hassan 2009; Agamben 2005), “a condition…that makes them exist outside the law” (Hassan 2009, 130). In effect, they remain unwanted and inadmissible within the new state and thus they will have to either leave or live on the fringes of the receiving nation. As visualized in Journey Through Hell, the Ethiopians are on the move, but it is not exactly clear where they are going except that the narrator thinks they might be headed for Saudi Arabia. This seeming lack of respite in the migrant’s journey, presents another critique of their home government.

The message embedded in this sequence is revealed in the juxtaposition between the migrants and the landscape along which they are walking. First of all, the landscape reinforces the imagery of wrong or otherwise unwanted immigrants. The desert looks wide and flat. It provides no points of escape from surveillance. People trekking on it are easily visible. For someone trying to avoid getting noticed, this landscape is the wrong place to be. It provides no cover and therefore exposes the Ethiopians to arrest. At a point in this scene, the camera is focused on the feet of the walking migrants. An important yet easy to miss symbolism is displayed in the footprints left by these fleeing Ethiopians. What this suggests is that the ground, for its lack of vegetation, records, for the authorities, evidence of the presence of undesirable borderline transgressors. The soil
does not only hints at their presence but also keeps a trail of their journey which may be used to track their movements for the purpose of apprehending and removing them from Yemen. With no place to hide, the Ethiopians are reaffirmed as unwelcomed subjects.

What is easily discernible in this scene is the vulnerability of these rejected migrants. However, in their state of uncertainty, the Ethiopians are sending their last protest message back home. The desert landscape is also a reminder to the fact that Yemen is a poor nation. This frames the pursuit of the Ethiopians as preposterous. It is usually the case that economically stronger countries feel threatened by the influx of foreigners. It is thought that “large refugee populations challenge socio-economic structures” in the host country (Bessa 2010, 95). In this case, however, an economically weak nation (Yemen) is rejecting citizens of an equally poor country (Ethiopia) from its territory. While this exclusion demonstrates humanitarian insensitivity, it is also a way of guarding national interests by ensuring that foreign entry does not cause an unnecessary imbalance in the economic structure. What is therefore being implied in this scene is that a nation could be poor and still protect the basic interests of its citizens. As they flee from arrest, the migrants are indirectly telling their government that it cannot use the weakness of the national economy as an excuse not to provide the basic means of survival to its people. If Yemen could do it, so should Ethiopia.

Broadly speaking, *Journey Through Hell* has demonstrated two contradictory things about mobility: It is both easy and challenging at the same time. Easy in the sense that everyone, at least theoretically, should have the right of free movement. Hence, everyone should have the right to migrate whether as a form of protest, leisure, or for
professional reasons. One can therefore say that protest migration is the most accessible form of (dis)engaging with an underperforming state authority because a citizen reserves the right to move at will. The other side is that international mobility comes with immense challenges to migrants. It requires financial and physical investment, which not every person can endure. It is intriguing that faced with all of these difficulties, many Somalis and Ethiopians still find migration to be the preferred way to protest. It shows the success of this method of public dissent. If they did not find it viable, the wave of exodus would have eased due to the risks and other challenges involved in leaving for Yemen.
CHAPTER 4: **AFRICA STRANGER THAN FICTION: POSTCOLONIAL CRISIS THROUGH TOURISM**

The last chapter presented a film analysis to support the argument that migration from Somalia to Yemen is a form of protest against the state. It involved a study of how external mobility can construct a narrative of national failure. This section pursues a similar study in literature. It concerns S. VanOrden’s (2008) literary memoir, *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction*. The work concerns the author’s experiences while working with a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Mozambique. But as part of this volunteer work, he travels to South Africa for tourism purposes. This work thus deals with the two settings: Mozambique and South Africa, and will be interpreted as a volunteer tourist memoir. In this regard, the analysis here will argue that volunteer tourism is a symptom of a failing state system. It shows a community in need and a tourist willing to help. The volunteer tourist thus gets to visit places and witness the lives of the people living in these areas. For this reason, the tourist gaze will be relied upon to study this work, with the aim of assessing the extent of postcolonial dystopia being experienced on the continent.

Instead of outbound (emigration) mobility, as was the case in the previous chapter, inbound mobility will be the lens for gazing into post-independence Africa. This chapter has been framed in such a way that it is in some form of conversation with the previous. It was argued earlier that protest migration becomes necessary when citizens feel socially, economically, or politically alienated from the state. Their governments are not providing them with what they need in order to survive in their home countries. Migrants therefore use mobility to bring global attention to the failures of their home
leaders. In VanOrden’s memoir, mobility into Africa by aid workers, in this case volunteer tourists, confirms the narrative of protest migration—the story of a state in crisis. The relationship between the tourists and their host communities will be extended to investigate the representation of postcolonial dystopia in VanOrden’s memoir.

Volunteer Tourism and Memoir

Some scholars have maintained that tourism is simply about fulfilling a desire for leisure. For such academics, to think that tourism can have a political aspect is far-fetched (Rojek 2001). It is important to distinguish mainstream from alternative tourism. The former is concerned primarily with the pleasure of sightseeing. On the other hand, the latter has emerged recently because an increasing number of people are realizing that tourism is not just about leisure. Alternative tourism then allows one to combine holiday-making with productivity and/or activism. Volunteer tourism is an example of this genre of sightseeing.

Volunteer tourism is defined as “ideologically sound travel experiences that contribute to the natural, economic, social and cultural environment” (Wearing 2004, 218). The term “ideologically sound travel” refers to touristic mobility motivated by the idea that the leisure of touring a place can be harnessed to bring tangible benefit to the host community. Participants therefore “volunteer” in development projects in the tour experience. In this sense there is a mutual benefit to the tourist who earns the pleasure of sightseeing and the host community which benefits from the traveler’s volunteer services. Consequently, there are some who describe volunteer tourism as “utilizing discretionary
time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need” (McGehee & Santos 2005, 760). It is supposed to be a selfless journey with the aim of assisting people in need. Many scholars have proposed that this way of spending vacation should be called “altruistic tourism” (Matthews 2008; Mustonen 2005; Singh & Singh 2004). The reason is that participants “devote their time, money, and other costs…only for the benefit of those who are in need” (Coghland & Fennell 2009, 378).

Volunteerism has been suggested as a cosmopolitan ethic which recognizes all humans as important and deserving of assistance (Bernstein 2011). Cosmopolitanism considers all the people of the world as belonging to one country. This is not simply an idealistic construction of the world; there is a practical effect to it. Advancements in systems of transport, for example, have ushered in a new era where the world has become more closely interconnected than ever. The result is that national boundaries have become fluid because “all of us” have become citizens of the world. With this identity transformation, or extension, the global citizen now has a “civic” responsibility not just to his/her locality but the world at large (Appiah 2006). In this regard, volunteer tourism defines a global citizen because it involves leaving one’s locale in order to “address the needs and interests of human individuals directly” (Kleingeld 2012, 20).

From the foregoing, VanOden’s book can be described as a volunteer tourist memoir but not without further clarification. All reviews of this book have labeled it as humanitarian memoir. It is perhaps because that is how the author intended to market it. This kind of description however emphasizes aid work and downplays an important element of the story—tourism. This author proposes the label volunteer tourism to look at
both the tourism and humanitarian aspects of the work. The challenge, however, is that not everyone will consider the narrator’s intentions as altruistic enough to be described as volunteer tourism. This is because his aid work is actually a paid job. But according to Urry (2002) a person qualifies as a tourist if s/he travels to a new place, for pleasure, and intends to stay there temporarily. *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction* meets all of these criteria: the protagonist travels to Mozambique for a short period for sightseeing. Though taking up a paid job might imply that he is a migrant worker and not a volunteer tourist, he still meets the criteria of a volunteer tourist for the reason that his work with the NGO is ultimately intended to help his host community. In this case, the whole NGO system is considered to be an altruistic institution—volunteering to improve the living conditions of marginalized people.

A section of the academic world remains critical of the true benefits of volunteer tourism. Approaching the subject from the postcolonial theoretical approach, they challenge the idea of selfless dedication attributed to volunteer tourism. These scholars contend that volunteer tourists are motivated by the “feel good” factor (Alonzo & Liu 2013; Bales 1996; Greenfield & Mark 2004). It might seem that participants are not after any personal gain for helping others, but in reality they want to use it to build a pleasant public image for themselves—the image of being responsible global citizens. Some have also argued that volunteer tourism causes dependency syndrome for the host communities (Guttentage 2009; Palacios 2010; Vrasti 2013). If poor people are sure of receiving help from the benevolent global community, then they are not motivated to lift themselves out of poverty.
In the article “Gap Year Volunteer Tourism: Myths of Global Citizenship,” Joanne Hanley, Kevin Lyons, John Neil & Stephen Weary (2012) examine volunteer tourism as a field where the politics of hegemony and marginalization are enacted. They suggest that in the current trend of international volunteer tourism the move has almost always originated from the West to the rest of the world, especially to the so-called developing countries. In this regard, it shows the Westerner as the embodiment of the ideal global citizen; one who, even with the least of skills and experience, feels the ethical responsibility to go help undeveloped communities to develop (Brown & Hall 2008).

