

Social Semiotics in African Films and its Effect on International Relations

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations and
Politics at the Mafikeng Campus of the North-West University**



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

African films are mostly visual polemic couched in postcolonial dialectics. As a result, scholars tend to critically read African filmic texts with the theories of cultural studies as they negotiate the sociological significance of these visual texts. However, in a multidisciplinary world, this outlook may be considered parochial and simplistic because films, as cultural capital, embody divergent significations. This realisation makes it imperative for scholars to identify different approaches of teasing out the import of African films outside the confines of cultural studies. Such an investigation has the capacity to inspire interdisciplinary studies that will eventuate in more robust scholastic outcomes across the multitude of disciplines in academia. In furtherance of this goal, this study aims at analysing how African films have engaged the theories of International Relations and issues of international affairs through the lenses of social semiotics. Through the use of case study and textual analysis of three films – *Black Girl* (dir. Sembene Ousmane, 1966), *Sarafina!* (dir. Darrell Roodt, 1992) and *Tsotsi* (dir. Gavin Hood, 2005) – this study reveals that African films are not alienated from the significant concerns of international relations and, as a result, they can actually be used to teach and learn about International Relations. This study's outcome, in effect, suggests that scholars, whose research interest is the relatively new discipline of International Relations on films, can pontificate on theories of International Relations and understand issues of international relations not just through western films, as already canonised for this purpose by a couple of western scholars, but through African films as well. In the same vein, this study submits that the use of signs by African filmmakers is also beneficial to communication scholars and students with a major interest in semiotics.

PREFACE

This research was initially conceived as a grandiose project that should have traversed continents in search of a body of knowledge that would have changed the African academic landscape with regard to how International Relations (IR) is taught and learnt, especially with regard to how African films have been deployed by African filmmakers to negotiate the issues of IR on films. However, because of financial limitations and the exigencies of life, activities relating to the outcome herewith had to be streamlined. In spite of this setback, I do believe that this is a worthy study that should trigger further discourse on how African filmmakers have engaged with the issues of IR in their filmic texts.

The first chapter of this study provides a general overview of IR on films and it establishes in a nutshell the following: statement of the problem, research aims and objectives, methods of investigation, research design, research tools, approaches to data analysis and the legitimacy of the research process. On the other hand, the next chapter uses qualitative research methods to look at the meanings of experiences by exploring how people define, describe, and metaphorically make sense of them. Thereafter, the third chapter extrapolates from existing literature the meaning of IR theories and the many perspectives that may have generated the dialectics associated with the study of the theory of International Relations and how they are germane to the primary inquiry of this study. Consequently, the chapter outlines the academic discourses that define the most significant instrument of this research while also declaring its theoretical framework. The fourth chapter examines international relations through selected African films. As a result, it is an interpretative response to primary data through critical reading of filmic texts. This

is achieved through content analysis, which is an approach that seeks to discover thematic patterns that this researcher is predisposed to. Consequently, this chapter identifies and analyzes IR themes in African films by deconstructing coded messages in narrative forms. And, the fifth chapter investigates the social function of films and the political dimension of film grammar. In interrogating the notion of “film as an Agent, Product and Source of History”, the chapter x-rays the politics of communication within the context of social semiotics and international relations. Finally, the sixth chapter juxtaposes the findings of this qualitative study with the positions of two seminal studies on International Relations on Films.

It is my belief that this humble study will be a source of inspiration for future studies on how African filmmakers have embraced the issues of world politics in their works.

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"It takes a village to raise a child," says an African proverb. In my recent sojourn into the dense grove of knowledge at the North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa, in search of academic wisdom, this wise saying attributable to those who came before me come to life. If not for the community of distinguished scholars, academic administrators, family and friends, this journey may have been painful immeasurably. As a result, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following:

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of papa and mama: Daniel and Rachel Ohwovoriolè

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH INTENT

This chapter provides a general overview on the subject of International Relations (IR) on films and it establishes in a nutshell the following: statement of the problem, research aims and objectives, methods of investigation, research design, research tools, approaches to data analysis and legitimacy of the research process.

International relations on film is an emerging strand in the study of IR, and Gregg (1998), who is one of a few scholars who have engaged in exploration of the inherent potentials that abound in using film to interrogate international relations theory, argues that this new area in the study of IR has the capacity to bring new and refreshing perspectives to the way IR is taught and learnt. This proclamation of “new and refreshing perspectives” may be read to mean a departure from a tedious more traditional pontificating of IR theory. However, Cynthia Weber (2005: xvi) is more succinct on the significance of film in the study of IR when she posits that “re-examining IR myths through popular films does not only allow us to rethink the IR myths themselves; it also enables us to think more deeply about the relationship between IR theory and popular culture.” In other words, Weber is calling attention to both deconstruction and the politics of constructivism which may be at the centre of discourses in films as well as making a case for an engagement with popular culture by IR scholars.



To suggest a re-examination and rethinking of IR myths or theories is to advocate an alternative approach for the studies of IR. This is informed by positions among

deconstructionists who aim at showing “that what a text claims it says and what it actually says are discernibly different” (Bressler, 1994:71). This argument is emboldened by the principles that poststructuralist scholars promote, which is that “a text has an infinite number of possible interpretations [since how a reader arrives] at meaning is both arbitrary and conventional” (Bressler, 1994:71). Arbitrariness evokes subjectivity, which is a nuance that is the antithesis of what scholarship holds sacrosanct. In spite of this contradiction, nonetheless, “possible interpretations” that are informed from a personal prospective are not an anathema because reader-response criticism postulates that the text is not the sole determiner of meaning since the reader is an essential participant in the reading process and in the creation of meaning (Bressler, 1994:49). This approach recognizes the fact that the reader of a text is independent in his or her thought as he or she engages with a text. However, because he or she is a product of a community, he or she is aptly described as a “social subject”. Therefore, his or her subjectivity, as John Fiske (1987:62) argues, “results from ‘real’ social experience and from mediated or textual experience.” As a result, Fiske (1987:62), further states: “This social subjectivity is more influential in the construction of meaning than the textually produced subjectivity which exists only at the moment of reading.” In essence, the reader determines the meaning of a text based on inferences or deductions that are informed by his or her social affiliations. This is in tandem with Fiske’s (1987:64) posture when he opines that there is no “closed text ... where the dominant ideology exerts considerable, if not total, influence over its ideological structure and therefore over its reader.” In echoing Louise M. Rosenblatt’s ideas as enshrined in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of Literary Work*, Bressler (1994:48) submits:

...the reading process involves a reader and a text. The reader interacts or share a transactional experience: the text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various past experiences, thoughts, and ideas from the reader, those found both in real life and in past reading experience. Simultaneously, the text shapes the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting, and ordering those ideas that both conform to the text. Through this transactional experience, the reader and the text produce a new creation.

