Visual Culture, Crises Discourse and the Politics of Representation: Alternative Visions

of Africa in Film and News Media

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Abstract

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<u>Visual Culture, Crises Discourse and the Politics of Representations: Alternative Visions</u>

<u>of Africa in Film and News Media</u>

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This dissertation explores the role of African media in shaping Africa's image through both the analysis of newspapers over the course of the 2014 Ebola crisis and an exploration of African films. This methodology redeploys aspects of Africa's (in)visibility in global politics and discourse on representation in geopolitics. Placing African film and media organizations at the center of analysis in this study is vital, as they add diversity of voices to the conversation about Africa's image in the media.

The dissertation looks at how Africa is framed as perpetually "in crisis." Specifically, the research engages analysis of African film and media depictions under the premise of crises to advance Africa's visual culture and representation. I am interested in exploring how coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak in *The Inquirer,* a major English newspaper in Liberia*,* compares with that in the *New York Times* coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Likewise, I explore how African cinema frames and represents crisis through three films – *Xala* (Ousmane Sembène, 1975)*; Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu, 2009); and *Les Saignantes* (Jean-Pierre Bekolo, 2005).

I argue that African films speak to the possibility of positive anticipated outcomes ignored by western scholars, and, therefore, possess the agency to decolonize minds. For instance, *Pumzi* and *Les Saignantes* offer an outlook on Africa's challenges and

possibilities through newly imagined futures. Precisely, the selected films first address Africa's crisis in relation to the political, economic, and environmental struggle as well as gender discourses and, second, offer a prescription of development and progress. How do African filmmakers and media personnel, through their various creative works, reconstruct Africa's global identity? Finally, I advance that this research gives voice to how Africa frames crisis.

This dissertation interrogates an unbalanced global power structure that has been typically Eurocentric. Taking an opposing position, this project foregrounds Africa's representation of crisis from an African-based perspective. The academic discourse of this dissertation is situated within several disciplines: African Media studies, Cultural Studies, African Film Studies, and Visual and Popular Culture. These disciplines intersect within the ideological debates about Africa's politicized representations, usually from a postcolonial standpoint, to redefine and reconstruct cultural misrepresentations.

The dissertation concludes that though Western media continues to negatively frame Africa as a place of unending crisis, Africa's media, scholars and journalists are taking equal ownership of its crises and reshaping the continent's image in the global scene. It confirms that Africa's media such as the selected films and new media that are analyzed in this study, portray Africa in a way that corrects misconceptions and reshapes the continent's identity for the rest of the world.

Dedication

To

Delight Jessica Agboada and Grace Awuni Azumah

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Acknowledgments

I could not have embraced this huge baobab tree without the support of others. This dissertation, like all human ventures and accomplishments, is truly a collaborative work (I take full responsibility for the errors and flaws in this work).

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My graduate education, which began at the Center for International Studies, was a journey of self-discovery. It was also during this period that my passion was ignited to research and add to the knowledge about Africa. Dr. Ghirmai Negash and Dr. Steve Howard, members of my committee, have been instrumental in challenging my academic, pedagogical, and critical thinking. We have had several conversations in private spaces that continue to shape my research ideas. I am grateful to you, and most importantly, I thank you for your mentorship and friendship.

Also, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Erin Schlumpf, a member of my committee and secondary area supervisor, for her timely interventions, recommendations, and corrections. Dr. Schlumpf has been instrumental in my theoretical and practical

understanding of gender discourse in Film Studies, an area that occupies one of the critical issues discussed in this dissertation. Thank you.

My appreciation also goes to Professors and staff of the School of Interdisciplinary Arts. During my graduate studies, I received vital guidance, administrative and financial support that has made the completion of my graduate studies possible. Thank you for this opportunity. This dissertation is not made up of a few moments of research and writing, but a progressive event that spanned from the very first day I was admitted into the program. I would like to thank Dr. Charles Buchanan for his editorial skills, comments, and feedback during the writing of this dissertation.

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Introduction

This dissertation explores the role of African media organizations in creating knowledge and constructing the image of the continent within the geopolitics of representation. I argue that this research is particularly important as it 'flips the script' – through shifting from the dominant research focus on how Africa is perceived from Western or European perspectives toward the construction of representations from the African perspective. This research engages film analysis and media discourse under a thematic discussion of how crises are framed in Africa and how scholars who are African reconstruct Africa's global identity through their various creative works.

To this end, the present study analyzes Africa's media—African films and newspapers— as 'meaningful actors' (Chabal 28). By changing this global power structure, my project aims to admit African media into the geopolitical debates on identity formation and to develop a contextual and ideological understanding of the discourse on the politics of representations with respect to Africa. The focus is to (re)illuminate Africa's representations that were previously invisible in global politics and discourse. This present study contributes to global debates by adding diverse voices to the conversation about the representation of Africa in the academy (Wahutu 46). Hence, I investigate the relevance of various aspects of crises, including post-independence struggles, neocolonialism, environmental issues, sexuality and women's agency, and economic disparities, using the selected research objects.

The academic discourse of this dissertation is situated within several disciplines: visual culture, African media studies, cultural studies, African film studies, and popular

culture. These disciplines intersect within ideological debates on Africa's politicized

representations in order to redefine and reconstruct cultural misrepresentations, usually

from a postcolonial standpoint. This dissertation bridges several disciplines in its

approach and explores narratives generated within an interdisciplinary field of critical

discourse on identity and image-making. In the global arena, identity-making is one way

of overcoming subjugation and neglect. Thus, this study lays the foundation for critical

discourse on Africa's media exports of the continent's narratives to the West.

Michel Foucault posits that power structures are embedded in the discourse,

which is reflected in language (Foucault 2012). This theory may inform comparative

analysis between the selected African and Western newspapers. Since it is through the

media that Western media outlets continue to frame Africa's image, it is through such

mediums that the role of Africa's media in constructing the identity of the continent can

be adequately assessed. Through analyzing the specific choice of words in these texts,

researchers can determine suitable methods to label, describe and assess meanings.

In this study, I explore the means by which visual culture (in this case, African

films and newspapers) delivers Africa's alternate visions of itself and continues to

reshape the continent's image in the world. The imagery of Africa as a 'dark continent',

which was inherited from colonial experience and anthropological references, continues

to be central to the continent's identity on the world stage. The pictorial representation of

a stereotypical Africa is gloomy, and for centuries it has remained a continent painted

into this one-dimensional image. This historically driven portrait is framed around

particular crises—political instability, economic dungeons, epidemics, and social

decadence. In using visual culture strategies, the filmmakers featured in this research have counteracted the slanted images of Africa, allowing the audience to re-establish new perspectives about the continent in matters of politics, gender, sexuality and ecology.

The study examines the genre of African films with regards to the narrative styles and the artistic productions used in projecting themes of crisis, as well as how these styles are ideologically deployed to reflect an image of Africa that is different from how Western media capture the continent. For instance, one prominent theme in African films is the depiction of Africa's historical past and current political struggles, which is a central focus in the film, *Xala*. Africa's historical past and political struggle continue to be weakened because of the artistic objective of directors to use the medium to revolutionize the political scene (Gabriel 16). Teshome Gabriel puts forward that the function of the film is to "decolonize minds, contribute to the development of radical consciousness, lead to a revolutionary transformation of society and develop new film language with which to accomplish these tasks" (3). This reading is significant because the messages of these films highlight popular narratives that have been used to describe Africa and, at the same time, project a new image of the continent. The agency of African films to decolonize minds speaks to the possibility of positive anticipated positive outcomes which Western scholars usually ignore. For instance, *Pumzi* and *Les Saignantes* present an outlook of Africa's challenges and possibilities through new imaginations. Precisely, these films first address crisis in relation to political struggle and, secondly, offer a prescription for development and progress.

All the identified works were analyzed and framed around two broader theoretical discussions. First, I treated the films and newspapers as 'media,' engaging them from the perspective of their ability to generate discourse on the subject of representation and identity of Africa on the global front. Media discourse, as defined by Donald Matheson in *Media Discourses: Analysing Media Text* is used broadly in this research to refer to the debates, judgments, and information generated by the narratives of the films and newspapers that provide a novel perspective in engaging with Africa and its people (Matheson 2). In addition, the study unearths the visual potency as well as a textual representation of the continent.

By contributing to the current quest to advance African visual culture, this research engages film analysis and media discourse under the theme of crises. Specifically, it examines while also reflecting on African filmmakers and media personnel reconstruct Africa's global identity through their various creative works. I advance the argument that this research gives a voice to how Africa frames crisis. The self-reflexive approach to this study provides room to engage the various identified crises from Africa's perspective.

Second, this dissertation aims to dismantle broader crisis narratives, which for centuries have continued to dictate how others talk about Africa. More precisely, it seeks to repurpose the concept of crises beyond its current utilization by African philosophers and social science scholars in order to analyze and understand their postcolonial condition. To this end, the research explores a reframing of crisis through three films to uncover specific discursive systems used in drawing a difference between Africa and the

rest of the world (Kavwahirehi 101). Kasereka Kavwahirehi, a Professor at the University of Ottawa, argues that the re-utilization of crisis allows for a deeper understanding of current happenings in Africa and also unearths strategies for altering global discourses that have been used to categorize the continent. Kavwahirehi argues:

> Therefore instead of being seen as the signs of irrationality, pathology or abnormality of African societies, tensions, conflicts, factors of mobilization and change, as well as contradictions, can appear as manifestations of a profound crisis which is to be understood not only as a revealing moment but also as the most real essence of the contemporary (modern) society in search for new rationalities and new social and political orders. (102)

Researchers such as Melissa Wall, Emmanuel Onyechika, Olusei Adegbola, Sigunu Wahutu, and other collaborators have made contributions to the discourse on Western media coverage and representations of Africa.[1] These studies are essential in that they uncover underlying Western assumptions that the South is weak and North is powerful. Even though it has been recognized that Western media coverage of Africa is biased, fewer researchers are commissioned to study ways African artists and media entities are counteracting these slanted narratives. Thus, the present research aims to address issues concerning Africa's identity and image-making different from how the

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[1] See Melissa Wall, 'An Analysis of News Magazine Coverage of the Rwanda Crisis in the United States' *Gazette*, 59 (2), 1997; Emmanuel Onyechika, 'Coverage of Africa by the African-American Press: Perceptions of African-American Editor' 2000; Olusei Adegbola et al, 'Everything's Negative about Nigeria: A Study of US Media Reputing Nigeria' 2018; and Sigunu Wahatu, 'In the Case of Africa in General, there is a Tendency to Exaggerate: Representation of Mass Atrocities in Africa' 2017.

West discusses Africa in global political and social engagements. Such an embodied approach to media and visual culture takes us beyond the "study of imaginations regarding representations toward more visceral and material approaches of cultural forms" (Meyer 7).

Africa's Discursive Systems and Narratives

Scholars argue that the West's vision of Africa has been the product of Western imagination rather than that of a serious interest in what happens on the continent (Chabal 1996; Wong 2012; Werbner 1996). I attempt to understand what produces the identity of contemporary Africa as advanced by media personnel and filmmakers. The expectation that postcolonial Africa would progress has not materialized, and it is thought that Africa is facing challenges in dealing with the consequences of this failure. This is because the structures left behind by colonialism and the new formations of neo-colonialism continue to derail efforts of total emancipation. Therefore, African states and their people are in a constant battle of negotiating their identity, which is underpinned by current debates on modernity and development (Chabal 36).

The discussion of Africa revolves around several dominant narrative themes. These themes give rise to specific visual identities and crises that are used to advance a biased description of Africa and its people. Patrick Chabal (1996) identifies four discursive narratives: 1) debates on the acute economic crisis, 2) political instability, 3) re-traditionalization of African societies, and 4) the marginalization of Africa on the international scene (28). Each chapter of this research focuses on one of these discursive narratives establishing a foundation for analyzing the chosen research objects. Through

such an approach, the analysis centers on highlighting the factors that contribute to the identified discursive narratives and identifying the ways they are deployed.

First, Africa's acute economic crisis broadly suggests that its economy is fraught with challenges that prevent it from growing with regards to the benchmarks of development set by the West. An analysis of Africa's history provides an understanding of how the economies of African countries and Africans have been steadily eroded through colonialism and the slave trade. Currently, factors of neocolonialism disguised in global imbalance and global trade and engagements continue to widen the economic gap. Within this narrative, Chabal (1996) points out that other dynamics exist, such as low economic growth versus high population growth; declining exports versus the high rate of imports and failed industrialization projects; high borrowing and foreign debts, and weakened currencies (29). Oversimplifying Africa's economic challenges, as can be witnessed in Western media coverage of Africa, reduces the continent's predicaments to a series of "casuistic or tautological clichés," mostly centered on the innate economic inability of Africans (Chabal 30).

Secondly, representation of political instability tends to portray Africa not just as a continent where meaningless wars are fought, but also as a continent with a lack of leadership and with political corruption within the question of power that has unleashed untold violence on ordinary men and women. This discursive narrative has been used to discuss, for instance, atrocities in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique, Angola, Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Such arguments tend to conclude that all violence in postcolonial Africa is as a result of willful political negligence and a

deliberate agenda (Chabal 31). The arguments made by Chabal (1996) for the causes of

political instability in Africa do not absolve leaders of the actions and inactions that

contribute to violence in the continent. Instead, they speak against the overgeneralization

and single-dimensional narrative used to describe Africa's political structure and events.

I highlight this perception of Africa's political landscape in my analysis of

Sembène's *Xala* and Bekolo's *Les Saignantes.* In my analysis, I attend to ways these

blatantly held assumptions by the West affect the framing of how Africa is handled and

discussed. The intent of this analysis is not to erase the acuteness of Africa's political

fragilities and failures, but to provide a perspective for engaging in political analysis that

is based on both the conceptual clarity and historical knowledge necessary for

understanding the politics within African societies. The goal of this research is to

advance a kind of analysis that represents Africa rather than demeans Africans (Chabal

32).

The second discursive narrative that this research address' is the project

undertaken by the West to "re-traditionalize" Africa. To this end, I analyze the

application and use of this discursive narrative in *Les Saignantes* and *Xala.* The quest to

assimilate Africans can be traced to the periods of the slave trade and colonialism.

Following the independence of most African states, comparisons are usually drawn to

differentiate African societies from the rest of the globe. Re-traditionalization of African

societies unearths ethical and theoretical questions of "authenticity," suggesting that

Africans have the ultimate options to "be like" their former colonial masters or at best

"go back" to "age-old traditions" (Chabal 33). The error with this discursive narrative is

that it suggests a regressive "backward" civilization – a crass and gross simplification of Africa's traditions and mores. The notion of regression rests on the assumption about the linearity of "progress" (Chabal 33). Chabal (1996) argues that two characteristics emerge when "re-traditionalization" of contemporary Africa is discussed. First, Africans are or perceived to be behaving according to norms and values associated with 'traditional' Africa rather than Africa constructed by colonialism. Second, there is a perception that politics in Africa are conducted in ways that are either incomprehensible to the West or appear to be reminiscent of precolonial politics.

Although the question of re-traditionalization is most visible in the discussion of African identity, this is by no means the only domain in which evidence for it is found. For instance, there is also apparent marginalization of Africa on the international scene. Indeed, there is a perception that the continent is irrelevant to global dealings because of its aforementioned problems specifically its deficits in three key areas of international affairs: economics, health and politics. In economic terms, Africa is marginalized with respect to world industrial development and to global commerce, where its contribution to world trade is limited to primary products. As such, there is a limited world market share and high dependency on foreign aid and food imports. Recently, in political terms, the West, French and British, for instance, continue to have a military presence in their former colonies (Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe), whereas America maintains its entrenched interests in countries such as Liberia, Ghana and Ethiopia (Chabal 34). Despite the fact that Africa has become central to the foreign policy of the West, European involvement in times of crisis (like that experienced in Chad, Rwanda,

Burundi, Somalia) received little attention from the industrialized G7 countries. Chabal (1996) conjectured that this was a result of the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War rivalry, particularly in Africa (35). With regard to health, African countries are perceived to have poor health facilities and personnel and are thus unable to survive without the help of foreign assistance in times of crisis. I used this perceived marginalization of Africa on the international scene to analyze *The Inquirer* and *New York Times* coverage of the Ebola pandemic in 2014 and also in the discussion of themes identified in *Pumzi*.

These are matters of perception, specifically Western perception of Africa, but perceptions are impactful and should be discussed. Interrogating how these discursive narratives operate in Africa is important because it helps the researcher avoid overgeneralizing and limiting arguments about Africa.

Methodology

The study uncovers how African media organizations – newspapers and African films – engage in constructing the image of Africa in crisis. It assesses how African media conceptualizes and engages in the discourse of crises across selected African films. By departing from existing research on the image of Africa as portrayed by Western media, the goal of this project was to shift the Western media from the center to the periphery and to replace it with African media organizations.

Newspaper publications were sourced from the LexisNexis database using the keywords 'Ebola' and 'Africa' from August 2014 to December 2014. Articles for the study were selected using a simple random sampling technique. First, headlines, lead

paragraphs and keywords were sampled, then comparative analysis was drawn between *The Inquirer* and the *New York Times* within the broader benchmark of misrepresentations to determine ways African newspapers differ. Nvivo version 12 was used in the coding of the above parameters to allow for credibility and reliability.

This dissertation is positioned within the broader scope of qualitative research as it attempts to provide interpretations, descriptions, and debates within the social phenomenon of identity-making. The foundation of this dissertation rests on Visual Culture and Discourse Analysis while drawing on other means of interrogation such as Self-Reflexivity to examine mainstream African media's efforts in constructing Africa's identity in times of crisis such as the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

Visual Culture

I used Catalina Bogdan's and Nicholas Mirzeoff's scholarly works on visual culture to broaden my engagement with the themes and debates identified in the selected films and newspaper publications. Visual culture was used here because it provided means for highlighting critical moments of cultural significance and provided deeper meanings of the interactions and definitions with regard to politics, class, gender, sexuality, and race (Walker and Chaplin 20).

Images become synonymous and representational with the intended meaning of words used to describe Africa. The analysis reveals the specific communicative agency of images employed by filmmakers when speaking about Africa. I argue that these images are not consumed for their aesthetic beauty and do not function within the boundaries of fine arts only, but also function as semiotic representations of reality. Catalina Bogdan in

The Semiotics of Visual Languages (2002) defines pictorial language as the "phenomenological continuum whose 'atomic' meanings are given through either literary symbols, or, more generally, via poetic symbols codified figuratively within the frame of ideas" (1). Entman as quoted by Wahutu suggests that framing is done by pitching selected aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in communicating text with the goal of promoting a specific problem definition, causal interpretation and moral evaluation (Wahutu 45).

Also, Nicholas Mirzoeff in *Right to Look: A Counter History to Visuality*: *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (2011) and other scholars such as Morra Joanne and Marquard Smith in *Visual Culture* (2006) and John Walker and Sarah Chaplin in *Visual Culture: An Introduction* (1997) advance the argument that today, the visual is everywhere. Beyond interacting with media, either through the traditional media or the internet, our lives are lived under surveillance. These scholars further argue that we are unable to comprehend the complex processes happening around us irrespective of our desire to film, be filmed, or exert our gaze on that which is watched. It becomes clear that the act of seeing facilitates the act of comprehension. In this regard, the narratives that portray an image of Africa are continually shaping the ways the world sees the continent. Thus, visual culture is the visual events in which we gain information, meaning, or pleasure through the medium of visual technology. Visual technology is broadly defined as any machinery or system designed to facilitate looking or be looked upon (Mirzoeff 11).

Visual technology may include but is not limited to pictures, videos, television, oil painting or the internet. Prominence is given to the audience who contemplates what he/she is viewing to decipher between real or unreal, gain information, meaning or pleasure from that interaction. Thus, visual culture becomes a strategy that enables the scholar to interrogate definitions, functions, meaning, and purpose of postmodern everyday life from the perspective of the consumer rather than the producer.

Likewise, for this study, I turn my attention to the producer (Africa's media) because it inherently engages in (re)casting visual representations of the continent. Visual culture is used here to focus more on the significant cultural context through the highlighting of critical moments where the visual is contested, debated, and transformed, providing social interactions and definitions regarding class, gender, sexuality and race (Walker and Chaplin 20). Precisely, visual culture focuses on the visual as a place where meanings are created and contested. One major argument against visual culture both as a field of study and strategy for interrogation is that it is too broad; its branches permeate other disciplines such as media, communication, and cultural studies. However, there are two counter-arguments to this idea. First, visual culture assumes an interdisciplinary approach where a school of thought or field of study becomes part of the means of critique and instruction. Therefore, it embodies the characteristics of interdisciplinary study, which is the ability to create new objects which belong to another.

Simply put, its definition is obtained from the questions it poses and the issues it raises. Secondly, in academic disciplines like those mentioned above, whose means of engagement traverse borders of traditional academic disciplines, visual culture can also

be grasped as a research tactic. Indeed, it is a tactic with nonrestrictive means of interpretive structure with the sole aim of gaining an understanding of models and processes of producing the visual by prioritizing interactions within the African cultural landscape and people's everyday lives beyond the original boundaries outlined by higher education. I apply this approach to the analysis of news texts on the coverage of the 2014 Ebola crisis.

Precisely, visual culture is used to emphasize the visual, including literary productions by African films and newspapers in contesting the image of the continent in geopolitical space. Ultimately, through the lens of visual culture, the dissertation determines the efficacy of the images Africans produced to challenge Western-held notions about the continent and its people.

I acknowledge that the debates on representation and identity operate within more substantial power dynamics that have, among other things, differentiated the global North from the global South. Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, social theorist, and literary critic, in *Discipline and Punish* (2012) advances that control of power is vital to the oppression of other forms of knowledge – local and traditional knowledge (236). Foucault states:

> Our society is one not of spectacle, but surveillance; under
> the surface of images, one invests bodies in-depth, behind
> the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the
> meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of
> communication are the supports of an accumulation and a

centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the

anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the

individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social

order, it is preferable that the individual is carefully

fabricated in it, according to the whole technique of forces

and bodies. (Foucault 217)

These instrumental theoretical contributions to the power of discourse uncover the

power held within knowledge construction and its dissemination. As such, considering

the traditional role of the media to educate, inform and entertain, the media is concerned

with the exchange of carefully crafted narratives about the world. For example, Western

media's dispositions towards Africa as an uncivilized, disease-ridden, poverty-stricken

and war-prone continent, fits within the larger scheme of *othering* cultures that are

outside one's boundaries. By this claim, we understand that the relationship between

Western media and its reportage about Africa is a power play through the control of

knowledge. The ability to label and stereotype aside, showing the differences between

cultures is used to suppress and marginalize alternative forms of knowledge and

discourses about Africa.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis allows for the close reading and decoding of language systems

through the description and assessing shared meaning within a community (Matheson 1).

This project evokes discourse analysis since it is concerned with the representations of

Africa as the global south within the socio-political relationship with the global north.

Discourse analysis is concerned with challenging predominant meanings associated with social engagements to unearth new values and thinking. Discourse analysis provides an interdisciplinary approach – media text analysis, engagement with interviews, visual analysis, film/video analysis— in the analysis of meanings and assessments. In the book, *Media Discourse,* Donald Matheson (2005) argues that discourse analysis "allows us to study media discourse in ways that show the media's connection to other parts of social and cultural life" (2). Therefore, this dissertation primarily focuses on discourse generated by African media around themes of crisis and the ways Africa's identity in geopolitical spaces is constructed. I focus on Africa's media role in knowledge production, culture, and power relations with the global North. Matheson (2005) defines discourse analysis as the exercise that allows us to study "kinds of interactions media texts set up between people and the world and between the powerful and the rest. Moreover, it analyzed how meaning is made differently in different media texts, and therefore what different ways of seeing and thinking tend to be found there" (1).

While there exist different strategies in the analysis of language in discourse analysis, the present research to determine meanings relied on the lexical choice and labels approach to determine meanings. The lexical decision approach is applied by "looking at a range of possible vocabulary items that a reporter could have chosen, to critique the ones particularly used repeatedly in the news" (Matheson 20). Two factors guide this approach: determining choices between words and identifying consistent patterns of used words. According to Matheson, consistent patterns suggest a "preoccupation within the particular discursive context, and which therefore add up to a

representation of the world for culture or for a group which holds status within a culture"

(22). This approach has shown to be effective in building the meaning of a text. Labels,

on the other hand, are the words used to 'sort' people into social categories. Labels are

used to define "how members of the society can understand, and judge any actions done

by that person and allows them to generalize about them" (Matheson 24). Within the

news texts, labels are used to provide specificity of places, social class, and culture,

which gives credence to the meanings of the information provided. To effectively analyze

representations and identity construction as engaged in by African media, labeling

strategies help to uncover the means of categorization employed by journalists and their

respective media organizations. Specifically, the lexical choice is used to analyze

headlines of selected news articles, while labeling is applied to analyze the first and last

paragraphs of the news text.

Self-Reflexivity

As the study focused around an insider perspective on the image of Africa as

projected onto the global scene, self-reflexivity was an essential theoretical foundation,

aiding the inward-looking style of investigation and interrogation of findings. Bugomil,

with other collaborators, defines reflexivity "as the awareness of the researcher's

presence and contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research

process" (362). While reflexivity has been studied from the perspective of the researcher,

I employ it here from the perspective of the media outlets and artists who craft Africa's

identity. Newspaper publications and films selected for this project are engaged from the

perspective of ascertaining 'high-quality awareness' of African psychological,

philosophical, and emotional understandings of how these African thoughts operate (Bugomil et al. 362). When this awareness is achieved, Africa's image in relation to the West can thoroughly be debated.

The media contributes extensively to how the world is perceived by its audience and is therefore capable of manipulating the audience's point of view to suit its agenda. Self-reflexivity theory allows for the creation of a balance and the opportunity to re-theorize questions that revolve around social classes, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, nation and global capital together (Morley and Chen 5). At best, it provides a dynamic explanatory framework to confront such politically charged global debate as representations and identity.

Approaching African film from a self-reflexive standpoint is necessary to contextualize methods of production within the art of filmmaking. Within the African context, film functions as a force for engaging the socio-political issues from a cultural standpoint. This emphasis is necessary if we consider the task of cinema as an art form within the African context as a reflection of the quotidian lives of its people. Manthia Diawara argues, "[African] film draws on local culture and experience" in its quest to "raise the consciousness of the characters at the end" (119). Diawara implies that African film narratives employ the cultural and customary guiding beliefs of the people, including myths and legends, to facilitate societal change in addition to entertaining and addressing matters of concern to the public.

Intersectionality: Film and Newspapers

Francis Nyamnjoh, a Professor of Anthropology at University Cape Town, advances that Africa's media facilitate popular empowerment as a societal project (1). The powerlessness associated with Africa is a result of the marginalization of Africa's colonial history and current socio-political realities. As such, the discussion of representation is generally considered from the perspective held by the 'powerful' against the 'weak,' making it easier to sidestep Africa in ongoing debates in geopolitical spaces (Nyamnjoh 3).

Therefore, this study approaches newspaper publications and African films as mediascapes that focus on the primary function of the media as an institution that "facilitates popular empowerment as a societal project for social change" (Nyamnjoh 1). Nyamnjoh advances that Africa's media is a crucial stakeholder in global politics and has the same effects as the media in the West, informing global knowledge. This research aims at turning our scholarly attention to engage with Africa's media as an enterprise of identity-making.

Similarly, in this dissertation, I engaged the discourses on the instructive role of cinema in the postcolonial and popular cultural contexts. I explored its efficacy in the act of framing crises and efforts to either counter or advance entrenched narratives about Africa. To this end, I attend to the aesthetic, political, and ideological implications of the framing of Africa in the selected films as 'fictionalized reality,' mediating the global perception of Africa and providing a robust counter-discourse to official narratives about Africa as a place filled with drought, epidemic, and war (Gugler 1). Josef Gugler uses

fictionalized reality to refer to films that do not only "tell of African struggles for liberation" but also "offer critical perspectives on post-colonial development and the everyday living condition of the African" (4). Thus, the study advances that images of Africa, as shown in films, are capable of framing public knowledge and perception about a phenomenon.

Prior Studies

This study concerns African media organizations' contributions to representations of the continent. It examines the ways African media organizations (specifically, newspaper coverage, including news photographs and African films) discuss and engage with conversations on the crises and the framing of representations in geopolitics. The study, interdisciplinary at the core, also provides a review of disciplines that intersect with this project, such as visual culture, popular culture, and media studies. While the study of how Western media continues to show Africa in a negative light is not new, fewer researches have been commissioned to interrogate how African media frames the continent to the world.

It appears that Africa is still recovering from reductive narratives and images about its society and cultures, despite several attempts in academia and socio-political discourse to correct these misgivings (Ayisi and Brylla 126). Two factors influence these reductive narratives and 'single stories' about Africa: (1) Africa's history of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism with respect to the West and (2) the ideological visions, stereotypical images and inhumane portrayal of Africa established earlier by European explorers (Ayisi and Brylla 126). Conspicuously, African literary critics especially have

engaged in the exercise of 'writing back' to reconstruct the damaged image of Africa. For example, in examining the portrayal of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Nigerian author and poet Chinua Achebe, stated that Africa is seen as "the Otherworld, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (783). Likewise, Ngugi wa Thiong'o postulates that "the continent provided the terrain and its people— particularly the fact of their blackness—provided Europe with a contrasting view of its self-image as the civilized" (240). In contrast, the current visual representation of the continent is an indication of a "deep-rooted ideology than mere imperial dominance" (Ayisi and Brylla 127). These single stories have formed the memory and consciousness held about the continent, thus entrenching these popular and dominant narratives of cultural representations.