On the surface, this would readily qualify as a worthy cause, but Hanley and her co-authors posit that the dominance of the developed (Western) nations in volunteer tourism is rather “reinforcing negative stereotypes about the developing world” (371). In a way, it perpetuates “a colonial legacy of particular attitudes, images, and stereotypes” of the global south (Hall & Tucker 2004, 660). It shows the “better off” Westerner as the savior who is going to provide desperately needed help to the “worse off,” developing part of the world (Sin 2009). Hanley et al. consider that this situation “creates unequal relationship whereby the [Western] giver might appear superior to the [non-Western] receiver” (371). In a similar argument, Tucker & Akama (2009) contend that volunteer tourism establishes a structural and ideological scale which rates the tourist higher and above the host community. This argument is reiterated by Pastran (2014) in her argument that “By its nature, volunteer tourism brings together economically powerful volunteer
tourists (who have enough discretionary economic resources to be able to afford a trip to volunteer abroad) with less powerful host communities” (49).

Two frameworks from the above discussion on volunteer tourism will be applied to the study of VanOrden’s memoir. The first is the mobility frame. The scholarly opinions surveyed above indicate that volunteer tourism is a manifestation of global citizenship. In this regard the tourist responds to an ethical responsibility to help others. But where these “others” are at distant locations, the volunteer tourist needs to be mobile; s/he must be capable of travelling to where his/her help is needed. The global citizen is therefore defined, in part, by his/her (international and/or local) mobility (Schattle 2008). This attribute of the volunteer tourist allows for the deployment of mobility in the study of VanOrden’s memoir. As Urry (2002) explains, “Tourist relations arise from a movement of people to, and their stay in, various destinations. This necessarily involves some movement through space” (4). Tourists attain their experience through a kind of mobility which is motivated by spatial interest and curiosity (Urry 2002). To learn about the toured space, one will therefore have to follow the trail of the tourist. It is the mobility frame which will be used to discuss contemporary Mozambique and South Africa.

The second frame relates to the theme of inequality which the volunteer tourist has with his/her host community. Volunteer tourism has been criticized as enforcing images of a superior West travelling to a critically deprived Third World country with the intent of going to “save” it. This dichotomy will direct the discussion on the postcolonial dystopia of Mozambique. In reading *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction*, the narrator’s volunteer work in Mozambique goes to illustrate the needy state of the country. This
frame however cannot be used to investigate the South African situation. The reason is that the narrator’s travels to South Africa do not involve volunteer work.

Notwithstanding, the mobility frame could adequately account for postcolonial South Africa. The Mozambican situation simultaneously deploys both the mobility and inequality frames. With respect to South Africa, however, the latter will solely be relied upon.

Memoirs and autobiographies are very similar, and for this reason people usually use the two interchangeably. However, O’Connor (2011) notes their differences. She suggests that autobiographies are about “a person who has been in the public eye, and who, towards the end of an illustrious life, sets that life down, generally in chronological order, for posterity” (xxiii). A memoir however “tends to be shortened in time and focuses more on the writer as an individual” (xxiii). It is restricted to experiences relating to specific moments in the writer’s life—childhood, travel, war, a period in one’s professional life, among others (Zinsser 1998). In a sense, an autobiography is a story about a life, in its entirety, while the memoir is a story from a life (Barrington 2007).

Memoirs are among the most powerful ways of reflecting on the society for the reason that, though it has creativity to it, the story is expected to be honest (Clark 2007; Roth 2014) and experiential (O’Connor 2011). African literature is seeing a growing tradition of memoir writing which reflects on the continent. They include works about war: *A Long Way Gone* (2007) by Ishmael Beah, *Guns Over Kigali* (1997) by Henry Anyidoho, *There Was a Country* (2013) by Chinua Achebe, and *Left to Tell* (2007) by Immaculee Ilibagiza. Others are reflections on colonialism: J. M. Coetzee’s *Boyhood*
(1998), Ngugi wa Thiongo’o’s Dreams in Times of War (2011) and In the House of the Interpreter (2012). There are some memoirists who have focused more on current socio-political issues. Examples include Wole Soyinka’s You Must Set Forth at Dawn (2007), Nelson Mandela’s A Long Walk to Freedom (1995) and Douglas Rogers’ The Last Resort (2010). Considering that memoirs are about actual experiences, its writers have more freedom when it comes to authorial setting.

Many novelists are identified, and so are their works, based on national or continental origin. Some fictional artists tend to feel compelled, or simply consider it a duty, to articulate issues that pertain to their homelands. Thus, the place of origin becomes a perpetual setting for creative impulse. In memoir writing, the author tells a story from his/her personal life; where it happened is of lesser consequence. The memoirist can therefore tell stories relating to any setting—country—in the world. S/he simply needs to have personally experienced the place. The tradition of memoir writing in African literature has gathered significant contributions from non-African writers. Examples include No Mercy (1997) by the English author Redmond O’Hanlon, The Unheard (2007) by the American writer Josh Swiller and Shake Hands with the Devil (2003) by Roméo Dallaire, a Canadian national. Steven VanOrden’s Africa: Stranger Than Fiction (2008) belongs to this tradition of memoir on Africa.

Mobility and a Precarious Setting

The memoir begins in media res with an introduction of the socio-political setting of Mozambique. The memoir begins with the narrator, Steve, at a hospital in Indonesia.
He had taken some days off from his humanitarian job in Mozambique so he could go with his wife, Jeni, to visit Indonesia. Incidentally, Indonesia happens to be Jeni’s home country. During the trip Steve visits a doctor for treatment of an illness he contracted in Mozambique. The medical officer diagnoses his health condition as having resulted from the stress associated with his aid work in Mozambique. He accordingly advises: “Either quit your job or you are going to die!” (VanOrden 2008, 1). This scene necessitates a question: Why did he not go to a hospital in Mozambique for treatment? The answer is that the hospitals in Mozambique are “like a pit stop to the mortuary” (VanOrden 2008, 148). This makes it necessary for him to wait till he arrived in Indonesia. Here, the mobility frame is used to illustrate the state of postcolonial deterioration in Mozambique. The narrator does not say all that he thinks about his host community. Instead, he allows the reader to make interpretations based on his mobility. He is using this international mobility to suggest that the health system in his host nation is dysfunctional. The irony here is that the hospital is supposed to be a place where one goes for cure. But in this case, readers are told that, in Mozambique, there is no difference between the hospital and the mortuary. It is an imagery which presents postcolonial Mozambique in dire circumstances. The memoirist then uses this image for both practical and stylistic purposes.

Memoirs are often mistaken for raw narratives of the author’s life experience but, in fact, they make use of literary styles that are typically deployed in fictional writing (Gewurt 2008). In the opening two literary styles are used simultaneously; the use of media res and the development of narrative setting. Media res in creative writing refer to
the style of beginning a story from the middle point. Bell (2014) explains that “middle” does not refer to a chronological point but to a particular moment in the narrative where the writer wishes to begin the story. The purpose of this aesthetic is to create a dramatic beginning; that is, to “feature, overt conflict” (12). The Opening of *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction* depicts the narrator’s conflict—frustration—with the state of decline witnessed in Mozambique. As Gosselini (2011) discloses, “A typical memoir…orders and places experiences for dramatic effect” (135). As a volunteer tourist who is interested in helping his host community, the medical diagnosis he receives in Indonesia puts him in a dilemma. He is not sure whether to heed the doctor’s advice and quit or to return to continue with his altruistic work in Mozambique and face the risk of dying. This tension produces the desired dramatic effect on the reader. The narrator presents himself as a victim in order to draw sympathy and commendation from the audience (Lazar 2008). It also feeds into the altruistic motive supposed to be at the heart of volunteer work.

Another purpose of the dramatic opening is to give a tantalizing introduction to the narrative setting. It reveals Mozambique as the place where this drama is taking place. The reader who is scandalized by the narrator’s dilemma is expected to have a similar reaction to the setting. In defense of setting development in memoir, O’Connor (2011) explains that it is necessary because memoirists are writing about different parts (settings) of the world for which readers ought to be guided into the context of the piece. The seemingly fatal opening does exactly what O’Connor articulates. It portrays Mozambique as a near catastrophe and also shows the narrator as a survivor or, rather, as a tragic global citizen who is sacrificing his life for the wellbeing of an African country. This
invokes the inequality frame associated with volunteer tourism. The narrator understands the ethical responsibilities placed on him as a privileged global citizen, which makes it imperative that he go out to assist the underprivileged Mozambique out of misery.