The idea of a social subject conforms to the notion of the politics of constructivism since "politics are an inseparable feature of [man's] social arrangement" (Onuf, 2001:236). While Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley (2005:49) are of the view that constructivism is "a genuinely radical alternative to conventional IR," it is of import to point out that Onuf's (2001:236) discourse centres on what he describes as "those practices in any society to which its members attach the most significance." In unpacking these issues, in my view, through the ossification of scholarship as representation of the larger society, Onuf (2001:238-254), who is one of the founding constructivists, surmises that at the heart of the politics of constructivism are five cornerstones: identity politics, status politics, the politics of language, the age long methodological struggle for scholarly inquiry in social contexts and, finally, personal politics. The first of these classifications feeds on the notion of the "other"; the next is apropos label for a "system of rules" that distributes "resources preferentially" in ways that entrench hegemony; the third category speculates on the "performative" role of words since what it objectivises is actually a subjective representation; the penultimate type articulates the variants that typify "social action" while advocating diversity and, finally, the last of Onuf's pontifications attempts to defuse the idea that "scholarship *is* political." In spite of the difference of opinion that defines constructivism, Karen A. Mingst (2004: 75-76) states:

The major theoretical proposition that all constructivists subscribe to is that state behaviour is shaped by elite beliefs, identities, and social norms. Individuals in collectivities forge, shape, and change culture through ideas and practices. State and national interests are the result of the social identities of these actors. Thus, the object of study is the norms and practices of individuals and the collectivity, with no distinction made between domestic politics and international politics... constructivists see power as important [and they] also see power in discursive terms - the power of ideas, culture, and language.



In the light of the above observations and considering the fact that “popular films point to how politics, power, and ideology are culturally constructed and how the culture of IR theory might be politically reconstructed” (Weber, 2005:xx), it is sad to note that a quick examination of the available body of research work on the subject of international relations on film reveals that the West has taken the lead in providing the few researches or studies that focus on the capacity of Hollywood films as apparatus that show the various ways filmic texts depict the several aspects of international relations (Gregg, 1998: blurb). In fact, as at the time of this research, only one major primary text on the subject of international relations on film exists – *International Relations on Film* – written by Robert W. Gregg. Another text akin to Gregg’s, first published in 2001 and re-issued in 2005, is a theory reader written by Cynthia Weber titled *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*. These two publications rely mostly on Hollywood filmic texts to make their points. Thus, presently, there is no evidence of any major scholarly engagement that focuses on the subject of international relations in African films. What this implies is that in order to teach international relations on film on the African continent, scholars will currently find comfort in what has been written by the West for the world. Again, it means that the ideological construct of the West remains the dominant ideology that shapes how international relations is read in films since the lack of scholarly texts with an African perspective on this

subject matter subjects African students of international relations on film to a skewed intervention just as it suggests that African films have not contributed an iota of significant material towards the studies of international relations in film beyond the four Gregg mentioned in his text. As a result, it will be appropriate to argue that African films should be confined to the backyard of history.

Conversely, this study argues that African filmmakers have also seen the inherent value of what may have been considered “the utility of the feature film as a vehicle to dramatize issues and events, challenge conventional wisdom, rouse an audience to anger, and even revise history” (Gregg, 1998: blurb). Therefore, this study fills the gap by exploring how African filmic texts have countered existing dominant ideology, “expose the ideological dimension that limits human possibility according to the needs of the dominant class order, [and] how it becomes possible to represent and recognize ourselves within those processes of communication ...” (Nichols, 1981:3), in order to assert Africa’s political and cultural sovereignty in an era of globalisation that undermines a balance of power.

This intent, which the statements above espouse, may not be as obvious in African films as they are poignant in most Hollywood funded films, and it is the reason why a conscious effort has been made to critically study and interpret the signs employed by the African filmmakers through the language of the camera to engage in the cultural politics of the time and address other international issues that impact on the continent through the prism of popular culture. This becomes an imperative since films, according to Gregg (1998: 3-4) “can enhance our knowledge of international relations” because they make “abstractions concrete”. These abstractions he identifies as “the great concepts that have dominated the

dialogue about international relations – concepts such as sovereignty, nationalism, balance of power, hegemony, and deterrence” (1998: 3-4). Besides making concrete the abstract, it is Gregg’s (1998:5) view that “movies can help us to identify ... events and with the historical context in which they took place” since “conflicts between ideologies and interests take the form of conflicts between individual protagonists”(Gregg, 1998:4). Above all, it is a belief that “films can contribute to a better understanding of international relations by serving as catalysts for debate and further inquiry” (Gregg, 1998:6), just as it is recognised that “films reflect the knowledge, the perspective, and the vision of those involved in their making ... and in doing so they frequently distort the record – omitting here, embellishing there, manipulating our sympathies all the while” (Gregg, 1998:7).

It is this inherent ability of the filmic texts, which Gregg highlights, that informs positions such as Judith Mayne’s (1993:15), which suggest that a film’s narrative seduces “the reader [audience] through the interaction of a variety of codes,[and] formalized vehicles of meaning.” However, in order to organise meaning and address its readers/audience in specific ways as Mayne (1993:15) posits, it is important to recognize that film “interacts with the human emotional system” (Tan, 1996:4), through the assemblage of images susceptible to various definitions and, within the purview of popular culture, it has the capacity to ensure that the “ongoing and phenomenal growth in the production and circulation of popular culture *makes* world politics what it currently *is*” (Grayson, Davies and Pilpott, 2009:157).

In as much as this study breaks new grounds in relation to how African filmic texts have tackled international issues ranging from environmental matters, terrorism, nationalism,

culture, regionalism to global trade, poverty and human rights, the core of this research focuses on how these films have deployed social semiotics to engage in the negotiation of power.

Statement of the problem

In the light of the fact that film is a discourse that employs images seductively in order to manipulate the emotion of the audience, this study is of the view that the calculated concerns of African filmmakers in relation to international relations presuppose that the intrinsic value of African filmic texts is their ideological pursuit which, in turn, is an act of power politics or negotiation of power between transnational actors in the Third World and the First World respectively. This position, nevertheless, is in agreement with the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. According to this declaration in its Article Five, '[e]very individual shall have the right to respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and the recognition of his legal status.' Thus, the fundamental human rights of the African people are inalienable, and filmmakers also enforce these facts through the content of their filmic texts. As a result, agency becomes more imperative when one takes cognizance of what Grayson, Davies and Philpott propose (2009:157): "it is also in the cultural imaginary that significant political battles are fought, 'because it is here that coherent narratives are produced, which in turn serve as the basis for any sense of community and political action' that define politics."



This exploration is a direct result of the recognition of the position that suggests that "film is part of a broader system of cultural representation which operates to create psychological dispositions that result in a particular construction of social reality, a commonly held sense

of what the world is and ought to be that sustains social institutions” (Ryan and Kellner, 1990:14). This, of course, is at the core of the concerns of the theories of international relations. Therefore, every *signifier* in modern African filmic texts with regard to international relations is aimed at interrogating what Baylis *et al* (2008:19) describe as “power relations across regions and continents.” The extent to which this is true in relation to the primary enquiry of this study is what forms the body of this research.