African Image as Captured by Western Media

The image of Africa—as an impoverished, disease-prone, weak, and corrupt place—has become the mainstay of Western media coverage of the continent (Nittle, par. 1). For example, in June 2011, the *New York Times* published photographs of a naked woman dying during childbirth. That same year, CNN covered a story of two Kenyan boys who were forced to do menial jobs of delivering goats to a slaughterhouse for less than a penny per goat, bolstering the sense of high mortality rate and economic misery within the continent. Karen Rothmyer recorded that between May and September 2010, most widely read US newspapers and magazine coverage of Africa focused on poverty without providing the pertinent details to back such conclusions (19).

The portrayal of *otherness* in Western media centers on coverage of crisis and 'hopelessness.' The long-standing theme of famine and catastrophe associated with the continent during and after the colonial era continue to be the beat of Western media. Nadra Kareem Nittle engaged the argument of Ethan Zuckerman, co-founder of Global Voices, an international community of citizen bloggers, that the held image of Africa among the West is a result of the notion of the continent as needing help (Nittle, par. 5).

Likewise, in an analysis of news magazine coverage of Rwanda crisis, Melissa Wall, a journalism professor at California State University, points out that the negative news coverage of Africa is influenced by the organizational values and demands of Western media (261). Reporters and editors spearhead these values and demands. Through the act of deciding what gets published, media personnel also engage in the construction of representations. Wall traces the start of negative reportage of Africa to the nationalist movements in the 1950s, during which the contention for freedom began to malign the efforts of Africans as custodians of their quotidian lives. To the West, the violent means which African sought their independence and sovereignty which could not have been attained by other means, was a confirmation of the longstanding label of Africans as savages (263). The purpose was to paint Africa with a one-dimensional descriptive brush, resulting in dehumanizing its leaders' quest for freedom and sovereignty as primitive and uncivilized.

In a similar study, Oluseyi Adegbola and other collaborators examined United States television coverage of Nigeria. The study discovered that though there was a low frequency of negative reportage about Nigeria at the time, two variables were

responsible. First, there was a decrease in adverse events occurring in Nigeria between 2005 and 2006, when the study was conducted. Secondly, the evolving US policy towards Nigeria with regards to military and trade likely influenced the neutral position of US media towards the African country (58). Irrespective of the selected medium's positive outlook towards Nigeria, the study concluded that "while the valence of reporting may have improved, reports about Nigeria that are exclusively positive remain marginal at best" (59). This is indicative of a correlational exchange between media reportage of events in Africa and Western political action. Gorm Olsen et al. refer to this as the 'CNN-effect' – "a term which implies the media can influence the decisions of political leaders, including the foreign policy agenda of Western governments" (110). Gorm Olsen and other collaborators in their research considered the influencing factors which determined the level of humanitarian assistance provided for countries in crisis. They discovered that the media was a crucial player in drawing decision-makers and donor agencies' attention to places in crisis, especially in Africa. Thus, the media provides crucial preconditions and the basis for a policy response to a humanitarian crisis.

Studying African Media's Role in Global Politics of Representation

While there exist many studies of the ways Western media frames Africa, there is a less comprehensive study of African media organizations' contributions to constructing the image of the continent. African media is usually studied and examined within its national boundaries and sovereignties. The power held by African media organizations has not been studied within geopolitical discourse because it is considered to be in its developmental stages, thus having little potency to influence global discourse. The goal

of this project is to change this assumption by removing these imaginary boundaries and exploring the media field as partakers in the geopolitical debates of identity and representations.

This dissertation falls within the ardent interest of African scholars whose passion has been to retell Africa's story. The act of retelling Africa's story has been prominent in literary circles with forerunners like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others, whose aim has been to shift the dynamics and interests in academia and to place Africa at the center and the global North at the periphery. Shifting African media to the center and Western media to the periphery is important because the center in global politics is a place of power (Wahutu 46). Siguru Wahutu's work on *Representation of Africa in African Media* (2018) discusses the ways four African media organizations (Kenya, Egypt, Rwanda, and South Africa) and journalists framed the conflict in Darfur (60). Wahutu observed that in order to avoid deploying the same narratives used by Western media to describe Africa, it is essential to contextualize the framing of conflicts in African media. Analyzing the presence of ethnic and conflict framing in the African media coverage of the Darfur conflict, Wahutu argues:

> Ethnic and conflict framing should not necessarily be understood as bearing similar connotations to its use by Western media organizations when the latter frame conflict in Africa. Used by African media fields, the ethnic frame does not have the causal significance in explaining the conflict in Africa, rather it is used largely to domesticate the news and to demarcate which actors

should be understood as Other and whom audiences share an affinity

with. (61)

Similarly, Pollock and others, Melissa Wall, and Emmanuel Onyedike advance that it is vital to engage African media fields as proponents of 'meaningful acts' because such engagement enriches the understanding of African representations in geopolitics. The act of swapping dominant occupants of the 'center' and 'periphery' is considered as the second wind of Africa's struggles to obtain a permanent seat in geopolitics. Hunter-Gault (2006) states:

>The new wind blowing across the continent – a
>second wind if you will, holds the promise of an
>African Renaissance, and with it, a change in the
>way the continent is portrayed. Indeed, those in
>rebellion against the distortions of the past are
>generating "new news" on the continent, and many
>of them are African journalists. (107)

In his dissertation, Kingsley Antwi-Boasiako looked at how journalists conducted their duties during the Ebola outbreak. The study used a comparative approach by interviewing West African journalists from Sierra Leone and Ghana who reported on the 2014 Ebola outbreak about their experiences and challenges faced during the crisis (Antwi-Boasiako 8). The purpose was to identify the differences and similarities in the approaches used by West African journalists in both affected and non-affected countries as they responded to health emergency outbreaks like the 2014 Ebola pandemic. Antwi-

Boasiako uncovered that, despite the several challenges facing African journalists, such as high risk of infections, human rights abuse, and government censorship, their primary goal was to inform and educate the public in hopes of halting the spread of the virus. Antwi-Boasiako did not address the effectiveness of these reports and the ways they fit within the discourse of representation and identity formation. Building on this iconic research, this dissertation will specifically consider and analyze news reports with regard to Africa's identity on the global front.

The media in Africa and the West are entirely different in news offerings as the politics differ in both countries. Conventionally, media in Africa has challenges emerging from state-owned media, which controls what information is disseminated and thus the likelihood that the audience hears news that favors the paymaster. As more of these state enterprises become privately owned, more attention is placed on social issues, creating a platform for public debate and discussion.

Similarly, the same parading representations of Africa, as witnessed in the traditional Western media, are equally present in cinema. These media outputs collectively produce reductive popular and dominant constructed images about Africa and society. As such, what is known about Africa is visual.

African Film and Emerging Debates: Filming Africa by Africans

In *African Film, Re-imagining a Continent (2004),* Josef Gugler, a professor of sociology and Director of the Center of Contemporary African Studies at the University of Connecticut, examined how several African films highlighted Africa in a 'good' light. This dissertation adopts Gugler's approach in two ways. First, it aims to establish the

image of African people in a deliberate attempt to provide a multiplicity of narratives and discourse on Africa's identity in African film and to reconstruct its image in the universe of images (Gugler 4). Second, it aims to obtain a deep understanding of the ways by which Africa constructs its image in the global scene by expanding the scope of the study to include the interaction of filmic narratives with other media such as newspaper publications. Gugler's work offers a model that, when followed, will lead to a new conceptualization of African identity and image in the global politics of identity. Gugler comprehensively analyzed seventeen films that touched on the social, political, and cultural issues within the continent. I acknowledge that it is difficult to avoid an analysis of African films without engaging with themes of colonialism, corruption, inequality, and the condition of present governance. As such, the model presented in Gugler's work provides a possibility of studying Africa's image-making in the film scene.

Gugler's work focuses less on the theoretical and more on in-depth engagement with the historical events and experiences that have shaped the African filmic scene. Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema, Politics, and Culture* (1992) provides a bridge by detailing the historical underpinning leading to the setup, productions and 'unseen' powers that control the African film industry. Likewise, obtaining a clearer understanding of the typologies of African cinema is important for this study as it sets the basis for analysis. Diawara argues that it is through the understanding of the typologies of African cinema that discourses are opened for the reader to, "engage in a dialogue about the diversity of movements in African cinema" (166). The future of African cinema can be considered from its history, which now forms the foundations of Africa's contested

image in the global scene. For instance, if we compare Anglophone and Francophone African film industries, it is clear that they both suffered from the same challenges of lacking/poor infrastructures and funding and were mostly used as propaganda tools for the advancement of new government machinery after colonial rule (Diawara 120). These challenges, however, undermine the contributions of African films towards political struggles, cultural rehabilitation movements, and social integrations. Diawara's work is useful as it allows for a rethinking of current or modern setups of the African film industry in the era of social media, fast communication systems and easy access to equipment and tools used by other filmmakers in the West. The artist can then be regarded as a leader of revolutions, as characterized by post-colonial films, in the new era constructing the image of Africa to the West. This study accepts Diawara's conclusion and attempts to offer another insight into how African film frames crisis and considers other aspects of filmic discourse, such as the inclusion of gender. It recognizes the contribution of female filmmakers, women protagonists and the challenges female artists face.

Next, two theoretical questions unsettle the African filmic scene: What aesthetic appeal guides the production of African films? What guides the textual content of African films? This dissertation intends to provide answers to these questions and, at the same time, advance Diawara's work through in-depth research and comprehension. Teshome Gabriel in *Third Cinema in the Third World: the Aesthetics of Liberation* (1982)*,* though he acknowledges that the art of cinematic expressions is not native to Africa, also

examines the cultural means of expression in the Third World film industry.[2] Teshome

defines Third Cinema as "a cinema of decolonization and for liberation," adding that the

Third Cinema produces and serves two distinct functions – opposing imperialism and

class oppression of all forms and building up an ideological and revolutionary agenda (1-

2). Considering that Africa is still waging war against colonization and neo-colonization,

the study of Third Cinema is still relevant today. It occupies an important space in any

study of African film. Third Cinema seeks to "decolonize minds, contribute to radical

consciousness, lead to a revolutionary transformation of society and develop new film

language with which to accomplish these tasks" (3). This research is concerned with the

newly developed language used by filmmakers to communicate new narratives and

identities of the continent. Though Third Cinema is hardly new. In fact, it is usually a

term used to refer to films from the 1960s and 70s. Teshome's contribution offers

relevant guidance to unpack the ideological, stylistic, theoretical, and cultural codes with

which film from Africa can be analyzed and engaged.

Popular Culture

Turning our attention to the popular culture within the domain of African media, I

rely on the extensive study and publications by John Fiske – *Understanding Popular*

Culture (1989), *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Culture* (1994),

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[2] Indeed, the use of Third World today is problematic. The term Third World has been historically used to refer to states in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It has also been used to refer to underdeveloped or developing nations – nations which are constructed around socialist systems of governance rather than capitalist. It usually evokes the discourse between the North/South. Teshome uses the term not to allude to a Western model of "social democracy" but rather "it's indigenous and places more emphasis on culture as a tool for ideological as well as economic independence" (121). Third World is used here devoid of its political and social associations. That discussion is carried across in its relations to Third Cinema.

Television Culture (1987) and *Reading Television* (2003). Fiske engages with both popular and culture by prioritizing the inputs of viewers. Fiske focuses on the people as the mainstay of popular culture, which is a diversion from the academic agenda to establish and operate 'power-bloc.' Engaging African media and film via popular culture are relevant in the media analysis of constructed images by African media during the 2014 Ebola crisis. Another reason for engaging African media via popular culture is that image-making is in close relation with the making of culture. Fiske posits that "culture is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experiences, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved. Within the production and circulation lies pleasure" (xxx). The present study is primarily concerned with the models that ease the process of advancing collective desire in identity-making. Meanings associated with a person or place are enabled through the decoding of cultural symbolism — our understanding of the power held by culture aids in determining and ascribing labels to a people.

This study considers the 2014 Ebola outbreak and its subsequent coverage among the African media landscape as a 'Media Event' (Fiske 2). A Media Event encompasses various media content, either 'real' or 'mediated representation.' A Media Event is then taken to be "not a mere representation of what has happened, but it is its reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not has preceded it" (2). This is not entirely different from Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality and simulacrum. The idea of hyperreality suggests what is real or representational is a single concept that shares the difference in divergent views. As such, the African image in geopolitical

spaces is representational of the daily lives of its people. Likewise, Fiske furthers

Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and simulacrum through discourse analysis.

Discourse, Fiske (1994) defines as:

> language in social use, language accented with its history of
>
> domination, subordination, and resistance; language marked
>
> by the social conditions of its use and its users; it is
>
> politicized, the power-bearing language employed to extend
>
> or defend the interests of its discursive community. (3)

Fisk (1989) provides a theoretical model that allows us first to consider dominant

concepts and to deconstruct and construct "meanings and pleasures and to deploy

resources appropriate from popular entertainment" (xv). It provides a deeper

understanding of ways culture works and models through which these understandings can

be deployed for engagement of a culture, its people and geographies. Fiske (1987) refers

to culture-making as "a social process: all meanings of self, of social relations, all the

discourses and texts that play such important cultural roles can circulate only in relation

to the social system" (xxv). Likewise, the "popular" in culture refers to the resources and

language of apparatuses such as television, records, clothes, and video games, which

carry the interests and desires of the economically, ideologically and dominant

hegemonic portrait of Africa in the Global North. However, Fiske (1989) does not attend

to the political potential, action, and rhetoric of popular culture, however, he does not

dismiss the fact that such possibility will present a fascinating and almost complete study

to the field of popular culture. While using models set out in Fiske's (1989, 1994, 1987,

and 2003), I turn to the political potential of culture and meaning-making as a catalyst in the dialogue between the global south and north.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I analyze *Xala,* which was produced by the world acclaimed, prolific Senegalese filmmaker, Ousmane Sembène in 1975. Sembène, a film director and writer, has produced numerous works, including *Black Girl* (1966), *Mandabi* (1968), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977) and *Moolaade* (2004). Most of his films are known to reflect historical and political themes concerning Africa. *Xala* was chosen because it provides a basis for engaging the dominant identity of Africa as propagated by Westerners. *Xala* was selected to provide a historical lens for the political crisis of Africa in the post-independence era, which has been captured within filmic narratives. From a historical standpoint, the film serves the purpose of providing a foundation for the arguments underlying this research that emerge from the post-colonial /post-independence era. The West continues to negatively frame Africa as a place with failed governments, massive corruption, and disregard for the rule of law. *Xala* is analyzed to unearth the political climate and to illuminate how Sembène discusses Africa's political crisis. Thematically, the chapter will consider broader issues on sexuality, gender, grassroots mobilization, and social class as it pertains to state-building.

Chapter 2 analyzes Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005). The film is recognized for its critical contribution to the current challenges facing Africa's government machinery within political crisis discourse. The Cameroonian filmmaker uses futurist-science fiction for *Les Saignantes* to tell the story of a failed, corrupt

government. Bekolo used sex workers, who are considered the 'destitute' in many African societies, as the agents by which to punish corrupt government officials and bring forth a new kind of hope. The goal of this chapter is to engage current political happenings and discourse on gender and sexuality. The analysis sheds more light on how the African artist is rethinking post-colonialism in the twenty-first century. Such thought is worth interrogating because, instead of pointing fingers to the West as the orchestrator of Africa's woes, it also provides a stronger foundation upon which to engage, discuss and portray the African.

The focus of Chapter 3 deals with the environmental crisis, primarily in the futuristic production of Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009). *Pumzi* not only captures Africa's imaginations in a utopian sense but rather engages how these imaginations could be weaponized in addressing Africa's socio-political crisis. *Pumzi* begins with a teletype caption that places the film spatially in East Africa and temporally thirty-five years after World War III—The Water War. Water, an essential commodity of life, is rationed in an advanced scientific enclave, which is later revealed as the only place in the region that sustains life. While this film comments on present challenges and politics around water and the environment at large, it is layered with several narratives—gender, climate change, and technological development.

Chapter 4 undertakes an analytical approach to the discussion of the sampled news publications during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Specifically, it examines through content analysis how *The Inquirer*, a newspaper from one of the countries that were particularly affected by the Ebola health crisis, covered the outbreak. The outcome of

these analyses was compared to a similar analysis of how the *New York Times* covered

the epidemic. This chapter contributes to the overall objective of this research to

participate in ongoing debates on Africa's identity around the theme of a health crisis.

Also, this chapter highlights how relevant coverage of crisis from various media sources

compares to Western media depiction of the continent.

In conclusion, I provide a discussion on the analysis conducted in the previous

chapters. This is done by engaging several theories that underpin this research—crisis

theory, film studies, popular culture, and visual culture. The idea of 'flipping the script' is

moving away from the dominant research. It provides an alternative outlook on how the

West has perceived Africa. At the same time, this research engages African scholars and

journalists' contribution to reconstructing Africa's global identity through their creative

works.

Chapter 1: Africa's Political Impotence and the Discussion of Hygiaesthetic, Disability and 'Dirty Dogs' in *Xala*

This chapter examines depictions of Africa's political crisis and conversations about disability and gender in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* (1974). The research offers a tripartite analysis of the film. First, I describe the way the film establishes the political crisis of Senegal and Africa at large with an emphasis on the nature of neocolonialism and the allegorical representation of *impotence,* the curse. This aspect reflects on the aspirations following Senegal's independence as well as its failures. It also considers whether the values inherited from African mores of leadership – *Africanity* – is indeed a viable political ideology that can withstand neocolonialism. Also, I engage in the discussion of the film's technique of tackling the underlying message of the political crisis in Senegal. The second part addresses the film's engagement with the aesthetics of disability by noting ways in which the film's narrative style engages with several perspectives on disability in Africa with its connection to politics and governance in the continent. Thirdly, I discuss the film's visually rich cinematic techniques and ideological urgency in unpacking issues of femininity and masculinity. I argue that the film considers women-centered agency through the establishment of a multiplicity of gendered identity and relationships.

 I engage the film as an artistic assessment of the pitfalls of Africa's independence aspirations, the nature of neocolonialism, and boundaries on gender and sexuality, which represent contemporary political realities of Senegal and Africa as a whole. Ousmane Sembène's cinematic journey seeks to capture Africa's realities, and, at the same time, to build consciousness. Sembène, in an interview with Harold Weaver (1980), explains that

African filmmakers must produce "series of films oriented in the same way" as Western cinema to "succeed in modifying the powers that be and [to] develop the consciousness of the people" (27). Following this clarification, I read *Xala* as a critique of Africa's political crisis, which has successfully diagnosed and procured antidotes for the slanted images about Africa.

Xala (1974) features El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a successful businessman who marries to a third wife (N'Gone) as a result of his growing stature and "duty" to his Muslim faith. His dreams and happiness are short-lived when an inexplicable impotence makes it impossible for him to consummate his marriage. The day after this calamity, he goes to work under a cloud of confusion and shame. El Hadji is further angered by a blind beggar who sits and chants ancient songs outside his office. Several attempts to evict the blind beggar including forced removal and harassment by the police seems to fail. Later in the film, we get to know that the beggar and El Hadji are connected by blood and bonded by the occurrence of the 'curse'. Their relations fell on the rocks because El Hadji used his political connections to take a land that belongs to his brother. In return, the blind man cast a spell on El Hadji for the injustice. The only way to reverse the curse is for El Hadji to subject himself to the gathering of 'beggars' to spit and humiliate him. The act of spitting on a person in most African cultures is considered shameful and de-humanizing.

Sembène one of the early Soviet-trained African filmmakers, launched into his career into film making functioning in two ways – writing fiction and directing films. As an author, Sembène directs the films he writes, which gives him autonomy over the

production of his works. This unique attribute of Sembène in the cinematic world enables him to circumvent the tyranny of capitalism. Nonetheless, auteurship does not provide the filmmaker a pass out of capitalist means of production. Despite the ownership enjoyed by the auteur, individuals or entities providing funds to cover the production of the film can also determine the content of the production. Xala was funded by the New Yorker Film an independent film distribution company that was founded in 1965 with the goal of importing films that are not available on the United States market.

Sembène's passion as a filmmaker is not to make 'a beautiful history' but rather to delve into undiscovered African/Senegalese cultural heritage and allow the people to own their history. Samba Gadjigo (1995) opines that Sembène's works do not engage in a theorization of Blackness, which is the crux of the Negritude movement, where proponents (academics and politicians) engage in debates of vision and version of Africa using borrowed traditions such as European-based languages (38). As such, all his films, including *Xala,* function in three instructive ways: (1) as a counter-visual which questions popular notions to contradict prejudice of popular and official memory, (2) to subvert the source of memory by calling for a plurality of historical interpretations, and (3) to stand against other discourses regularly deployed in political, legal, ritualistic and religious practices. As Gadjigo puts it, "For Sembène, historical films should be neither mere entertainment nor nostalgia for reaching the past as something that cannot be reopened and changed. Rather, it looks at the history to shape the future" (45).

It is essential to note that *Xala* is not the first film from Africa that deals with the political failure of African states nor is it Sembène's first film on the topic. Note the

poster of this 1966 film *La Noire de* (*The Black Girl)* on the wall of El Hadji's oldest

son's room near the end of the film. Following the independence of African countries in

the 1960s, African scholars, including filmmakers, were preoccupied with reclaiming

African stories by limiting assumptions in the West and confronting the failures of

African states through comments on leadership and governance by the African elite. It

was at this time that films commenting on neocolonialism such as Kwaw Ansah's

Heritage Africa (1989), Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest,* and Moussa Sene Absa's

Tableau Ferraille (1997) began to run commentary on these matters. Likewise, it is

easier to consider *Xala's* narrative and pictorial style as a visualization about the failure

of newly formed independent African states and also a commentary on issues of

corruption, ill-fated governance, dwindling economies, and social decadence in Senegal.

Xala functions in this study as a re-visualization of multiple identities held about

Africa(ns). By re-visualization, *Xala* confronts the current political realities of African

countries by providing a new reading necessary for engaging the dilemma facing the

continent. Further, while most post-colonial films are in inward-looking, *Xala* includes

bold statements by bringing to bear foreign influence on the political structures in Africa.

The filmic text equally engages in, for instance, matters of disability in anticipation of

leading a conversation that involves all members of the community. Sembène's choice to

use non-professional actors in the film equally suggests that the target audience is both

the lower class and middle class of the society. In this case, grassroots and disabled

persons are not used as props but instead, they occupy the central theme of the film –

echoing the theme of inclusivity.

Overall, I argue that Ousmane Sembène's film *Xala* (1975) theorizes and problematizes the *curse* as a powerful visual re-telling of Africa's political crisis. The curse functions as a disease and visual representation of the African cultural mores which suggests 'inclusiveness' by highlighting the 'incompleteness' of the male character. This chapter contributes to the general framework of this dissertation by analyzing how the filmmaker employs sexual impotence, aesthetics of disability, and sexuality to reveal the overall plot of the film's re-visualization of Africa. In this manner, I turn to the discussion of the concept of sexual impotence, and its allegorical allusion to political impotence as rendered in the film.

Africa's Political Crisis: A Curse and Political Impotence

As stated earlier, Africa's image is discussed in the West under the larger discursive system of underdevelopment. This system is one "through which African worlds have been established as realities of knowledge which become the African order of knowledge" (Raditlhalo 172). African scholars and writers, through their various occupations, continue to engage with this discursive system in order to re-theorize the political-economic realities of their countries and challenge the attitudes held about the African state, chiefly through the use of postcolonial theory. The goal is to achieve what Chinua Achebe refers to as a 'multiplicity of truths' to reach several viewpoints. Sam Raditlhalo (2005) utilizes Achebe's idea in the development of "heteroglossia of dialogic engagement" (171). Raditlhalo (2005) explains heteroglossia as "a dialogic process through which any claim to monolithic truth – as exemplified by politicians and their sycophants in one social institution – is shown up by contrasting it with another point of

view in which no 'truth' is unproblematic" (172). For instance, African writers and

filmmakers through their occupation bring to the discursive platform notions of new-

political ideas and institutions, injustice, corruption, opportunities, and the domination of

the rich and educated few over the poor majority. Through these occurrences, several

ideas about African political thought and philosophy are propagated.

Within the discursive system of underdevelopment is a class and power system,

which culminates in a discourse used in talking about Africa's. Africa's deficiencies in

political expediency and instability are attributed to acts of undemocratic rulership,

corruption, inexperienced leaders, poor leadership, injustice and nepotism (Szeftel 2000;

Hanchey 2016; Raditlhalo 2005; Chabal 1996 & Boeck 1996). Inasmuch as *Xala* echoes

assumptions about the African political scene, it is also a statement of present

happenings, diagnosing the current issue as a *curse* manifesting the form of political

impotence of the nation-states. It is important to keep in mind that the persistent

visualization of Africa in the West has been sustained through historical

knowledge/events and, quite recently, through forms of neocolonization.

Three specific factors – corruption, poor leadership, and grassroots neglect –

which cover the visualization of Africa's political scene are equally carried as leitmotifs

in *Xala.* I interpret these themes as the curse and political importance of African states.

The issue of corruption has been approached as solely an African problem promulgated

by its leaders. Morris Szeftal (2000) provides several viewpoints as a result of his studies

of this narrative of corruption. Szeftzal (2000) highlights that the narrative of corruption,

though a reality, has been used to create a system where African political leaders depend

on the West for political power. The sole purpose of this dependence, however, only

benefits the West, whose sole aim is to accumulate wealth and global leverage.

Szeftel (2000) notes, "Africa's development crisis has intensified dependence on

the political domain even more and has increased conflict, as claimants fight over a

diminishing pool of resources. Far from arresting the upward spiral of corruption,

liberation and governance measures imposed by the donors have encouraged the

development of new forms of corruption" (288). Pak Wong (2012), in agreement with

Szeftel's assertion, points out that corruption as a neo-colonial construct. He states:

> At the peripheries of the global capitalistic economy, the post-
>
> colonial African state has been a collaborative predatory instrument
>
> for metropolitan capitalists and the African ruling elite minority to
>
> siphon off the continent's resources to Europe for European
>
> development while leaving Africans and their economies poor and
>
> underdeveloped. (67)

In a nutshell, while both Szeftel (2000) and Wong (2012) do not trivialize

the damage caused by corruption, their approaches allow for a more holistic

contemplation of the issues at hand.

In *Xala,* Sembène exposes the political system by focusing on corruption. The

images of the abrupt takeover of the Chamber of Commerce by Africans as shown in the

film represent the political takeover by the people just as it happened during the 1960s

when most African states fought for independence. In addition, the ejection of an

assortment of political symbols associated with the colonial order from the Chamber, as

seen in the first scene of the film, takes on its full political significance. After this scene, the new leaders retreat into the Chamber, and they are met by the French Advisor, who then present briefcases full of money to the new leaders. This scene speaks of the newly established form of dependency on colonial masters represented by their Advisors. Corruption functions as the operation principle, which creates and intensifies the system of dependency. This system requires African leaders to continually rely on Western donors for help and support, hence further enriching and entrenching Western hegemony. "Corruption provides a means of transferring public resources to the new middle-class and bourgeois in the post-colonial order" (Szeftel 287). Sembène through these scenes chronicles the start of neocolonialism as well as the beginning of corruption. More so, *Xala* problematizes corruption by engaging it as a label that describes the African political scene as an act perpetrated by the West.

Therefore, *Xala* provides a critique of foreign relations of domination, dependency, control, manipulation, skepticism, and exploitation, which has characterized post-independent African states. The film tracks down the historical-structural pattern of post-colonial African underdevelopment demonstrated through corruption and the relationship between Africa as the periphery and the West as the center of the capitalist system (Wong 70). The film achieves this in two specific ways: (1) by positioning the French Advisor at the center of domestic politics and as the connection for post-colonial African leaders' foreign relations, who acts as an intermediary between African leaders and the West, and (2) the future of African states consider that the film discusses alternate

policy option for grassroots participation in politics as a way of building a robust electoral democracy based on accountability (Wong 74).

In addition, the multifaceted nature of corruption attracts debates on Western aid. Corruption establishes and further widens the gap between the global South and North. As a result of the system of dependency derived from the narrative of corruption allows the West to occupy the position and image as wealthy and powerful. Western countries, therefore, assume the responsibility of providing aid to African countries to aid in their developmental agenda (Hanchey 2016 & Chabal 1996). Western aid becomes a more prominent way of securing funds to tackle Africa's numerous problems and also fuels corruption as resources are directed elsewhere. Western hegemony over Africa as wealthy, powerful, and developed is thereby deepened. Jenna Heanchey (2016) opines in her study of humanitarian aid from (non) governmental organizations "reinforce Western assumptions about Africa and entrench imperialistic power relations by portraying African agency in Western-centric ways" (12).