The narrator reveals in the memoir that he became interested in humanitarian work after seeing “a documentary [film] years before about an aid agency that was helping the people of South America” (VanOrden 3). He also discloses that before choosing to go to Mozambique, he had previously tried to go to Japan and Singapore for aid work. However, he was unsuccessful in both attempts. This brings to the fore, once more, the political dimension of humanitarian tourism. His inability to serve in Singapore and Japan suggests that the two countries do not feel the need for external help. It is a demonstration of self-sufficiency. They are making a statement about the social and economic progress they have attained since independence. In this regard, both countries consider themselves advanced enough to be on a par with any Western country. They understand that accepting volunteer tourists will imply that they are failing countries that need to be assisted. In view of this negative narrative behind the offer and acceptance of aid, both countries are unwilling to accept volunteer tourists. Mozambique, on the other hand is open to international support in the form of volunteer tourism. This is an unpleasant commentary about the postcolonial state of affairs in Mozambique. It shows that the country has not made enough progress since attaining independence, and thus needs help from the American volunteer.
Modes of Mobility and the Visual Assessment of Postcolonial Mozambique

From his home in Seattle, Washington State, to the host community of Maputo, Mozambique, Steve uses two modes of transportation—plane and car. The two modes of mobility present the traveler with very contrasting views of the setting. These contrasting views develop the setting further so readers can have a more comprehensive look at postcolonial decadence, which is presented at the beginning of the memoir. The mobility frame applies to this situation, since readers get to learn more about contemporary Mozambique through the narrator’s travels. The narrator’s flight into Mozambique gives him a positive impression of his destination. He arrives in the rainy season when there was an abundance of trees which gives a beautiful aerial view of the country. Unable to conceal his surprise, he turns to a co-passenger and says to him, “Maputo looks so beautiful” (VanOrden 2008, 7). This impression of beauty contradicts the perception of degeneration initially presented. The beautiful aerial view created a positive image of the setting for as long as the narrator was still gazing down from the plane. As soon as he changes his mode of mobility from the airplane to a car, the beauty quickly gives way to an ugly scene.

Henry, the country director of the NGO was at the airport to welcome and drive Steve to the office. The journey from the airport to the office told a story completely different from what the narrator had imagined based on the aerial view. He confesses:

On the car ride to the office, the reality of where I was and the living conditions of those we were there to serve hit me. When looking out the window of the plane, I did not understand or realize the situation on the ground. Now, peering out the
window of our Land Cruiser, my perceptions quickly changed; Mozambique was not beautiful. Poverty, disease, and suffering were clearly evident. (VanOrden 2008, 8).

The views expressed above indicate the narrator’s surprise at the lack of development in the capital city of Maputo. National capitals are generally designed to present visitors with pleasant impressions of a country. For this reason, capital cities typically are the most outstanding urban presentations of a country (Bassnett 2007). This was the impression Steve forms while still in the airplane. Once on land, the image of Maputo changes from the typically well-designed capital city to a decayed urban center. As the capital city, one would expect Maputo to give a good impression of the country. Here, the opposite becomes the reality in the car drive from the airport. Scenes of deprivation and marginalization are “not hidden in [the] inner city...or pushed over across the tracks on the other side of town” (VanOrden 2008, 8). On the contrary, “They were everywhere” and the short drive from the airport to the office gives any foreigner “an orientation [about Mozambique] that volumes of reading could never do” (VanOrden 2008, 8).

The contradictory views from the plane and on the ground point to the two roles Steve intends to play in his host country. As Hanley and co-writers argue, in volunteer tourism, the giver (the tourist) perceives himself/herself as superior to the receiver. Here, superiority is to be understood in terms of privilege. It is a reasonable expectation that one ought to be in some kind of privileged position—to be better off—in order to help the underprivileged. The impressive aerial view from the plane makes the narrator question his mission in Mozambique.
From the plane, Steve sees Mozambique as beautiful as the state of Florida. The look from above ground creates the impression of equality between him, the volunteer tourist, and his Mozambican benefactors. His knowledge of Africa might be that of a continent in anguish and in need of assistance. But here he was looking at Maputo, an African city which, from the aerial picture, is as sophisticated as Florida. This view created a positive image of postcolonial Mozambique.

According to MacKenzie & Sumartojo (2012), postcolonial countries design their cities to depict the post-independence era. It is to project images of national modernization. Thus, urban centers try to give a visual sense of postcolonial progress. In a related observation, Certeau (1984) argues that cities are built to give a utopian, stylish, view of urban space. For this reason, the architecture of a city is designed visually to “repress all physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it” (94). Certeau contends that the utopian design is visible when viewing the city from a high-rise building. He suggests, however, that walking will expose what the design has attempted to hide about the city.

In relation to Steve’s view from the aircraft, it shows a visually appealing picture of Mozambique. The above ground gaze represses the physical, political, social, and economic defects on the ground. It tells the story of a nation that is progressing. This image however presents Steve with a challenge. It does not fit the narrative of an aid-receiving economy. Thus, the “privileged” volunteer tourist would find that Mozambique does not need assistance. But when he uses ground transportation, the illusion of advancement fades away. Certeau recommends walking as a way to make meaning out of
the structural glamor of a city. In this case, the volunteer tourist uses driving to the same effect. The car ride gives a visual voice to the city; it allows what is hidden from the aerial gaze to become visible. The scenes of decay observed by the narrator affirms the country’s worse off state for which reason he, who has experienced a better off life in America, finds it necessary to help improve the life of the people. This new ugly picture quashes the initial positive impression of Mozambique. The drive gives visual proof of postcolonial dystopia.

Viewing the Present from the Past through Mobility

The scene of decay observed on the car ride does not however mean that, once on land, Steve found nothing positive about Mozambique. He was particularly impressed with the quality of the roads. They were nicely paved with functioning traffic lights. But considering that this great infrastructure exists within the context of total decay, the memoirist concludes that “It was evident the Portuguese had sunk a lot of money into this city during Mozambique’s colonial period” (VanOrden 9). Also, on the second day of arriving in Mozambique, Henry takes him out to “do a little sightseeing of the city” of Maputo (VanOrden 19). The tour ride once again exposed the pictorial contradictions of Maputo. The beautiful beaches and infrastructure were hard to miss. On the other hand, the tour enabled Steve to notice the extent of structural degradation of the place: “You could tell that at one time this city had a lot of money and was really a world-class city with very nice homes and infrastructure” (VanOrden 20). But the present view of the place is indicative of it being abandoned over the years to decay. Steve could not help but
“notice that nobody had painted the houses, taken out the trash regularly, or cleaned the streets properly for the last 25 years” (VanOrden 20).

Here, through the sightseeing experience of VanOrden, readers are given a comparative viewpoint of Mozambique under and after colonialism. The writer helps readers to find an answer to the question: “Are the people better off after independence or before” (VanOrden 22). From what the narrator saw on the tour, it would seem that he shares Boom’s (2011) view that “In its recent history, Mozambique has been in a continual struggle for development” (1). Thus, Mozambicans are worse off today compared to when they were under colonial rule. His comments suggest that the few beautiful scenes are testaments to a glorious past—when the Portuguese were in control. The deterioration observed in Maputo is not an isolated situation. It extends to the entire country. On a trip to Port Quembo, another important Mozambican city, Steve toured around to see how different it might be from the capital city. But what he witnessed was that there is not much of a difference between the two cities:

Much like Maputo, it [Port Quembo] was once an impressive city. You could tell, when it was still a colony, lots of money had circulated there, and it was evidently a combination business destination and playground for Mozambique’s rich and famous. But as we drove into town I could see it was so dirty and run down that it was only a picked-over skeleton of a once beautiful place (VanOrden 86).

This reaffirms the volunteer tourist’s conviction that Mozambique under Portuguese authority was better off than when indigenous Mozambicans took over the administrative function of the country. This image of a nation in post-independence crisis thus makes
Steve’s presence in Mozambique a laudable gesture by a global citizen. In line with the opinion of Hanley et al, it shows an unequal relationship where the privileged Steve finds it ethically within his place to offer aid to an underprivileged Mozambique.

Also, the narrator’s tour reveals a historical context which supports the claim by Hansley et al that volunteer tourism creates an unequal relationship between the giving tourist and the receiving host community. Clearly Steve has a positive opinion about the imperial legacy of Portugal. Simply put, it served a good cause. It benefited the Mozambicans except that the post-independence leaders could not maintain, let alone build, on the achievements of the Portuguese. This opinion sounds strikingly close to—perhaps exculpation of—the colonial ideology of the “White Man’s Burden.” It is “the West’s fantasy that ‘we’…[are] the chosen ones to save the Rest” (Easterly 2006, 23).

Steve’s opinion seems to be affirming the altruistic motivation which the White Man’s Burden supposedly entails. It suggests that the Portuguese embarked on the colonial project in order to bring development to the Black people of Mozambique. This opinion is demonstrated by the fact that since the departure of the Portuguese, the people of Mozambique have not been able to maintain, let alone build on, the developmental feats attained by the colonists. The degradation of the city observed in the tour is thus blamed on the ineffectiveness of postcolonial leadership. The tour showed that since independence, Mozambique has not been able to demonstrate the ability to achieve its pre-independence hopes.

Given this background, even in the post-independence era, the West still perceives the need—the burden—to assist Africa (Mozambique) to achieve development.
But this time, instead of through colonialism, it is through development aid (Easterly 2006). Humanitarian outreach programs have therefore served as an opportunity for the West to save Africa from underdevelopment. This mentality portrays the dystopian experience of postcolonial Mozambique. It shows that the attainment of independence was not enough to bring about the desired economic and social progress. It leaves Henry, a Spaniard, to contemplate that Mozambique attained independence too early:

[Y]ou have to understand Maputo’s past to understand the way things are today.