Research aims and objectives

Classical Realists, according to Larkins (2010:19) “argue that the power of the state is dependent on the material resources at its disposal.” This condition presupposes that Africa is unequally yoked with the First World in their relationship since the West is more advanced and wealthy in every ramification in terms of material resources available to it. The preponderance of this wealth, which is at the disposal of the West, is not only deployed to develop industry and manufacture in western communities, but it is used to export cultural legacies that create a new form of reterritorialisation through informatisation, a paradigm which suggests that the manipulation of information is at the heart of current economic production which the west dominates (Hardt and Negri, 2005:190).

Consequently, this study primarily interrogates the social practice of African filmic texts as a direct response to the nature of the current global system through the lens of social semiotics by engaging the belief that film language “can provide a satisfactory and generally applicable account of all meaning in representation and communication” (Kress and Mavers, 2011:167). The expectation is that future scholars on this subject will use the outcome of this study as a framework for viewing African filmic texts as a veritable body of knowledge

and history that are also “clearly important to an understanding of international relations” (Gregg, 1998:1) since, according to Hardt and Negri (2007:199), “the structure and management of communication networks are essential conditions for production in the informational economy.” To this end, this study examines and evaluates critically the management of the signs employed and deployed by selected African filmmakers on international relations. Basically, this study searches for the intended meaning as codified through representation in sign, text, genre, discourse, speech, gesture, as well as in music, within the ambit of issues and theory of international relations.

In doing this, the research sought to address the following questions:

1. What are the defining elements of the narratives that constitute discourse in African filmic texts that indicate that the filmmaker has a political intent or message?
2. To what extent do African filmmakers employ signs ideologically to address issues of international relations with the intent to influence international political context?
3. What are the discernible dominant film theories and aspects of film language that influence the production of African filmic texts which suggest that the film represent or rejects existing political ideologies, institutions and events?
4. What conclusions are derivable when this is juxtaposed with the theories of international relations?

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

This study used qualitative research methods. This approach “focuses on the meanings of experiences by exploring how people define, describe, and metaphorically make sense of these experiences” (VanderStoep and Johnston, 2009:165). In as much as the tools this study employs do not constitute a process that determines its end result through the acculturation of ideas in a scientific laboratory, yet the findings of this study may be considered empirical since they are knowledge gained through direct and indirect observation or experiences: fundamentally, this research depends on the record of the researcher and others’ experiences and observations in order to answer four (4) empirical questions that were stated on the previous page.

According to VanderStoep and Johnston (2009:165), experiences are largely informed by grand narratives or stories which have “identifiable functions for the community.” To this end, a grand narrative, “is characterized by a prescribed sequence, required elements, identifiable functions, and a script” (VanderStoep and Johnston, 2009:164). In essence, in a grand narrative, a definite pattern is identifiable because the narrative is designed, functionally, to emancipate a people, and this correlates with Jean-François Lyotard’s theory on the narrative of emancipation which, as interpreted in the *Encyclopaedia of Marxism*, “is all those conceptions which try to make sense of history, rather than just isolated events in history.” Consequently, the idea of interconnection between social systems is an iron core of the narration of emancipation or grand narrative. Although considered archaic by

postmodernist preachment – Jason Schulman in his "In Defence of Grand Narratives" declares: "postmodernists oppose 'grand narratives'" – grand narrative of any kind remains significant because the "common functions of grand narratives include helping a community make sense of some phenomenon or providing a moral lesson," argue VanderStoep and Johnston (*ibid*). Grand narratives, therefore, are instruments that make imagined communities or nation cohesive and inspired. If a nation, as Benedict Anderson (2007:256) argues, is an imagined political community "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them," and yet the nation is "always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship," it becomes very important for such communities to protect their boundaries and sovereignty by subscribing to things that hold them together and by asking questions about issues that are of collective significance. After all, "the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism" (Anderson, 2007:257). Grand narratives always elicit inquiry since they are inherently oppressive in nature and informed by the idea of exclusion or politics of status. In relation to this research, the grand narratives that this study engages within its narrative discourse are informed by colonisation, post-colonization and globalization.

Germane to the issues raised in the previous paragraph is the view that qualitative research also "focuses on the social and cultural construction of meaning [because] the social scientist studies the different components of reading comprehension - e.g., decoding, comprehension strategies" (VanderStoep and Johnston 2009:166). Since language reflects the nature and identity of an individual which may then project itself through ideological construct either in the creation or consumption of the text, it is important to understand the

intricate balance that exists in an individual in a social world, which Simon During (2007:172) says is “described in a battery of metaphors.”

No two individuals are the same. As a result, ideological constructs and “battery of metaphors” by individuals or groups may be varied and this position is given credence by Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (2007:173) who suggest that individuals and groups are made of lines that are very diverse in nature in an entity. Deleuze and Parnet (2007) identify three distinct lines in their analysis through which humans may be classified or described with innate attributes which each of the lines typifies. However, this amalgam of lines is the very element that makes every individual complex and different in political and psychological complexion. In other words, society is populated by binary constructs and by denizens that are constantly polarised but amenable to arguments and susceptible to influences. As a result of these realities, VanderStoep and Johnston (2009:166-167) posit that qualitative research is founded on the following assumptions:

- Knowledge is constructed through communication and interaction; as such, knowledge is not “out there” but within the perceptions and interpretations of the individual.
- Knowledge is constructed or created by people.
- One cannot analyze and understand an entity by analysis of its parts; rather, you must examine the larger context in which people and knowledge function. This concept is called the social construction of reality.
- Participants have a different view of reality. Therefore, no wrong or right social constructions.



- Qualitative research taps into people's interpretations of their experiences.

The implication of the above statements manifests itself through an understanding that meaning is not derived through set formula. Instead, meaning emerges through ostensible obfuscation which is crystalized in Binary machines that "grow more complex as they intersect or collide with one another, confront each other, and cut us up in every direction" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007:175). Simply put, the reading of the filmic texts used in this study is envisioned through the lenses of Reception Theory which is informed by the principles of reader-response criticism with consideration given to form as an obvious interlocutor in the discourse.