Through aid, the image of the West is positioned as an agent with resources and good-will. In contrast, African states are projected as victims, thereby erasing the agency of Africa in the process. Heanchey (2016) defines agency as "a collective attribute rather than individual" (13). Patrick Chabal (1996), on the other hand, outlines that aid causes more problems than it intends to solve. Chabal (1996) argues that there are three distinct ways to assess the damages caused by aid— "projects are defined in the terms that are congenial to the donor, not to those for whom the projects are intended; that those African officials who press for such project aid do so because they know that this is the

language they must currently use to extract resources from the West, and those resources will be used primarily by those who claim them rather than by those in whose name they are claimed" (45). Though the effects of aid are not explicitly defined or spoken about in *Xala,* we can identify some trends of events that establish acts of corruption. For example, El Hajj's constant request for funds from the Prime Minister of the Chamber to cure his *curse,* an issue that has no bearing on the state matters. I saw the handing of the briefcases of money at the beginning as the beginning of this cycle. The colonizer (in the form of the advisor) passes along some of the spoils of colonialism via these briefcases of cash. This is money that was robbed from the people of Senegal, to begin with. The briefcase becomes a symbol of political power (remember how El Hadji has to give his back at the end and it's handed on to a new man?). So, the idea that this briefcase of cash can simply be used by the individual/colonizer (just as El Hadji uses his money to pay for a third wife) and not for the good of the people, is a legacy of colonialism. And, right, El Hadji asking for government funds to cure his curse is an extension of this. The government that works by robbing the people is impotent (just to extend the metaphor a bit further).

Sembène does not exonerate the African elite but instead institutes two forms of arguments. First, that though corruption in the continent flourished as a result of the greed of the new political order, it started with the West. Second, corruption must be tackled from its roots by charging the West with crimes of venality. The briefcases the French Advisor present to the members of the Chamber of Commerce in the film have multiple symbolisms concerning global discourses and politics. In the African political scene, it is

a symbol of authority – mostly used as a fashionable accessory by politicians and technocrats. It is employed here as a means of cementing the new position of the African elite. As stated earlier, it is also a symbol of corruption. Its contents are shrouded from the public eye and only appear in moments of illegal exchanges.

Foreign debt and aid –the vicious cycle of 'borrowing to meet financial obligations of GDPs, repaying with high interest and borrowing' within the political and economic discursive systems continue to cripple African political progress. Aside from this, nation-states have to deal with droughts and floods (resulting in famine and starvation), war (producing refugees), ethnic rivalries/religious intolerance (producing genocide, refugees, terrorism), and economic hardship (resulting in low living standards and migration). As such, all these happenings in African states produce knowledge about the continent as a place remitting poverty, chaos, and unimaginable suffering (Raditlhalo 171).

In the academic and operational sense, 'poverty' is seldom discussed as a disease. Poverty is seldom used within the underdevelopment matrix beyond socio-economic boundaries. A careful analysis of the allegorical use of *Xala* reveals that the tentacles of poverty spread even wider. El Hadji's frustration with his *Xala* is heightened by the fact that he used all his resources to seek a cure hence plummeting his resources and bringing his business to a near collapse. His request for further assistance from the Prime Minister of the Chamber of Commerce is rejected. Consequently, *Xala* suggests that the denouncement of colonization never meant that the formerly colonized nation would acquire the necessary potency to make a bid for a role in the world economy, which is

considered as the fruits of liberation (Raditlhalo 170). The impotence means that dominance of the former colonial powers in both "advising" as depicted by the presence of the Frenchman in the film, will continue to grow unrelenting.

In relation to the theme of the curse and political impotence as identified in the film, I argue that Sembène problematizes the issue of corruption and expands the threshold on the matter. The idea of the *curse* is global, which is considered a problem for both the West and Africa. However, political impotence is only used as a critique against African leadership, which, out of greed, fails to prevent further avenues of siphoning resources out of the continent. Next, I examine the debates surrounding African political thoughts as expressed through notions of *Africanity.*

Africanity

The conversation on corruption usually centers around issues of leadership. It is for this reason that leadership depictions in the film must be studied within their contemporary context. Some scholars (Hanchey 2016, Wong 2012 & Werbner 1996) argue that Western influence in Africa endures primarily because of shared economic interest and the assumption that African leaders lack experience and diplomacy in governing their people. Western governments presumed that the act of handing over power to the African states was benevolent by intension while legitimizing new ways of maintaining influence, control, and access to the people and resources of the continent (Werbner 1996).

Democracy was instituted as the system of governance – disguised in providing the people with the power of rulership yet giving the West control and influence under

the pretense of a free market. Chabal (1996) points out that "the West demands a democracy in which it can recognize itself: party plurality, competition, regular multiparty elections and parliamentary politics" (46). It must be noted that such an argument does not suggest that democracy or its process is meaningless. However, it interrogates the agenda as advanced by the West "regardless of whether the circumstances of individual countries are propositions to the creation or strengthening of political accountability by way of the Western recipe of multiparty elections" (47).

Sembène's deployment of the *curse* offers an intrinsic view about African governance which bears semblance to French nationalist political philosophy. Such leadership in which there is no adherence to indigenous cultural thought is bound to fail. Sembène advance that one of the challenges that hinder the development of a tailor-made political system is that the process for independence, as viewed in *Xala,* is satirized, performed, and theatrically staged. On the stage, both sides of the spectrum bear witness. On the one side, the French act as though they had transferred power to the people while holding on to the control of the state and on the other hand, African elite falling into the grand scheme of imperialism provide the scripts for the performance of freedom which is perpetuated by the casting of a spell on the people.

Xala's first sequence shows the flamboyant and theatrical ejection of French representatives, including their icons (two busts of Marianne, the female symbol of the French Republic, army boots and hats). Sembène employs low-angle shots during the festive display to capture the frantic efforts of the political elites busily ejecting the French and their symbolic political items. Characteristically, the filming technique works

to showcase and establish the crucial significance of the unfolding events. It uses the architectural design of the Chamber of Commerce to establish a physical and hierarchical distance between the African elite and the new leaders of Senegal who parade in traditional attire at the top of the front step, as if on a stage, which is in sharp contrast to jubilant masses who remains on the street. This hierarchical distance created by governmental systems can never be closed.

Sembène uses this scene as a metaphor to mimic the stage on which the African elite perform to the admiration of the people, who are oblivious to what is happening in the building, cheer them on and support them. This conclusion is easily drawn because these scenes are soon followed by the return of the French Advisor to a meeting –this time, the African elite dressed like the French and seated in their seats— and offers the new leaders briefcases full of money. Sembène, though, subscribes to the notion that the road to freedom has not been easy as he reminds the audience that independence with all its pageantry is merely a pretense. Such deductions suggest that colonization has taken on a newer dimension. France still controls the economy and political machinery behind-the-scenes, alluding to the fact that colonization metamorphosed into postcolonial Senegal. The political fiction is further corroborated by the fanfare which accompanies the celebration of independence as the narrative is unraveled.

Richard Werbner (1996) states, "worse still, many African countries appear to be States in name only. Their sovereignty is virtually a political fiction; their control over economic flows across their boundaries, effectively minimal; their lapses from public security into political violence their retreat in practice from populist promises of the early

nationalist period after independence, often externally forced; their impoverishing withdrawal from public welfare institutions, internationally sanctioned" (6). His analysis of the trends of neocolonialism in Africa points out that political independence in Africa did not result in the attainment of freedom, instead, it resulted in a change of national status while foreign powers still mediate affairs. Most provocatively, he argues that Western Metropolitan powers granted independence as a way of dominating the world through capitalism (Werbner 5).

The African leaders planned to get rid of everything with semblance to the colonizer – the very act of taking our destiny in our own hands. Thus, in the film, the group headed by the Prime Minister begins to remove all objects linked to the colonizer. They remove the bust, and boots but the semblance of the French flag—a blue cloth hanging on the wall and a red cloth covering a wardrobe—stays. This single icon appears to point us back to the kind of independence that was attained. As stated earlier, Sembène is convinced that it is merely a pretense. The colonizer remains in the shadows of government buildings and corporations, still determining the fate of the African. It is a showcase of themselves, the new political order, a confirmation that "the sons of the people are now leading the people."

More to the point, leadership operates within the broader topic of political ideology. Africanity, the African thought of political expediency, is founded upon nationalism and socialism. Nationalism bears a promise, offering the African leaders who are now at the helm of affairs the opportunity to recraft history and agency in socio-economic, political, cultural and spiritual fields (Raditlhalo 169). The characteristics of

Africanity can be linked to that of socialism and democracy. As provided in the film, the

Prime Minister in *Xala* defines it as *sons of the people leading the people on the people's*

behalf. He goes further:

> We choose socialism,
>
> The only true socialism.
>
> African socialism.
>
> Socialism on man's level.
>
> Our independence is complete

In the 1960s, African socialism gained popularity as a political ideology that

promised the ability to secure Africa's resources, place governance in the hands of the

people and ensure the equitable distribution of resources among all citizens regardless of

class and social standing. What is African socialism? The answer to this important

question lies in the speeches delivered by the Prime Minister in *Xala*. These speeches set

the tone for a deliberation into the hopes and expectations of the African elites in their

quest for freedom and liberty. In addition, a common filmic style in the form of narration,

which Sembène uses to question the African political-philosophical foundations. He also

makes a case for the effectiveness of this political system and the ways it intends to

operate within African society. In any case, as the camera captures the Prime Minister in

close up shots during his speeches, it can be said that they are directed at the audiences

(made up of both those at home and abroad). The primary audience for Sembène is a

hybrid one – Africans and primarily Western scholars. Sembène is engaging them in the

various narratives used to describe Africa, challenging such discourses, and creating new identities. In *Xala,* the Prime Minister says:

> Mr. Minister, Deputies, and Honorable colleagues
>
> Our revolutionary action is not in vain. Our presence
>
> in the chamber of commerce is sanctioned by our
>
> chosen guide, father of the nation.
>
> We must work together. Our enemies haven't given
>
> up. To seal the memorable date, we are invited to the
>
> wedding of our honorable colleague, El Hadji Abdou
>
> Kader Baye, who takes his third wife today.
>
> Modernity must not make us to lose our Africanity.
>
> All respond: Too right…. Long live Africanity.

The intersection of politics, the aspirations of the new African leaders, and the domestic sphere, along with customs and tradition, are introduced here as the council is informed of El Hadji's marriage to a third wife. The cheering of 'long live Africanity' in response to the President's statement, "modernity must not make us lose our Africanity," unearths a critical question, "what constitutes Africanity?"

This assumption is particularly problematic in that it presupposes that African culture and tradition must visually be archaic, baseless, and static to fit within Western predefined parameters. Invariably, Sembène is not only mocking the African elite, whose disposition is to avoid and erase all elements of Westernization but also the Westerner who engages in the expedition of finding an 'authentic Africa.' For instance, I argue that

Sembène suggests that the practice of polygamy is one that ought to be left behind.

Rama, El Hadji's eldest daughter, who refuses to speak French (and insists on speaking

Wolof) and who says she would never share her husband with another man, seems to be

the voice of the future. Or, even El Hadji's secretary, who is married (but only to one

man). Even El Hadji's second wife (who leaves El Hadji, taking her children with her)

seems to be rejecting polygamy. And, the film suggests that it is wrong to use polygamy

as an excuse to use the people's money to have more for yourself. It's almost portrayed

as a kind of gluttony.

     The idea of authenticity is used to address two major challenges facing Africa and

its people. First, the lack of political response of Africa's new leaders to address key

issues of concerns for nation-building. Secondly, the idea that African culture has to be

trapped in past histories to be relevant. The act of going back and holding on to certain

customs and values without questioning its relevance in the name of Africanity belittles

the ingenuity of Africa and its people. Why do we have to remain in the past to be

'authentically' African? The answer partly lies in fact – and in the material evidence of

the film—that the essence of freedom and liberty is to consciously project difference in

all spaces and institutions. This way of interpretation fuels Western notions of Africa as a

place of poverty, which lacks innovation and bedeviled with crises and wars. Sembène

posits here that such slanted machinery, employed by the West in matters of identity,

representation, politics and governance, contribute to the widely held misconceptions

about Africa. These challenges, though not only the prerogative of African leaders, are

among the discursive systems that define Africa's realities. Political instability is a

primary discursive system.

The image of Africa, as observed by the West, as this dissertation argues, is

discussed around specific crises: governance, health, economic and social (Armes 1975,

Gugler 2003 & Barlet 2000). The political crisis, which holds that Africa is unable to

govern itself, continues to form the image of the continent. More so, several historical

events in the eighteenth century have contributed to the endorsement of these held images

– the Berlin conference, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and resource exploitation

(Barlet 5). The thematic and narrative content of *Xala* (1975) comments on the failures of

African leaders to attain the aspirations and dreams that powered the quest for

independence. A careful study of the visual and filmic text explains a duality of

objectives in the revisualization of Africa's political crisis. First, to reveal the

stereotypical assumption of Africa's political space and second to assert a reconfiguration

of African political thought to foster a new way of thinking and self-image.

Africa's history of slavery and colonialism started because of these held notions,

and the advent of neocolonialism continues to persist, partly as a result of repeated and

reinforced images of Western leaders coming to the aid of Africa. Josef Gugler (2003)

points out that the "White superman in Africa and the white woman he saves" are

epitomized in this regard (2). Likewise, Olivier Barlet states, "those that came to film us

never showed [that] the people here are human beings. They came to show us to their

audience as though we were animals" (5). For instance, the infamous Berlin Conference

of 1884-1885, which led to the partition of Africa, exposed the true motives of the

Europeans in the "Scramble for Africa" and the non-presence of African representation was an attestation of the inability of the Africans to govern themselves. Therefore, the idea and implementation of Africanity was meant to cure the 'dis-abled' nature of governance in African states. As such the concept of Africanity intersects with the discourse on disability. I examined how *Xala* is creatively employed to discuss issues of disability in relation to neocolonial, political crisis.

Aesthetics of Disability

Mainstream representation positions the African body as less ideal, different from bodies that matter. Similarly, *Xala* adopts the concept of disability to represent the political crisis in Africa – the allegorical representation of sexual impotence of the middle-class politician. Within global politics, the politics of indifference has been advanced through disability. For instance, racial differences are underpinned by the fact that a person's skin color is considered to be superior and holds more privileges over the other. Likewise, most treatment of disability by African literary and film scholars or works about Africa has been in connection to the failure of the social, economic and political structures within the state. These images create a sense of alienation and erasure for differently-abled bodies.

In *Xala,* we encounter multiple narratives around the subject of hygiene, which is a deliberate attempt by the African leaders to maintain and imitate the models of the former colonial state. They believe they must rid the city of 'human trash,' similar to the curing of the impaired sexuality of the lead male character in *Xala*. The politics of hygiene is interwoven with the economic and political imagery of the ideal systems of

power, in this case, the way the former colonial state emulates the idea of development as espoused by the West. This is achieved through presenting an image of a clean city typified by the absence of the disabled person on the street, a vibrant working class, and a healthy economic and political system—one that is not *cursed*. The achievement of this state is meant to cater to the potential of French tourists, who desire to visit Senegal and witness the semblance of 'development.' As such, Senegal must embrace the ideals of hygiaesthetics, through the aestheticization of public spaces and public bodies, by showcasing itself to outsiders as an able, ordered, contained and healthy urban body politic – one that is likened to its former colonial state (Dam 212).

In response to these modes of inequality and misrepresentation, postcolonial literature and other creative works strive to show alternate visions about Africa to the world. However, due to the long history of discursive and material identities of Africa, the use of disability metaphorically continues to obey modes of installation advanced by the West. Ato Quayson (2007), in *Aesthetic Nervousness,* refers to this as the Aesthetics of Nervous Conditions (10). The study of disability and its framework including ways it fits in the wider discipline of power and identity has received little attention. Ato Quayson is one of the foremost scholars to use the framework of disability studies to analyze and critique global and postcolonial literature.

In the examination of aesthetic nervousness, Quayson (2007) explains that a "subliminal fear and moral panic" arises when non-disabled and the disabled encounter" (14). It evokes a radical deliberation about health and wholeness. Quayson (2007) defines aesthetic nervousness thus: "when dominant protocols of representation within the

literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (15). The interactions that take place between non-disabled and disabled bodies are referred to as aesthetic nervousness since these encounters generate meanings created about disabled bodies that signify systems of representation. Quayson (2007) identifies nine taxonomies within which aesthetic nervousness occurs. They are disability as null set (empty vessel) or moral test, ability as the interface with others, disability as an evocation of disjuncture between thematic and narrative vectors, disability as evil, disability as an epiphany, disability as a signifier or ritual insight, disability as inarticulable tragic insight, disability as a hermeneutical impasse, and disability as normality (52). These nine forms of aesthetic nervousness allow Quayson to analyze works of literature by examining ways disablement is discussed in various social, economic and political contexts.

While Quayson tackles the use of aesthetics of disability in works of literature, other scholars, such as Mitchell & Synder (2016), and Lipenga (2016), have expanded the scope of the framework. These scholars argue that the application of disability to other fields, such as film studies, allows for the expansion of disability studies. The field currently "by and large focuses on the work of white individuals and is itself largely produced by a corps of white scholars and archivists" (Lipenga 217). It must be noted that the application of aesthetic nervousness to film analysis is limited, and thus offer great potential to study disablement by noting the various ways disabilities manifests within certain cultures and societies. According to Manthia Diawara, one of Africa's leading film scholar avers that the semiotic function of the film allows African filmmakers to recreate, rewrite and redistribute the continent's history. Lipenga (2016)

argues by adding that disability as a tool in films, for example, allows filmmakers and spectators alike to critique neo-colonialist African leadership (216). Likewise, Mitchell and Snyder confirm that "disability films employ experimental narratives techniques to stimulate interior subjectivities that offer access to disabled people's way's [of] experiencing the world directly" (25). The images that disability films tend to ask spectators to question where a shrewdly or regulated form of institutionalized approach is warranted to protect disabled persons.

Chivers and Markotić (2010), in *The Problem Body,* discusses the framing of the disabled body in film. Their consideration includes a vast number of impairments and medical conditions, especially prosthetic limbs, phantom limbs, blindness, developmental disability, terminal illness and mobility impairments (225). Although the concepts expressed by both Quayson and Chivers and Markotic*,* use different means for their analysis, both studies intersect conceptually at the quest of treating persons of disability the same way abled bodies are treated. According to Anne-Marie Callus (2018), "what emerges from these various discussions is the point that having an impaired mind or body is not considered to fall within the normal range of human experiences but is deemed to be abnormal and therefore the binary opposite of normal" (226).

The use of disabled actors in the film, *Xala,* prompts aesthetics nervousness among viewers. I argue that Sembène's intentional use of non-actors with disability achieves two important goals. First, it presents an opportunity to study attitudes towards disability in various African cultural realities. Second, Sembène's uses his occupation of filmmaking challenges prevalent misconceptions and stereotypes about disability. By

challenging predominant misconception, Lipenga (2016) advances that we can mount an argument against global scholarship on disability in Africa, which cannot be engaged with the same understanding held about disability in the West and other European countries. He argues, for example, that Western scholars engage disability from the perspective of individual experience. In most African societies, disability is an embedded concept whose unpacking requires engagement with other forms of knowledge such as nature, social values, religion, and cosmos. As such in the African context disability is not an individual experience but communal.

Recent scholarship suggests that more research ought to be commissioned to the study of disability in African films (Lipenga 2016 & Dam 2016). Quayson's impressive work and interrogation of the use or non-use of the disabled body invites post-colonial scholars, authors, and filmmakers to question cultural and foreign-held images of disabled bodies. Such invitation led to the idea of *hygiaesthetic* or *aesthetics of hygiene,* as a way of also looking at the issues of disability in interrogating African films. Dam defined hygiaesthetics as "an ontology that privileges the hygienically and aesthetically orderly subject/site" (209). The term falls in the broader discipline of Disability Studies, which recent postcolonial scholarship has widened to include 'bodies that matter' versus 'unclean bodies.'

Therefore, the means of operation and application of disability discourse on a wider scale affect our reading of African films. Dam (2016) first used the term hygiaesthetics to analyze Ousmane Sembène's works and how the filmmaker re-theorizes disability in relation to all spheres of African society. However, his analysis does not

capture how Sembène universalizes disability as a national issue that requires the attention of all spectators. Scholars devoted to the study of representation and identity agree that retheorizing in terms of the application of the hygiaesthetics or bodies of representation could aid in leveling the fields of inequalities (Quayson 2007; Dam 2016; & Radithalo 2005). Therefore, hygiaesthetics needs to be explored within this new context.

Hygiaesthetics is a new field of inquiry, developed to study ways ideas of hygiene are aesthetically used to appeal to the public and how it has been employed to advance modes of inequality. Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* offers a new viewing of disability as a way to counteract dominant narratives about the postcolonial African state. Those who govern most African states headed by the middle-class bourgeoisie are very concerned with getting rid of disabled and sick people off the streets and corners in the city. Hygiaesthetics or politics of hygiene then can be inferred as a model inherited from the colonial system of governance.

Sembène re-visualizes the bodies of differently-abled persons and their role in governance by indicating the importance of their participation in nation-making. I advance that the representation of disabled persons in the film both possesses figurative and realistic attributes that promote the plot of the film. First, it brings to the fore bodies which are barely considered in 'abled-nationalism'—the act of building a nation with able-bodied persons. Second, it uses the powerful force of these groups of people (grassroots) to undo misrepresentations about African identity and its position in geopolitics. All these navigations fall under the umbrella of hygiaesthetics. For instance,

when El Hadjji calls the Prime Minister and requests for the disabled persons whom he refers to as "human trash" to be removed. Persons with disabilities within the interpretation of this scene represent the debris of nationalist projects, which dictates that the city must be cleaned. Moreover, their presence is suggested to be bad for politics and tourism because these beggars are living embodiments of dependence, non-productivity and visible bodily difference (Lipenga 215).

Interestingly, there is another critique Sembène injects here, namely, that the urgency of striving for an able nation is flawed on the very basis of the fact that disability is inherent in every citizen or that the abled are in fact more disabled because they are morally bankrupt. For instance, El Hadji's experience of *Xala* though not visible can be regarded as another form of disability. Thus, Sembène transfers disability to the able-bodied politician and supporter through the curse of impotence. Callus (2018) states, "it is a minority which those of us who do not have a disability can easily become a part of as a result of injury or ill-health" (227). The transfer of disability brings to the fore Quayson's idea of 'dialectical interplay.' Dialectical interplay means the "encounter between the preconceptions about disability that the reader brings with them to the text and the reminder presented by disabled characters that disability is, after all, an integral part of the human condition" (Quayson 21).

Sembène employs this aesthetic to reframe Africa's visibility in geopolitics. Sembène uses differently abled persons in opposition to how they have been used, critiqued, and storied in narratives about Africa by Africans or the West. Disability in postcolonial literature has usually been employed as a signpost to showcase the failures

of African governments and society. These groups of people and the matter of disability are often less discussed within film studies (Dam 2016). However, *Xala* utilizes this non-visibility of the disabled "as a powerful visual-narrative to dominant discourses of the postcolonial nation" and various facets of politics. The use of this visual narrative unearths the fact that Sembène is conscientious that disability is universal, and everyone 'lacks' in one ability or another. It humanizes individuals with different abilities as bodies that matter and advocates for their involvement and participation in the national discourse. One of the long-standing narratives about the African body is that it is deformed, at least when compared to "bodies that matter." The creation of the image of the African with a defective body as metaphors has rendered them unseen and unheard by critics and viewers (Dam 208). *Xala* escapes aesthetic nervousness by tackling the issue directly and representing these "deformed bodies" as they are, giving them a voice, and placing them in the view of the audience. By doing so, they occupy the view of the audience and become seen and well-thought-out while a multistoried analysis is provided.

Sembène engages with beggars and lepers in a newly imagined way—not as destitute, needy, and helpless, but as kingmakers with an agency to affect the governing of the state. For instance, Sembène's decision to use non-professional actors to portray disabled persons puts his subjects into view and makes a statement that 'dis-abled bodies' matter too. Radithalo (2005) advances that African scholars engage beggars and the destitute within two archetypes: first engaging with beggars in a mystical, romantic way and second, as an index of the betrayal of the ideals propounded by nationalism (Africanity) (169). Sembène uses this notion to argue that the beggars (grassroots) in

Xala, who are regarded as irrelevant to the political and economic movement of the country, actively hold political power and religious backing to make and unmake a political leader.

Re-Storying the African Reality

The thematic and the filmic style of *Xala* discussed here unveil the various ways Sembène frames and engages with the identity of the African. *Xala*'s narrative style falls within specific literary productions such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) or Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Americanna* (2013) and her seminal talk *Dangers of a Single Story* (2009)*.* These productions draw our attention to misconceptions held by the West about Africa. These novels are considered in form, performing an essential function as Writing Back. In the filmic sense, it can, therefore, be advanced that Sembène engages in *Filming Back*. The term *Filming Back,* in Prabhu's (2014) contemplation, is the refusal to conform to the normative visual representation of Africans and the will to push a re-imagined means of representation. *Xala,* beyond its artistic attributes, is considered as the torchbearer by shaping the form of African film by visualizing the realities of the continent. It is a significant contribution which documents the histories of Africa from the viewpoint of Senegal, and a considerable critique of the neo-political structures that further saw the decadence of governance in many African states. The film, in this chapter, is considered as a research site and artistic examination of the dichotomy of power relations between Africa, neo-colonial institutions, and the citizenry (who is oblivious to the new dispensation are deceived and exploited). *Xala* is prophetic – it cuts through the unfilmed aspects of contemporary happenings in Africa. Likewise, the filmic

voice of *Xala* speaks to the failed governance and corrupt leaders of Africa and also to the West. The film weighs in on the debate that Africa as a continent is ungovernable, whose people are savages unwilling to be governed, and whose leaders are nothing but representatives of their former masters.

Xala is an examination and contribution to the African philosophical thoughts of identity, abilities, and strategies, within the context of globalization and specifically with regards to Senegal's relations with France. Sembène seizes this understanding of African history and employs it as a film technique, which pitches Western iconographies of Africa against parallel ideas of realities to tell a different story. The semiotic function of the film acts as a tool for "reinforcing public 'taught' memory and hence its false historical consciousness" (Gadjigo 35). Samba Gadjigo explains that globalization and perhaps this era of social media activities of dismantling borders and facilitating speed in sharing of images and electronic media, the camera can be considered as a significant project of immortalizing the history of Africa. Most instructively, Sembène ignites the flame of consciousness and the realization of the fact that historical films play an important role in the construction and representation of African identities.

"Dirty Dogs," Feminism and Sexuality in *Xala*

Another issue addressed in the motif of *Xala* is the representation of women and tradition. Through *Xala,* Sembène reframes narratives about women and tradition against the fragile nature of masculinity. Besides the broader theme of corruption and new forms of imperialism feasting on the minds, resources, and freedom of Africa as shown in *Xala,* Sembène also attends to the important debate on Africa's masculinity and femininity

through the lenses of education, religion, modernity and capitalism. Aaron Mushengyezi (2004) argues that Sembène upends the binary by projecting most of the female characters as the 'masculine power' against El Hadji who is depicted as a representation of the African male character (49). Such reading is particularly vital because it helps bring out the ideological makeup of the female character. Sembène has continued to state his conviction about the fact that African women are liberated and free than most women in the world. In an interview with Perry and Partick McGilligan (1973), Sembène advances that African women are an intricate part of African history, economic and social progress:

> Women have played a very important part of our history. They have been guardians of our traditions and culture even when certain aspects of the men were alienated during the colonial period. The little that we do know of our history we owe to our women, our grandmothers. African women are more liberated than elsewhere. In certain African countries, it is the women who control the market economy. There are villages where all authority rests with the women. And whether African men like it or not, they can't do anything without the women's consent, whether it be marriage, divorce, or baptism. (41)

Women-centered issues, though they continue to receive attention in recent scholarship, are less discussed in films and other creative works. "Colonial writing on Africa not only ignored women subjects," as Mushengyezi (2004) points out, "but even when the writing considered women, it pushed them to the margins as third-class citizens in the imperial commonwealth" (48). As such, women's issues exist in moments of 'half-told stories' and silence. In the contemporary world, the agenda of patriarchy is further entrenched as women continue to be captured as marginalized in the post-colonial hierarchy of power and patriarchy in their societies.

Sembène argues through the filmic text that women are the central system of all facets of a working society. Historical accounts – Westerners as well as Africans—have been unable to capture all the complexities and power of the African feminine by always reducing the female desire to needing a man, childbirth, and dominance in the domestic space. *Xala* engages women by pressuring the spectator to follow the actions of the various female characters in the film and to drawing meaning from their positionality (Prabhu 84). For instance, Rama, the daughter of El Hadj and a partaker in the victories against the mishap of the new government, is seen as resilient and bearing hope against a corrupt, male-dominated, postcolonial, urban society.

The character of Rama not only challenges the status quo but also confronts the ill-fated masculinity, by stating: "all men are dirty dogs" in response to El Hadji's quest to marry a third wife. Mushengyezi (2004) in analyzing the role of Rama advances that, she embodies Sembène's ideological understanding of leadership in Africa which ascribes that governance must constitute ultimately in character and deed a desire to

improve the living standards of the population and not a selected few. This element is in sharp contrast to Africa's current governance system (50). Rama represents the revolutionary persona that Sembène hopes to achieve with the film, *Xala*. Rama is considered genuinely liberated and courageous to stand against oppression as she did several times challenging the logic in her father's actions. Through the same revolutionary technique, Rama bridges the gap between education, tradition and modernity. Despite her education, Rama holds on to the tradition and religion of her clan. For instance, she wears an afro, speaks in Wolof to her father despite being spoken to in French, and refuses to drink the imported water, *Evian,* when her father offers it. Her refusal to drink the Evian water can be interpreted as her rejection of capitalist influence in the country's economic affairs through foreign business.