In 1975, when Mozambique obtained its independence after five centuries of colonial rule from Portugal, the African people were not exactly ready for the freedom and responsibility that was all of the sudden dropped on them. Unlike other European colonialists that assisted their former colonies after independence, the Portuguese literally cut and ran overnight, leaving the country in chaos. (Van Orden 22)

This opinion displays two things. One is that the Portuguese did not complete the task of colonialism. Secondly, they (referring to the West as a whole) have a responsibility to return and finish what they started. In the opinion of Frantz Fanon (2004), postcolonial African leaders were not prepared for the task of national administration. They attained the position on accident. He argues that when colonial resistance, started by the masses, gained momentum, it became imperative that they had leaders for the cause. The (semi)educated class took advantage of the situation by stepping to the front of the campaign. In this way they played the role of intermediaries between the colonists and the colonized. Hence, on the exit of the foreign powers, these intermediaries were
automatically elevated to the position once held by the colonists even though they had no experience in political organization or economic administration. To excuse their incompetence, in the new position, current leaders of the continent have found it expedient to blame the legacy of colonialism for every single thing that goes wrong in post-independence Africa (Ayittey 1992).

During the tour of Maputo, Steve’s colleague Henry spotted this functional deficiency of postcolonial African leadership. He tells Steve that independence, in Mozambique, replaced the capable colonial authority with an “inept and inexperienced government,” which has since failed to establish “a functioning government or economy” (22). This comment taken in the context of the national decline observed in the tour, confirms Fanon’s assessment of African postcolonial leadership.

Volunteer Tourism: An Encounter with Two Worlds

Mobility is not simply a physical motion of a body or an idea from one place to another. As Urry (2002) argues, the interest of tourism is that it gives “pleasurable experiences which are different from those typically encountered in everyday life. He explains that a traveler sets his/her gaze on the new environment, looking for anything that will be pleasurable to the eye. As he puts it, “When we go away we gaze on a set of different scenes, lands, landscapes, or townscapes which are out of the ordinary” (1). In moving, one is changing temporal space but the displaced body maintains a link between the points of mobility—the point of departure and the destination. To move from point A to B, one carries with him/her the experiences of point A to B. It is the way that a body in
motion would be able to interpret the new environment. A person can like or dislike place B based on a previous experience with point A. Hypothetically speaking, if a person is often starved at point A and s/he moves to B where there is food, all things being equal, s/he will prefer B to A. The mover’s opinion of the destination will be positive because of his/her past negative experience at the point of departure. A similar situation is said to occur in memoir writing.

According to Fennelly (2014) the art of memoir writing is a process of examining the effect of an experience on the writer. She explains that memoirists prefer to use the first person narration because it creates two characters—the “I” who experienced an event in the past and the present “I” who is writing about the past event. To write a memoir means the “I” of now has been strongly affected by the experience of the “I” then. A similar relationship occurs in tourism (Urry 2002). Here, the touring “I” as a displaced body is compelled to make meaning of the new environment based on the experiences of the immobile “I.” The immobile persona does not mean a fixed and unmovable body. It rather refers to the person who is residing within his/her familiar locality. The tourist’s experience on site is subconsciously shaped by what is familiar to his/her locality. Whether a scene is beautiful or ugly, or a culture is “modern” or “primitive,” the observing “I” forms his/her impressions by referring to the experiences of the immobile “I.”

Applying this concept to VanOrden’s memoir, one can say that when Steve arrived in his host nation, he still carried with him his American experience. His judgment of the new abode was based on his American-ness. It is what he used to
understand his new environment. This gives readers a comparative lens to gaze into postcolonial Africa (Mozambique). For example, concerning the rule of law in Mozambique he expects it to be similar to what exists in the United States or any other Western nation. When he finds out that it is not the same, he laments: “In Mozambique, where there is a law that is vague or incomplete in scope, those in power interpret the laws and enforce them simultaneously, whether it be the police or a government official” (VanOrden 64). The memoirist cites this as the reason why there has been minimal progress in Mozambique, because the situation encourages corruption and abuse of power. Corruption in Mozambique has been described as “largely symptomatic of a lack of checks and balances among the three branches of government, limited transparency and access to information, minimal accountability of elected officials” (USAID 2005, 1). State officials wield unlimited authority and are therefore not accountable to anyone. If the limits of power are unknown, then it is impossible to ascertain whether a state official is acting within or outside his/her authority. Thus, the police for example could take bribes and torture people because no authority superintends over them. Comparing this circumstance to his American experience, the writer feels that the Mozambican situation is the exact opposite. Based on his knowledge of the system of authority in his country of origin, the narrator leads readers to appreciate postcolonial Africa in ways which are suggestive of a lack of progress.

In another instance, the narrator makes a list of problems he has witnessed in his tour of Mozambique. He notes a number of challenges, including famine, disease, corruption, fear, war, death, pestilence, violence, unemployment, and oppression.
Following this long enumeration, the narrator takes a moment to reflect on his life in America in relation to the African life he is witnessing. He comes to the fatalistic conclusion that:

If you were to put one of these negative environmental factors in a Westerner’s life, they might think the end has come upon them. [But] Africans live with all of these negative forces simultaneously on a daily basis, and God works overtime, trying to break them free from the bonds that cripple them. (VanOrden 67)

By comparing life in Africa to what he is familiar with in the West, readers are able to picture the enormity of the problems that afflict Africa today. It seems that the memoir was intended for a Western audience. It is for them to read about the dire conditions of the place so it can whip up humanitarian interest in the continent. In which case, the comparison of African and Western lives will make the latter understand how privileged s/he is in relation to the former. The unequal relationship will then mean that the better off will have to help the worse off, as Hanley et al have argued.

Some might raise the concern that it is not fair to judge Africa by American standards. However, it fits within the conceptualization of this chapter that such an assessment should be made of postcolonial Africa. The narrator is a non-African working and touring the continent. He also has no prior experience of Africa. Given that he goes to Mozambique as a novice, the only scale with which to assess the state of affairs in his host nation is the American society in which he grew. Also, the fact that he goes in as an outsider and perhaps a “neutral” evaluator is important for this kind of study because his observations will be more or less instinctive rather than thought out and self-censored. An
African assessor’s evaluation might suffer from blindness to the familiar sight. This refers to a situation where being too familiar with a place might impair what one can see in that place. Some situations that might seem “normal” to the African observer because the individual has lived with it his/her entire life might not be regarded by an outsider in the same light. Thus, while the African might leave them out in his/her assessment, the non-African might in fact be shocked by it and therefore note it for the audience.

Volunteer Tourism and Transcendental Diagnosis of Postcolonial Africa

According to Rak (2004) the autobiographical writing “shapes events, while the memoirist foregrounds events that may shape his[/her] perspective” (311). One will not have to read well into Africa: Stranger Than Fiction to realize that the narrator is proposing his own perspective on the challenges of contemporary Africa. He seems to think that the problems of the continent can be resolved by a Christian religious method. K. Andereck and N. McGehee (2008) contend that religion plays an important role in volunteer tourism though people do not want to admit it. These two scholars find it ironic that Western churches that have been unsuccessful at proselytizing within their specific societies find it necessary to undertake volunteer tourism in other parts of the world. Agreeing with this point, Taillon and Jamal (2009) argue that volunteer tourism is a manifestation of the Christian value of helping distraught “neighbors”—anyone within the broader human community. By this, it is reasonable for churches to help people farther away, even though there might be some people within the immediate community who equally need help. This religious feeling of obligation to provide aid to other people
could be either material or spiritual support in the form of evangelism (Vukonic 2005; Yeung 2004). Steve’s proposal of using religion to solve Africa’s problems suggests that he believes in offering both the material and religious assistance to Mozambique. He works with an NGO which is engaged in development projects. At the same time, he feels that the problems of Africa require Christian religious solutions.

Not long after assuming his position in Mozambique, he is sent on a food conference back in the United States. On his return from the meeting, a team of auditors visits the NGO’s office to check their accounts. To entertain the auditors, Steve and Henry decide to take them out to play golf. At the end of the game, they go around town to shop for African artworks as souvenirs. At the craft market, they observe an array of “animal carvings made from both wood and stone, and of course some artifacts of indigenous religious origin that have their roots in what we would call ‘black magic’” (VanOrden 56). This art is presented as a god, showing the non-Christian religious tradition of the Mozambicans. Henry explains to the group that “Even though Mozambicans will claim to be Christians or Muslim, “they still consult with the witch doctor on many things”” (VanOrden 56).