Therefore, as far as this study is concerned, its embrace of empirical research as informed by the practices of qualitative research theory is steeped in the idea that the text is not the primary determinant of meaning because the reader or viewer (in the case of films) is a significant factor. This fundamental understanding is connected to points made by Bressler (1994:49), who argues that the reader has become "an active participant along with the text in creating meaning," and Fiske (1987:82) who acknowledges that "the socially situated" individual has a "semi-controlling role" despite the fact that the negotiation of meaning is a social process. Disavowing the idea that meanings solely emerge from a story's "overall structure" as assumed by structuralists, Fiske (1987: 80-81) declares:

Meanings are determined socially; that is, they are constructed out of the conjuncture of the text with the socially situated reader. This does not mean that a reader's social position mechanistically produces meaning for him or her in a way that would parallel the authoritarian way that texts used to be thought to work. The word "determine" does not refer to such a mechanistic, singular, cause and effect process; rather it means to delimit or set the boundaries [and] leave plenty of room for different inflections, for any one person is subjected to a wide

variety of social determinations The argument that people's subjectivities, their consciousness of self, and their social relations are produced socially rather than genetically or naturally, does not mean that all people are clones of each other, the mass products of an identical social mold. ... A theory of social determination not only leaves room for individual and other differences, it emphasizes them; but it also emphasizes that the significant differences are produced socially rather than genetically, and that these differences exist within and against a framework of similarity.

In other words, the readings, the findings and the conclusions stated in this research are open ended, and they may be subjected to other rigorous interpretations and theoretical frameworks.

Research Design

Every research work is time consuming because, as Fuller (2010:1249) points out, this activity "suggests an exhaustive process of inquiry whereby a clearly defined field is made one's own." This, no doubt, requires a scholar to be knowledgeable and become authoritative on a particular subject. As Fuller (2010:1249) suggests, the scholar, through the rigor associated with research, consequently exhibits "a familiarity with a wide range of established sources." However, researchers are compelled to delineate their research strategies since they do not have a finite time for the realization of their research goals. This, also, becomes necessary since a defined pattern turns into a beacon that keeps the research focused on its goals. In simple terms, research allows for the "the deployment of methods that economize on effort to allow for the greatest yield in knowledge" (Fuller, 2010:1249). However, to effectively achieve this, an efficient research design is required.

Research design is classified into three distinct categories – experimental, quasi-experimental and non-experimental (Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger, 2005: 123) – and

DeForge (2010:1252-1253) defines research design as “the plan that provides the logical structure that guides the investigation to address research problem and answer research questions.” This explanation applies to either qualitative or quantitative methodology. As a result, VanderStoep and Johnston (2009:182) posit:

Qualitative research must address many of the same design issues as quantitative design—sample, variables, measurement, analysis—but these issues cannot be determined in advance of data collection. These processes may well change, as the data collected dictate the questions and the design.

The above assertion notwithstanding, this research certainly determined during the planning stage to employ two distinctive qualitative approaches in this study. These are case study and textual analysis.



Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger (2005:147) say that case study “involves an in-depth examination of a single person or a few people” and, according to them, the objectives of this approach are to “provide an accurate and complete description of the case [in order] to expand our knowledge about the variations in human behaviour”(Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger, 2005:148). In the same vein, Putney (2010:115) points out that a case study requires “a detailed inquiry into a bounded entity or unit (or entities) in which the researcher either examines a relevant issue or reveals phenomena through the process of examining the entity within its social and cultural context.” In spite of the similarities of these definitions, both sets of scholars, however, do advocate a measure of caution. Marczyk *et al* (2005:148) indicate that this approach demands tons of information since “conclusions are based on a much more detailed, comprehensive set of information”, and

Putney (2010) points out that it is difficult to define case study since it is a “versatile approach to research” which, therefore, makes:

Some researchers [to] regard case study as a research process used to investigate a phenomenon in its real world setting. Some have considered case study to be a design – a particular logic for setting up the study. Others think of case study as a qualitative approach to research that includes particular methods. Others have depicted it in terms of the final product, a written holistic examination, interpretation, and analysis of one or more entities or social units. Case study also has been defined in terms of the unit of study itself, or the entity being studied. Still other researchers consider that case study research encompasses all these notions taken together in relation to the research questions (Putney, 2010:115-116).

In spite of the incongruity stated above, Putney (2010:115) cautions that “care must be taken to limit the number of cases in order to allow for in-depth analysis and description of each case.”

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that this study views case study as integral to the qualitative method of research. And, in cognizance of the work of Robert Stake (1994) on the classification of case studies, this research uses the *intrinsic case study* because of the researcher’s “inherent interest” (Putney, 2010: 116) in a particular case – African filmic texts. And because of the fact that this research is “a study of a particular issue that is examined through one or more cases within a ‘bounded system’, such as a setting, a context (Liamputtong, 2010:191), this research employs the multiple-case design because of its twin-purpose, which is both descriptive and explanatory. According to VanderStoep and Johnston (2009:209), “the purpose of a case study is to understand the characteristics that define a particular bounded system, and perhaps to describe an event or process occurring within that system.” Because case method allows a researcher “to explore and describe things and events in great depth” despite the fact that it is believed to be “prone to bias,

lack of accuracy, and generalisability” (Liamputtong, 2010:203), this study chooses to utilise both descriptive and explanatory case studies because of the intrinsic values as they relate to the nature of the discourse in this study. For instance, a descriptive case study, according to Putney (2010:118), “uses *thick description* about the entity being studied so that the reader has a sense of having “been there, done that,” in terms of the phenomenon studied within the context of the research setting” and, on the other hand, “an explanatory study is more suitable for delving into *how and why* things are happening as they are, especially if the events and people involved are to be observed over time.”

For this study, *Black Girl* (dir. Sembene Ousmane, 1966), *Sarafina* (dir. Darrell Roodt, 1992) and *Tsotsi* (dir. Gavin Hood, 2005) are the designated films to be used as case study. Each of these films was selected because of its historical significance; for instance, *Black Girl* is one of the earliest works of the man considered the ‘father of African film’ and, according to *Los Angeles Times*, Ousmane has been described as “the most significant force” in African filmmaking history” [whose body of works establishes him as] “someone whose passion and commitment to societal change have inspired filmmakers and infuriated governments in Europe as well as at home.” In deference to Jonathan Rosenbaum (1997), Wikipedia declares that *Black Girl* is the “symbolic genesis of sub-Saharan African filmmaking.” *Sarafina!*, in the same measure, is iconic and its import is unequivocal. It is the major work that chronicles for posterity through critically acclaimed performances – stage and film – the bloody Soweto uprising of 1976 but, above all, it celebrates the unsung heroes of the South African liberation struggle.

To this end, the *New York* magazine declares: “The beauty of *Sarafina!* is in how ordinary everyone looks, how representative of a gallant segment of oppressed humanity.” The active

involvement of the ordinary black South African in the struggle was necessitated by the absence of the black political elite. According to the playwright cum screenwriter, Mbongeni Ngema in an interview published in *Jet* magazine, “With all the political leaders in jail, in detention or exile outside of South Africa, the children were left in the forefront of the struggle.” However, *Sarafina!* is not just a tribute to the past and the upheavals that defined black nationalism in South Africa, but it is also an affirmation of freedom and a prophetic declaration buoyed by Frantz Fanon’s (2004:6) words: “To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject.” With regard to *Tsotsi*, it is acknowledged as the first African film to win the Academy Award (Oscars) for Foreign Language Films. However, its significance to this study is not just that: it is mostly attributable to the fact that this film, which is an adaptation of a novel by Athol Fugard, bestrides two worlds or era. According to Mehlbaum (2013:2), the film, unlike the novel, is “not set in the 1950s to 60s but in the post apartheid South Africa around the beginning of the new millennium.” This is significant within the context of the current South Africa problematic as it borders on development and the future of the new nation.