Also, Sembène revisualizes the image of African women as having agency and voice. Rama's ability to call men who engage in polygamy as "dirty dogs" in the presence of El Hadji, her father, demonstrates her pride and resolve without fear. Similarly, Rama tells her mother to divorce her father and further indicates, "I won't share my husband with another man because men are bastards," and "a polygamous man is a liar." The usual assumption is that women are forced to conform with traditions and cultures and in the process, they lose their voices since such customs and traditions only cater to the needs of the man (Gugler 131). However, Sembène indicates that such precedent is changing as a result of education and globalization.

In addition, Sembène uses the characters Adja (El Hadji's first wife) and N'Gone's (El Hadji's third wife's mother) to drum home the different positionalities of African

women and their interactions with traditions and religious norms. Adja accepts El Hadji's

quest for a third wife as a duty by her Islamic beliefs and place in society. N'Gone's mother

partakes by upholding tradition through the counseling she provides her daughter on her

wedding day. On the night after the wedding, N'Gone's states:

> Remember that men and women are not equal. Man is the
>
> master. You must always be available. Don't run away.
>
> Don't raise your voice. Do what he says. Be submissive.

The above passage establishes the long-held notion that the desire of the woman

must be to be married and remain subservient to the man. Furthermore, a surface reading

of these characters will reveal that these women's adherence to traditions leaves them at

the behest of patriarchal and phallic power (Mushenhgyezi 51). I argue that the imagery

of this has a duality of purpose—to establish the standing of women in the African

society and, most importantly, to drum home the fact that women play a crucial role as

custodians of history. Within these roles, women are able to assert themselves. Adja can

speak to El Hadji as an equal and affirm her position as the first wife, who must be

respected. In the film, she commands this respect when El Hadji commands her to step

out of the car to go and greet Oumi, El Hadji's second wife. Adja refuses and reminds El

Hadji that the custom demands that the younger wife must be the one to greet the eldest

wife. Through Adja, Sembène showcases that, contrary to held beliefs that the traditional

woman is oppressed, the African woman enjoys rights, pleasures, desires and freedom.

Sembène in an interview with Murphy (2001) states:

But the African woman has more freedom than the European

woman! You ask these questions Europeans think that the

African woman is oppressed. In Africa women and men have

separate powers in strictly defined areas. (230)

Although the claim that African women are freer than European women are wild

and unsubstantiated, Sembène's argument puts forward that, nonetheless, African women

exercise some level of control and freedom within their cultural contexts. These cultural

contexts may not necessarily be in line with Eurocentric elements of freedom and power.

Perhaps, it can even be considered as a provocative claim to challenge scholars to engage

in a more ubiquitous discussion on power, sovereignty, and rights of African women

within specific cultural and traditional contexts. Similarly, it suggests that the assertion

that African women are subjugated based on Eurocentric metrics of gender discourse is

somewhat misleading.

Sembène advances through the plot of the film that the liberation of the African

state is possible through a careful blend of education and tradition and the avoidance of

neo-colonial tendencies. Oumi, the second wife, is portrayed as assertive and

representation of African women who are driven by materialism and desire for money.

Among El Hadji's wives, Oumi is the only one that can relate to him on an equal level

and speak to him without any fear of repercussion. She can tax El Hadji for money for

her upkeep. In one instance, while El Hadji contemplates who amongst his wives had cast

a spell on him, Oumi wakes him from slumber:

Hey, stop dreaming. Come down to earth. You are too old to

tame a young chick … this is none of my business. Tonight,

is my turn …. You can't fool me … Your marriage is not

working. Tonight, at my place.

Mushengyezi (2004) argues that this is deployed as a bad hybrid of modernity and tradition (50). Mushengyezi further argues that her portrayal of being materialistic conforms with capitalist consumer culture, which the post-colonial state has inherited through neo-colonial interactions. Whereas this is a plausible deduction, I argue that Sembène equally complicates this idea against the fact that 'materialism' has been used as a form of control over the desires of the woman. In most African societies, a 'good' woman is one who does not bequest herself with material gains and, as such, is considered modest. The 'bad' woman, on the other hand, is that woman who will go to any extent, including sex work, to get what she desires. Sembène upholds that the African woman is equally allowed to desire the pleasures of the capitalist world, such as owning a nice apartment, wearing weave hair, makeup, wearing revealing dresses, and negotiating sex. However, I read Oumi as Sembène's way of representing and validating the desires and passions of the African woman.

The ability to have sex is a key indicator to validate the humanness of the male ruler. The act of marrying more women is only a mere vehicle that will arrive at the testament that the male figure is able to manage his affairs, even though the current trends continue to weaken polygamy. Precisely since polygamy no longer serves a traditional value – labor and continuity of kinship— it has been replaced with the need to fulfill

social stature. El Hadji's first wife, Adja's role fit within the traditional role of domesticity, Oumi the second wife, serves to install his image of a modernized Western couple, and N'Gone affirms his economic success. Mbembe points out that the goal of such categorizations is to exercise power and authority in such a way that the male ruler's pride is demonstrated by possessing an 'active penis.' This is acted through sexual rights over the female body and the keeping of many wives. Through such reading, the female is framed and thought of in regard to unconditional subordination – the main principle held by the male spectator as a need to maintain his pleasure and one of the pillars the androcratic system (Raditlhalo 110).

Through several female characters in *Xala,* we are introduced to the diverse versions of the female identity and various facets of their agency. For example, Adja's normative obedient nature and refusal to leave her marriage, Oumi's irresistible sexuality, and Rama's boldness in resisting oppression, speak to the power of the female identity as meaningful agency beyond specific sequences within the film. Several dominant narratives are overturned to reveal as a new image of the African woman. Three most important ones are, (1) the notion that nationalization of women's bodies occurs and are only visible through marriages, (2) the value of the female character is only recognized in her silence while experiencing abuse and violence, and (3) the making of a nation-state (politically and economically) is the reserve of only the male figure.

Film production though foreign to the African visual culture and introduced in the 1900s, has given the African scholar/director/artist tools to tell multiple stories about the continent's past, present, and future. This chapter contributes to the overall goal of this

dissertation to repurpose the concept of crises beyond its current utilization by African philosophers and social science. The goal is to uncover the happenings in Africa and its relationship to the world. Most postcolonial debates center on ways the West has framed Africa in the media. By flipping the script, the goal here is to uncover ways Africans have framed themselves to the West.

> The ability to picture oneself is a vital need. In fact, if a man were to live without the capacity of forging a picture of himself, he would have no aspirations, no desires, no dreams of his own. The same applies to a community, a society, and a people. A society daily subjected to foreign images eventually loses its identity and its capacity to forge its own destiny. The development of Africa implies among other things the productions of its own images. (qtd. in Pfaff, 2004, 2)

Gaston Kabore's quote shows the reasons African film occupies an important place in the history and future of Africa, and most provocatively, acts as a call to action for the continent and its creative actors to recapture Africa's imagination and voice in global discourse. As such, the primary responsibility of the African director is to challenge dominant, slanted historical narratives about its people, community, and culture, and next re-configure these errors in an attempt to create a new iconography that better suits the African identity. This act of re-configuration is not merely one-sided by flaunting the African as superior in comparison to Western counterparts, but rather

developing a critical approach beyond the "single-story" approach which has been told by the West about Africa.[3]

In conclusion, *Xala,* as a post-colonial motion picture production, expresses Senegalese and Africa's socio-political viewpoint by challenging "official history." Likewise, it offers ideas and suggestions for dealing with and solving the numerous socio-political challenges facing the continent. Sembène employs the strategy of appropriating Africa's history, to tell multiple stories stressing the meaning of Africanity. Africanity here includes all noted acts or iconographies that make up the African personality, such as acts of rituals, voodoo (or black magic), corruption, political instability, gender disparity, and poverty. The film draws on the larger theme of the post-independence struggle of Senegal and features in the discursive plot issues surrounding the economic and political climate of the country.

The narrative is framed around the sexual impotence of a Senegalese businessman, his fellow bourgeois colleagues, and the behind-the-back influence of neo-imperial institutions such as the Dakar Chamber of Commerce. It appears as a single critique of the political leadership that was inherited from France's control of the country. The film is laden with visual and textual narratives on various issues such as gender, the role of peasants and masculinity, a visualization of the realities of the time. The interpretations of *Xala* provided above demonstrate a political crisis as the main factor challenging the new postcolonial or neocolonial state.

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[3] Chimananda Adichie, Dangers of a Single Story, Ted Talk.

Chapter 2: (Re) Solving Africa's Economic Crisis: African Spirituality, and

Mevoungou* in Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes

This chapter examines the deployment of spirituality and the theme of prostitution in Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005). The film articulates the complexities of greed and unending desire for sexual adventure among the political elite, which has led Cameroon to an economic standstill. The chapter also examines that the film's use of space, montage, and parable as narrative techniques helps the audience to understand and engage with the plot of the film, which facilitates an awareness of the country's political and economic equity. I read *Les Saignantes* (2005) for its abstract approach to the narrative style, which is installed by the use of interludes, voice-over, horror, and sci-fi, all props that advance traditional ways of storytelling in many African traditions. Invariably, the diegesis allows the audience to analyze the film in a way of demonstrating an aesthetic of Third Cinema. These techniques uniquely implemented by Bekolo give the viewer a chance to comprehend the film's message and initiate a cathartic quest to act. In this chapter, two of the crisis narrative systems, acute economic crisis, and re-traditionalization of African society, are discussed.

This chapter contributes to the overall goal of the dissertation, which takes a critical look at the concept of identity and alternate visions of Africa as advanced in film and print media within the continent. The premise of this dissertation is that African filmmakers who produce for the Western gaze equally engage in the occupation of showcasing the identity of Africa that is capable of forging a visual presentation about the continent in global discourse. It must be stated that this work acknowledges the considerable efforts which have been committed to issues of representation, for example,

how African film captures modes of global encounters such as globalization, development, and modernity. However, the task of studying the efficacy of film and African visual culture in general as a tool for re-imagining Africa's image in the global front remains scanty. Richard Werbner & Terence Ranger's (1996), *Postcolonial Identities,* Josef Gugler's (2003) *African Film: Re-Imagining a Continent*, and Carol Magee's (2012) *Africa in the American Imaginations* remain some of the recent and most extensive studies to date. This dissertation explores both the rhetoric and actualization of narratives surrounding identity formation and Africa's place in the geopolitical front.

Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005) marks the year 2025, showcasing two *femme fatales* entangled with the political elites. These two high-class sex workers (they call themselves "Les Saignantes," or "The Bloodettes") uses their sexuality to gain access to some of the highest-ranking political officials in Cameroon, supposedly with the intent to rid the country of corrupt men who have ruled the country for decades, creating a rather dystopian society. *Les Saignantes* opens with the death of the Minister, Secretary-General of the Civil Cabinet (SGCC), while engaging in a sexual act with Majolie one of the Bloodettes. The death of the SGCC allegorically alludes to corrupt politicians, who according to the plot of the film must be skinned and eviscerated. The monetary exchange for sex provides a clue to the cause of poverty that has consumed this dystopian world. This science-fiction, erotic, thriller film comments on the political crisis, which centers on the sensibilities of corrupt African leaders, economic mismanagement, and their destruction of the economy.

Les Saignantes is a classic example of a film that takes on self-reflexivity as a tool for critiquing the structures of post-independent African states and reconstructs the dented identity of the continent as one lacking technological development, thus increasing poverty among its people. Francis Nyamnjoh (2012) defines reflexivity as the "ability to determine, surface and factor in the extent to which our dispositions, social backgrounds, and social positions influence, in often veiled and subtle ways, the perspectives we hold on how different or similar to us those we study are" (66). Several themes overlap in this sci-fi, action, horror film. The three-way analysis of the film carried out in this chapter focuses primarily on the text of the film and the ways it addresses: (1) the economic crisis of Africa, (2) issues of women in nation-building, politics and power, and (3) African spirituality and ritualized practices typified through the representation of *Mevoungou* and re-zombification of the African. The later provides us with an alternative view or solution to solving the economic and political crisis that confronts Africa.

Mevoungou, as used in the film, appears first as a person-narrator but later takes the form and shape of a *ritual of passage* and guardian spirit, which provides strength and protection for the female fatales, as they forge ahead to rid the country of corrupt officials. Such multiple uses suggest that the only aspect of the African socio-political ecosystem that is 'incorruptible' is *Mevoungou*. Likewise, Bekolo employs the dispositions about Africa (as zombies lacking technological advancement) to project a new perspective about the continent's social background and positions. The act of producing these new perspectives and narratives can be understood as shaping the

continent's identity. The idea of Zombies, first used by Frantz Fanon (1963) to describe

the lack of consciousness of the African bourgeois and political climate, is further

discussed in this chapter (12). The label of zombies, used by Western scholars to describe

the African, strips its people of all dignity and humanness (Fanon 14). Contrary to this,

Bekolo adopts this zombified image of the African as an iconic representation of

empowerment willed by the grassroots, destitute and low-lifers of society — *sex workers.*

It is important to contextualize the economic crisis as presented and resolved in the film

in order to provide a brief overview of Africa's economic crisis and its modes of

representation.

The Postcolonial Nation-State as a Prostituted Economy

Patrick Chabal (1996) in *The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation* examines

Africa's crisis through four different outlets of narrative systems – acute economic crisis,

political instability, re-traditionalization of the African society, and marginalization of

Africa in the global front (28).

Bekolo addresses the issues of economic crisis by positioning sex workers as the

protagonists in the film since it serves two essential functions. First, in the African

context, it represents the grassroots taking into consideration public understanding and

regard for persons who engage in the act of prostitution. This strategic use of prostitution

brings about a re-invention of the trade, by empowering sex workers in the film as

freedom fighters and liberators. This way of reading is particularly important because it

does not perpetuate the line of monolithic utilization of female characters as 'signs' and

'subalterns' (Kapanga 150). Instead, the label of sex work generates the hybridity of the

identity of feminine desire, sexual power, and liberty. In my understanding of the use of

sex workers, there is no denying that Bekolo depends on the trope and archetype of

known representation of African women both at home and abroad. The two heroines'

names are archetypical: "My Pretty" and "Pet" (or "Sweetie") are the translations of the

women's names. However, I want to suggest that there is a strategy to the trope, rooted in

the film which complicates this characterization of the use of African women's historical

specificity. Secondly, the symbolic standing of prostitution unearths a sense of exchange.

It draws on these complexities in the African context by looking at the interactions

between the political elites and members of the country on the one hand, and the African

political elite and the world economic superpowers, on the other hand.

The use of sex workers in overthrowing corrupt leaders and starting a revolution

in African creative works is not new. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood* (1977), for

example, chronicles how the economy of sex and prostitution are used to sustain a

livelihood that is complex in its relations to the world. In capturing the complex web

within which Africa's resources and riches continue to be exploited and marginalized,

Thiong'o (1977) writes:

> And later, when Munira wants to despise her, calling her a
>
> [sex worker], Karenga reminds him that the definition of
>
> prostitution has changed: 'we are all [sex workers].' In a
>
> world where a man who has never set foot on this land can
>
> sit in a New York or London Office and determine what I
>
> eat, drink, read, think, do, only because he sits on heaps of

billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world we are

all prostituted. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*)

This statement establishes that Africa's economic predicaments are founded upon

Western influence and exploitation. In the film, Bekolo shows this link through the mise-

en-scene, where items associated with modernity, such as the voice-activated vehicle

which belongs to the Minister; video-enabled mobile communication devices, soliciting

the services of female sex workers; and billboards are icons of a consumer-capitalist

system. Discussion of Africa's economic growth or predicament is intrinsically

connected to issues of development and aid. According to Chabal (1996), colonialism and

neocolonialism eroded Africa's growth and development in the last decade, rendering the

economies of the majority of African countries acute (26). He outlined several factors

that have contributed to the unfair distribution of global wealth. For instance, unfair

global trade and exchanges, portrayed through high population growth against low

economic growth, have left many African countries unable to provide for its numerous

populations few basic amenities. Likewise, following the stabilization of most African

states in the 1970s, Western countries through institutions like World Bank (WB) and

International Monetary Fund (IMF) incentivized aid to countries that import more food

and necessities. Sam Raditlhalo (2005) in analyzing the African economic crisis, points

out that Western governments continue to benefit from foreign debts and loans. As such,

while African countries continue to spend more money on importation and servicing

foreign debt, Western countries continue to flourish as they find new markets for

industrial surplus and receive high interest on loans (Chabal 30). In chronicling the

disparity that arises in the conversation on poverty, Raditlhalo, citing Mwalimu Nyerere, states:

> African states are still among the poorest countries in the world by a long way. Yet between 1989 and 1996 African states paid 224 billion USA dollars in servicing their debts to the North; Sub-Saharan Africa, which includes 35 of the 47 world's Least Developed Nations, paid an average well over 2 billion dollars a year! Yet the debt continues to mount; whereas in 1982 Sub-Sharan Africa owed some 77 Billion USA dollars, by 1995 it owed 233 billion USA dollars! The largest part of that increase is the results of arrears of payments being capitalized in the Debt Service due naturally giving up all the time. (Raditlhalo 171)

Likewise, the discursive symbolism of prostitution generates a notion of uneven trade. It can be equated to the problematic nature of aid. Jenna Hanchey (2016) declares that although some benefits are derived from aid, the dynamics and nature of aid continue to position Western donors as 'wealthy' and 'saviors' over Africa. Hanchey states, "humanitarian aid reinforces Western assumptions about Africa and entrenches imperialistic power relations by portraying African agency in Western-centric ways" (12). Chabal affirms Hanchey's assertion by pointing out that donations contribute to Western congruent efforts to maintain and further advance a congenial global image. Chabal further compounds the aid argument, indicating that 'project aid' is detrimental to

Africa's development in three specific ways: (1) projects are defined in terms that are pleasant to the donor, not to those for whom the interventions are intended, (2) those African officials who press for such projects do so because they know that this is the language they must currently use to extract resources from the West, and (3) those resources will be used primarily by those who claim them rather than by those in whose name they are claimed (Chabal 45).

African Sexuality, Gender, and Politics

The absence of the African female body from historical accounts on heroism and triumphs has been systematically woven into local thoughts about the continent's existence and global explorations. While African men are immortalized in the pages of literature and film, casting their deeds as the standard of greatness, the African woman remains in the shadows. *Les Saignantes* in form and content is a departure from the usual imagery of the female character. The protagonists, unlike films such as the *Battle of Algiers*, showcases the strength of women with a focus on their sexuality, desire, passion, spirituality and strength.

The "invisibility" of the African woman, as Margaret Strobel puts it, is partly attributed to the occupation of colonization and the emergence of nation-states, which systematically erased existing structures that built the African thoughts about gender (510). Strobel (2014) argues that this erasure has been possible as a result of the lack of scholarship committed to re-enacting the stories of the African woman. The transition from the colonized state to the nation-state, which was mostly a reinstallation of colonial

structures, meant that women's exclusion from nation-building was pushed beyond the edges of history.

Oral history is the domain where memories of female warriors survive. Nonetheless, some differences within communities did not institute female leaders in their socio-economic and political structures. These communities simply erased women's contribution to state-building. Majolie and Chouchou, the two protagonists in the film, consciously move from second-class citizens to an unrelenting political force. They intentionally refuse to inherit the dual burden of indigenous and colonial sexism (Strobel 511). Strobel (2014) points out that "oral history, the mainstay of pre-colonial African history, rarely records changes in the activities and daily lives of women. Traditions beyond living memory tend to describe the political history of a society. Unless the group had a queen or queen mother or female chief, they would usually ignore women" (511).

Bekolo's use of prostitution, which constitutes the central theme within the film, can easily be constructed to mimic popular assumptions held by the public about the female social condition. It will not be wrong to read the use of prostitution as a tool employed by Bekolo to juxtapose prostitution with men's humiliation. Contrary to this, some scholars argue that depicting women, just as how Bekolo's captures the two sex workers, is exploitative. They argue that such a depiction disempowers the woman's ownership of her condition and, in Bonnie Ross' words, "feminizes" the woman once again (161). In that same manner, such a reading renders the realities and experiences of women in various capacities as weak. I argue that instead, Bekolo recognizes the agency of women by constructing and empowering sex workers as the hope of the future for

African nation-states. Though their actions are used to explain the condition of the African elites as corrupt and sex-obsessed, the sex workers in this film are neither 'signs' and 'props' but rather active participants in nation-building. Thus, Bekolo characterizes the two sex workers, Majolie and Chouchou, as a symbol of a "modern woman's liberation and active strength" (Roos 162). This symbol of strength is visible as Bekolo's imagination and philosophy of using sex workers as the choice of resistance reveal the power of the 'grassroots' and their ability to ignite a new hope of an equitable nation-state.

Also, I advance that Bekolo diverts the audience's attention from sex to focus on the utility of prostitution, thus, advocating that sex workers are not only good for sex but hold agency in fighting against corrupt governments. The consumption of the narratives of sex workers as a degraded, stigmatized, capitalistic commodity regarded as moral cancer in society is a product of both Western and non-Western worlds. For instance, in Ghana, the moral standing of a woman is dignified by her ability to be married or while waiting to be married must stay away from sex (Diabate 172). Traditions and rituals such as Dipo, a practice celebrated in the Eastern Region of Ghana, is a festival that ushers young girls into puberty. These ladies must ensure that before this ritual, they remain virgins. The completion of this ritual indicates to the men of the community that these young women are ready to be married. To stay sexually pure means to have limited sexual relations with fewer men. However, the narratives of sexual morality are upturned in *Les Saignantes*. Bekolo reconciles these conflicting images of prostitution through new images, which signify the sex workers as independent and heroic revolutionists.

Likewise, considering that sex work has existed at least since colonialism, Bekolo takes on an existing trope within the arena of corrupt politicians and turning on its head to destroy the old and create the new power structure.

This is particularly important as this way of representation complicates the binaries and thus disrupts the hierarchies of power that caters to frame African colonial histories broadly and specifically with regards to women discourse on two fronts – Western perspectives of the African woman and post-colonial African perspectives. Prominently, Bekolo addresses prevailing post-colonial binaries that have, for the last century, muted the experiences of the African woman. Prevailing binaries – rural/urban, private/public, resistance/collaboration, citizen/subject – inherited from colonial structures are overturned in the film to project a new image of the African woman. Hence in *Les Saignantes*, women are pictured in private spaces, for example, exerting their bodies, power, and sex to revolutionize the political terrain. In contrast, the men, who by exercising their masculinity patronize these private spaces, are defeated and overthrown. The film profoundly makes a daring statement that women occupy all spheres of the state and their experiences matter.

Africa's colonial experience shifted our understanding of women's contribution to politics, thus, the post-colonial reality inherited from colonial sexism is that the domestic role of women in society is an inferior contribution to state-building. The genesis of this can be attributed to the omission of facts or misrepresentation of African customs and norms in addition to the disregard of the ethos and values that are held by Africans. Historians have overlooked the place of the woman and her importance in telling African

history from the precolonial to the colonial era. Osborn Emily (2011), in *Our New Husbands are Here: Gender and Politics in a West Africa State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule* draw attention to the influence of domestic affair on state-making and also provide compelling evidence of ways in which the domestic sphere contribute to the establishment and sustainability of the state. It is important, also, to discuss the circumstances that led to the oversight by historians to record women's participation in African history during colonization. It is, therefore, imperative to state that the role played by women in the production of agricultural fields, the control of reproduction, and as a source of physical labor, are key factors in preserving and sustaining the state. This narrative hence situates the important contributions of women to the African political climate. Prostitution, which equally takes the form of exchange, labor, production, and control of reproduction, in the film, assumes the economic nature of the nation-state. Bekolo thus advances that these economic activities contribute to the silent experiences women face in the new state. By this act, the morality and devaluation attributed to sex (prostitution) are demystified and deconstructed. We can now see its political and economic power. Majolie's ability to separate home from business is one that is remarkably representative of the effects of womanhood. This is not about choosing a suitor. Specifically, Majolie's trade allows her to engage in polyandry, taking charge of her sexuality and retaining her ability to choose her suitor.

Likewise, women's responsibility in ensuring the smooth operation of the household by submitting to one's husbands and teaching customs and values to children can be considered as a mark of leadership. Women's acceptance of this responsibility and

zeal to perform these domestic roles ensure that men (heads of the family) have a sound mind to focus on their commitment to state-building. Even in a polygamous family, the division of labor and delegation of authority existed in order to create a harmonious and peaceful home (Osborn 29). As this linkage and bond of family breaks, the repelling effect spreads to the state. The reverse is true as the Chief of Jankana had to transfer the right of leadership to the Kaba clan as a result of the non-performance of the domestic role by his wife (Osborn 35). If such an account is true, it is valid to ask if a simple act of dishonesty, deception, and non-loyalty of a wife could determine the clan that wields the mantle of leadership. Why then did historians downplay the contribution of women in such light?

There was a conscious attempt to draw the line between men and women through the use of economic relevance as the standard that in 'the economic sphere, men and women could not be equal' (Osborn 65). However, that is only a means of gender classification. Such an attempt pushed to the background the contribution of growing vegetables, dyeing cloth, and making of various handicrafts to support households and micro (demand and supply) economy of the state. Such activities undertaken by women created a system of transfer of cash, goods, and services. In the absence of intra-state trading, it is evident that political stability and cohesion in leadership will fail. Conflicts and rebellions were the end product as members of the community sought out leaders that could provide for their needs and wants. Men engaged in long-distance trading because it was not only profitable but also was a means of strengthening foreign relations and creating ties for warfare.

Additionally, the role of reproduction continues to be overlooked by historians, since it is regarded as a natural mandate for women to give birth and nurture children. Osborn (2011) posits that through the institution of marriage, women served as a means of fostering unity between families (29). The more families were interconnected, the less likely it is that the state would be thrown into confusion and chaos. Family relations were inter-related and extended with children. Likewise, generational lineage through childbirth promoted order in rulership and entrenched the system of the transfer of power. Women show respect for husbands, loyalty to siblings, and support for co-wives and acceptance of the position of submission (Osborn 30).

African Spirituality, Women's Solidarity and Political Resolution

Bekolo uses *Mevoungou*—the narrator— an elusive, mystic spirit, a popular rite in Cameroon, to advance the role spirituality plays in governance and women's solidarity. The depiction of *Mevoungou* as a spirit acts as a two-edged sword wherein one instance, it is known to cause havoc and lead the host in disarray, and in another instance, it can foster peace and harmony. Among the Berti in Cameroon, the *Mevoungou* ritual involves the stimulation of the clitoris by older women is done to commemorate female empowerment and community cleansing (Langford 183). Bekolo employs the *Mevoungu* ritual as the centripetal force in the film to analyze the political decay and provide hope for the reorganization of the hierarchical powers of the dystopian future of the postcolonial state. The true nature of the *Mevoungu* ritual is adopted and embellished to flourish the narratives of the film. It is mythicized to fit the description of the Western

gaze and localized enough to generate the indigenous lessons members of the

Cameroonian community can understand.

With regard to the mythicization of *Mevoungou*, it acts as a spirit that is

everywhere, all-knowing, and offers strength to those it possesses. This use of *spirit*, an

African spirit, is untypical and dense and requires unpacking. I argue that in the sense of

providing a force as powerful as the middle-class men, *Mevoungou* becomes the guiding

spirit that is capable of redeeming the African state from neocolonial pitfalls. Precisely,

Bekolo advances that women form part of the viable force that is capable of healing

Africa's diseased political scene. In the first scene of the film, we are introduced to the

definition of *Mevoungou* by a voiceover:

> *Mevoungou* is neither a living being nor a thing
>
> *Mevoungou* is not a place much less a moment
>
> *Mevoungou* is neither a desire nor a state of mind
>
> Because *Mevoungou* is something we see and experience
>
> But cannot quite define
>
> You don't decide to see *Mevoungou*
>
> *Mevoungou* appears to you
>
> *Mevoungou* invites itself

From the narration above, Bekolo makes an effort to avoid rendering Mevoungou

as a ritual. Instead, through the above statement, I argued that he establishes it as a form

of a *spirit* as it possesses the characteristics that define its function. This way of

representing Mevoungu allows the text of the film to function as a ritual and offers new

manifestation as an African spiritualization. Usually, the narrative toes the line of a negative comprehension of African religion and spirits by colonial masters. African religion was considered barbaric, uncultured, bloody, involving powerless dolls and carvings. African spirits, on the other hand, were completely non-existent in such narratives. African deities were not defined, and documentation on where and how they function in African societies are not readily available. Christianity and or Islam became the ideal form of spirituality forced on African communities.