This experience gives readers an initial hint of Steve’s religious mission in Mozambique. When Hanley et al talk about volunteer tourism creating a feeling of superiority and inferiority, they are not simply referring to the socio-economically well-off versus the underprivileged. The following concept should be included in your introduction to this chapter—it is fundamental: It includes religious superiority. The narrator’s religious-based opinion of the problems of Mozambique suggests that he
regards Christianity in higher esteem compared to the local religious practice of his host country. He believes that Mozambique and Africa as a whole are going through troubling postcolonial times because Christianity is yet to take roots on the continent. Summing up his view of Mozambique based on the tours undertaken, Steve declares that:

God’s hand in Mozambique was both extremely powerful and yet agonizingly weak. The people were spiritually hungry and receptive of God’s message, and to evangelize there was easy compared to evangelizing in the West. Many biblical principles have the ability to set the Africans free and give them a quality of life that they ordinarily could never realize. (VanOrden 67).

The above statement makes clear the author’s feeling of religious superiority. He makes a case for Mozambicans to convert to Christianity because that is what will set them free from their current woes.

There is a lot that one can say about this position but such a debate is not of primary concern to this section of the study. Rather, this author’s interest is to examine the message being communicated through the proposed (Christian) religious solution. In this regard, two messages are present in the suggestion. It is a hopeful end to a hopeless situation. “Hopeful” in this context, is being used in the religious sense of believing and expecting intervention from a higher, spiritual, authority. In ordinary religious practice, this stage follows the failure of humans to solve their own problems. At this point, they give up and invite God or any similar spiritual being to intervene. Here, there is still the hope that the problem can be resolved, but there is also the understanding that no human effort can cause that to happen. In the case of Steve’s proposal for a religious solution, it
means, by his assessment, Africa’s postcolonial dystopia can only be reversed by a
supernatural force (Rother 2014). Considering that the colonial period of Mozambique is
glorified in this memoir, Steve’s call for God’s intervention is indicative of the extent of
decline experienced after independence. It shows that the nation has failed to the point
where it is humanly irredeemable.

Other times, religion is used to make implied statements that might sound
offensive if made directly. Throughout his stay in Mozambique, Steve is mindful of his
foreign status. The abuse of power witnessed by him taught him one lesson: The sooner
he recognized that he is an alien and avoided collision with state authorities, “the easier
things would be [for him]” (VanOrden 65). As a result, despite all the scenes of decay he
witnesses, he never, directly, blames the Mozambican authorities for the lack of progress.
Nor does he criticize them for not doing enough to make life better for their people. This
does not mean he made no political comments. Where he found the need to do so, he
conveyed his views indirectly through religion. For instance, following his visit to Port
Quembo, the author describes what he saw in a religious tone:

[I]t looks like Satan created his hell right here in Port Quembo. I wonder what
happened to make it all come to this? You can see, feel, and breathe the
handiwork of an incredibly evil force here. You know, since I came to
Mozambique, I have often felt that evil is very strong here in this country…I
wonder sometimes why Satan has the freedom and power to bring society down
to such a horrible level. (VanOrden 88).
Satan in this context is being used figuratively to refer to the leaders of Mozambique. According to S. Hauser (2001) when a person writes a memoir, s/he “convey[s] more than the details of our [the memoirist’s] life” (9). The life details are presented through fictional aesthetics such as imagery. Metaphorical comparison, in the literary sense, is one way of forming vivid imageries to create a “heartfelt, even passionate memoir” (13). She contends that “The device can help our readers understand in a meaningful way experiences that they have not had” (13). Morgan (2014) considers metaphor as an essential aesthetic in memoir writing. She accordingly advises memoirists to “invoke the descent of exact metaphor as if they were grace” (N. p). This way, the writer presents the reader with more than a textual account of an experience. VanOrden uses religious imagery for the purpose of giving readers a visually and imaginatively vivid description of the decadence he is forced to witness in Mozambique. But at the same time, he does not want to overtly offend the authorities of the country.

The leadership of Mozambique is compared to Satan because they exercise unlimited powers. The police, government agents, airport and border officials, hospital administrators, and practically everyone entrusted with official responsibilities try to use it to their personal benefit. They take advantage of people, knowing that “There was no high court or police…[one] could run to” (VanOrden 65) for justice. The narrator’s primary concern is not the unlimited authority per se. What he considers to be immoral (Satanic) is that this capricious exercise of power is evidently having a sustained detrimental effect on the national wellbeing. It is having a degenerative impact on everything good in Mozambique and nothing is being done about it. Though this is a
scolding commentary on Mozambique’s postcolonial leadership, it is presented in a way that it sounds harmlessly religious.

Postcolonial Dystopia: The Beggars Versus the Givers

It seems that the notion that volunteer tourism creates a relationship of superiority and inferiority equally permeates the psyche of the Third World host community. Such nations have resigned themselves to the powerless position of a vulnerable group that is expecting assistance from the privileged Western tourist. In VanOrden’s memoir, the Mozambicans display an attitude which confirms their powerlessness in relation to the volunteer tourist. They see every Westerner as a donor (philanthropist) to whom they relate, or must relate, as beggars.

In their visit to the beaches of Maputo soon after VanOrden’s arrival in Mozambique, Henry confides in VanOrden that he hates going to swim. His reason is that though the beaches look nice, he is often frustrated by the way Mozambican patrons always harass expatriate (Western) visitors. The local people are constantly looking for ways of getting money from the foreigners either by selling them something or simply asking for financial gifts. This initially surprises Steve. It however does not take long for him to personally experience the situation Henry described to him. And for most of his stay in Mozambique, he had to deal with people going to him for money.

People coming to me for money were a never-ending burden. I use the word ‘burden’ because that is what it was. To my church members, government officials, people on the street, even our employees, I was a walking dollar sign.
Everyone thought that my bank account was an endlessly-flowing well, and if I didn’t give money it was because I refused to help them. (VanOrden 69)

The relationship between the tourist and the Mozambican suggests that the latter has given up on all internal sources of help. For some, like government officials, the perception that volunteer tourists are privileged people gives them a reason to extort money from them in the form of bribes. But for the majority of people on the streets, they look to the tourist for financial donations. The feeling of being abandoned by the state is what has led them to look elsewhere for assistance. Under such circumstances, some Mozambicans have left to go work as miners in neighboring South Africa. But, it is not everyone who is mobile. The immobile therefore rely on the Western tourist who has the capacity to travel into Mozambique. This strategy is the reverse of protest migration.

Instead of leaving the country to go seek assistance, one rather waits on help to come into the country. After all, the purpose of volunteer tourism is that instead of giving donations to help people elsewhere, one goes there oneself to make sure the assistance is received by those who truly need it (Keese 2011). It is for this reason that street children and other marginalized segments of the Mozambican society target Western tourists for financial help.

It is even suggested that some parents pour “scalding hot water on [their children]…so that they can get more money from begging” (VanOrden 12). The physical disfiguration is intended to make the children appear more vulnerable, and thus induce a “sorry reaction” from the expatriates. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the notion that all volunteer tourists are generous helpers is valid, certainly, not everyone can be
assisted because of two reasons. One is that “There were so many people in need in Mozambique and the opportunity to help was overwhelming” (VanOrden 158). Secondly, the tourist’s “charity” funds are not unlimited. Consequently, as generous as they might seem, the tourists will not “have enough for everyone” (VanOrden 69).

This then creates a condition for competition among the masses that have turned to begging for survival. The deliberate disfiguration of some of the children is to make them visually attract more sympathy. And with that, they expect to be among the few who will end up getting monetary help from the expatriates. It appears as though in everything that Mozambicans do, “If there is a way they can get money from the white man, they will do it” (VanOrden 2008, 11). Consequently, while street children and other destitute people line up along main roads to beg for money, other pedestrians deliberately walk very closely to cars driven by expatriates, hoping to get some money from those drivers that will hit them.

The relationship between the tourist and the people of Mozambique is shocking. A skeptical reader will find it hard to believe that people are willing to get hurt or disfigure others in order to receive money. In other literary genres, this might not be a problem. But in a memoir, information that sounds exaggerated will often be questioned. One of the distinguishing features of the memoir from other autobiographical literatures is its strict adherence to honest representation. Though it makes use of a writing style commonly associated with fiction, a memoirist will have to face the paradox of using fictional style and telling the truth at the same time (Larson 2007). Style is therefore no excuse to exaggerate. There are other writers who have argued that accurate
representation is not a critical feature of a memoir. James Frey, who has been widely criticized for exaggerating aspects of his memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, (2005) argues in his own defense that he originally wrote his book as a novel. He then decided to keep the novelistic style after converting it into a memoir. He found nothing wrong with embellishing some of the information since he felt most of what is in the memoir are true representations of his experience (*CNN Larry King Live Interview with James Frey*, 2006). Despite the explanation, his artistic reputation is still being attacked by those who maintain that regardless of stylistic choices, a memoir ought to be free of exaggeration. Similarly, Ishmael Beah’s memoir, *A Long Way Gone*, has received some critical reviews accusing the author of exaggerating his childhood in Africa (Sherman 2008; *Development Economics* 2013).