Textual Analysis, according to VanderStoep and Johnston (2009:210), requires “the identification and interpretation of a set of verbal or nonverbal signs.” And, Charles Sanders Peirce (qtd. in VanderStoep and Johnston: *ibid*) argues that “a sign ... compels [one] to think about something other than itself.” The import of this method is that “meaning is at the heart of textual analysis [since it] can be analysed from the perspective of the speaker’s intent, the audience’s reaction, the historical or cultural context in which the text was created, or the contemporary historical and cultural context in which the text is experienced

today. [However, it is significant to note that] each perspective on meaning will likely yield a different interpretation of a text" (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009:211).

In other words, to effectively appreciate the plausible meanings of a filmic text – especially in Africa – within the total ramifications VanderStoep and Johnston (2009) advocate, one has to revisit the polemic Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino ((1969) espouse in "Towards a Third Cinema". According to them, "[b]ecause our culture is an impulse towards emancipation, it will remain in existence until emancipation is a reality: *a culture of subversion* which will carry with it an art, a science, and *a cinema of subversion*." This declaration assumes that "there is a subtle but discernible link between art and the landscape out of which it grows" thereby making the artist "the "imaginative leader" or the "guiding sensibility" of his community." Although it is subjective, yet the Argentines' argument with regard to a galvanizing "impulse towards emancipation" finds good company in Claude Lévi-Strauss (cited in Leach, 1974:53) who postulates that "myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact." Within this context, George Lamming's words in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1992:37) come to life with regard to the function of an art form, which he perceives as "a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of ... community."



In as much as this study contextualises a range of African films within theories of international relations and juxtaposes same within a framework that situates them around issues of international relations as informed by specific grand narratives, it is the researcher's opinion that Althusser's (1971) works on "interpellation" as it pertains to the theories of spectatorship explains how ideological systems manifest in film language. Succinctly put, Judith Mayne (1993:14) states that the "study of interpellation, or the *subject*

effect in film ... was designed to explore how film-goers become subjects, how the various devices and components of the cinema function to create ideological subjects.”

Therefore, the textual analysis component of this research does not require collection of external data because it is dependent on “how the narrative seduces the reader through the interaction of a variety of codes, formalized vehicles of meaning” which, of course, is influenced by “how ... a narrative text organizes meaning and addresses its readers in specific ways” (Mayne, 1993:15).

Research tools

Data this research uses were collected through close reading of the filmic texts, which are the primary data source for this study, and from limited secondary data source on the subject of international relations on film.

According to Sarah E. Boslaugh (2010:1330) in her contribution in *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, what distinguishes both data sources from one another is not “specific qualities of the data itself but on its history and relationship to a specific analysis.” In other words, as she opines, “primary data are collected by a research group for the specific analysis in question, whereas secondary data are collected by someone else for some other purposes” (Boslaugh, 2010:1330). This researcher’s personal interpretation of the films selected for this study generates the primary data for discussion. However, in accordance with universal academic practice, the researcher did choose relevant secondary data to address its peculiar research questions (Boslaugh, 2010:1330).

Approaches to data analysis

This study organises data collected in a more meaningful way through a combination of the following types of analysis:

- **Content analysis:** Liamputtong (2010:281-282) points out that this approach “makes use of some underlying counting elements [since] “when we identify a theme or a pattern, we are isolating something that happens a number of times and consistently happens in a specific way.” Thus, Liamputtong asserts that researchers are required “to know what they want to look for in the text.”
- **Thematic analysis:** Quoting Braun and Clarke, Liamputtong (2010:284) states that this is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data.” This approach “involves searching across a data set – be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts – to find repeated patterns of meaning.” As a result, Liamputtong (2010:285) declares that “coding plays a major part in thematic analysis [since] the researchers need to perform initial and axial coding in order to deconstruct data, put them into codes, and find links between them.”
- **Narrative analysis:** Emphasis is on experiences – including feelings, images, meanings and reactions – and narrative form, which Liamputtong (2010:286) says may include “the linguistic and metaphorical form of telling the stories, which may include how the narrator and the researcher interact, characters, emplotment, metaphor, and chronological sequencing.”

- **Semiotic analysis:** Echoing Melissa Hardy and Alan Bryman, Liamputtong (2010:290) states that the concern of this approach is “to uncover the hidden meanings that reside in texts [by uncovering] the way meaning is formed through ‘a process of signification or connotation.” Above this, “a semiotic approach attempts to reveal the processes of making meaning and ‘how signs are designed to have an effect upon actual and prospective consumers of those signs.”

Legitimacy of research process

In order to establish the reliability and validity of this research, this study is subjected to triangulation. As far as Liamputtong (2010:26) is concerned, triangulation is the “most powerful means for strengthening credibility in qualitative research [since it] is ‘based on the convergence of information from multiple sources to corroborate the data and evolving themes’.”

Methodological triangulation is the primary kind of triangulation that this study uses. Data derivable from interview, focus groups and content analysis are compared for congruency.

Data and interdisciplinary triangulations are secondary types that this study employs. Liamputtong (2010:26) indicates that the former uses “multiple quotations from the data to confirm and illustrate emerging themes of interest while the latter “refers to the use of multiple disciplines in one research project.”

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW: PRAXIS AND SENSIBILITY

This chapter extrapolates from existing literature the meaning of IR theories and the many perspectives that may have generated the dialectics associated with the study of the theories of International Relations and how they are germane to the primary inquiry of this study. Therefore, this chapter outlines the academic discourses that define the most significant instrument of this research while, also, declaring its theoretical framework.

The topography of world politics and the tapestry of cultural studies embody one reality: the consistent infraction of humanity and the persistent desire to emancipate one society from the shackles of bondage put in place by another entity, which may enslave a people economically, politically, culturally and psychologically. In essence, literature, language, media studies, politics and international relations are kindred spirits because one is akin to the other as they all entrench themselves in a preoccupation that seeks to understand humanity, query the operations of nation-states and transnational actors in relation to their alleged interests with the hope that the human condition will be for the better. However, one overarching feature that defines the idiosyncratic nature of these disciplines is that they are as contentious as the conflicts they strive and thrive to resolve: Utopia and realism co-habit the space where these disciplines occupy. And, this binary opposition provokes anarchy as social structures are undermined by those determined to rupture the social order or hierarchy. As a result, *language* becomes a tool deployed to present, re-present and represent ideas in literary works and in other forms of media products that have the tendencies to become state apparatuses. Such transformations, unequivocally, may be

informed by dominant ideologies, and these ideas are embedded in messages that are textual, audio or visual. At the end of the day, the ideas become images etched in people's consciousness with the ability to change the identities of individuals susceptible to media influences. Such influences may not be absolute since media consumers have the capacity to interrogate media content as well. Therefore, the power balance between the producers of media content and the consumers of the products gives credence to the belief that "power enables subjectivities to develop, individual identities to unfold, collective values to coalesce" (Luke, 2010:35). Film is one of the literary texts or media products that may be used to encode messages that have the ability to manipulate or influence perceptions of what the world ought to be. However, meaning is enabled by both the producer and the consumer.