Bekolo employs *Mevoungou* to re-direct our attention to the efficacy of the African spirits and their contribution to state-building. In the film, we know those that hold office have equally fortified themselves with totems and gods, to whom they offer sacrifices to stay powerful and retain rulership. The narrator provides a summary of what characterizes *Mevoungou*:

> Maybe we had neutralized it, but the beast still lived.
>
> *Mevoungou* was a serious thing, a thing
>
> that would either destroy us or the
>
> country. We had to use *Mevoungou* and
>
> get rid of it quickly if we wanted to
>
> survive. We were already dead. Nothing
>
> worse could happen to us. It wasn't our
>
> skin at stake here but the future of the
>
> country.

Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, a professor in the Theology Department at the University of Virginia, in *Women of Fire and Spirit,* provides insights into the indigenous religious structures in Africa. In discussing the indigenous religious structures in, for instance, Western Kenya, she discusses that the role of women in the various religious institutions in the state and ways certain norms and values such as age dynamics were determinants for the position women held in religious institutions. In the film, Chouchou's mother and the older women represent the 'Mother of *Mevoungou'* as depicted in the actual ritual. These women become powerful as *Mevoungou* empowers the two young women to repress the machinery of the patriarchal state.

Rachel Langford (2017) argues that *Les Saignantes'* short-lasting triumph of the female over the male who indulges in corruption is a departure from "the original power of the *Mevoungu* ritual" which was "aimed at rectifying society, here the protagonists' praxis, even when doubled by the power of the *Mevoungou*, only enables the two female protagonists to usurp the phallic in their sexual and social practices for finite ends" (185). Langford's (2017) arguments are based on the closing of the film, which omits clear results attained from the reconstruction of the gendered power. Though this is a valid point to make, I read the application of *Mevoungou* in this regard as a convergence between the efficacy of film, beliefs, and spirituality. The end goal of *Mevoungou* is to purify oneself; as such, the female sex workers are empowered to purify the political elites of the nation-state while Bekolo purifies the minds and imaginations of the audience. Naminata Diabate (2016), addresses the multiple uses of *Mevoungou*, by asserting that the "ritual functioned as a means of affirming women's personality of

reinforcing their productivity and of engaging in double sexuality" (173). Such reading

highlights the use of empowered women through the ritual of *Mevoungou* as a mode of

resistance against male domination.

On the subject of purification, *Mevoungou* requires that the initiated is cleansed

and purged. Bekolo plants moments in the film that signify the cleansing and purging of

Majolie and Chouchou. Majolie takes the first ritual bath after the SGCC's death. This

scene shows Majolie vigorously scrubbing her body. The physical cleansing is followed

by an internal purging where Majolie walks into a bar, grabs a bottle of vodka, gulps it,

and then urinates outside the bar in the full glare of male patrons while expressing

orgasmic sounds. The act of drinking the alcohol and the public urination symbolizes

Majolies access to the spiritual world, and the purging of her spiritual being (Diabate

176). Diabate argues that the first act of purification fortifies Majolie and Chouchou with

the supernatural powers to dismember and dispose of the body of the SGCC. Invariably,

such supernatural powers, as employed here by Bekolo, signifies the power of the female

character and sexuality.

Critics such as Langford (2017) and Diabate (2012) argue that the non-capturing

of the clitoris and utilization of sex scenes in the film are efforts to desexualize the ritual

of *Mevoungou* which erases and renders the pleasures of 'women as invincible.' This

argument is rooted in the fact that, as part of the *Mevoungou*, female pleasure is of

particular importance that the clitoris of the initiated is stimulated to arouse sexual

pleasure.

By rubbing and stretching of the clitoris, the initiated is empowered. In the film, Majolie teases Chouchou by saying, "They want to see your clitoris," which Chouchou answers "they can't see my clitoris." Another way of analyzing this issue of erasure and de-sexualization of the female body is to consider the merits of portraying women differently from characters engaging in a sexual occupation. Through such filmic sequencing, Bekolo diverts the attention of the audience from the sexual imagery that is usually linked with the female body to focus on other aspects such as the confrontation against a corrupt government. By doing so, Bekolo avoids the muddy waters of essentializing the existing narratives that surround African women.

Again, from the passage above, Bekolo suggests that *Mevoungou* can be a good catalyst and also a bad reactor by suggesting, "we had to use *Mevoungou* and get rid of it quickly." This brings about the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" cultures/religions. Hoehler-Fatton argues that the label of applying labels of whether a spirit is good or bad is dependent on the purpose or act performed by the spirit. For instance, among the people of Luo in Southern Sudan, a *juogi* (spirit) is classified as "evil" or "good," depending on the spirit's purpose or activities performed. For instance, ancestral spirits *Kwere* were invoked to punish wrongdoers until a sacrifice was made to appease the spirit. On the other hand, the *jochiende* was the demon spirit known to be evil. Following the adoption of Christianity, these indigenes referred to the good spirits as "Holy Spirit" and the bad ones as "Satan." Hoehler-Fatton (1996) states that "whereas in the past people would turn to their *kwere (*or *juogi*) for help in difficult times, Christians- who

make up of nearly 90 percent of the Luo population now frequently turn to the Holy Spirit" (p. xiv).

This dissertation is less concerned with the metamorphosis of indigenous religion into Christianity; rather, it is concerned with how African religion plays a central role in state-building. It also considers the innovative use of *spirits* by Bekolo in the film. From the deductions made from Hoehler-Fatton's point above, we notice that Bekolo's approach to spiritual encounters in the film follows a similar fashion. *Mevoungou* possesses the duality of function extrapolated by Hoehler-Fatton. The Prime Minister's invocation and use of *juogi* here can be described as the 'bad' spirit while the one which empowers Majorie and Chouchou can be referred to as the 'good.' These spirits perform the checks and balances that help prevent and put-in-check abusive powers by a single entity.

Secondly, in African literature, most scholars have resorted to reclaim women's power and their role as goddesses of their community. In communities were women held such powers, their contributions were undermined by Western scholars even though women played vital roles in the religious institution. The *clan*, made of older women, as shown in the movie, acts as the guardians for the sex workers, guiding them through their business. Through this, Bekolo draws our attention to some overlooked aspects of African governance and offers a newer insight into the completion of nationhood and the cost for attaining freedom. *Mevoungou* holds the African consciousness and ability to re-enact a newer dispensation of rulership founded on loyalty, truth, fairness, accountability, and justice. In the last scene, we anticipate that the actual victory and future of the

country. *Mevoungou* can be attributed as the force that helps secure the country and its people from its corrupt leaders and neocolonial tendencies. The narrator admonishes us:

> It was *Mevoungou* dancing, *Mevoungou* dreaming. *Mevoungou* danced. *Mevoungou* dreamed in technicolor. We were living in 2025, children growing up as if they had no parents and parents behaving as if they had no children. And in 2025, there was no place for despair. We had to move on, that's all. The country could not continue like that with a future. It has to change.

Beyond the idea of African spirituality typified through the representation of *Mevoungou,* there is an encounter of aesthetic treatment of the corpse, grime, and death. For instance, the SGCC's corpse which is dismembered into packageable pieces that Majolie and Chouchou can easily carry around in shopping bags; the abattoir which features dead cows hanged up with its direct similarity to the corpse of the SGCC; the vomit that spews from the corpse when the drunken Chouchou attacks it; or the detached scrotal sac of the corpse with which the Chouchou and Majolie kick around in a game. These scenes allow the film to fit into the horror filmic index, which is characterized by its "irrepressible traces of past traumatic events" (Langford 185). Also, these scenes are multi-layered with various metaphorical allusions that mimic the reality of the postcolonial state.

The SGCC's death, which occurs as a result of the sexual encounter, for instance, speaks of the power of sex and the agency of Majolie. The remains of the SGCC here could represent the overthrow of the political head and machinery as well as the patriarchal hierarchies in the postcolonial state. The image of the SGCC represents the past physical representation of the neocolonial control and adherence to colonial tendencies. While Majolie and Chouchou find strategies to dispose of the body of the SGCC, they decide to remove the head and replace it with another. Also, in the opening scene, Majolie is seen bouncing on the body of the SGCC while supported by straps. The straps allow her to swing from the ceiling and land on top of the SGCC. In one of these sex acts, Majolie, hangs in a way such that, her legs are propped up further towards the ceiling, while her head with outstretch hands clumped together putting her in a shooting position towards the SGCC. I read the shooting position as a transfer of the sexual power and agency from the SGCC to Majolie, who can dictate and decide how her body can be used or desired. It equally speaks to the literal killing of the SGCC and signifies a political take over by Majolie.

The cultural representation here is a mockery of the expectation of the Western gaze that is excited to ascribe and assess modes of "exoticism" and "authenticity." Therefore, I agree with Lanford (2017) that Bekolo craftily employs *Mevoungou* in *Les Saignantes* to question Western aestheticism of African rituals captured on film. Langford argues, "it is particularly telling that the film's prime narrative motor should be mediated in this way by the layered histories of cultural appropriation, adaptation, and re-appropriation" (186). Bekolo's craftiness is evident in his ability to re-visualize the

complexities surrounding the *Mevoungou* ritual layered with the representations of gender, cultural exchange, and political revolution.

(Re) Zombification of the African Scene

I use the term *Zombification* which is my theoretical approach to describe the 'barbaric' nature for which the African people and the state of its cultural thought have been stripped from its "normal" self and points to the lack of development and advancement in the condition of human living. Fanon's (1963) understanding of the term as espoused in *Wretched of the Earth* is that problems of identity and purpose arise once human beings are pushed outside their culture, environment, systems of beliefs, religion, and other relations. These individuals become Zombies – non-living beings, unable to reason, take action or govern themselves.

Fanon (1963) points out that the act of zombification exerted on the Black character is manifested by the desire to become something they are not. Zombification, thus by my contemplation, is a symbolic system of belief used in (re)structuring of the self. Zombification in operation manifested as a class-system or means of identification, thus for the blacks in the West, it represented several stereotypes that reduced them to zombies. In Africa, through colonization, it was a system meant to condition Africans to look down upon their identity, culture and values and accept any treatment offered by their "White Savior" (Wynter 38). Those that invaded the African state were preoccupied with vile motives of making the African look different –thus lower to the level of animals. In all contemplations, Wynter avers that colonizers treated Africans in Africa as zombies, because they lacked religion, their culture was barbaric full of rituals and

bloodshed and had no political structure, and development (much emphasis on technological advancement).

Technological progress, therefore, becomes another criterion for marking the developmental level of a state. In the dystopian world of Western countries as advanced by Hollywood, people do not assume and own their humanness; instead, their affairs are controlled and managed by *Cyborg*. It is both a statement of advancements in human intelligence and passion and a visual conclusion of Western states' achievement of efficiency and power (political and military might).

Specifically, Bekolo takes on this form of classification of the Africans as zombies, which has been used in historical and present narratives to describe the socio-political, gender, and sexual climate of the African state. The technological apparatus, mobile phones, video-calling, and voice-controlled vehicles are juxtaposed to the traditional apparatus of telepathic communication, the all-seeing-eyes of the clans' women, and protective agency of *Mevoungou*. Bekolo showcases through the film that African ingenuity, intelligence and technological development as a new way of capturing the beauty of Africa's conditions. Bekolo, I argue, adopts Fanon's solution to solve the social problem left by colonization and neo-colonization. According to Fanon, the answer lies in the use of similar elements of force to solve and address Africa's current social issues. Accordingly, to re-humanize a zombie requires the fight against all elements of damnation and taking responsibility for the human conditions that set him apart.

African Storytelling Sensibilities Expressed in the Film

Bekolo takes a great deal to rework the form of African film (for example, the use of scene markers and the interplay of narrator/actor role) to achieve two important goals – (1) de-mystify the narratives of the African spectator and (2) re-map a new identity for African cinema. The demystification of the African audience stems from their expectations, intentions and desires to see certain narratives and content in an African film. It connotes that African films must act and receive action in a peculiar manner that identifies them as an African creation.

Bekolo tackles both content and form, specifically with the form through re-imagining other genres the African film can occupy. In other words, Bekolo wants the audience to consider the form of the film as much as the content. Since spectatorship is an important element to the success of the film coupled with the burden of reaching the appropriate audience. Bekolo configures a new way of 'watching.' For instance, there exists an understanding that African film does not warm up to the horror film genre. Linda Williams as cited by Langford argues that "the use of horror and other excessive genres such as pornography is a form of cultural problem-solving that mounts a challenge to 'standard' conceptions of the narrative" (Langford 186). Likewise, Bekolo employs the subject of death, corpse and decay to communicate to the African audience an idea of a horror film. Also, the ability of Bekolo to show nudity as a way of engaging the body of the African woman further grounds the genre of the film. The use of specific editing and shooting technique is a way of establishing Bekolo's auteur-ship. Bekolo explicitly uses blue lightning, fog, deep shadows, and several installations to foreground the mise-en-

scene of horror-sci-fiction of the film (Langford 184). The shooting of the film takes

place in the nightlife of Yaounde, which provides a visual mimicry of the dark political

times set out in the film. Langford points out that "the film's action takes place in the

'terrible places' that are characteristic of a contemporary horror film, places which grip

the peripheries of the urban centers of postcolonial global capitalism (184). The

nighttime, which marks the time of the film, equally points to the enactment of

Mevoungou.

      Anjali Prabhu in *Contemporary Cinema of African and the Diaspora* refers to this

phenomenon as "Africa Watch" (233). Prabhu thus defines Africa Watch as the act of

"watching films through Africanized perspective from all locations and privileging

critical methods that allow for the conception of "Africa" via such a perspective" (Prabhu

1). A further explanation will reveal that the act of watching entails more—it involves

identity formation, which includes prejudices and stereotypes of African cinema, its

people, and creators. Prabhu (2014) states, " the meaning of African Cinema, as

delineated in this watch(ing), is such a unity only insofar as it is a particular and perhaps

time-bound (though certainly not a-historic) interpellation of the contemporary world's

inhabitants that these filmmakers make through their vocation and genius" (233).

      Bekolo employs scene markers with questions on a billboard which is read aloud

by the narrator. These questions at first appear to be disconnected from the content of the

filmic text, nonetheless, these scene markers allow the spectator to intentionally think

about the narrative of the film and its content. By obscuring the act of watching, Bekolo

carefully directs the audience to see and think about filming strategies that have been

used to describe African films. Bekolo is deconstructing the form of African films. The film opens with the first title, "How can you make an anticipating film in a country that has no future?" The title appears on a billboard suggesting the ideas that Bekolo is projecting in the ensuing scene and, at the same time, advancing questions asked by African filmmakers. Part of the question equally involves challenging the expectations of spectators and what they hope to see in other to attribute 'Africanness' to a film. The questions Bekolo poses grabs the attention of both the audience and the directors. For the audience, it asks a further question, what is the future of this country?

Rhetorically, considering the stereotypical labeling of the continent, it highlights certain hypocrisy within the ranks of power. The emancipator of African states from colonization led African states to envision a future where the African could compete on the global front. Bekolo's question then implores us to probe further. The bid here that intrigues the audience is the very basis that leads the country to lose its future. What is the perceived future? How would we know if we have or have not attained it? The future can conveniently be said to refer to the developmental achievements of the country. It suggests that without ascribing to the Western matrix of development, Africa has no future. The props in the frame of the first scene perhaps could give us a glimpse of this future. The cars suggest a developed means of mobility and affluence, a state where the public can afford the luxuries. Their wooden sign is not as big as the billboard that bears the question, but it, however, speaks of a thriving business. In the background, we see a house that could mimic as a business complex or a residential apartment. Either way, the duality of what the building could be and used for points to a middle- or higher-class

neighborhood. Though produced in 2005, the movie is set in 2025, marking the futuristic essence of the film.

In conclusion, this chapter analyzed the deployment of spirituality and the theme of sex work in Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005). The film addresses the political crisis in the nation-state of Cameroon while commenting on issues of greed and unending desire for sexual adventure among the political elite, which has led Cameroon to an economic standstill. I identified that the deployment of sex workers and other female characters provide a refreshing image of women in national politics. Specifically, there was an erasure of binaries and hierarchies of power that have tended to frame African colonial histories with specific reference to women as subservient to men. Bekolo in *Les Saignantes* painted a picture of women exerting their bodies, power, and sex to change the political orientation of the nation-state. Women are seen to occupy both the private and public spaces. The abstract approached of *Les Saignantes* (2005) with regards to its narrative style, genre and diegesis allowed the audience to engage the film's plot as a way of demonstrating the Third Cinema aesthetic and enter into a conversation with the film's message whiles generating a cathartic quest. This chapter contributes to the overall thesis of this dissertation to engage film analysis and media discourse under the thematic discussion of how crises are framed in Africa, and at the same time to study how Africans through various creative works reconstruct Africa's identity on the global scene.

Chapter 3: Mothering Nature: Black Feminist Futures in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the futuristic imaginations of Africa by Africans and ways these new visions offer alternate discourses of engaging with issues on representation about Africa and Africans. In this chapter, I address how the work of Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) through ecological prophecy and crisis imagines and reenacts the image, body and function of the African feminine. It can be conveniently stated that the film was made for the Western audience who are already aware of the proponents of sci-fi genres and educated African populace who by consuming foreign sci-fi films anticipate such renditions in their futures. For example, this film was made possible through German and American grants and production companies. It first screened at Sundance generating discussion on the future of African films.

Kahiu, through this Afrofuturist work, addresses ecological issues – shortage of water, polluted environment—that will eventually lead to an uninhabitable geographical space. Politically, the film contemplates the inactions of African governments and institutions in addressing abuse of the environment and proper regulation of activities such as mining, oil drilling, and deforestation, which continue to make Western countries rich but African countries poor. These analyses are obtained from the climax of the film, where there is a long shot on a signpost with the inscription "caution: radioactive nuclear river." The film also talks about the female's body, injecting new ideas of the feminine function in these ecological debates through the notion of *mothering*. Therefore, this chapter argues that the idea of *mothering* offers a possibility for working through crisis– in action and philosophically by presenting *Maa Itu* (our truth).

Pumzi takes place in Kenya, in the Maitu Community, thirty-five years after World War III – The Water War. In the Maitu Community, water is essential (as it is in our current dispensation), and it is the measure of wealth and currency for the exchange of goods and payment of wages. It is rationed daily and dispensed at security checkpoints. Individuals are able to get additional portions by recycling their sweat and urine and storing them in their personalized jars. In this world, movement and even dreams are heavily restricted by an authoritarian government that continues to churn out one message: "The outside is dead." In this future, Asha, a young scientist/curator working at a Virtual Natural History Museum in the Maitu Community, harbors the desire to venture outside the sustainable community into the dead world with hopes to save it. Her desires are heightened by the series of dreams, which the audience sees on a monitor, suggesting that life exists on the outside world but also that inner life is monitored. An advanced Artificial Intelligence always reminds Asha to take her *Dream Suppressants* whenever she dreams. Asha refuses to obey the instructions, knowing the suppressants will only oppress her from following her dreams and passions and more importantly, that it will make the truth inaccessible to her. There's a kind of play with the magical and unconscious in Kahui's work Asha's dreams are corroborated when she receives a potted soil, which after several tests, suggests that it is capable of supporting life. Asha plants a seed in the soil and waters it with her rationed water. After several hours the seed begins to sprout. Upon this discovery, Asha requests an Exit Visa from the Council of Elders (all women), but she is refused and commanded to abandon her quest. She is arrested due to her persistence and reassigned to a different post, which involved

riding an in-door cycling bike to generate kinetic energy for the community's use. During one of her breaks, a pale (working-class) female custodian, whom Asha showed kindness once, helps Asha to escape. After walking several miles in desperate search of this utopian world, Asha finally encounters a dead tree, still standing erect and decides to plant her pottered plant in the same spot. She coils her body around the plant, and in a fast-forward motion, we see the tree grow as her body is morphed with the tree as it blossoms. Here, I consider ways Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) as an Afrofuturist art comment on women's rise to power and their role in solving the environmental challenges facing the continent. *Pumzi* does not only capture Africa's imaginations in a utopian sense, instead, these visions are also weaponized to address Africa's socio-political challenges.

While this film comments on present challenges and politics around Africa's ecologies, it is layered with several narratives on gender, climate change, and technological development. Specifically, this chapter enters into a conversation with *Pumzi* to illustrate the new conceptualization of the African city, expanding the occupational consideration of Afrofuturism and the female body in futuristic terms and her role in solving ecological challenges. I equally address several debates facing the African female-author and filmmaker. I argue that *Pumzi* is a response to the ecological discursive system which has been used to frame Africa's present and future identity. In the next section, I provide an overview of Africa's ecological challenges.

Africa: "The World Septic Tank"

Patrick Chabal's (1996) framework, as states and discussed extensively in previous chapters, provided four distinct factors that outsiders perceive as crises in Africa today (28). These perceived crises – acute economic crisis, political instability, re-traditionalization of African societies, and the marginalization of Africa in the international front—lead to generalization, overly sweeping, and limiting arguments about the continent. Chabal's instructive study, however, omitted to discuss issues of the ecological factors that also contribute to the monolithic tone with which Africa is discussed. To Chabal's credit, I advance that the environmental challenges facing Africa, such as dumping of e-waste on the continent's soil are as a result of the manifestation of the four distinct crises that continue to slant Africa's image. For instance, waste dumpers are turning to Africa as a dumpsite as a result of a lack of effective political oversight and unscrupulous trading agreements (Brooke 1). This dissertation, therefore, advocates and treats ecological challenges facing Africa as a factor that determines the continent's place in the global front.

Africa faces several ecological challenges, nonetheless, *Pumzi* talks about specific actions such as nuclear dumping, oil drilling and mining which is ultimately polluting and contaminating water bodies and the environment. In an interview with Samantha Burton, Kahiu reflects on filming *Pumzi* indicating that, "I didn't dwell on Africa's past or Africa's present. Also, I think it was timely. It has such a strong environmental theme in it." In 2018, Multinational Non-Governmental (MNGOs) such as the United Nations, Population Action International (PAI), and Council on Foreign Relations (CFR),

forecasted that by 2025 there would be scarcity and water shortage in 48 countries (UNWater/Africa 2). The water crisis, as these organizations foretell, emanates from decades of abuse of the environment by Africans and western states. Western mistreatment of the environment is shrouded in lots of illegalities under the pretense of financial and political support.

Cahal Milmo (2009) reports that British municipal waste managers continue to breach British and international law, which bars the exportation of broken electronic goods which includes sending tons of toxic waste to Africa. Milmo points out that "Britain is responsible for around 15 percent of the EU's total e-waste, which is growing three times faster than any other municipal waste stream" (Milmo). These toxic wastes usually are made of defunct televisions, computers, and gadgets. Milmo cited an investigation that was conducted by several news agencies revealing that fifteen shipping containers of e-waste from Europe and Asia arrive at Lagos, Nigeria, every day. During the investigation, a defunct television fitted with a satellite tracking device was monitored which revealed that Western dealers were involved in the shipment of an estimated 940,000 tons of domestic electronic waste to the shores of Nigeria (Milmo). The problem is further compounded as scavengers, and scrap dealers cause more waste by breaking down components and burning of heavy metals and dioxins to sell. These toxins are trapped in the atmosphere, injecting toxic elements into the soil and water bodies.

Rebecca Short (2016) sheds more light on land leasing for toxic dumping and ownership that is compounding Africa's water crisis and ecological challenges. Short states besides the fight against land grabbing in African, land leasing has equally become

a topical issue where lands are not used for agricultural purposes but toxic dumping (Short). For example, the catastrophic damage caused by the 2004 tsunami revealed the existence of poisonous water containers on the northern coast of Cameroon owned by foreign firms. Toxic waste such as radioactive uranium, lead, cadmium, mercury, industrial, hospital, chemical and leather treatment waste were documented in the 1980 United Nations Environmental Protection (UNEP) at the shores of the country. A similar occurrence in Cameroon revealed that in the early 2000s, about "5,600 liters (1,232 gallons) of chlorine were dumped in 2005 in a village near Douala, the nation's economic capital" (Brooke).

Human health and wellbeing in these countries continue to dwindle as there are no establishments of efficient recycling plants and the meanings of properly storing these toxic wastes. It compounds the already existing challenges of poor management of plastic waste and other environmental issues such as draught. In late 2019, Cape Town, as a result of a long looming drought in Northern and Southern Africa, has led to a shortage of water. This shortage has led to the rationing of water to thirteen gallons per day per person (Baker). According to Aryn Baker (2019), the situation is anticipated to be hopeless should Day Zero occur. Baker states, "Day Zero is when the government will turn off the taps for most homes and businesses in the city to conserve the very last supplies" (Baker). Though important institutions such as the hospitals, government organizations will continue to receive water, the majority of residents will lack access.

The above scenarios and current happenings do not absolve the actions and inactions of the African government from the ecological problems facing the continent.

Instead, while it points to a lack of political will and action in protecting the

environmental needs of African states, it uncovers more in-depth and robust ways Africa

continues to occupy space inequalities. Africa has become the world's septic tank

because of held assumptions of the continent as a poor, and corrupt place that heinous

acts go on punished. Kahiu's work, though silent about European and Western role in the

deteriorating environmental challenges in Africa, presents enough props that allow us to

make the above inferences. Instrumentally, *Pumzi* does not settle on the problem, instead

through the mise-en-scene, it offers a different conceptualization of the African state. We

shall turn our attention to discuss the merits of this reconfigured African city.

Towards a Reconfigured African City

Kahiu's metaphor of this community shown in *Pumzi* can be considered as a neo-

conceptualization of the future of African cities. The current image of the African city is

conceived historically as a space offering high visibility for colonial presence. In framing

the city, Anjali Prabhu (2014), states, "cities are Africanized not merely through the

presence of Africans but through cinematic reclaiming of perspective for African and

diasporic exigencies as these play out in the specificity of the characters, spaces and

narratives of the film" (55). The reclaiming of the city and anticipation of the future of

Africa in this utopian world is demonstrated through the symbolism of advance

knowledge in science and technology implemented to alleviate the burden and effects of

war and calamities.

Kahiu, through this utopian space, intentionally erases all forms of labels and

images associated with Africa as a place of poverty, with high illiteracy and a lack of

technology to recreate an efficient one with sustainable energy, democratic society and

filled with healthy people. Kahiu, in an interview with Moulin d'Ande in 2009, asserts

that African scholars must intentionally choose the image of Africa they want others to

see since Africa has been given little opportunity to voice her opinions and correct certain

slanted narratives. Kahiu states:

> All the images that are coming out about Africa have
>
> been about salvation, children with flies in their eyes,
>
> or war or destruction, or poverty or hunger or famine.
>
> There's been so many negative images coming out
>
> that if we don't actively combat those images, we are
>
> doing ourselves a disservice and not only for
>
> ourselves but for future generations. (d'Ande 2009)

Kahiu's installation of this utopian world is, therefore, achieving two critical

goals—counteracting negative images about Africa and offering present generations with

aspirations, desires and ideas of possibilities available to advance development in Africa.

This utopian city is also about space, narratives and material contemplation. The simplest

definition of space comprises of both the theoretical and physical expression of human

existence, in the sense that as part of human imagination, it bears the marks of human

activities that "real" places hold "materiality" (Prabhu 55). I agree with Prabhu that many

cities, including this utopian world, are a testimony of those consumed imaginations from

colonization. In this new world, Prabhu states, "formed by the development and spread of

capitalism and are highly associated with both new economic success and spread of

entrepreneurship" (55). These new opportunities, at its foundation, allows for individual aspiration to be birthed, though difficult.

Kahiu draws upon the spectators' experience of cities, ideas of development and concepts of modernity entrenched images of genders as advanced by the media, to recreate new dispensaries of thoughts about the image of women and knowledge. Our current contemplation of space involves the physical demarcation of a large stretch of landmass and water bodies, within this space lies the expression of modernity, collective and individual aspiration, dreams and mostly an idea of ways it should function or not.

The term 'modern state' carries different meanings and put forward the concepts of culture, tradition, and nation into uneasy narratives. Meyer and Geschiere (1999), through historical analysis and ethnographical sketches, engage the issues and problems of modernity in Africa. Modernity, as a product of postcolonization, the term has been continuously associated with the ability of African countries to climb the ladder in order to reach the commodification of the economy and materialism. We see this manifest in the form of water/energy rationed among the inhabitant, to the extent that waste is recycled to be used again—the very narrative of efficiency, a benchmark of development and modernity.

In the discourse of modernity, Africa is portrayed as the different, with its people caught within old traditions and customs. The idea of modernization, as stated by Meyer and Geschiere (1999) points to the act of "civil society reforming and developing the African State rather than the state of developing agricultural society" (2). In a simple sense, the idea has been to move Africa from one point of non-civilization (poverty,

sickness, poor infrastructure, etc.) to a developed one. I agree with Meyer and Geschiere (1999) that, "to remain conscious of the teleological force of the notion of modernization and to resist its powers to draw our understanding into meta-narratives that should be critically investigated instead of reproduced" (8). Nevertheless, Kahiu is not merely restating a slanted-held notion about Africa. Kahiu is establishing Africa as a major hub of knowledge production, which will, in challenging situations such as drought, will save the world. In *Pumzi,* the feminine body and the concept of *mothering* as another alternative in solving Africa's ecological challenges are put forward.