Should VanOrden’s memoir become a bestseller like *A Million Little Pieces* and *A Long Way Gone*, readers will raise concerns about possible exaggeration of events. It is unthinkable that parents will pour boiling water on their children for the sole purpose of maximizing returns from begging. Equally outrageous is his description of people who purposefully place themselves in situations where they are likely to be run over by cars simply because they want money from the drivers. Be that as it may, the wretchedness observed in Mozambique provides a cover for an exaggerated memoir. The high rate of socio-economic decline makes the embellishments less shocking. A situation becomes outrageous if it is an extraordinary or unbelievable occurrence. In the context of the widespread postcolonial misery presented in the memoir, the writer can resort to embellishing and it will not create any artistic uproar because the reader will not be
shocked. The desensitization of the reader indicates the normalization of postcolonial decay in Mozambique. It presents Mozambique as a dysfunctional country where what ordinarily would shock people in other countries is regarded as normal occurrence.

Race and Socio-Economic Disparity in Mozambique

Concerning the racialization of contemporary Mozambique, the interest in this regard is to examine race in the context of how it define the country’s economic progress. During colonialism, the White rulers had monopolistic control over the economic resources of their colonies. Expectedly, there was an economic disparity between black Africans and their white colonists. The current study seeks to use Steve’s mobility to find out how the situation has changed since independence.

Soon after taking up the finance director position in Maputo, Steve goes on a hunt for rental housing. This takes him to a neighborhood called Coop. Here the author makes an observation which sheds light on the racial structure of Mozambique. This residential area “was between the wealthy neighborhoods of Sommerchield, where most of the expats lived, and the common flats of the middle class Africans in Maputo…You could tell at one time this had been a very upscale neighborhood, where the wealthy Portuguese had once lived” (VanOrden 21). Three living facilities are presented here to show that there is still a relationship between race and economic status. Many of the expatriates in Maputo are White which means that Sommerchield is basically for white people. Incidentally, the place is described as an affluent neighborhood. This indicates that even after independence, White people still control the wealth of the country. The other
residential area is Coop which used to be for White residents during the colonial period. But it is now dilapidated to the point that all the Whites have moved to Sommerchield. The third neighborhood is a cluster of flats for African elites.

There is a relationship between Sommerchield and Coop which is critical to understanding the contemporary racial division in Mozambique. Coop was, during colonial times, for only Portuguese. After independence, they moved to create yet another exclusive White neighborhood. This is indicative of the fact that political freedom did not desegregate the country economically, nor did it result in the dissemination of wealth. The only change which has taken place is that the link between Whiteness and wealth has been reinforced, as non-Whites can live in Sommerchield as long as they can afford the high cost of rent. This effectively puts away the mostly poor (black) Mozambicans. At the same time, it allows for non-White expatriates who have money to live in the White quarter.

The African quarter might be physically separated from the White neighborhood but the two are characteristically similar since both are high class residences. The neighborhood for the African middle class is equally an affluent area. The residents can afford to live in Sommerchield where the expatriates reside. But they decide against that because they want to show some solidarity with the rest of the Black population. At the same time, the African middle class wants to affirm its status by living like the Whites (expatriates) do. To achieve both interests, they have chosen to live in liminal space—a place not for expatriates and not for “regular” Africans. Regular Africans are the many homeless and poor people Steve encounters throughout his roving. The effect of this is
that the elites detach themselves from the mass of underprivileged populace because the
majority of Mozambicans cannot afford to live where the African middle class lives.
What this indicates is that independence has been beneficial to a small section of the
population, the African elites.

Fanon (2004) makes a firm assertion that African independence only benefited
the bourgeoisie of the continent but not the masses who actually fought for freedom. To
him, political emancipation hardly changed the circumstances of the ordinary people. It
was simply a change in the color of leadership; that is, White colonist replaced by Blacks.
And this new ruling class was and continues to be primarily motivated by the desire to
live like the former colonists. This includes amassing wealth and consolidating power.
The colonial structure which enriched the ruler and impoverished the ruled thus still
exists in postcolonial Africa (Settles 1996). The effect is that there is a disconnected
relationship between the post-independence national authority and the citizenry. This
position applies to the African middle class who have enriched themselves with public
funds and then moved to live in upscale neighborhoods, away from the poor majority
(Obe 2014).

This sense of detachment is further enforced by the frequent visits of the middle
class to restaurants serving predominantly expatriate customers. For example, the narrator
describes seeing a few Africans at Mundo’s, a restaurant where mostly Westerners
“lounged away the evenings in Maputo, sipping espresso and smoking cigarettes
(VanOrden 53). Steve suggests that the few African elites who also patronize the
restaurant do so “more for prestige rather than cuisine” (VanOrden 53). This suggests, as
Fanon notes, that the bourgeoisie of postcolonial Africa are purposefully detaching themselves from their people. Generally, the purpose for keeping a distance from their people is to affirm their superiority in relation to the ordinary Africans. They hope that associating themselves with the expatriates will give them the prestige of being middle class Africans. In addition, their behavior can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the ruling class for their role in impoverishing the broad mass of the population. They avoid living among their people because it will cause them to witness their misery on a daily basis. It is an indication that the ubiquity of poverty registers a sense of guilt on the conscience of the leaders. In order to suppress this guilty feeling, they seclude themselves from the predominantly Black population and patronize expatriate restaurants. This way they do not have to constantly witness the postcolonial misery visualized on the streets.

In all of this, it is important to comment on how Steve’s mobility aided the reader’s access to the racial and socio-economic reality of modern Mozambique. The narrator’s status as an expatriate (White) facilitated his movement to the three neighborhoods. The agent he contacted to help him find an apartment for rent considered Steve’s status and therefore took him to upscale areas of Maputo. Whites, as has previously been noted, are perceived to be affluent. For this reason, the agent, acting like a tour guide in this context, takes him to neighborhoods that he considers to suit Steve’s status. If the narrator were a Mozambican, the agent likely would not have taken him to the upscale areas. Thus, readers would have had no way of understanding the socio-economic imbalance existing in the country.
Journey into Post-Apartheid South Africa

South Africa is considered the most successful African country and a model for the rest of the continent (USAID 2013). Steve’s journey into the country sheds light on South Africa beyond its international reputation as a flourishing nation. To observe South Africa’s postcolonial state, the narrator and his wife, who had joined him in Mozambique, go there on vacation, where they meet up with his aunt and uncle.

In South Africa, they begin their sightseeing in the “extremely beautiful city” of Cape Town (203). All of them are impressed with the modern view but they could not stay there for long. To satisfy his uncle’s interest in bird-watching, Steve takes the group to the outskirt of the city. On this trip, “We couldn’t help but notice the disturbing disparity between the city of Cape Town and the areas just outside the city limits. You go from nice oceanfront properties worth a fortune, to driving a few miles outside and seeing little shanty towns crowded with people” (204).

The stark contrast between the main city of Cape Town and the outskirts reveals the shadows of apartheid that still lurk after independence. According to P. Maylam (1995), in the era of apartheid, Cape Town, unlike other towns in South Africa, was built around the idea of racial exclusion rather than division. This means that it was supposed to be specifically for White residents. In other cities that practiced racial division, they spatially mapped out all the races and allocated them to specific areas. In this case, the different races resided in the same city except that one could only live outside of the territory assigned to his/her race. Cape Town was different in the sense that the government removed non-White races, especially the Blacks, and settled them in
townships outside of the city. The implementation of the policy of exclusion earned Cape Town the notoriety of being “South Africa’s most segregated metropolis” (Spinks 2001, 16).

Steve’s sightseeing trip to the country reveals that not much has changed since independence. The narrator notes that the shanty towns (Black settlements) are situated outside the city limits of Cape Town. It is an observation which invokes images of apartheid segregation. It visually draws attention to the fact that the policy of racial exclusion is still operational in the contemporary era. Also, the townships are described as “crowded.” This suggests a sense of spatial containment of the Blacks. Ideally, where there is overpopulation, it puts pressure on the resources of the area, forcing people to move (Cassils 2004). But in this case, it appears that the residents are, by some factors, immobile. They are stuck in the exploding (in terms of population) townships. There is no other way to describe this situation other than segregation.

Apartheid left in its place a system of unequal development which is causing South Africa to remain segregated. As Charlotte Spinks (2001) explains, apartheid was not just about the separation of races but also involved discrimination in development. White areas got to be developed while the rest was neglected. This created inequality, which the post-apartheid government was expected to correct. But, it becomes obvious in Steve’s holiday trip that the government has not been able to bring about parity in development. This failure has caused the country to remain separated though segregation laws that no longer exist. J. Steenkamp & Burgess (1998) describe South Africa as a two-tier society in which “Whites live and work in a modern economy while the majority
Black population often interact with that economy only superficially” (86). In effect, the country’s structure of selective development has put Blacks in an informal economy while Whites are in the formal economy. It is this disparity which Steve’s comparative view of Cape Town and the townships explicate. It shows the irony of extreme poverty existing on the fringes of affluence. This is proof of the fact that independence has not resulted in any significant improvement in their lives.