Man's continuous engagement with the notion of what the world ought to be is consistent with the age long dictum attributed to Aristotle that declares humanity a community of political animals. This conclusion, inferred or deducted, may be absolute when one considers the fact, as Robert Jervis (2012:623) argues, that "most of us were interested in politics long before we were exposed to, and often enthralled by, IR theories." This situation, according to Jervis, exists because "we were driven to think about what was happening in the world, why it was happening, how things would turn out, and what various countries, especially our own, should do." These are integral discourses that are within the purview of International Relations.

Definitions and Controversial Perspectives on IR and its Theory

An uncomplicated definition of IR may be difficult to establish just as much as circumnavigating the quagmire that defines IR theory may be dicey. This is because IR

scholars have failed to concur on a particular definition that objectifies the discipline just as they have failed to agree on the particulars of IR theories. Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley (2005) and Keith L. Shimko (2005) point out the controversial issues that tend to greet any specific definitions of International Relations.

Brown and Ainley (2005:1) state that “‘International Relations’ (upper case – here frequently shortened to IR) is the study of ‘international relations’ (lower case)”. However, for them, the contentious issue is “what are ‘international relations’?” They suggest that answers given to this question are central to finding the definition that may be apt for International Relations. However, since both scholars suggest that IR “arguments are often not easy to grasp”, they submit that “‘international relations’ do not have some kind of essential existence in the real world of the sort that could define an academic discipline” (Brown and Ainley, 2005:1). This quandary becomes stunning in this claim:

A survey of the field suggests that a number of different definitions are employed. For some, international relations means the *diplomatic-strategic* relations of *states*, and the characteristic focus of IR is on issues of war and peace, conflict and cooperation. Others see international relations as being about *cross-border transactions* of all kinds, political, economic and social, and IR is as likely to study trade negotiations or the operation of non-state institutions such as Amnesty International as it is conventional peace talks or the workings of the United Nations (UN). Again, and with increasing frequency in the twenty-first century, some focus on globalization, studying, for example, world communication, transport and financial systems, global business corporations and the putative emergence of global society. (Brown and Ainley, 2005:1)

In as much as Brown and Ainley (2005:1) are of the view that the above “conceptions obviously bear some family resemblances”, yet they are quick to point out that “which definition we adopt will have real consequences for the rest” since “each has quite distinct

features.” This very concern manifests itself in Shimko’s engagement with the definition of what ‘international relations’ are.

According to Shimko (2005:3), “there is no reason we must settle on any final definition” because of international relations’ “ambiguous and shifting boundaries.” This propensity, he suggests, threatens what he describes as “a fairly narrow view of international relations as the study of state behavior and interaction” (Shimko, 2005:2). To this end, he submits:

Today, the more commonly used *international relations* connotes a much broader focus. Although no one denies that state behavior is *a*, and maybe even *the*, central focus of international relations, few believe this one focus defines adequately the boundaries of the discipline. An emphasis on state behavior is fine, but not to the exclusion of all else. There are simply too many important actors (e.g., multinational corporations and religious movements as well as inter- and nongovernmental organizations) and issues (e.g., terrorism and global warming) that do not fall neatly into a statecentric vision of the world (Shimko, 2005:3).

Beyond this, Shimko (2005) highlights another conundrum which IR scholars are faced with towards finding a succinct definition of what constitutes international relations. In disavowing an idea that privileges one definition over the other, he argues:



If a very restrictive definition will not suffice, how much should it be expanded? As we begin adding more and more to what we mean by international relations, it is hard to know where to stop. The line between domestic and international politics blurs as we realize that internal politics often influence a state’s external conduct. The distinction between economics and politics fades once we recognize that economic power is an integral component of political power. We also find ourselves dabbling in psychology to understand decision makers, sociology to explain revolutions, and even climatology to evaluate theories of global warming. It may be easier to specify what, if anything, does *not* fall within the realm of international relations. Once we include all of the relevant actors and catalog the multitude of issues that can conceivably fall under the general rubric of international relations, we may be tempted to throw up our hands in frustration and define it as “everything that goes on in the world” (Shimko, 2005:3).

There is no doubt that his declaration gives weight to another scholar's position. In his book *The Longman Guide to World Affairs*, Cathal J. Nolan (qtd. in Shimko: 3) explains that international relations is "the whole complex of cultural, economic, legal, military, political, and social relations of all *states*, as well as their component populations and entities." This, in my view, is akin to Karen A. Mingst's (2004:2) definition of international relations, which she says is:

... the study of the interactions among the various actors that participate in international politics, including states, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, subnational entities like bureaucracies and local governments, and individuals. It is the study of the behaviors of these actors as they participate individually and together in international political processes.

The fluidity the various opinions suggest with regard to what international relations embodies brings one to the problematic subject of theory since definitions may be informed by theoretical inclinations of individual scholars in spite of the fact that IR theories are not controversy free. However, what is obvious through these multifarious definitions and problematic which the scholars propose in relation to the study of International Relations is the idea of multidisciplinary. This notion that IR is "pluralistic and eclectic" (Mingst, 2004:14), therefore, encourages a multidisciplinary approach in understanding the issues that characterize international relations. Multidisciplinary study, as *Wikipedia* defines it, "involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to redefine problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations." This is the nature of this study. As a result, theories that this study employs are not simply the prerogative of International Relations since this research engages with theories from language studies, literary studies, cultural studies, film studies and media

studies in an effort to “redefine problems” and bring understanding to “complex situations”. The main problem that this study defines is this: can African films be used to teach International Relations? If yes, what are the *Afrocentric* issues that position African films within IR discourse? The answer(s) lies within theory because, as Mingst (2004:14) suggests, “theories provide frameworks for asking and answering core foundational questions.” So, what is theory?