Mothering and Black Feminist Futures

The African woman looking old beyond her years, half-naked, withered breasts with a bowl in her hand has occupied the visual media of the United States and other Western countries for a long time (Aidoo 16). In an attempt to capture the 'real African women,' this image of helplessness is typically shown alongside flies hovering around the faces of her children. This image of the African woman has become the standard used in talking about the challenges and experiences of women. These images continue to confirm and engrain images of the African woman in the minds of the world as subjugated, without agency and living in abject poverty whose only occupation is to exist in the domestic space, giving birth and rearing children. *Pumzi* is a departure from this held dominant image of the African woman. The single, childless African woman is cast as a non-sexualized being with desires, experience, and agency to cause a change in the world. It achieves this by unearthing an alternate ideological and practical discourse on African feminism.

There has been a movement to adopt a term that accommodates various facets of African feminism. Mohanty's (2003) work, *Feminism without Border,* makes a priceless contribution to the discourse on feminism by advancing efforts in solidarity with 'women-freedom fighters' in attaining social, political and economic justice. In the case of *Pumzi*, solidarity is towards the enshrining of the freedoms and desires of women in the cultural and ideological framework of the working-class. Through a careful deliberation and unpacking of Kahiu's feminist quest shows an intersection of ideas with Mohanty's vision for today's feminism agenda. Mohanty expresses her feminism agenda to be:

> world that is pro-sex and -woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, insecurity and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth form the material basis of people's well-being. (Mohanty 3)

Such a feminist agenda is geared towards bridging the gap between men and women whiles desisting from acts that strike one gender against the other. Similarly, it acknowledges that the experiences of women in the world cannot be discussed in a homogenous manner—but takes specific contexts into account. Therefore, the experiences of women in Western countries differ widely from women in Africa. The ultimate goal is to attain equality and justice for women within their narratives and experiences. Women's efforts to achieve say, equal work equal pay, involves waging a war against gatekeepers within the patriarchal system. Likewise, in solidarity with the feminism movements, it is important to separate and discuss feminism along with classification (West/North on one side and developed/underdeveloped on the other).

As rightly posited by Mohanty (2003), "development policies do not affect both groups of women in the same way. Practices that characterize women's status and roles vary according to class. Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks" (30). Of course, the patriarchal nature of the society does little to illuminate the freedom and justice enjoyed by women. On the other hand, it equally hides the struggle of women in these cultures. The shared ideas and arguments by Kahiu in *Pumzi* and Mohanty points to a critical direction of engaging in feminism theory thus refraining from overgeneralization. More so, it advocates for, in order not to restrict our sense of inquiry, restraining from constantly framing women and feminist struggle along with political and economic lines which falls within the dominant discourse of

'western/developed' against the no longer used term 'third world/or

undeveloped/developing nations'.

Specifically, Kahiu rethinks and recreates the form of the African feminine

through the text of this science-fiction film. In Prabhu's contemplation, it invades "the

postcolonial underbelly, resurrecting powerful images of the female body and character"

(56). Two thematic terms, ecowomanism and ecofeminism – both alluding to the idea of

the female aligning herself with nature – are visible in the film. Ecowomanism is now

used by most African feminists since the term assumes Afrocentric thoughts and black

feminism in general. Ecofeminism, on the other hand, is favored primarily by white

feminists as a ubiquitous point of entry in accommodating the voices and experiences of

women of color (Rico 85).

Amanda Rico defines ecofeminism as "a contemporary political movement

operating on the theory that the ideologies which authorize injustices based on gender,

race, and class are related to the ideologies which sanction the exploitation and

degradation of the environment" (86). Both could easily fit into engaging with the

feminist discourse of the film. Nonetheless, I further theorize Kahiu's use of *Mothering*

as a new way of contemplating the thoughts and experiences of African women in

relation to the environment. In the first scene of the film, Kahiu presents audiences with

news clippings with the headlines, "The Earth is Changing Already" and "Whole Day

Journey in Search of Water" to announce the ecological perspectives of the film. After

this scene, Kahiu begins to play with words *Maitu*, *Maa* and *Itu*. The term *Maitu* in

Kikuyu language means Mother, *Maa* means truth and *Itu* means *our*. I infer from the

pieces of evidence of these facts that Kahiu is intentionally caving a new or advancing an existing one, *Motherhood*, as one of the viable means of solving the environmental challenges facing the continent.

The burden of motherhood is beyond the responsibility and feminine desire for a man and children, rather the quest to save an entire generation by catering for the environment. Asha, the lead actor, carries the African burden and responsibility through her quest in search of life and to sustain the environment. I employ the term "mothering" rather than an eco-focused scholarly term since it allows for broader inclusion of various functionalities and knowledge about the African female body in African thoughts and experiences. It allows for, as Kahiu unapologetically advances, Africans to voice their opinions and suggestions based on their experiences and realities.

Caroline Brown (2010) posits that the limitation of the female, for instance, in film, is entrenched by the male consumption (234). The cinematic gaze, which is largely influenced by culture and tradition, is male-centered. In most cases, the female character in film is engaged as an 'erotic object.' In film, the female irrespective of desires and experiences become a trophy to be earned by the hero. Per Andrea Hairston's (2016) analysis of *Pumzi*, Asha's commitment to her dreams is a rejection of the mundane task of cataloging, which involves the mourning of bleached fossils, withered limbs, and dried bugs (13). Her actions give birth to hope as she follows her visions into a radiated, devastated landscape. Hairston (2016) points out, "Asha is no helpless, suffering victim. She would transform the world. Hope is, of course, not the same as optimism. Hope is counterfactual, is faith" (13).

Through this depiction, the audience is able to glean semblances to their quotidian lives. The eroticization of the female character is particularly problematic as it allows for the continuous assumptions of the identity of the woman, her role and contribution to society (Brown 235). *Pumzi's* response to this is the erasure of all forms of sexual or erotic attribution to the protagonist, Asha. Asha's costume is non-sexualized designed to divert more attention to her role and make visible her desires, dreams and aspirations. The only challenge that Asha faces is the control exerted on her by the system of governance into suppressing her dreams. Anytime Asha dreams in the film, we hear the phrase, "dream detected take your suppressants." This speaks to the patriarchal grip on the feminine by preventing her from dreaming and participating in heroic acts.

Mothering brings forth the essence of continuation of life as enacted by Asha, the heroine of the film, one that will save the world from extinction and absolve all physical and philosophical notions of the female character. Adérónké Adésànyà, a Professor of Art History, argues that to know the motivation of people requires the interrogation of their held opinions on gender roles in order to understand the full dynamism and nuances of the cultural diplomacy. Even though this utopian world seems to exist outside all evidence of cultural influence and suggesting human survival solely depends on science, there is a little glimpse of a previous way of life, which motivates Asha to seek a life outside the enclave. The dreams that Asha continues to have are placeholders to the past that can be traced and examined. The dreams here become a metaphor of historical knowledge and evidence of the cultural fabric of the past generations. The tangibility of

the dreams is depicted through the concurrent video loops shown on a computer while Asha sleeps.

For instance, Adesanya, in exploring the Yorùbá diplomacy, came to the conclusion that gender representations are further channeled through historical accounts that have "muted" and appropriated the female sexuality. From the findings, two constructed views of the Yorùbá and the African woman at large exist: (1) that the female is subjugated and mistreated and (2) that the female who once held power some years past lost this authority in contemporary terms (69). In the film, Asha demonstrates these two constructed views posited by Adesanya. Even though Asha as the curator in the museum forms part of the knowledge production and dissemination, she is prevented from venturing into areas such as the search for life that is destined to liberate the people. Such subjugation is necessitated as a result of the history of a scarcity of water that has plunged the world into the drought. The Museum within which she operates functions here as an important place where knowledge is acquired. The museum contains artworks that, in a sense, can act as "a source of information about the values, morals axioms, and other features of the world view which suggest that society's image of reality" (Adesanya 70).

Regarding the issue of subjugation, Adésànyà posits that successful Yorùbá women may have experienced short-lived success as the patriarchal system did not allow them to flourish and foster strongholds. Adesanya, in citing Eva Figs, states that "the person who dominates cannot conceive of any alternative but to be dominated in turn" (71). The concept of sisterhood is complicated as the Council of Elders in *Pumzi* refuse

solidarity with Asha in her pursuit for the search of life outside of the utopian world. I argue that the film director Kahiu, here, attempts to individualize the goals, desires, and aspirations of the African woman. In general, the act of solidarity suggests the presence of support and collectivity as women pursue purpose. However, it can also lead to overgeneralization and monolithic discussion of women's experiences. By separating the aspiration of Asha from the power of control held by the Council of Elders (women), it suggests that these two groups of women, even though they may share some ideas and history, have individual ambitions. This reading is particularly important because, as Vivian Adair (2008) puts it, it allows for an appreciation of the "complexity of the circuit through which bodies are represented and understood in ways that reflect the dominant ideology" (135). Ideologies are important to take into account as they determine, shape, and reinforce public opinion nurtured by culture and traditions.

Mothering also advances the notion of choice, empowering women to choose in life the things that favor them. The dominant notion dictates that the African woman desires to grow up having learned all the details of domestic management, marry and bear children. In that narrative, the choice of the female is set in stone and provides little room for adjustments. Kahiu is of the view that African women can leap through the cracks of erasures and make their own choices. Asha represents the middle class in the utopian world in *Pumzi*, educated and occupying an institution that generates curiosity and advances knowledge. Asha, despite presented with all these forms of power, still chose *Mother* nature. By doing so, Kahiu presents "complex stories that refuse the iconography

of the poor woman as a lawbreaker, bad mother, incapable worker or degenerate citizen"

(Adair 145)

Kim Miller (2010) points out that impoverished women can be represented within

two iconographies of poverty: (1) trivialization of harsh realities of daily lives women

face and (2) representation of poor women as deviant victims without agency and power

(189). Predominant representations of women, as indicated earlier on, collapse and erase

experiences as a homogenous image of the feminine character. Kahiu, through the

character of Asha, reenacts the image of the African woman as educated with an agency.

The filmic character is employed here to address the agency of women who are able to

rise above the opposition, just as Asha confronts and disobeys the Council of Elders in

her quest to cause an evidential change (Miller 190).

Besides countering the image of the impoverished African woman, *Pumzi* delves

into debates on surrogacy, childbirth, and labor. I read Asha's quest and desire to restore

life outside the camp as the debate surrounding commercial surrogacy – the act of

birthing life. Commercial surrogacy, as we understand from the various scholarships

evokes an issue of moral and ethical ambiguity. From a moral standpoint, surrogate

mothers are treated with disdain and shame, as they are comparable and attributed to

having low moral standards. Because in the African cultural setting, a mother/woman

does not get pregnant for another just for monetary value. However, Pande (2014) tries to

shed more light on the economic and psychological empowerment, and opportunity

surrogacy has given women. Beyond the surveillance of women's bodies through the

process of disciplinary tactics employed by clinics, surrogates are introduced to services

and medical care that are ordinarily inaccessible. Pande (2014) states, "as surrogates, they suddenly find themselves in an unfamiliar relationship with the hyper-medicalized system of reproduction, a medical system that has previously been inaccessible to them as lower-class women in an anti-natalist state" (5).

The commercialization of the womb and women's bodies has created a condition where the rights of surrogates become secondary. The economic importance is placed on the product, thus the babies and means of production, thus the womb. Another aspect that advances this argument is the requirement needed for women to benefit from being a surrogate. Pande asserts that the requirements for a surrogate are a healthy womb and a virtuous ("inert and submissive") disposition (75). Likewise, Elizabeth Anderson (1990), as cited by Pande states that "the commodification of reproductive labor makes pregnancy an alienated form of labor for the women who perform it: selling her reproductive labor alienates the woman from her "normal emotions" (7). Virtuousness is presented as the moral condition that requires women to fit into the cultural definition of a female based on her readiness to submit to patriarchal authority without resistance. Adding, it affirms the acceptance of the role of women as agents of reproduction through childbirth. They are not regarded as individuals offering "labor" but rather acting on their nature's given abilities. Intended parents and clinics administrators have invasive rights to the body of the surrogate and control the affairs of the surrogate until the baby is delivered as the lack of control of their bodies.

In the last scene where Asha falls, helpless, thirsty and later become part of the growing tree advances that the woman is the sole sustainer of life. Amrita Pande's (2014)

Wombs in Labor, through the narratives of commercial surrogacy in India, provides a comprehensive debate on ways the commodification of women's bodies either empowers and exploits women. From a feminist standpoint, it provides an insight into the dominant strands of gender roles in society where women are limited to the role of reproduction. Kahiu is not only accepting this fact but also making a statement of the duality of the female character as one who must procreate to sustain life and also can be at the realm of power and knowledge.

It was clear that one of the primary reasons that affirmed women's decisions to become surrogates is to improve the economic standard of living of their families. Irrespective of this fact, surrogacy is misconstrued among men. Panda asserts that whereas the concept of labor for men equates reproduction to value, labor for women is closely linked to the biological makeup of women and nature. In that sense, the act of giving birth or 'labor' in the case of surrogacy is not considered as significant work (8). However, Kahiu advances the notion that surrogacy, which is not limited to the biological form based on the concept of labor and ownership of wealth, leads to the success of women and the world.

Female Authoring: Afrofuturism as a New Tool of Storytelling

Kahiu's work is considered as an Afrofuturist and within the broader genre of science fiction. However, most scholars engaging with her work and other similar works will settle for Afrofuturism as the term that completely engages with the narratives presented in the creative production. Amanda Rico defines Afrofuturism as "aesthetic works of black cultural production that treat futurist themes concerning Africa, and [the]

diaspora" (82). This definition in its operationality and conceptuality is most accurate. However, other debates about why artworks by Africans tend to be influenced by European labeling are still relevant. They presuppose that, for instance, science fiction is alien to the African cultural productions, and thus Africa lacks the means of productions and perhaps the content as well.

In an interview with d'Ande, Kahiu recounts a conversation she had with a colleague director who told her to decide how to label her 2009 film. The choice was either science fiction or fantasy. The reason this was important, according to the director, was that Western audiences separate the genres. Ultimately, Kahiu labels the film as science fiction. These series of events led Kahiu to argue that science fiction is not new to Africa considering the content and the forms stories told in Africa occupy. She states:

> The African storyteller, to a larger extent, has been ascribing to the genre. We have used animals, insects, trees to tell a story. May be because it was not as widespread. We did not have the internet as in the access, or the storyteller told their stories to the villagers, and it never got passed that… There have always been people om all cultures who have looked into space or seers who have looked into the future to tell the people what if going to happen. (d'Ande 2013)

Kahiu's argument allows for more questions concerning the relevance and use of the term Afrofuturism and the function of the female author and filmmaker. The effort to categorize, such as in this case, alludes to the agenda of labeling everything by its origin and allows creators to strike a difference in the art world. This act of labeling, to some extent, further widens the binary that exists between the West and the rest. By decolonizing these acts, we bring to bear the practical work being done by black female artists. As such, I argue and agree with Rico (2017) that "Afrofuturism is not only to project black bodies and subjections into 'futuristic' geographies—although that is a vital aspect of the genre—but also to reimagine and work through historical memory" (84).

Science fiction is not a popular film genre in African cinema. Some scholars argue that the African film industry is less sensitive to issues of gender (Jacobs 15). This makes Kahiu's efforts in producing a sci-fi film a worthy contribution to the arsenals of great filmmaking in Africa. It has given voice to women to tell their own stories and share their experiences from their perspectives without having to rely on the third-person narrator. Kahiu states in an interview with d'Ande:

> I want to make a love story, just because people laugh, and cry, and wake up, and make love, and have lovers, and divorce [in Africa] just like anywhere else in the world. We just don't hear those stories. I want to tell stories about Africa that I live in. The Africa that 1 know. The Africa that has every sort of person—every woman—you can find

imaginable. The LGBTi community here,

everything. I make my films because I'm proud of

where I live, and I'm proud of the people that I know.

(d'Ande 2013)

Female filmmakers are using the skill of storytelling to reconfigure persistent toxic gender narratives and advocating for the reconstruction of the female image and stereotypes in Africa. Judith Mayne in reviewing the relevance of women in film, advances that female authorship is critical in defining "the source of a text and as a movement in female-specific tradition" (Mayne 126-127). I utilize the term female authorship to mean or evoke its symbolic representation of a text. Mayne argues "films and videos could be considered a language of its own, but the language it uses still symbolizes the same binary order that has dominated our society with its phallocentric perspective" (125). Providing alternate visions of the human quotidian is a powerful occupation as the creators can form new public opinions and alter cultures that have long existed. Particularly for the women, as discussed above, the female visual creator can recast the feminine character and the contribution to state-making. In altering histories, Kim Miller (2010) argues the female artist can use "art-making as a vehicle to address and confront social and gender inequalities" (190). Such occupation further affirms the fact that women are equally concerned and invested in their economic survival and self-representation and not left at the impulse of patriarchy.

I treat the female filmmakers, directors and producers as authors. Texts of the film and scenes (image-making) present the filmmaker a powerful tool to affect a dominant

discourse. Ethiopian filmmaker Salem Mekuria (2012) argues that the intersectionality of representation and self-representation adopts the idea of treating the film as a "school of history" – a space where one does not only learn about the past but possess the power to recreate history (Mekuria 8). Females filmmakers must engage with this way of approaching authoring for two reasons. First, to enter the dominant space that has witnessed continuous misrepresentation of the female character. It is only within this space that the 'new entrant' can revisit these images and reposition them for a new debate (Mekuria 9).

Second, that the female, as Helene Cixous (1976) puts it, "must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been drawn away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same laws, with the same fatal goal" (875). The act of writing allows (an act of power dynamics) the filmmaker to inject "herself into the text" and evoke new ideas, dismantle subjective ones and chart a new path of comprehending the feminine image. *Pumzi* recreates the image of the future African female character as one without makeup, impeccable body size (not fat nor slim), immune to hair politics, well-educated and passionate about her dreams and goals.

It is imperative to pay close attention equally to borrowed theories on the subject while arguing for an ideal means of framing a feminist discourse or ideology that considers the culture and perspective of Africans. In that regard, I approached the theory of female authorship in conjunction with the African feminist perspective of *mothering* as advanced by Kahui. The African feminist framework, to begin with, is not entirely new

or different from western perspectives. Indeed, irrespective of cultural and geographical differences both seek to achieve a single goal—that the woman shares the same table with their male counterparts. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (1998), as cited by McFaddan (2011), postulates that "feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman" (30). Leaning towards the African Feminist ideology, however, does not obliterate this fundamental goal. Rather it serves as a caution against the over-dependence on western theories by reducing over-dependence and somewhat provides a clear vision of critical construction of the African female identity in her own right.

In any case, as Ama Ata Aidoo cautions, the term feminist and feminism should not be used carelessly to mark text or visual medium that simply talks about women (20). The term is not at the prerogative of women and less at the arm's reach of men. Likewise, making "women protagonists of drama or fiction is not feminist" (Aidoo 20). Instead, for Aidoo, the term feminism should only be engaged in creative work that "deals with women's issues with concern and commitment in ways that go beyond that would be of general interest to the author herself, as well as her potential [viewership]" (20). As such, Kahiu's revisualization breaks down all modes of dominant gendered stereotypes against women in *Pumzi* can be considered as feminist writing. Kahiu's aspiration of providing an alternate visual image of the female for younger generations, as she reiterates in several interviews, is a confirmation of the fact (Burton 64).

Globally, women are faced with similar or thematic problems, forming the minority in all societies. Caroline Brown (2003) advances that the cinematic gaze, a film

theory that conceptualizes the ideologies of the audience and filmic text, is largely male

gendered (234). Women from Africa with their western counterparts differ inexperience,

and the means of expressing and transforming dominant ideologies that fuel these

stereotypes equally remain different. Most instructively, it is more difficult to place

African feminism in a flowery sentence as an attempt to define it. Its composition, made

of many strands (informed by age, class, sexual orientation, culture and identity) and its

fluidity are subjected to various manifestations and implications. Rodo Gaidzanwa states:

> various tendencies within feminism in Africa raised issues
>
> relating to customs and traditions that undermine African
>
> women's land and property rights; violence against women
>
> in public and private spaces; and gender-based inequalities
>
> in education, health, economic and political power.
>
> (Gaidzanwa 8)

This points to the impossibility of engaging in a feminist discourse of the subject

without looking at colonization and the role it played in objectifying the African woman.

The dilemmas of African feminists have been overshadowed by continual debates

surrounding colonialism usually focused on defending African cultures, values and

practices. The discussion outlined in this chapter, as argued elsewhere, looks at the

African Women's Movement, specifically from the viewpoint of women in filmmaking.

There are two main challenges facing the African Feminism movement. The

struggle between African men and women to reach a consensus on the agenda and course

of feminism on the one hand and the gap between African women identified either by

belonging to intellectual or popular feminism on the other (McFadden 10). Patrick

McFadden in considering the prospects and challenges of African Feminism identifies

that intellectual feminism is usually promoted by urban and educated African women

with acquired knowledge from abroad and exhibiting the tendency to export the debate

on women's rights outside Africa as a result of their access and easy option for

ideological borrowing. Those belonging to popular sects, on the other hand, emphasize

that African cultures promote the identity of the woman as a coequal to the man.

 The tension that erupts from the collision of these distinct views is that African

academic feminism attack aspects of African culture such as polygamy, excision and

forced or early marriages. The critique is that such debates reiterate the paternalistic

attitude and tone of Western women towards African women and only resonates with the

elites. For instance, as McFadden points out, "Many feminist arguments on female

circumcision automatically assume that women subject themselves to this procedure only

at the insistence of males, thus ignoring the likelihood that for some women, this is a

choice regarding how they want to treat their bodies" (11). The limitation hardly allows

collective reflection on African women's condition and the appropriate solutions to the

related problems (Gaidzanwa 10). Mothering, therefore which represents the actual

experiences and desires of the African woman, presents an instructive way of

contemplating African feminism.

 In conclusion, this chapter contributed to the overall goal of this dissertation by

examining Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) as it offers new visions of Africa. It was

addressed that Kahiu's *Pumzi,* through ecological prophesy, and tackling the

environmental crisis differently imagine and reenact the image, body and function of the African feminine. Specifically, *Pumzi* discussed ecological issues such as water shortage in direct connection to nuclear dumping and activities of oil drilling and mining, which are ultimately polluting and contaminating water bodies and the environment. The water crisis emanates from decades of abuse of the environment by Africans and western countries. Kahiu through *Pumzi* advances the notion of mothering as an alternative way of engaging the female's body and function in those identified ecological debates. Likewise, Kahiu rethought and recreated the form of the African feminine through the text of the film, *Pumzi*. Two thematic terms that occupied the analysis of the film were ecowomanism and ecofeminism – both alluding to the idea of the female aligning herself with nature – and are visible in the film.

Chapter 4: *The Inquirer* and *New York Times* Coverage of the 2014 Ebola Crisis

The image of Africa—as an impoverished, disease-prone, weak, and corrupt place—has become the mainstay of Western media coverage of the continent (Nittle, par. 1). The western disposition about Africa has continued unabated for centuries and dictates the Western treatment of the continent. The portrayal of *otherness* in Western media centers on the coverage of crisis and 'hopelessness.' It involves the long-standing themes of famine and catastrophe associated with Africa during and after the colonial period. Nadra Kareem Nittle adopting the idea of Ethan Zuckerman, the co-founder of Global Voices, an international community of citizen bloggers, advances that the image held about Africa in the West is as a result of the notion of the continent as one that needs help (Nittle, par. 5).

Several scholars such as Sorenson (1991), Wonnah (2018), Marsh (2016) indicate that mass media coverage of Africa is an imposition of a narrative structure that constructs health, famine, disasters, war, death and poverty as an ideological reality of the continent (Sorenson 223). Health crises, since the onset of HIV/AIDS, malaria, polio, and Ebola, is a major discursive narrative used to describe Africa. The 2014 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa was considered the largest health crisis since the discovery of the virus in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976 (Wonnah 7). By far, it has been the biggest health crisis that challenged the health systems of West African countries aside from the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1970s. The virus affected some 28,103 persons resulting in 11,290 deaths in the most affected regions of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea (WHO). Efforts to mitigate and reduce the spread of the disease saw the collaboration of governments, humanitarian organizations from the Global North

and media organizations in providing assistance, health care and support to the affected areas.

Samson Wonnah (2018) uncovered that, though the presence and concerns of the Global North have been tremendous in providing support for Africa during a health crisis, Western media shifted attention and coverage of the situation from the threat of Ebola to the cultural factors that contributed to the spread of the virus (8). Wonnah states, "several observers have described how the Ebola response witnessed the castigation of local beliefs and practices around illness and death and the outright marginalization of traditional healers" (8). These coverages further capture Africa in the frame of narratives that support the public perception of the continent as a 'dark continent.'

This assumption further corroborates Melissa Wall's assertion that coverage of the crises in Africa is influenced by the organizational values and demands of Western media (261). These values and demands allow media organizations, as a result of their positionality, to engage in acts of forming representations. Western media organizations use these powers through broadcast and news publications to suppressed insurgencies during colonial rule and control public perception about the continent.

Considering the fact that all media entities have the power to frame ideas and advance an opinion, this study reveals Africa's media contribution in re-telling their stories to the world. As such, this chapter uses discourse analysis to analyze the publications of Liberia's *The Inquirer* and *New York Times* coverage of the 2014 Ebola crisis. These newspapers are analyzed to ascertain their contribution to framing Africa around the health crisis. The study approaches news agencies as crafters of knowledge

and thus indicative of their collective ability to form public opinion, perception and improve the public's knowledge inventory and processes. Before proceeding to discuss the comparison of coverage of the Ebola crisis between *The Inquirer* and *New York Times*, it is important to understand the power of the media and theories that guides their operations. I engage with the operationality of Agenda Setting and Framing Theory within the media landscape briefly.

Media Power: Agenda Setting and Framing Theory

In media studies, it is a widely held opinion that the media holds enormous power in shaping the image of a nation and its people. More so, the media's power is witnessed in its ability to direct and mediate public discourse. The phrase, 'the media can make a guilty person look innocent and an innocent person guilty,' speaks to the ability of the media to shape perception and reality within the public domain. A careful analysis of the statement reveals the interplay of two prominent theories that continually bestow power and authority to the media –Agenda Setting and Framing Theory. It is important to note that these theories are not exclusive in detailing the numerous theories (such as Cultivating Theory, Magic Bullet Theory and Priming) that govern the operations of the media and understanding the role they play in societies. Nonetheless, Agenda Setting and Framing Theory forms the foundation of the media's reach in crafting identity and representations in public discourse.

Agenda Setting theory was conceptualized in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw to provide an understanding of how media programming affects the audience's perception. Simply put, these scholars arrived at the conclusion that

continuous repetition of a news item or program leads to the formation of a public

agenda. The issues discussed in the news or media program become part of a public

discussion that lingers on as long as the media gives attention to the matter (Wonnah

2018). In analyzing the influence of the media on the audience and its role in forming

public agenda, McCombs and Shaw in 1968 studied ratings on issues voters regard as

important in comparison with media content on American presidential campaigns

(McCombs & Shaw, 177). They found out that there was a correlation between the

number of media reporting on identified issues, audience participation, and importance

audience associated with those issues. McCombs and Shaw, therefore, concluded that the

act of choosing which news items to publish or broadcast exercised by media personnel

especially, editors, journalists, and directors, play a crucial role in influencing the

public's attention on issues of importance. As such, "readers learn not only about a given

issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of

information in a news story and its position" (McCombs & Shaw, 176).

Whiles McCombs and Shaw's study is iconic within Mass Media studies, it only

focuses on the political economy created by the media. Scholars advance the arguments

that the ability of media to set the public agenda can be expanded to all facets of our

quotidian lives. Vivien Marsh (2016) posits that such theory has been deployed by

international news organizations who are constantly shaping public perception about their

countries and forming public discourse about the country they cover. In the case of

Africa, Marsh acknowledges that Western media are repeatedly "portraying Africans as

victims in need of salvation from the West" (Marsh 57). As noted, the tentacles of the

media are able to reach beyond its geographical boundaries and influence public agenda.

Through repetitions, rebroadcasting and republications, the media can direct public

attention to generating public opinion and perceptions. These perceptions and opinions

then become public knowledge and gradually become part of an ideology held in the

public domain.

Once the media has set the agenda and initiated a public discussion on a matter,

framing is employed further to influence public thoughts and ideas on the issue. The

theorist Erving Goffman defines Framing Theory as the "schemata of interpretation that

enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label events and life experiences"

(24). While Agenda-Setting focuses on the repetition of a news item or media

programming, Framing Theory is much more concerned with how a piece of information

is presented. A perspective in the news is crucial in media operation because it guides and

dictates to the audience how to approach a matter or thing about it (Marsh 58).

For the audience to obtain a schema of interpretation, they must first be presented

with viable content from the point of view, which enables them to apply labels of

meaning to it. These labels are generated from their interaction with everyday life and

public discussion on a matter that is relatable (Goffman 24). Framing is always successful

because, as Goffman advances, at the micro-level individuals are constantly mutating and

acting to create impressions and identity about others (Goffman 30). At the macro level,

culture allows for the larger public to share ideologies that allow for a broader form of

impressions communicated about others. It is within this form of framing that we can

better understand the intricacies of stereotyping, stigmatizing and labeling both at the

regional, national and global levels. Further, Melissa Wall (1997) corroborates the above assertion by adding that a superior-inferior complex influences the types of news about Africa. She states, "news is not merely the random reporting of events, but rather [are] constructed and shaped by reporters and editors who determine what is worthy of coverage and what is not, and how events will be presented" (Wall 261).