Steve’s trip to South Africa also shows that a section of the historically privileged White population also feel disillusioned with the post-apartheid government. While on holiday, the narrator had to accompany his pregnant wife to the gynecologist. After the examination, the doctor engages him in a conversation about contemporary South Africa. After Steve reveals his American nationality to the gynecologist, the White South African medical officer expresses his disappointment with America for putting “pressure on South Africa to end apartheid” (VanOrden 198). He believes that the nation was better off under White rule. To him, what the United States did was simply to force the White government to “hand over everything to the [incompetent] blacks” (VanOrden 198). He goes ahead to say that the post-apartheid government has not done enough to build on the legacy of the apartheid government. The current reality, he contends, is “50% unemployment, sky rocketing crime and murder, corrupt police system, the justice system is on the verge of collapse, rape is common place” (VanOrden 198). This negative comment may not have been uttered if not for the fact that it is an informal conversation.

Memoir is described as the most informal of all the genres of creative writing. The informality arises out of its “semblance to normal speech” patterns (Allison 2005,
It is for this reason that memoir is said to benefit from conversational style. According to Waxler (2011) it is the source of the memoirist’s creative freedom. It allows for the writer to be experimental (Gilbert 2013). The interaction between Steve and the gynecologist shows that any subject can be discussed freely. Steve’s chat with the doctor is to create a friendly environment for a frank talk on post-apartheid South Africa.

The gynecologist shows no hesitation in making his opinion known because he sees Steve as a co-interlocutor whom he can trust. Without trust people are more cautious of what they say, even in a conversational context. In this case, the doctor felt comfortable because Steve is also white. This establishes a racial bond between the two. Considering the racist implication of his comments, it is unlikely that the gynecologist would have expressed those sentiments if Steve were not White too. He attends to both Black and White patients but the narrator does not say that he engaged his Black patients in a similar conversation. It confirms that the doctor felt comfortable with Steve because both of them are White. Steve even alludes to this point when he says that he had heard similar opinions “often from other white South Africans” (VanOrden 198).

South African independence did not do away with racial animosity. There is no trust between Blacks and Whites. As the narrator observes, “There is no denying the great divide that permeates the landscape, the public places, and the socio-economic environment between white and black” (VanOrden 77). Even for Steve, who is an American visitor, he is not exempt from the racial politics of the country. As a White person, he gains the trust of Caucasian South Africans but gets shunned by the Blacks.
His attempts to befriend or have conversations with them were all unsuccessful. This explains the author’s reliance on conversations with White people.

The disadvantage of this approach, however, is that it is biased. It assesses the postcolonial state of the country from the perspective of White people. Considering the level of racial animosity in South Africa, it is not surprising that the consistent opinion expressed in these conversations tends to blame the post-apartheid Black-led government for the decline of the country. To confirm this narrative, Steve closely observes every place he visits in the country. He notes from these tours that virtually all the rich farmers are White. Also, most of the businesses in the country are White-owned. This calls for a reexamination of the gynecologist’s opinion. Steve’s assessment of the White population suggests that, as was the case during apartheid, they are better off compared to the Blacks. This makes the doctor’s lamentation difficult to comprehend. The only way to understand is to interpret it as an articulation of suppressed Black opinion.

Though 60.1 % of Black households live below the poverty line, the history of brutal domination by the White minority serves as a reason for them to continue supporting the post-apartheid Black government (Spinks 2001). Therefore, despite feeling disappointed, support for the post-independence government endures (Essa 2014). The ruling African National Congress (ANC) for example has won every election since independence even though many are unhappy with the government’s inability to bring about socio-economic equality. Surveys show that black South Africans are the most optimistic concerning their country’s future (Moller 2013). This feeling of optimism, coupled with the strong sense of racial solidarity, could potentially affect the views of
Blacks about the country. They could suppress their true opinions in the hope that the situation will soon improve. The doctor’s comment can therefore be seen as expressing the feelings of the majority Black population. Many of the deficiencies he identified with the state affect Blacks more than Whites. For example corruption among the police and the justice system only means that the poor (majority Black) are disadvantaged. Hence, if these obstacles are removed, the poor stand to benefit more than any other social group.

Here, many might disagree with the gynecologist’s implied call for a return to the apartheid system. But even with that comment, he is stating the reality. Apartheid, as noted earlier, was about two things: segregation and unequal development. Both of these conditions still persist. This means that South Africa is practically still in apartheid. For anyone to suggest that the country should go back to a colonial system which was exceptionally brutal shows the person’s discontent with the current state of affairs. Under colonial rule, Blacks could explain why there seems to be little improvement in their well-being. With respect to the current conditions in South Africa, the anticolonial struggle by the Black population only led to the attainment of citizenship; it never defeated apartheid. This is why the doctor is suggesting that, if that is the case, it is better for the country to go back to the apartheid era. This official move would at least make people aware of the fact that apartheid still exists.

This chapter has made it clear the post-independence story of Mozambique has been catastrophic. The country has experienced sustained decline to the point where international support is urgently required. Steve’s presence in the country is in line with the altruistic nature of volunteer tourism. The memoir does not feature much of Steve’s
aid work in the country. Perhaps the purpose of the memoir is intended to represent the decline of the country rather than emphasizing the narrator’s contribution in stopping the decline. The intention for this might be to let the privileged (Western) world understand the degree of national degeneration and the need for it to act as global citizens to save the situation. For this reason, the narrative is told in vivid terms. The strength of this memoir is the narrator’s mobility and his attention to details pertaining to the places he visits. The reader gains close access into life in contemporary Mozambique through his mobility. It offers the reader a lens into the state of decay in the country. The narrator’s mobility can be described as transnational. This is in view of the fact that he travels to several countries. It will seem as though he has unlimited spatial access in Africa. Thus, despite the fact that the memoir is based mostly on the narrator’s experience of Mozambique, he also takes readers on an observatory tour of South Africa. Here, it is revealed that apartheid still has a strong hold on the country. Development remains uneven, causing palpable segregation. Steve’s experience of South Africa can be summed up as the betrayal of independence (Zine 2004).
CONCLUSION

This study has sought to present mobility as a tool used by artists to represent contemporary Africa creatively. In the early stages of cinema development, filmmakers were aesthetically inspired by mobility, especially the railway system. Automobile operators are unconscious witnesses to a film experience. This study has attempted to show how mobility continues to inform the creativity of filmmakers and writers. To do this, mobility has been conceptualized as something beyond a physical act, something with an expressive function. In this regard, the concept of political detour became important to the discussions in this dissertation, because it demonstrates how mobility can be used to present an artist’s opinion about a space.

In Chapter 1, political detour applies Knudsen’s assessment of globalization in his documentary *Heart of Gold*. The filmmaker’s perspective on financial globalization can be traced through the mobility of Akufo, the protagonist of the story. Akufo shows the negative effects of globalization on Africa’s mining economy. He is represented as a tour guide, who directs the gaze of the audience through his mobility. He chooses the path of his tour with the purpose of presenting the audience with pictorial evidence of how gold exploration in Ghana by multinational mining companies is leaving the local economy impoverished. Akufo’s mobility across mining fields exposes the negative consequences of large-scale gold mining on the fiscal, environmental, and cultural circumstances of Ghana. It shows that neoliberal economic practice weakens the control that developing countries’ have over their local economies. Governments are compelled to remove any regulatory framework that is considered to be a deterrent to foreign investment. The
analysis of *Heart of Gold* shows that this situation has put developing countries in a state where they are unable to benefit from their natural resources. In addition, they are unable to check harmful practices such as the destruction of the environment because of the fear that mining companies will move their investments elsewhere.

In Chapter 2, the concept of political detour is also applied to Abani’s literary piece, *Song for Night*. Here the writer uses mobility to address situations where African peoples are contributing to the underdevelopment of the continent. This author shows that My Luck’s movement between the river and the road is a form of political detour used to narrate the nature of life in a warzone. The war is, however, used as an allegory to represent other challenges facing the continent of Africa. These include armed conflict, religious intolerance, ethnic hatred, despotic leadership, and corruption. War is represented as causing the collapse of Africa’s infrastructure, including roads and hospitals. This is because the threat to human life results in people abandoning these infrastructures. The lack of maintenance over an extended period of time then causes these facilities to deteriorate. This situation contributes to the underdevelopment of Africa. Regarding religious and ethnic intolerance, Chris Abani shows that ethnicity and religion are superficial identities that should not divide people. It is impossible to determine the religious or ethnic affiliation of a person based on his/her looks. Therefore, it is absurd that people allow themselves to be divided by these identities. The novel relays the message that Africa can recover from its dystopian experience if its people are united by a common interest—which is to find prosperity and freedom. Also, the novel advocates for democratic leadership as a way of overcoming Africa’s challenges. The
current situation where leaders are creating paternalistic systems to perpetuate themselves in power is both dangerous to the security and economic development of the continent.

In Chapter 3, migration is discussed as a symptom of economic and political marginalization. It is presented in *Journey Through Hell* as a form of protest drawing attention to economic marginalization and political disarticulation. The filmmaker uses observational cinema to show the predicaments of Somalis and Ethiopian migrants trying to reach Yemen. In spite of the fact that thousands of these migrants die every year, this has not discouraged others from embarking on this perilous journey. It is argued that one of the reasons for this upsurge in mobility out of Somalia is that the country is a failed state. Over twenty years of civil war has resulted in the collapse of the central government of Somalia. Citizens are thus responsible for their own safety and wellbeing. Some of these citizens, who feel incapable of protecting themselves against violent groups, choose to leave the country. Similarly, the absence of the central authority has resulted in the collapse of the national economy. Somalis therefore consider leaving as the only option available to them if they want to survive economically. But this process is shown to be a perilous experience. Smugglers take advantage of the desperation of these people by overloading them into poorly constructed boats. The migrants also undergo physical abuse once onboard. The migrants endure the experience because they have lost everything at home and see that the only way to restore hope in their life is to leave for Yemen.