Henderikus J. Stam (2010:1498) defines theory as “a systematic representation of a genuine problem, articulated as far as possible in mathematical terms in the natural sciences or logical (or strictly linguistic terms) in the life and social sciences ... aimed at providing explanatory leverage on a problem, describing innovative features of a phenomenon or providing predictive utility.” Similarly, according to Brown and Ainley (2005:7), theory “is reflective thought.” In essence, it is that element of human activity that brings one in touch with the inner man: the very component that makes the conscious and the subconscious to entwine while interrogating the meaning of an event. As a result, Brown and Ainley (*ibid*) submit: “we engage in theorizing when we think in depth and abstractly about something [because] we sometimes find ourselves asking questions which we are not able to answer without reflection, without abstract thought.” In the same vein, Mingst (2004:57) states: “theory is a set of propositions and concepts that seek to explain phenomena by specifying the relationships among concepts.” Indirectly, she is positing also that theory is an enabler of reflexive acts. Consequently, she declares that “theory’s ultimate purpose is to predict phenomena.” And, to achieve this, Mingst (2004:59) goes ahead to proffer that predicting phenomena could be through what she describes as the “three levels of analysis” – the individual level, the state level and the international system level:

If the *individual level* is the focus, then the personality, perceptions, choices, and activities of individual decisionmakers ... and individual participants provide the explanation. If the *state level* or domestic factors are the focus, then the explanation is derived from characteristics of the state: the type of government (democracy or authoritarianism), the type of economic system (capitalist or socialist), interest groups within the country, or even the national interest. If the *international system level* is the focus, then the explanation rests with the anarchic characteristics of the system or with international and regional organizations and their strengths and weaknesses.

However, it is of import to acknowledge the contention of radical theorists who Mingst (2004:3) says argue that “theory is situated in a particular time and place, conditioned by ideological, cultural, and sociological influences.” Nonetheless, in order to “predict phenomena” relevant to IR discourses, it is important to recognize the fact that International Relations as a discipline hinges on certain traditional theories: liberalism, realism and Marxism. However, if the definition of what constitutes international relations was a cumbersome exercise among IR scholars, then it is not an incongruity to acknowledge the disturbing grit that paves the path of IR theories. This position is made significant when one considers the fact, as Mingst (2004:3) argues in *Essentials of International Relations*, that, first, “there is no single objective reality, only multiple realities based on individual experiences and perspectives” and, second, “theory development ... is a dynamic process.” The implication of these statements, as a result, is that theory is subjective and could be manipulated. Thus, as Mingst (*ibid*) points out, “critical approaches to international relations have challenged the traditional theories of liberalism and realism and substantially modified radicalism.” These circumstances are informed by the belief that “a generalized theory based on historical, philosophical, or behavioral methods is impossible to achieve [because] critical theorists contend that theory is situated in a particular time and place, conditioned by ideological, cultural, and sociological influences” (Mingst, 2004:3). To this end,

alternative theories that have emerged within the IR discipline are constructivism and postmodernism.

David Sidorsky (qtd. in Shimko 2005:51) opines that liberalism is “a conception of man as desiring freedom and capable of exercising rational free choice.” This positivist outlook is present in Shimko’s definition of liberalism as well. According to Shimko (2005:51), liberalism is a “social, political and economic philosophy based on a positive view of human nature, the inevitability of social progress, and the harmony of interests.” Basically, within the realm of International Relations, liberalism is an idealist worldview that imagines “a world in which law, institutions, and diplomacy replace power, competition and the use of force” (*ibid*). This concept is what defines Mingst’s (2004:3) proposition on liberalism which states that liberalism “posit that human nature is basically good [and] States generally cooperate and follow international norms and procedures that have been mutually agreed on.”

However, realism is an antithesis of what liberalism preaches since this theory argues that “states exist in an anarchic international system” (Mingst, 2004:3). To this end, Shimko (2005:46) is quick to point out that realism is “a pessimistic view of human nature” which has “its intellectual roots in conservative social and political philosophy.” As a progeny of conservatism, realism is influenced by the following conservative beliefs (Shimko, 2005:46-27):



- People are flawed, imperfect, and imperfectible creatures
- Human nature is a mix of good and bad features, and the latter can never be completely eliminated

- The Christian theological view of people as tainted by original sin is one of humans as flawed creatures
- Secular versions of conservatism emphasize that even though people are capable of rational, thoughtful, and ethical behavior, they are also motivated, perhaps even more so, by the baser impulses of lust, passion, and greed.
- People are essentially social creatures [who] are driven, and have a deep-seated need, to belong to groups. [In essence], people are not, and do not want to be, isolated, unattached beings. People are not individualists; they derive a great sense of belonging and comfort from their group and social identities. [However, these] people view themselves and their groups with which they identify as not merely separate and different but also superior in some way: This is what [is called] collective or group egoism
- The inevitability of social conflict: People and groups will always find themselves in conflict with others.

The notion which the above conservative principles propound supports Mignst's (2004:65) prospective which argues that realism "is based on a view of the individual as primarily selfish and power seeking" and, according to her (2004:3), it promotes the idea that every state "bases its policies on an interpretation of national interest defined in terms of power."

The same power relation is at the heart of Marxism, which is regarded as a major radical approach amongst IR theories. Mingst (2004:71) says that "[r]adicals are concerned most with explaining the relationship between means of production, social relations, and power."

Therefore, at the core of this characterization is the suggestion that Marxism is a “social theory emphasizing the importance of class conflict for understanding social relations, including international politics” (Shimko, 2005:55). However, Mingst (2004:72) points out that “no political configuration can be explained without reference to the underlying structure of capitalism.” Within the context of these dialectics, national interests may therefore be obfuscated by international structures that control economic factors that are considered “ingredients of power” (Mingst, 2004:72). This fosters, unequivocally, imperial tendencies and “imperialism produces the hierarchical international system, in which there are opportunities for some states, organizations, and individuals and significant constraints on behavior for others” (Mingst, 2004:73). In other words, “uneven development empowers and enables the dominant states to exploit the underdogs; the dynamics of capitalism and economic expansion make such exploitation necessary if the top dogs are to maintain their position and the capitalist structure is to survive” (Mingst, 2004:73). Through this assertion, it becomes significantly obvious that there is no harmony of interests in world politics, especially when IR is perused through the lenses of both realism and Marxism. This condition is paramount if what Shimko describes as the “nonneutrality of the state” is taken into cognizance, which is an argument that highlights the idea that “government is not a neutral actor [and] it is systematically biased in favor of the dominant, controlling economic class” (Shimko, 2005:57). This belief is what constructivist discourse disavows.

Shimko (2005:63) argues that beliefs, social norms, and identities provide “basic insight to understanding why states and other international actors behave as they do.” Accordingly, Mingst (2004:75), in as much as she posits that constructivism “is not a uniform theory”, opines that [all constructivists argue] that state behavior is shaped by elite beliefs,

identities, and social norms. [Also, she points to the fact that], constructivists see power as important ... [but they] see power in discursive terms – the power of ideas, culture, and language.” Therefore, what is tossed to the fore is how constructivism has departed sharply from the theories before it, and the radical point of divergence between this theory and other IR theories is explicitly in the idea that analytic reasoning is the new site of contestation and that power is no longer the exclusive prerogative of the dominant states because of the belief that “individuals in collectivities forge, shape, and change culture through ideas and practices. [and that] state and national interests are the result of the social identities of these actors” (Mingst, 2004:75). Consequently, she (2004:76) states: “Power exists in every exchange among actors, and the goal of constructivists is to find the source of power.” As a result, Mingst (2004:76) concludes that the constructivists’ “unique contribution may well be in elucidating the sources of power in ideas and in showing how ideas shape and change identity.” Furthermore, Mingst (2004:75) points out that, for constructivists, “the object of study is the norms and practices of individuals and the collectivity with no distinction made between domestic politics and international politics.”