In Mass Media, the perspective given to a news item offers the organization an advantage to spin it according to how they please. Therefore, the perspective and mode of presentation of information create a frame among the public—it includes all that is shared and made available to the public. As stated earlier, these theories can operate as standalone or deploy in such a way that they complement one another. For instance, the media, on the one hand, will employ Agenda Setting Theory to dictate to the public on 'what to think about' and on the other hand, employ Framing to present the information in a way that influences the audience on 'how to think about' the presented issues.

In a similar study, Oluseyi Adegbola and other scholars conducted a study to determine the United States television coverage of Nigeria. The study discovered that negative reportage about Nigeria between 2005 and 2006 was low. Among the reason cited for the results obtained, Adegbola stated that two variables were responsible. First, Adegbola identified that there was a decrease in adverse events occurring in Nigeria at the time the study was conducted between 2005 and 2006. Second, the evolving US policy towards Nigeria with regards to military and trade most likely influenced the neutral stands of US media towards the African country (58). Irrespective of the positive outlook towards Nigeria, the study concluded that "while the valence of reporting may

have improved, reports about Nigeria that are exclusively positive remain marginal at best" (59). It is indicative that there is a correlational exchange between media reportage of events in Africa and Western political action. Gorm Olsen et al. refer to this as the 'CNN-effect' – "a term which implies that the media can influence the decisions of political leaders, including the foreign policy agenda of Western governments" (110). Gorm Olsen and other researchers in their research considered the influencing factors which determine the level of humanitarian assistance provided to countries in crisis. They discovered that the media was a crucial player in drawing decision-makers and donor agencies' attention to places in crisis, especially in Africa. The media provides crucial preconditions and the basis for a policy response to a humanitarian crisis.

In theory, due to the pivotal functions of the media, they are perceived to remain neutral and objective as possible. However, the theories discussed here and other factors such as ownership, which controls the form and functions of media organizations, suggests that it is impossible to attain neutrality and objectivity in practice. Wonnah (2018) puts forward that messages obtained from the media only "offer a particular reading of social events" (42). To further probe and provide a better understanding of media framing, let us now consider how Africa is framed around the theme of a health crisis.

Africa's Health Crisis

Africa's health crisis is part of the larger discursive systems Western media organizations use to talk about Africa. Health crisis discourse is carried under the broader issue of poverty (Sorenson 224). According to John Sorenson (1991), "crisis-oriented

coverage may have encouraged a view of famine as an event which struck with unexpected impact" (224). Two foundational ideologies characterize Africa's health crisis. The first ideology is based on the fact that reportage about Africa as a place full of disaster is profitable with regards to humanitarian aids. Second, the constant portrayal of Africa in a single-story which allows inherent assumptions that it is a place that needs salvation to continue to flourish the 'white savior' syndrome (Sorenson, 1991 and Gorm Olsen, Nils Carstensen & Kristian Hoyen, 2003). This does not, however, suggest that all efforts by other foreign countries to assist countries in Africa in crisis are ill-motivated. Instead, I question modes of such efforts that thrive on 'us' against 'them' dichotomy in which highlight differences.

Gorm Olsen, Nils Carstensen & Kristian Hoyen, (2003) comments that three factors cause humanitarian aid in times crisis to have a negative effect on recipients (108). They outlined that the intensity of media coverage, degree of political interest and strength and presence of humanitarian NGOs and International Organizations in that specific country were the factors that cause humanitarian aid to have adverse effects. These three key factors unearth the business model that is applied to the health crisis in Africa. The researchers identified that for Western mass media to focus on a crisis, these conditions must be met. Olsen, Carstensen & Hoyen (2003) advanced that "another precondition for media coverage" in Africa "has to do with what is sometimes called the 'news-attention cycle' or the 'issue-attention cycle'" (112).

John Sorenson, on the other hand, adds that due to the model given above, small items of foreign news are not given much attention until they develop into a crisis in

which case "they function to reinforce the image of the Third World as dangerous and unpredictable" (224). This has played out in numerous health crises, for instance, the recent Ebola outbreak. Wonnah argues that less attention was paid by Western media and International Organization when it was first recorded even though the disease had a high fatality rate. The Ebola outbreak only gained attention when it became an 'African crisis' and a public health problem. Wonnah argues that the negative portrayal of Africa in the Western media, as stated elsewhere, is part of a "deliberate system of biases reflected in the ways the American media," for instance, selects foreign news (45). It is characterized by a set of global discourse systems based on commercial prudence, political expediency, and sociocultural criteria determined by the West. He declares as these sets of systems aid in creating a benchmark of relevance, Western cultures value their cultures as superior to Africa, and consequently, "news events from Africa are presented as abnormal or unnatural" (45).

The Framing of Africa: Coverage of the Ebola Crisis by *The Inquirer* and *New York Times*

I provided an analysis of the selected news articles published in *The Inquirer* and *New York Times* using five key indicators: sources where information was obtained, keywords used in the headlines, determining the tone of the headlines, ascertaining whether or not if the lead sentence was positive, negative or neutral and identifying reoccurring themes in the article. In this section, I present findings from both newspapers separately and then draw a comparison in the conclusion. The data referenced here are detailed in Appendix A.

Framing of Ebola in The Inquirer

Sources, where journalists and media organizations obtain information from is crucial. It provides credibility to the information disseminated and gives credence to the organization for doing an in-depth work of seeking knowledge from experts, victims and people who are closely linked to the matter. Content analysis of sources identified in *The Inquirer* newspaper (52 in all) revealed that there was an attempt to create a balance of where information about issues reported on Ebola was obtained. The data gathered indicated that there was an equal number of experts, health workers, government officials and Intergovernmental Organizations. These sources were subdivided into Liberian (26) and non-Liberian (26) sources. Journalists refrained from quoting victims, families of victims and persons close to victims. Liberian sources included government officials, Ministers and health works while non-Liberian sources included foreign government officials such as Ambassadors and Intergovernmental Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU).

Expert sources, such as health workers, or academic specialists, made up of more than 50 percent of sources that were quoted in most of the news articles. It is important to note that, during a crisis, these persons are the contact officials of most public and private institutions, and as such, they are able to avail themselves to journalists by granting interviews and providing commentary on pressing issues. Groups such as Doctors Beyond Borders (DBB) and government ministries were releasing regular press briefings and attending public events. Since these positions form the frontline of the crisis, they knew about what was happening in Liberia.

Collapsing categories of sources into non-Liberian and Liberian revealed that Liberian sources (including governmental, local people and organizations) made up 50 percent of all sources. It was revealed that Liberians were given a voice and agency in the coverage of the crisis, suggesting a positive representation of Liberia.

The headline of each news publication was analyzed in two ways by paying attention to the keywords and determining the overall portrayal of the headlines as positive or negative. The headlines of the selected news articles were analyzed to decide whether or not they listed the cause of the problem or provided a solution to the problem. The headline analysis further suggests that *The Inquirer* outlook was generally positive. The data from the research revealed that most of the headlines (73 percent) listed solutions and provide hope to readers about the ways the government was tackling the pandemic.[4] Among those that were considered negative, 23 percent of the news publications listed and attributed causes of the spread of the pandemic to cultural insensitivity and lack of support from organizations.[5] Out of the headlines that listed solutions, Liberians were encouraged to participate in the fight against Ebola while the majority of the headlines contained the promises made by the government to solve the crisis. There was a strong attempt by journalists to reclaim and redirect efforts in fighting the pandemic to the collective efforts of the populace. For example, in the headline "U.S. Military Response to Ebola First Shipment Arrives GOL Needs U.S.$375 Million to

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[4] An example of such publication is: "Anti-Ebola Fights Intensifies," *The Inquirer*, 24 October 2014.
[5] An example of such publication is: "Ebola Affects More Men than Women," *The Inquirer*, Timothy Seaklon, 22 September 2014. Details of all the headlines are provided in the Appendix to this document.

Fight Ebola - Opens Largest Treatment Center At Island Clinic[6]," the United States

provided support in several millions of dollars was juxtaposed with the opening of the

largest treatment center in the community that was hard hit by the pandemic. This

portrayal despite the fact that foreign governments and organizations were making

monetary and clinic material donations, gave Liberians agency indicating that the

government and the people were actively working to end the pandemic with their

resources.

The keywords also contribute to how images are formed about a country.

Keywords used in headlines provide clues to the audience of what to expect and the

image to associate with a news article. The keyword results showed that the image

created offered a sense of hope, action and commitment to the fight against the disease:

the words 'defeat,' 'fight' or 'assures' appeared several times in all the 15 news articles

that were analyzed. Also, keywords such as 'cross-border,' 'coordination,' 'fight against'

indicated a multileveled collaboration among health institutions, personnel and the

public. A word cloud of all the key work identified, as shown below, clearly shows the

direction and the public attitude publications in *The Inquirer* sort to create among the

public.

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[6] Italics demonstrate my emphasis.

Figure 1

Word cloud of keywords in The Inquirer

Created with Nvivo (version 12), by Dennis Moot

From the word cloud above, it is clear that the most used keywords in the news articles were 'awareness,' 'fight,' and 'treatment.' Visually, these keywords provide an image of the media engaging in the three crucial functions during a health pandemic: education (awareness), prevention and saving lives (treatment and fight). As such, I conclude that coverage by *The Inquirer* was positive, with an emphasis on resolving the pandemic. Aside from these key features analyzed in the selected newspapers, reoccurring themes were identified. These themes tend to cluster in specific patterns that are easily identifiable in a way to determine how public opinions are formed.

Identified Themes in The Inquirer Coverage of the Ebola Crisis

I identified four themes in the selected newspaper coverage of the Ebola crisis in Liberia:

1. Agency: Liberians actively working to leverage against the Ebola crisis

2. Collaboration, Foreign Help and Support: Focused on how foreign involvement in fighting the pandemic was framed

3. Education and Mobilization: Identified the fundamental role of the media to provide adequate information to the masses on prevention, treatment and support. In terms of mobilization, Liberians were encouraged to come together to fight against the pandemic

4. Hope: A deliberate attempt to provide an image of the country winning the battle against Ebola

1. *Agency: Liberians actively working on to leverage against the Ebola crisis.*

During a crisis, it is easier to forego the efforts by governments and citizens in resolving the issue. Melissa Wall (1997) indicates that in times of crisis, African countries are portrayed as passive and non-actively finding solutions to the problem (264). To determine the 'agency', each article was closely analyzed according to whether the content emphasized domestic activity (generated by the government), social activity (individuals, experts, MNGOs, foreign support), or balanced activity (indicating a balanced view of Ebola activity).

Contrary to the notion that Africans are passive during a crisis, news articles chose to present the Liberian government and people as actively working to mitigate the spread of the Ebola pandemic. For instance, this headline, "I'll not rest until we defeat Ebola – Ellen Assure" (*The Inquirer*, 2014), provides a sense of assurance to the audience by showcasing the relentless efforts of the President of Liberian in resolving the problem.

More so, the same level of the agency was noticed among government Ministers, private organizations, and local people. Concerning the agency of government, the President and Ministers were portrayed as using all avenues and resources to provide treatment to victims, educate the public, and provide interventions to help halt the spread of the disease. Antoinette Sendolo's publication on December 16, 2014, highlighted the success of the government's efforts in fighting against the spread of the Ebola disease. Sendolo (2014) quoted:

> Internal Affairs Minister, Morris Dukuly, has corroborated reports that the Ebola virus is still decreasing as efforts continue by government and its partners to eradicate it in the country. Speaking at the Ministry of Information regular press briefing on Ebola, the Minister said as the Ebola crisis continues to decrease in the country, members of the Ebola Burial Team need to be remembered and considered as heroes as well as health workers.

The quote above demonstrates the efforts of the government with the support of the public in improving the pandemic. Likewise, it also indicates a multifaceted level of health workers and burial teams working together harmoniously to solve the problem. The news coverage equally communicated a sense of a working system and health facilities that were established to see to the treatment and care of affected persons.

> He said since the opening of the 150 beds in Island Clinic last Sunday, the facility has admitted 112 patients with about

56 Ebola patients being transferred from the Redemption

Hospital in New Kru Town. Tolbert Nyenswah further said

49 out of the 112 patients were tested Negative for Ebola but

are being monitored and being treated for Malaria, fever,

running stomach and other sicknesses. "We are monitoring

them and there will be another Ebola test on them within the

next 48 hours," he added. He said of the patients at the Island

Clinic, 56 of them are Ebola positive and are receiving

treatment and being catered to by the over 75 medical team.

(Timothy Seaklon, September 22, 2014)

Overall, news publications in *The Inquirer* communicated a sense of commitment on the part of the government, health workers, and local persons working towards resolving the pandemic. Discursive narratives, as outlined in the introduction, such as those that demonstrate the passive nature of African people, were absent.

2.   *Collaboration, Foreign Help, and Support: Focused on how foreign involvement in fighting the pandemic was framed*

Collaboration between different parties and agencies during a crisis is crucial. News publication in *The Inquirer* gave much credence to local cooperation and couched foreign help and support as equal partners to the governments and local agencies. Locally, grassroots collaborations received equal attention from the media as well as foreign organizations. This gave credibility to the fact that the country was not waiting on only foreign donors to contribute towards the management of the Ebola pandemic. It

provides a sense of confidence among the public by reducing anxiety and increasing

confidence in the government. For instance, the quote below, a news item covered by

Antoinette Sendolo on November 27, 2014, provides insight into the level of support

received from a local organization and their contribution:

> According to the Establishment Coordinator of (ABIC),
> Madam Yvette Chesson Wureh in a press statement read
> during the official launch of the project title: "You Can Stop
> Ebola"-Women Working Towards Zero Cases" recently, the
> project seeks to continue the anti-Ebola awareness campaign
> in market places and provides logistical support for four (4)
> major markets in the country.

Indigenous organizations and foreign governments in Liberian provided

assistance to support the government's efforts and events designed to mitigate the havoc

caused by the pandemic. *The Inquirer* did not focus on channeling information on

accusations at victims and personnel working to improve the living standards.

3.   *Education: Identified the fundamental role of the media to provide adequate*

information to the masses on prevention, treatment and support.

During health crises such as the outbreak of Ebola, education plays an essential

role in providing information to the general public about prevention, treatment and

support. *The Inquirer* prioritized education and events on sensitization than any other

news item. This was a re-occurring theme that was noticed in most of the publications

analyzed. It also captured efforts of collaborative efforts among public and private

organizations on educating all sectors of the masses, including market women and populations in rural areas. Sendolo (2014) quotes:

> Madam Wureh called on all Liberians to continue every measure that seeks to eradicate Ebola, sternly noting that people must not neglect the preventive measures such as washing hands, keeping distance and avoiding personal contacts especially with sick people showing the following symptoms: vomiting, running stomach, fever, headache, muscle pains, rash and red eyes; no contact with dead bodies adding that "this must be our daily recitation.

The quote above indicates that collective importance was placed on the education of the people. It suggests that every available strategy was implemented to help eradicate the Ebola pandemic. From the quote, important preventive strategies were provided to the public in a bid to prevent the spread of the disease: washing hands, keeping social distance, and avoiding personal contact with persons that are sick.

4.   *Hope: A deliberate attempt to provide an image of the country winning the battle against Ebola*

Articles published in *The Inquirer* during the spread of Ebola, carried a sense of hope, assuring the public that the situation was under control. Government officials seized every opportunity to re-assure Liberians that the fight against Ebola was gaining traction towards the achievement of success. Thus, readers find hopeful the proclamation made by the Liberian President who said, "I will not rest until Ebola is defeated" (The

Inquirer, 2014). It provides an image of a government that is tirelessly seeking and using all avenues and resources to improve the living standards of the people.

In other cases, news text focused on disseminating news on the decline of the pandemic which suggested the successes of government interventions and strategies: "Internal Affairs Minister, Morris Dukuly, has corroborated reports that the Ebola virus is still decreasing as efforts continue by government and its partners to eradicate it in the country." Thus, boosting public confidence and morale in joining in the fight against Ebola.

Publications obtained from the *New York Times* did not follow the same trend. I discuss in detail, in the same manner as I have done above, how the *New York Times* covered the Ebola crisis.

Framing of Ebola by the New York Times

Among the 15 news articles analyzed, 57 sources of information that contributed to the news articles were identified. Similar to the sources identified in *The Inquirer* news articles, sources were mostly aid workers, health works and experts in state universities in the United States. Local people and organizations in Liberia or other African countries were not considered as viable sources of information. Other sources included: foreign government officials, Ambassadors, Intergovernmental Organizations (such as WHO, Doctors without Borders, United Nations). The most frequently quoted sources were experts made up of academic officials from public schools and health professionals from the United States.

The identified sources were categorized into non-Liberian and Liberian. The study revealed that non-Liberian sources (including governmental and non-governmental organizations) made up 87 percent of all sources cited in the news articles. Liberian sources made up 40 percent of all sources of information that were cited. The finding suggests that the *New York Times* gave more voice to sources outside Liberia during the coverage of the pandemic. Likewise, it can be concluded that considering these results the presentation of Liberians and African was far from positive.

This further influenced the headlines that were chosen to accompany the news articles. The headline analysis of the selected newspapers suggested that Liberians were not favorably portrayed. Most of the headlines listed causes of the spread of the pandemic and painted the picture of gloom and doom. In some cases, the headlines pointed out inefficiencies in the strategies implemented by the government and drew a contrast between other forms of catastrophes that had befallen the country. The table below shows a sample of headlines analyzed (the complete headline of the articles analyzed is provided in Appendix A):

Table 1

Headlines and Interpretations of the New York Times Coverage of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak

Headlines	Author and Date of Publication	Interpretation
As Many Doctors Retreat, Ebola Fight Grows Harder	Sheri Fink, August 17, 2014	Projects a picture of complicated and minimal efforts in curtailing the disease. Most instructively, it points to a lack of resources available in Africa countries to combat the disease.

Table 1 Continued

Ebola Outbreak Erodes Recent Advances in West Africa	Somini Sengupta, October 22, 2014	Quite straight to the point, the vagueness in this headline perpetuates the stereotype that Africa is a place of 'underdevelopment.' The ambiguity allows broad interpretations and assumptions to be made concerning the situation at hand.
Lax Quarantine Undercuts Ebola Fight in Africa	Adam Nossitter, Adam Bailes & Andrew Siddons, August 5, 2014	Again, *Lax* used here indicates a flexible structural system instituted in taking care of the disease. It points to the wide held assumption that Africa is a place of 'lawlessness.'

Table 1 continued

Trying to Contain Ebola in Liberia	John Moore, August 19, 2014	Several months into the pandemic, one will assume that there have been some successes achieved. Instead, this headline suggests a slow-paced attempt by the governments and citizens in finding a solution. The phrase 'trying to' negates all efforts that have been instituted to contain the pandemic.

Data Analyzed with Nvivo (12v). Interpretations by Dennis Moot

A keyword search revealed that generally, the output of the *New York Times* portrayal of Africans was negative. Overall, there were 32 keywords identified in the selected news articles for the study. Words and phrases such as 'slums,' 'time bomb,' 'mud,' 'Africa' and 'West Africa' appeared more times in the 15 headlines. Notable amongst these headlines are outlined in table 1, above. These keywords indicated and

perpetuated stereotypes used in discussing issues affecting African countries. In some cases, there was a blanket referral to 'Africa' and 'West Africa' even though the specific articles referred to a particular country. It suggested that all African countries were dealing with the Ebola pandemic, whereas it was most prominent in five (5) West African Countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, and Mali.

Figure 2

Word Cloud of keywords Identified in the New York Times Coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak

Word cloud created with Nvivo (version 12), by Dennis Moot

As the word cloud above indicates, it is clear that the most used keywords in the news articles were 'Africa,' 'slums,' 'defuse' and 'retreat.' Visually, these keywords in the news articles provide a negative image by entrenching labels used in describing Africa in crisis differently from *The Inquirer* publications, which sought to focus on

prevention (awareness), treatment and saving lives (fight). As such, I conclude that news articles published in the *New York Times* were negative in portrayal and more concerned with depicting Africa in an existing trope. Aside from these critical features analyzed in the selected newspapers, reoccurring themes were identified. These themes sought to cluster in specific patterns that are easily identifiable and aid the audience to form an opinion.

Identified Themes in New York Times Coverage of the Ebola Crisis

I identified four themes in the *New York Times* coverage of the Ebola crisis in Liberia:

1. Lack of agency, leadership competence, and Innovations

2. West as Savior Narrative, Foreign Support, and Aid politics

3. Lack of resources and poverty laden narrative

4. Reference to Africa as a country

*1.	Lack of agency, leadership competence and Innovation*

Three discursive topics emerged under this theme. Articles portrayed the imagery of lack of effort or action on the part of the government in curbing the pandemic, an attempt to expose incompetence in leadership and lack of innovation. Lack of innovations suggested that there was no evidence of novelty instituted by government, organizations and the people of Liberia in curbing the pandemic. It presupposed that countries battling the Ebola outbreak were waiting on others to come to their aid. First, there was a great attempt to compare the health facilities in the United States (US) with 'West Africa.' The comparison suggests that health facilities in West Africa are not up to the standards of the

US and, as such, making the fight against the Ebola difficult. A publication on August 16, 2014, stated:

> the stark difference in the care available in West Africa and the United States is reflected in the outcomes, as well. In West Africa, 70 percent of people with Ebola are dying, while seven of the first eight Ebola patients treated in the United States have walked out of the hospital in good health. (Catherine Saint Louis, *New York Times*)

The contrast failed to recognize that several countries make up the West Africa subregion, and as such, differences exist which makes a homogenous comparison problematic. Further, it compared victims that had survived in the United States to the five most affected countries in the region. When it came to West Africa, percentages were used instead of numbers, whereas numbers were used to indicate victims that had survived in the United States. Statistics from the most affected West African countries showed that there were about 28,638 cases, which resulted in 11,322 deaths, which is about 39.5% fatality. From this data, it shows that the 70 percent which makes up 8 cases recorded in the United States in comparison to the more than 28,638 cases recorded in West Africa is an exaggeration intended to highlight African countries as a failed system without a robust health system.

Also, the above comparison generates a discussion on leadership and its effectiveness in combating the disease. The sharp contrast suggests that while effective leadership led to efficient healthcare systems in the United States, the lack of it resulted

in several deaths in West African countries. Lack of leadership is yet another narrative used by the West to describe the non-development, war, sickness and corruption in Africa. Therefore, it becomes one of the factors that western media propagate as the cause of the spread of the Ebola pandemic. For instance:

> In announcing the United States' deployment, Mr. Obama was pointed in his message that America was "prepared to take the leadership on this" but could not fight the epidemic on its own. The White House in effect challenged other nations to roll out a similar level of response in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the two other nations hard hit by the disease, which were colonies of France and Britain, respectively.
>
> (Helene Cooper, September 13, 2014)

The phrase "prepared to take the leadership on this" though out of the contest, points to a deliberate attempt by the media to highlight that the challenge facing West African countries in the fight against Ebola is leadership. Again, it draws a comparison between US leadership, where it is perceived as the standard of leadership in moments of crisis, and leadership in Africa. By that, countries hard hit by the Ebola pandemic were referenced back to their colonial history, indirectly suggesting that the former colonial master needs to intervene. Cooper (2014) states, "similar level of response in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the two other nations hard hit by the disease, which were colonies of France and Britain, respectively." I, therefore, conclude that the *New York Times*

publications during the Ebola crisis represented West African countries as places without agency, effective leadership, and innovations in solving its crisis.

2.   'West as Savior' Narrative, Foreign Support, and Aid politics

The 'West as Savior' narrative, which dedicates that the West holds solutions to problems and challenges that emerge in Africa, has lingered on for several years. Such narrative puts forward a superiority-inferiority dichotomy, which is deeply rooted in areas such as political and economic power. In this case, the West as Savior narrative dwells more on the financial capacity of the West to provide financial assistance to countries affected by the Ebola pandemic to combat disease. As such, news articles consider a call for support and collaboration by African leaders as 'pleading.' Consider the headline: "Liberian President Pleads With Obama for Assistance in Combating Ebola" (Cooper, September 13, 2014). The outlook of this headline paints an image of African leaders always 'pleading' for monetary support. African leaders call-out-for-help are seldom captured as governments reaching out for collaboration in solving a global health crisis.

> The president of   Liberia, Ellen   Johnson   Sirleaf, has
> implored President Obama for   help   in   managing   her
> country's rapidly expanding Ebola crisis and has warned that
> without American assistance the disease could send Liberia
> into the civil chaos that enveloped the country for two
> decades. (Cooper, September 13, 2014)

The aid politics discourse complements this narrative. Within the politics of aid, the West assumes the position of a benevolent and kind as the media report depict them

as solving the problems of the world. It equally maintains the visual representation of the West as a financial powerhouse and wealthier than any other country. Through aid, the West is able to claim credit as the sole factor in improving situations during a crisis. Gentleman et al. (2014) quote, "Many aid officials say the Pentagon's role in building treatment centers, establishing mobile blood labs and ferrying Ebola supplies around Liberia has helped slow the epidemic there." In this manner, the success attained for the fight against Ebola is attributed to the aid provided by the West and not the efforts of West African countries. Health and war crisis, for years, has been the leverage organizations use as a basis to request funds and further entrench their economic control over the globe. Sengupta in chronicling the contribution of the United States, states:

> Aid has picked up since the Security Council's appeals. The United States plans to build 18 treatment centers across Liberia. Germany is building a treatment center in Sierra Leone and another in Liberia and using its military aircraft to transport supplies for the United Nations. China announced that it would send motorcycles to help track the disease, along with $6 million for food to those who are quarantined. A consortium of East African countries have promised to send 600 health workers. (Gentleman et al. 2014)

3. *Lack of resources and poverty-laden narrative*

In this frame, the *New York Times* articles analyzed revealed Africa as a continent without adequate and enough resources to help its population in a time of crisis. Africa is framed as a poverty-laden continent with no resources. Conveniently, no reference was made to the fact that the so-called failed state was plundered for the riches of the West. Some news items went as far as reporting on the situation of some African countries before the health crisis started. For instance, the quote below is an attempt to portray West Africa as a failed state long before the pandemic.

> Strife and poverty had crippled health systems in much of
>
> West Africa long before the Ebola outbreak. (*New York*
>
> *Times*, 2014)

This quote presupposes that the West African region has insufficient resources to curtail the outbreak. Also, the underlying ideology being espoused here is that without aid or assistance from wealthy nations, the continent is bound to lose the war against the deadly disease.

Further, the monolithic framing of Africa with regards to the inadequacy of resources was not just material but also human resources. The health systems (including health workers) of the continent were portrayed insufficient in the war against Ebola. For instance, the health system of Liberia was described as weak in comparison to the West. For example, the high death toll recorded was attributed to the "fragile health systems" in the affected countries.

> The stark difference in the car available in West Africa and
>
> the United States is reflected in the outcomes, as well. In

West Africa, 70 percent of people with Ebola are dying,
while seven of the first eight Ebola patients treated in
the United States have walked out of the hospital in good
health. (*New York Times*, 2014)

This quote points to the fact that the best way to curtail the outbreak is when external agencies and wealthy countries come to the aid of Africa. This portrays Africa as a continent that always needs saving whose best allies are the West. Such framing implies that Africa has no agency or systems of their own that could be maximized in situations like the Ebola pandemic. Also, this angle of analysis falls within the dependency paradigm of development where Africa is seen as a continent that lacks resources and needs the West to support them to survive. The following quotes substantiate the above argument.

Donors had spent millions of dollars in an effort to
strengthen the public health systems of Guinea, Liberia and
Sierra Leone long before the three countries became the
center of the Ebola outbreak. (*New York Times*, 2014)
Aid agencies of the United Nations have been active there
for decades, with projects to train health workers, improve
child mortality rates and get more children into school.
United Nations peacekeepers helped shore up Sierra Leone
for 20 years, since the end of its crippling war. (*New York
Times*, 2014)

The United Nations has spent upward of $8 billion on the

peacekeeping mission in Liberia since 2003." "The viral

illness has exacted a terrible toll, killing 729 people,

including top physicians in Liberia and Sierra Leone, nations

that already faced an acute shortage of doctors. (*New York*

Times, 2014)

This stereotypical representation of the countries stricken by the disease is partly

attributable to the excessive humanitarian aid by western governments and foreign

policies that restricts Africa (Oguh, 2015). The articles also made efforts to call on more

humanitarian assistance and financial support from other countries because that is the

only known avenue through which the countries affected can be saved.

The inadequacy of the health systems was highlighted along with the lived

experiences of the victims and their families. In one post, a family member narrated how

they lost trust in the conventional ways of healing and resorted to the traditional means,

but this did not yield any favorable results as his sister passed away on the way back to

the hospital.

We removed our sister, so we could go on to the native side," said

Sule, referring to a traditional healer. 'Because we have tried the

English way. And it did not work," he said. So we go try the native

side, to see if it could cure her or not. (*New York Times*, 2014)

As Saudatu's condition worsened, the family put her in an

ambulance, back to the hospital. "On the way going then, the lady

died," said Sule, holding up a birthday card that Saudatu -- a tall

young woman in a black tank top -- had made for her mother. (*New*

York Times, 2014)

The above news article reveals the confidence most Africans have in their systems

of faith. It also tells how desperation makes a person utilize every means possible to seek

healing. Another reading is that, it typifies the black person as primitive when analyzed

with the modernization paradigm of development seen in the West were adhering to

scientific knowledge of reasoning and action are considered being developed.