In Chapter 4, VanOrden’s memoir *Africa Stranger Than Fiction* is discussed, showing how volunteer tourism confirms the dystopia of African independence. It is
argued that volunteer tourism presents Westerners as saviors who have the responsibility to save Africa from its post-independence problems. The journey of the protagonist in the story to Mozambique is assessed in relation to his exposure of African dystopia and his perceived responsibility to solve some of the continent’s problems. Two things emerge in the protagonist’s tour of Mozambique. First, he shows that everything good in the country is the legacy of their Portuguese colonists. All the good infrastructures and successful businesses are counted as part of the achievements of colonial rule. The second point revealed in Steve’s tour is that after independence, Mozambique has not been able to maintain, let alone add to, the economic achievements of Portugal. The protagonist observes a similar situation in South Africa. He reveals in his visit to South Africa, that the end of the apartheid regime did not result in the desired equitable distribution of resources. The Black population still feels economically marginalized; they constitute the poorest racial group in South Africa. It is likewise revealed that the country practices a discriminatory national development policy which privileges White dominated settlements over Black neighborhoods. This has perpetuated the apartheid system of selective development.

Mobility: Spatial Freedom and Expressive Act

Mobility is discussed in this study as a method of artistic expression which has been used to comment on the post-independence socio-economic dystopia of African countries. Mobility is framed in the context Cresswell’s (2006) theorization which considers it as a form of physical movement with meaning. The artists discussed here are
all able to use mobility as a narrative style in their depiction of Africa. Travel is treated as
a motif in all both the films and literary works analyzed in this research. Characters are
set in motion with the purpose of utilizing the freedom associated with mobility to tell
stories about specific African spaces. The type of freedom being sought is one that grants
spatial accessibility, meaning that the characters are able to go wherever they want in
order to report what they witness.

The protagonist in *Heart of Gold*, takes a tour of the minefield to reveal to the
audience, the negative effect of globalization in the gold mining industry of Ghana. He
relies on his invisible and innocent persona to walk freely within the mining community.
He has the freedom to go to mining reservations and private homes without getting
noticed by other people. Erik Knudsen utilizes this persona to search for visual
documentation to support the point that globalization is contributing to the Africa’s
current socio-economic difficulties. In *Song for Night*, My Luck displays substantial
freedom when it comes to mobility. Though he finds himself in a dangerous war
situation, his knowledge of the landscape is what keeps him mobile. The risk of death
does not impede his role as the walking narrator. Using his mobility, he is able to show
how armed conflicts, religious and ethnic bigotry, and corruption are contributing to the
dystopian experience of Africa. With regards to *Journey Through Hell*, the filmmaker has
greater mobile freedom compared to the migrants. He has the financial resource to pay
the smugglers more in exchange for favored of being allowed to travel and film the
journey of the migrants. With this acquired freedom, the filmmaker is able to observe the
experiences of the migrants. Viewers are presented with images of the voyage that will
cause them to understand migration as a method of protesting the dystopian reality of African nations. Similarly, the protagonist in *Africa: Stranger Than Fiction* relies on his freedom of movement as a volunteer tourist to observe and report on his experience in Mozambique and South Africa. Steve visits these two countries as a tourist which afforded him the freedom to undertake extensive tour of these countries. Readers are invited on these tours to explore the socio-economic conditions of the places visited. The protagonist therefore does not go on a typical tourist expedition which is motivated by the desire to see beautiful scenes; rather, his interest is to observe the failures of African statehoods.

The freedom to move is used in all the artworks in this research to show that the political independence of Africa is yet to result in the expected improvement in the socio-economic wellbeing of citizens. They all use tour-narrators who seem to have unlimited access to a fictional Africa space. Consequently, the narrators are able to tell stories through images more than words. The audience are told and shown images that suggest Africa’s dystopian condition.

The Burden of Mobility

Cresswell (2006) has argued that mobility should be practiced, experienced, and embodied (3). There should be a corporeal dimension to mobility which should be physically performed and experienced. Cresswell’s argument is that mobility goes with a measure of burden or discomfort. The films and literary works analyzed in this study show that mobility as a form of escape is characterized by an exposure to uncomfortable
visual and corporeal experience. In *Heart of Gold*, viewers observe a frustrated protagonist who is trying to understand what he can do with his gold find. Every place he visits reveals a negative aspect of gold-mining. He witnesses degraded environments and poisoned water bodies. Here, the corporeal task of walking through the minefield produces the discomforting experience of seeing his community being destroyed by multinational mining operations.

A similar situation is enacted in *Song for Night*. Readers encounter My Luck, the protagonist, who is recounting his harrowing life experiences. As a child soldier, he assesses his life before and during the war. But he suffers from amnesia which restricts his memory of the war. Walking through the warzone presents him with visual cues that help him to recollect his life story. The uneasy aspect of this tour is that it forces My Luck to confront his dark past. As a child-soldier, he has been forced to commit several crimes. Mobility helps him play his role as the narrator of the story. But it also leads My Luck on a guilt journey—it causes him to recall the crimes he has committed in the war.

In *Journey Through Hell*, the burden of mobility is not simply a discomforting experience, but a potentially tragic one. The migrants are trying to escape political disarticulation and socio-economic marginalization. But this method of escape means that they have to endure economic exploitation, physical torture and the possibility of death. In Bosaso, they have to rent shacks, and buy water and food at inflated prices. Once they board the boat to Yemen, they surrender their freedom to the smugglers who torture their passengers and threaten them with death. All of these experiences constitute what Cresswell considers as the burden of mobility.
VanOrden’s memoir also reveals some challenges to mobility. The entire story is based on what the narrator considers to be an extremely bizarre experience of life in Africa. He is shocked by the level of underdevelopment he witnesses in Mozambique. In South Africa, he is once again amazed by the high crime rate, racial tension, and disparity in development between White and Black settlements. He has to travel to Africa in order to tell the story of the continent. Once in Africa, he becomes overwhelmed by the odd scene and falls sick as a result. His doctor tells him either to leave Africa or to die. Steve’s burden of mobility is in the discomfiting scenes to which he exposes himself. Falling sick is a testament to the unusualness of what he witnesses on his trip to Africa.

Mobility and the Social Realist Representation

The task of artists in post-independent Africa is to represent life on the continent as close to reality as possible. To do this, they have adopted realism as the aesthetic mode that directs their creativity. Social realism describes artworks that advance real social causes. According to Mohammed (2011), “Both stylistically and thematically, films about Africa draw a great deal from social realist narrative techniques. These techniques interrogate people’s lives very closely through depicting images that are similar to day-to-day experiences of the audience, covering a wide range of socioeconomic and political issues in a less-fantasized way” (19).

The analyses carried out in this research suggest that mobility is a suitable style for representing the social realities of Africa. All the artworks attempt to narrate an aspect of African life in a way that is as close to reality as possible. *Heart of Gold* deals with the
practical effect of globalization on African economies. The mobility of the protagonist takes him to places where he can personally observe evidence of these negative effects. 

*Song for Night* also attempts to assess the effects of war on the socio-economic development of Africa. No specific African country is mentioned as the setting for the story, because the issues examined touch on varying developmental challenges facing different nations of the continent. *Journey Through Hell* captures realistic scenes of Somali and Ethiopian migrants leaving for Yemen. The documentary captures details about the life of the migrants from the beginning to the end of their journey. In *Africa Stranger than Fiction*, Steve offers a vivid account of his personal experiences in Mozambique and South Africa. The personal touch to the narrative makes it believable to the reader. All of these works engage with social and economic concerns of Africa.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the limitations of this research is that it does not account for immobility. People have used immobility to protest against conditions they perceive to be hostile. The Occupy Movement, a method of protest inspired by the Arab Spring, is a lasting reminder of the power of immobility. The modus operandi of the Occupy Movement has been to assemble people at a place and remain there until the demands of the protest are addressed. Ordinarily, people protest through public demonstrations. In these cases, they utilize mobility to draw attention to national, international, and institutional problems. What the Occupy Movement has taught the world is that occupation (immobility) can produce the same effect as demonstration (mobility). Further research needs to be
conducted on the formal strategies of representing immobility in both literature and film on Africa.

Also, in this age where terrorism is regarded as a major international concern for nations, mobility has become a contested issue. Stricter border controls and security checks enforced by the West—a place perceived by many as a utopian destination—has restricted the mobility of those who consider themselves to be living in a state of dystopia. It will be worth investigating how artists are assessing this new paradigm of global immobility and how it undermines protest migration. In this regard, films like *Days of Hope* (2014) by Ditte Haarløv Johnsen (2014) and *La pirogue* (2013) by Moussa Touré will offer a good cinematic representation of the issue.
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