4.   Reference to Africa as a country

One of the repetitive frames in the *New York Times* coverage of the Ebola

pandemic is the portrayal of African and subregions as a country. This frame is

considered misleading since Ebola did not affect all the 55 countries in Africa, but

instead, only affected 5 countries. This negative portrayal is consistent with extant

literature on how Western media consistently represent Africa as a country (e.g., Harth

2012; Oguh, 2015). This single representation also deepens the stereotypes about the

continent, thereby ignoring the political and economic progress happening in different

countries in Africa. This homogenous colonial representation of Africa has persisted for

several decades, and further perpetuated by the *New York Times* in its reference to the

few African countries affected by Ebola as a representation of the entire continent.

The dominant narrative that Africa is a poverty-stricken, war-torn continent that

lacks effective leadership persists in the more prominent imagery of Africa referred to as

a country. What is striking in these narratives about Africa is that the Western way of

living is considered developed. In contrast, the African way of living is deemed to be
dark, primitive, and backward. This can be traced to colonial times where the colonial
powers wielded control over the Africans. Because they were able to succeed, their way
of living became entrenched on the continent and considered the standard. This
perspective projects and perpetuates the core and periphery dichotomy. This unwarranted,
untrue, and homogenous representation of the continent of 54 countries and over 1.3
billion people in the 21st century is disappointing. Below are some quotes that typify the
homogenization of Africa as a country:

> Like most of the aid workers treated in the United States,
> those evacuated to Europe have generally fared better than
> patients in Africa. (*New York Times*, 2014)
>
> Dr. Sprecher said that most patients in West Africa were not
> well nourished and that *Ebola* quickly sapped what little
> reserves they had and then made them too sick to eat. (*New
> York Times*, 2014)

Furthermore, this theme syncs with Chimamanda's TED talk titled "Dangers of a
single story." Here, Adichie espoused that these single representations make one story
become the only story. Adichie continues that a single story can be created by "show[ing]
a people as one thing, only one thing over and over again, and that is what they become."
Thus, this frame deals a lot with representation. How the media represents –
underrepresent and misrepresent Africa is of utmost importance in this dissertation.
Following Adichie's argument on power, I content that Western media has been able to

frame the continent of Africa in such light because they wield more cultural and economic power than Africans. The interesting twist to this narrative is that the stereotypes about the continent of Africa may not be untrue, but they become the only story. Oguh (2015) corroborates Adichie's viewpoint by stating that Western media has failed to enlighten the world on the "diversity, uniqueness, and potential of the African continent" since too much attention is paid to the crises that plague the continent. Adichie's talk further highlights how a single story robs people of their dignity. Hence by portraying Africa as a country, all Africans are stripped of their unique ways of living or unique culture.

The call for the media to focus on the diversity that characterizes the African continent is fueled by the fact that the media serves as the source of information and education to many people in this globalized world who may not have access to other cultures due to economic isolation or ethnic segregation (Kidd 2016). To these groups of people, it is only the interaction they have with the media that form their knowledge and understanding of other cultures (Kidd 2016). Hence the media carries the responsibility to educate by sharing credible information and also avoid underrepresentation instead of perpetuating dominant narratives.

In conclusion, *The Inquirer's* coverage of the 2014 Ebola was more positive by focusing on prevention, treatment and efforts to combat the disease. The *New York Times* on the other hand focused more on drawing comparisons between the United States and African countries with regards to addressing health pandemics such as Ebola. While journalists from *The Inquirer* sourced information from local persons with expert

knowledge about the pandemic such as government officials who continued to implement strategies to curtail the spread of the disease, the *New York Times* primarily focused on engaging experts in the United States who were not in the field and could not offer accurate insight about what was pertaining on the ground.

The above conclusion was further uncovered in the headlines which accompanied news articles and specific themes that were generated in the body of the articles. Whereas keywords in the headlines of *The Inquirer* were more positive by providing hope and showcasing initiatives implemented by government, private individuals, and organizations to improve the crisis, headlines found in the *New York Times* sought to perpetuate stereotypes held about Africa. These headlines emphasized on Africa's poor health care system, inadequate healthcare personnel, and lawlessness in observing quarantine procedures. As such, the *New York Times* portrayed Africa as a place of constant disease outbreak and ungovernable people.

A careful analysis of the themes identified in the news articles revealed that the *New York Times* had the disposition of referring to the African countries that were most affected by the Ebola outbreak as a representation of the entire continent. In discussing the pandemic, news articles made blanket referrals to 'Africa' or 'West Africa.' Such representation was considered a monolithic configuration of African countries and homogenized the experiences of the entire continent. In addition, the United States of America was presented as superior to Africa, with regards to issues of support, aid and health care services. In some cases, comparisons that were drawn to show the difference between the US and African countries were unfair and unattainable. For instance, in one

example, the 8 cases that were recorded in the US was used to compare more than 20,000 cases recorded across the five African countries that were hard hit by the Ebola. *The Inquirer* in response covered the government's actions in solving the problem and providing a voice to the members of the communities that suffered most from the pandemic. Foreign support was framed in a way that indicated partnership and bilateral collaborations. In a nutshell, *The Inquirer,* in its positive outlook, represented Liberian by projecting an image of resilience, cooperation, innovation, agency and effective leadership in dealing with the Ebola outbreak.

Conclusion

While researching for this dissertation, I discovered that there was a remarkable body of scholarship committed to studying Africa's identity on the global front. These scholarships contribute to the more extensive debate on addressing stereotypes and images used in talking about Africa. This body of research provides an opportunity to give the 'subaltern' to borrow Spivak's term, a voice. These views are necessary for increasing consciousness among Africans and global citizens about perceptions and stereotypes. This dissertation stands out in a way that the films that were analyzed in the previous chapters contribute significantly to how Africa's identity has been depicted globally. Thus, this dissertation illustrates the representation of Africa in visual culture, and media studies from indigenous world views vary from the opinions of the Western world.

I am inspired by recent discussions of interdisciplinarity and the need for discovering ways several disciplines can share knowledge, ideas, and methodologies. Such discussions are gradually blurring the lines and removing boundaries that have limited disciplines within a specific demarcation. This dissertation, by toeing the lines of such discussions, is providing a bridge between the humanities and social sciences.

Scholars such as Meyer (2009) and Moores (2009) work in both interdisciplinary fields of religion, culture and media studies to expand our understanding and conceptualization of 'media.' Through such expansion, it has been realized that due to significant shifts in disciplines, the traditional definition of 'mass media' needs to be redefined.

Hence, there is a need to provide an understanding of media concepts to include "other media" such as films and "forms of communication" (Meyer 302). Likewise, I position the selected films in this dissertation within the theoretical understanding of 'media' which is understood as popular artistic and cultural productions that can form perception and generate an identity of a country and its people. These films have the ability to set public agenda and frame discourse just like traditional media.

The positioning of the films as "productions capable of setting public agenda and public opinion" (Meyer 2009) is also inspired by the 'interdisciplinary turn' in media studies (Couldry, 2004; Brauchler and Postill, 2011) and visual culture studies (Mirzoeff 2013). Meyer and Houtman, as cited by Oduro-Frimpong aver that the critical reasons for this turn are as a result of the "nagging dissatisfaction with [prior] approaches that take ideas, concepts, ideologies, or values as immaterial abstractions that are regarded as prime movers of history" (5).

Conceptually, the materiality of the films and newspapers that occupied this study converge at their core functionality which is films and newspapers provide audience messages that influence their perception about an issue. Instructively as discussed above, the films and newspapers address issues of representation from multiple perspectives. There was a great effort from most of the scholarship to provide a narrative that describes Africa's situation from Africa's perspective. More so, the films and newspapers that were discussed in this dissertation can be considered as having the ability to generate knowledge and discourse about Africa's current affairs. However, in order to measure the level of impact on how the generated knowledge and discourse can affect global

perception and engagement as compared to the ability of Western media organizations and Hollywood requires subsequent research. This research has paved the way for a continuous study and research to ascertain methods Africa's knowledge and cultural productions can employ to impact the continent's position on the global front.

Practically, the selected films and newspapers, intersect at the level of the materiality of a text. From the beginning, methodologically, films are mostly conceptualized within its material forms such as motion pictures, genre and formal elements among other things. As such, the script of films analyzed in this dissertation can be read just as how newspapers are consumed.

Generally, it is observed that African films emphasize addressing issues within specific cultural settings and capturing these cultures in a manner that corrects certain stereotypical understandings about the continent. This dissertation explored Africa's media organizations' role in creating knowledge and image within the geopolitics of representations. I argued that this research is particularly important as it allows for the 'flipping of the script' – moving away from the dominant research outlook that has studied how Africa is perceived from Western or European perspectives. As discussed in this dissertation, these portrayals entail a wide range of stylistic and narrative modalities centered around crisis discourse. The study advanced that Africa is discussed around themes of acute economic crisis, political instability, re-traditionalization of African societies, and the marginalization of Africa in the international scene (Chabal 28).

The dissertation examined ways the selected films and new media portrayed and depicted Africa to the world. It centered on the question of how Africa's media

productions offer alternate identity of the continent in the global front. To address these questions, I focused on three films – Sembène's *Xala* (1975), Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005), and Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009). Also, I analyzed news publications from Liberia, *The Inquirer,* in comparison with the *New York Times*. These media were chosen as a representation of five different African countries—Senegal, Cameroon, Kenya and Liberian – provide a glimpse of what is experienced in most African countries.

The dissertation, qualitative research in nature, employed Visual Culture, Self-Reflexivity and Discourse Analysis to draw out Africa's media effort in constructing the continent's identity during a crisis. Likewise, newspaper publications from *The Inquirer* and *New York Times* were selected from the LexisNexis database using the keyword 'Ebola' and 'Africa' and dates from August 2014 to December 2014. Using discourse analysis, the headlines, lead paragraphs and keywords were analyzed to understand the broader benchmark of misrepresentations and determine ways the newspaper from Africa differs. Nvivo version 12 was used in the coding of the above parameters to allow for credibility and reliability.

The analysis of *Xala* revealed that Sembène retheorized, Africa's political thoughts by providing a visual re-storying of Africa's political crisis, conversations on disability, and gender through the deployment of the *curse* of *sexual impotence* as a *disease.* Africa's political crisis is marked by acts of undemocratic rulership, corruption, inexperienced leaders, poor leadership, injustice and nepotism (Szeftel 2000; Hanchey 2016; Raditlhalo 2005; Lubeck 1992; Chabal 1996 & Boeck 2016). As such *Xala* tackled

three specific factors – corruption, poor leadership, and grassroots neglect – as leitmotifs representing the curse and political impotence of African states.

In *Xala,* Sembène exposes the political system by focusing on corruption. For instance, the images of the abrupt takeover of the Chamber of Commerce by the political elite, in contrast, represent the political takeover by Africans which characterized the independence movements across African states in the 1960s. Also, the ejection of an assortment of icons associated with the colonial order from the Chamber, as seen in the first scene of the film, takes on its full political significance. Through these imageries, Sembène chronicled the start of neocolonialism as the beginning of corruption. As such, *Xala* problematized corruption as both an African issue and an act perpetrated by the West. By this conclusion, Sembène does not exonerate the African elite. He advances the arguments: (a) that corruption on the continent has flourished in Africa because of the greed of the West (b) that any ruling on the act of corruption must involve charging the West with crimes of corruption.

Xala provided an intrinsic view that Sembène's contemplation of the *curse* of the nation-state involved the adoption of the French nationalist political philosophy disguised to bear African leadership styles. Sembène advance that one of the challenges that hindered the development of a tailor-made political system is that the process for independence, as viewed in *Xala,* is satirized, performed, and theatrically staged. Richard Werbner (1996) states, "worse still, many African countries appear to be States in name only. Their sovereignty is virtually a political fiction; their control over economic flows across their boundaries, effectively minimal; their lapses from public security into

political violence their retreat in practice from populist promises of the early nationalist period after independence, often externally forced; their impoverishing withdrawal from public welfare institutions, internationally sanctioned" (6). This analysis of the developments of neocolonialism in Africa points out that political independence in Africa did not result in the attainment of freedom.

The application of the aesthetics of disability and hygiaesthetics in the film demonstrated that Sembène re-visualized the bodies of differently-abled persons and their role in governance by placing them in roles of power, with the ability to reverse a curse. I advanced that the representation of disabled persons in the film both possesses figurative and realistic attributes that promoted the plot of the film. First, it brought out bodies that are barely considered in 'abled-nationalism'—the act of building a nation with able-bodied persons. Second, it used the powerful force of these groups of people (grassroots) to undo misrepresentations about African identity and its position in geopolitics. All these navigations fell within the broader spectrum of hygiaesthetics. Politically, Sembène further compounds the symbolic understanding of the *xala* placed on El Hadji as another form of disability. Thus, Sembène transferred disability onto the able-bodied politician and supported it with the curse of impotence.

The thematic and the filmic style in *Xala* was discussed to understand how Sembène framed and discussed issues such as gender. Through *Xala,* Sembène reframed narratives about women and tradition against the fragile nature of masculinity. This was carefully shown, I argue, to provide context on misunderstood influences in femininity in Africa. Sembène upturned the binary by projecting most of the female characters as the

'masculine power' and El Hadji as the feminine (Mushengyezi 49). For instance, Rama, who partook in the victories against the mishap of the new government, was seen as resilient and bearing hope against a corrupt, male-dominated, postcolonial, urban society. The character of Rama challenged the status quo and confronted the ill-fated masculinity, by stating: "men are all dirty dogs" in response to El Hadji's quest to marry a third wife. Through the same revolutionary technique, Rama bridges the gap between education, tradition and modernity. She wore an afro, spoke in Wolof to her father, who always spoke French, and refused to drink the imported water, *Evian,* when her father offered it. These depictions by Sembène in *Xala* re-visualized the image of African women with agency and voice.

In addition, the analysis of Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005) uncovered the significant positioning of spirituality and the theme of sex work. Sembène's Marxist lumpenproletariat (the beggars) can be likened to Bekolo's sex workers, who can also be classified as the lumpenproletariat in the Marxist system. The film articulated the complexities of greed and the unending desire for sexual adventure among the elite. It was argued that the film's use of space, montage, and parables as narrative techniques engages the audience to understand the plot of the film and also facilitate an awareness of the question surrounding political and economic equity.

Bekolo addressed the issues of economic crisis by using sex workers as the protagonists of the film to represent the grassroots while generating public understanding on the subject and, through this re-inventiveness, empowers sex workers in the film as freedom fighters and liberators. Bekolo's crafty visualization allows for a multiple

reading of gender, not just as 'signs' and 'subalterns' (Kapanga 150). Instead, it

generated the hybridity of the identity of feminine desire, sexual power, and liberty.

Bekolo's use of prostitution was understudied to confound popular assumptions held by

the public about the female social condition. Thus, Bekolo celebrated Majolie and

Chouchou, the two sex workers, as "a symbol of a modern woman's liberation and active

strength" (Roos 162). This symbol of strength is visible as Bekolo's imagination and

philosophy of the choice of resistance reveal the power and possibility to ignite a new

hope of an equitable nation-state.

Bekolo addresses the call from the West to re-traditionalize the continent through

the use of *Mevoungou*. The dissertation that Bekolo offered newer insight into the

completion of nationhood and attaining political and economic freedom. *Mevoungou*

holds the African consciousness and ability to re-enact a newer dispensation of rulership

founded on loyalty, truth, fairness, accountability, and justice. The cultural representation

here performed as a mockery on the expectation of the Western gaze that always desires

to witness modes of "exoticism" and "authenticity." I argued that Bekolo employed

Mevoungou in *Les Saignantes* as a means to question Western aestheticism of African

rituals captured in films. As such, Bekolo re-visualized the complexities surrounding the

Mevoungou ritual layered with the representations of gender, cultural exchange, and

political revolution.

More so, the dissertation addressed how the work of Wanuri Kahiu's (2009)

Pumzi reenacted the image, body and function of the African feminine while addressing

Africa's ecological issues – shortage of water, polluted environment. I argued that *Pumzi*

acted as a response to the ecological discursive system, which has been used to frame Africa's present and future identity. Several ecological challenges are facing the African continent and the world at large. Nonetheless, *Pumzi,* through specific actions, as discussed, such as nuclear dumping and activities such as oil drilling and mining which are ultimately polluting and contaminating water bodies and the environment. Kahiu's work presented enough props that allowed for discussion into the above inferences.

Instrumentally, *Pumzi,* through the mise-en-scene, offered varied conceptualization of the African state. Through the community showed in *Pumzi,* I argued that all forms of labels and descriptions used in discussing Africa were erased, including identities conceived historically as a result of colonialism. Kahiu, through this utopian space, intentionally erased all forms of labels and images associated with Africa, usually referenced as a place of poverty, with high illiteracy and lack of technology. Africa's identity was recreated as an efficient community, with sustainable energy, a democratic society, and filled with healthy people. The reclaiming of the city and the anticipation of the future of Africa in this utopian world was depicted through the advancement of knowledge in science and technology. Kahiu installation of this utopian world achieves two important aims—counteracted negative images about Africa and offered present generations with aspirations, desires and ideas of possibilities available to advance the course of Africa.

Also, *Pumzi* introduced cast the African woman as a non-sexualized being with desires, experience, and agency to cause a change in her world. It achieved this through the conceptual idea of *mothering.* The idea of *Mothering* was contemplated as an

inclusive feminist movement that takes into consideration the thoughts and experiences of African women without neglecting their biological role. I utilized the term "mothering" rather than an eco-focused scholarly term because it allowed for broader inclusion of various functionalities and knowledge of the African female body in African thoughts and experiences. Mothering brought forth the essence of continuation of life as enacted by Asha, the heroine of the film, as the savior of the world. Rather than an all-inclusive theory, mothering individualizes the goals, desires and aspirations of the African woman.

The three films are examples of crises from Africa's points of view. Newspapers are crucial conveyors of crisis. This project considers varying viewpoints of how a crisis is presented through media. In the newspaper analysis, it was concluded that *The Inquirer's* coverage of the 2014 Ebola was more positive because it focused primarily on prevention, treatment and efforts to combat the disease. *New York Times* was negative as it focused on drawing comparisons between the United States and African countries with regards to addressing health pandemics such as Ebola. While journalists and news organizations from Liberia sourced information from local persons at the forefront of the pandemic, government officials who continued to implement strategies to curtail the spread of the disease, *New York Times* engaged experts in the United States who were not in the field of the outbreak.

The above conclusions were determined through the analyzes of headlines which accompanied news articles and specific themes that were generated in the main articles. Generally, the analyzed keywords in the headlines of *The Inquirer* was considered

positive. These keywords provided hope and showcased governments, private individuals, and organizations' actions in solving the pandemic. Headlines found in the *New York Times* focused primarily on advancing stereotypes held about Africa. These headlines emphasized Africa's poor health care system, inadequate healthcare personnel, and lawlessness in observing quarantine procedures. As such, the *New York Times* portrayed Africa as a place of constant disease outbreak and ungovernable people.

The dissertation concluded that even though Western media organizations continue to frame Africa in a bad light as a place with an unending crisis, Africa's media, scholars and journalists continue work to overturn Africa's image in the global scene. It confirms that, Africa's media such as the selected films and new media that were analyzed for this research portrayed and depicted Africa in a way to correct misconceptions and to reshape the continent's identity in the global front.

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Appendix A: Selected News Articles from The Inquirer and the New York Times

Selected articles from *The Inquirer*

No.	Byline	Date	Headline
1	The Inquirer (Monrovia)	September 18, 2014	*'I'll Not Rest Until We Defeat Ebola-Ellen Assures - Urges Liberians to Play Their Part*
2	Antoinette Sendolo	November 27, 2014	*ABIC Takes Ebola Awareness to Market Women*
3	The Inquirer (Monrovia)	October 20, 2014	*Anti-Ebola Fight Intensifies*
4	Morrison O.G Sayon	August 13, 2014	*Chinese Experts Due Today for Ebola - Ellen Lauds Govt for Materials*
5	Timothy T. Seaklon	September 22, 2014	*Ebola Affects More Men Than Women*
6	Antoinette Sendolo	December 16, 2014	*Ebola Cases Still Decreasing*
7	The Inquirer (Monrovia)	October 23, 2014	*Efforts Continue for Ebola Treatment*
8	Garmonyou Wilson	September 12, 2014	*FDA, LCP Intensify Ebola Awareness Campaign*
9	Morrison O.G Sayon	November 25, 2014	*Fight Against Ebola Gets Boost*
10	The Inquirer (Monrovia)	November 28, 2014	*GOL Resolved to Kick Ebola Out By X-Mas*
11	C. Winnie Saywah-Jimmy	November 17, 2014	*OSIWA Identifies With Ebola Survivors, Victims*
12	Lincoln Barcon	October 01, 2014	*Rock Spring Community Hard Hit With Ebola Cases*
13	Antoinette Sendolo	October 16, 2014	*The Effects of Ebola On Women and Girls*

Selected articles from The Inquirer continued

| 14 | The Inquirer (Monrovia) | September 22, 2014 | *U.S. Military Response to Ebola First Shipment Arrives GOL Needs U.S.$375 Million to Fight Ebola - Opens Largest Treatment Center At Island Clinic* |
| 15 | The Inquirer (Monrovia) | December 12, 2014 | *Welcoming Cross-Border Coordination Against Ebola [editorial]* |

Data was sourced from the LexisNexis database

Selected articles from the *New York Times*

No.	Byline	Date	Headline
1	Effrey Gettleman, Jaime Yaya Berry, Sierra Leone, Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper	December 7, 2014	*As Ebola Rages, Poor Planning Thwarts Efforts*
2	Sheri Fink	August 17, 2014	*As Many Doctors Retreat, Ebola Fight Grows Harder*
3	Norimitsu Onishi	September 14, 2014	*Back to the Slums of His Youth, to Defuse the Ebola Time Bomb*
4	Somini Sengupta	October 22, 2014	*Ebola Outbreak Erodes Recent Advances in West Africa*
5	Karin Huster	October 21, 2014	*Fighting Ebola, and the Mud*
6	Catherine Saint Louis	August 16, 2014	*Hospitals in the U.S. Get Ready for Ebola*
7	Jeffrey Gettleman	December 31, 2014	*In West Africa, Ebola Ravages Economies, Too*

Selected articles from the *New York Times* continued

8	Adam Nossiter, Adam Bailes and Andrew Siddons	August 5, 2014	*Lax Quarantine Undercuts Ebola Fight in Africa*
9	Helene Cooper	September 13, 2014	*Liberian President Pleads With Obama for Assistance in Combating Ebola*
10	Nick Cumming-Bruce	October 26, 2014	*More Than 10,000 Africa Ebola Cases, Health Agency Says*
11	Helene Cooper	October 3, 2014	*Setbacks on Ebola: Contamination in Dallas, Slow Aid in Liberia*
12	Denise Grady, Sheri Fink, Sabrina Tavernise, Catherine Saint Louis MacDougall, and Elena Schneider	August 10, 2014	*Tracing Ebola's Breakout to a 2-Year-Old in Guinea*
13	John Moore	August 19, 2014	*Trying to Contain Ebola in Liberia*
14	Somini Sengupta	November 12, 2014	*U.N. Seeks a More Nimble Response to Ebola in Africa*
15	Denise Grady, Alan Blinder and Donald G. McNeil Jr.	November 1, 2014	*U.S. Success With Ebola Care Points to Africa's Staffing Gap*

Data was sourced from LexisNexis database

Appendix B: Source Codes Used in Coding the Selected Newspapers using Nvivo version 12

The Inquirer Source Code

Name	Description	Files	References
Headlines	This is a collection of all the headlines of the newspaper publication chosen for the analysis. No sentiment analysis was coded in this section.	15	15
Negative	Headlines were given a negative sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline were negative. A headline was attributed to negative sentiment in that case.	4	4
Neutral	Headlines were given a neutral sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline did not portray negative or positive information or was simply about something different other than the subject under discussion. In that case, a headline was attributed to a neutral sentiment.	0	0
Positive	Headlines were given a positive sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline was positive. A headline was attributed to positive sentiment in that case.	11	11
Keywords in Headlines	This contains all keywords identified in the headlines of the newspaper understudy.	15	30
Lead Paragraph	The lead paragraph is the first sentence of a news article. It carries important information that informs the audience about WHO said (or did) WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW.	15	15
Negative	The lead paragraph was given a negative sentiment if the keywords or group of words and the general tone of the paragraph were negative. The lead paragraph was attributed to negative sentiment in that case.	4	4
Neutral	The lead paragraph was given a neutral sentiment if the keywords or group of words and the general tone of the section was neither positive nor negative.	1	1
Positive	The lead paragraph was given a positive sentiment if the keywords or group of words, and the general tone of the paragraph was positive. The lead paragraph was attributed to positive sentiment in that case.	10	10
Sources	This code contains all the sources that were cited by news reporters. It is sub-divided into Liberian and Non-Liberian classifications. The Liberian classification was further divided into the Government of Liberia, and Local People and Organization. Non-Liberian sources were grouped into African Regional Intergovernmental Organizations, Foreign Governments and Officials, and Intergovernmental Organizations.	15	52
Liberian Sources		13	26

Name	Description	Files	References
Government of Liberia and Officials		11	18
Local People and Organization		5	8
Non-Liberian Sources		10	26
African Reginal IGO		2	5
Foreign Government and Official		6	11
Intergovernmental Organization		7	10
Themes		14	35
Agency	These coded parts of news articles that suggested the Government and people of Liberia taking active steps to tackle the Ebola pandemic.	10	20
Collaboration	These coded parts of the news articles that focused on people, organizations and governments contributing efforts towards the fights against Ebola.	6	7
Education	This involved the section of the selected articles which focused on educating the public on prevention, treatment and survival.	4	5
Foreign Help and Support	Framing of foreign support was important. This is a collection of all parts of news articles that suggested that foreign help and support was committed towards the fight against Ebola	6	11
Hope	Despite the havoc caused by the spread of Ebola, news articles carried and framed information on hope. There were salient of information suggesting that the government and people of Liberia were effectively tackling Ebola.	8	13
Mobilization	There was a general sense of news articles published in Inquirer calling out to the general public to participate in efforts of fighting against Ebola. They are contained here.	6	12

The *New York Times* Source Code

Name	Description	Files	References
Headlines	This is a collection of all the headlines of the newspaper publication chosen for the analysis. No sentiment analysis was coded in this section.	14	14
Negative	Headlines were given a negative sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline were negative. A headline was attributed to negative sentiment in that case.	13	13
Neutral	Headlines were given a neutral sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline did not portray negative or positive information or was simply about something different other than the subject under discussion. In that case, a headline was attributed to a neutral sentiment.	0	0
Positive	Headlines were given a positive sentiment if the keywords or group of words contributing to the information in the headline was positive. A headline was attributed to positive sentiment in that case.	1	1
Keywords in Headlines	This contains all keywords identified in the headlines of the newspaper understudy.	14	32
Lead Paragraph	The lead paragraph is the first sentence of a news article. It carries important information that informs the audience about WHO said (or did) WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW.	15	15
Negative	The lead paragraph was given a negative sentiment if the keywords or group of words and the general tone of the paragraph were negative. The lead paragraph was attributed to negative sentiment in that case.	12	12
Neutral	The lead paragraph was given a neutral sentiment if the keywords or group of words and the general tone of the paragraph was neither positive or negative.	2	2
Positive	The lead paragraph was given a positive sentiment if the keywords or group of words, and the general tone of the paragraph was positive. The lead paragraph was attributed to positive sentiment in that case.	1	1
Sources	This code contains all the sources that were cited by news reporters. It is sub-divided into Liberian and Non-Liberian classifications. The Liberian classification was further divided into the Government of Liberia, and Local People and Organization. Non-Liberian sources were grouped into African Regional Intergovernmental Organizations, Foreign Governments and Officials, and Intergovernmental Organizations.	14	57
Liberian Sources		6	13
Government of Liberia and Officials		3	3
Local People and Organization		6	10

Name	Description	Files	References
Non-Liberian Sources		13	44
Expert		5	11
Foreign Government and Official		7	10
Intergovernmental Organization		11	22
Themes		15	62
Aid Politics		6	10
Lack of Agency and Innovation	These coded parts of news articles that suggested the Government and people of Liberia were not proactive in solving the matter.	6	8
Lack of Leadership, hope and competence	Passages of the article focused on the lack of leadership, which suggested that there was less hope in gaining control over the epidemic and, as such, highlighting the incompetence of African leaders.	8	11
Poverty Laden Continent Narrative	Despite the havoc caused by the Ebola pandemic, some news articles focused solely on the matters alien to the pandemic as the cause and reason for the spread of the disease.	10	13
Reference to Africa		7	17
West Savoir Narrative and foreign Support	These highlighted parts of the articles suggested that the only way out was for the West to step in with regards to providing monetary, human and leadership resources. Aid plays a crucial role in situations like this public health challenge. This section highlighted the aspects of the news article that focused on highlighting aid as the sole proponent of solving the pandemic.	9	16

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