Apart from this, she also argues that constructivists abhor structures and she illustrates this with the work of Alexander Wendt, a constructivist theorist, who is of the view that political structure “does not predict whether two states will be friends or foes, will recognize each other’s sovereignty, will have revisionist or status quo powers ...” (qtd. in Mingst, 2004:75). In essence, as far as the constructivists are concerned, structure is non-existent and they do not recognize the notion of objective reality (Mingst 2004), which then means that there are “no authoritative texts, [and that] all texts are equally valid – both the musings of the elites and the practices of everyday men and women” (Mingst, 2004:76). This, definitely, ruptures

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the *status quo* by cannibalizing IR theories, and the significance of these positions is more vigorously pursued through postmodernism.

Like other theories before it, postmodernism is not an absolute theory since its meaning and concerns are open to contestation by varied postmodernist thinkers (Brown with Ainley, 2005:53; and Mahajan, 1995:45), and Henry R. Nau (2012:56) breaks down the dichotomy thus:

Postmodernists are associated with French theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who seek to expose the underlying meanings and hierarchies of power imposed by Enlightenment language and concepts. They hope to find a more socially just form of discourse, and many of them hold a belief in causality, albeit a causality that is constructed rather than objective. However, other postmodernists want to go no further than demonstrate that all social reality disguises power. They seek to deconstruct that power wherever they find it and show that all politics conceals oppression.

In spite of the above difference, Nau (2012:56) argues that postmodernists are “theorists who seek to expose the hidden or masked meanings of language and discourse in international relations in order to gain space to imagine alternatives.” And, he further argues that at the core of this theory is the belief that “all attempts at knowledge involve the exercise of power, particularly of words, language, texts, and discourses ... [and] that commonplace dichotomies in the study of international relations – sovereignty and anarchy, war and peace, citizen and human – mask a power structure that marginalizes many people” (Nau, 2012:55). However, to achieve these goals, postmodernists opine “that theory must unsettle established categories and disconcert the reader” (Brown with Ainsley, 2005:53). To this end, Gurpreet Mahajan (1995:45) describes postmodernism as “an intellectual revolution” which “represents a distinct theoretical and intellectual agenda.” The schema, which Mingst (2004) identifies is stated thus:

Alternative theorists are dissatisfied with using history, philosophy, or behavioral approaches. ... One group, the postmodernists, seek to deconstruct the basic concepts of the field, like the state, the nation, rationality, and realism by searching the texts (or sources) for hidden meanings underneath the surface, in the subtext. Once those hidden meanings are revealed, the postmodernist seeks to replace the once-orderly picture with disorder, to replace the dichotomies with multiple portraits.

Postmodernists also seek to find the voices of “the others,” those individuals who have been disenfranchised and marginalized in international relations (Mingst, 2004:10).

Mahajan makes more manifest what postmodernist concerns subsume, and in her own words, she states that postmodernism:

- Questioned the pursuit of universal and absolute knowledge, grand explanatory schemes and general theories of historical development.
- Challenged the enlightenment’s belief in the existence of underlying essences and unified entities.
- Focused upon the local and the particular [and] questioned both the validity and the necessity of universalizing narratives and argued that the logic of these metanarratives was totalizing [which] had led to imperialism and totalitarianism.
- Argued that there is no such thing as intrinsic nature, an objective reality or an accurate representation of the world as it is in itself. [In essence] there is no truth out there, existing independently of the human mind, waiting to be discovered. [It is the modernist belief that] all claims about the nature of the world are embodied in language and mediated through our theoretical paradigm.

- Argued that science is just another human activity comparable to literature and politics.
- Questioned the conception of language itself [and argued that] we must ... drop the idea that language is a system of representation. [As a result] she declares: (i) it was no longer appropriate to speak of language as being adequate or inadequate representation of the world or the self. (ii) It suggested that all languages are human constructs and they mediate our descriptions of the world. (iii) Since the world does not propose a language for us, it does not also tell us which language to use and which language game to play. (iv) The choice between one language game and another can neither be explained in rational terms nor grounded in 'algorithmic certainty'. [Therefore] there are no 'foundations' or 'universal rules' that can serve as common ground for adjudicating between the diverse knowledge claims and descriptions of the world. (v) Truth is a property of linguistic entities and it does not refer to an accurate representation or a mirror image of the world. (vi) There are no absolute referents in the form of 'intrinsic nature' or 'pure essence', and there is no sacred meaning that can give direction to our deeds. Meaning is, therefore, an object of self creation: it is to be made, not discovered.



The comprehensive nature of Mahajan's exposition as enumerated above provides an insight into how a postmodernist reading of African filmic texts can make clear the social and political intents of African filmmakers, especially with regard to issues of international relations on film. However, to understand these IR nuances, it should be understood that a feature film – a mass communication text – is a commodity manufactured by "productive

groups which work out and send out given messages by industrial means” (Eco, 1979:13). In order to better appreciate how meaning emerges from such a text, Eco (1979:13) states:

The study of mass communication proposes a unitary object inasmuch as it claims that the industrialization of communications changes not only the conditions for receiving and sending out messages but ... the very meaning of the message.

The industrialization of communications, of course, has impacted on cultural processes globally. And, “the conditions for receiving and sending out messages” (Eco: 1979:13) through film are disparate and dependent on factors that are both economic and political. These circumstances enunciate a global hierarchy that defines a cultural balance of power. As a result, there is always a social dimension that may be gleaned from film as a cultural product. To this end, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969:220) enthuse:

Until recently, film had been synonymous with show or amusement: in a word, it was one more *consumer good*. At best, films succeeded in bearing witness to the decay of bourgeois values and testifying to social injustice. As a rule, films only dealt with effect, never with cause; it was cinema of mystification or anti-historicism. It was *surplus value* cinema. Caught up in these conditions, films, the most valuable tool of communication of our times, were destined to satisfy only the ideological and economic interests of *the owners of the film industry*, the lords of the world film market, the majority of whom were from the United States.

However, “the conditions for receiving and sending out messages” (Eco: 1979:13) through films are peculiar in the Third World, in general, and in Africa, in particular. The uniqueness of these circumstances does not only define how most films are produced, distributed and consumed in the Third World, it actually informs cathartic value enmeshed in tripartite functions of demystification, causality and agency as embodied in what Solanas and Octavio (1969:220) describe as “*films of decolonization* that turned their back on or actively oppose the System.” Consequently, they assert:

This *cinema of the masses*, which is prevented from reaching beyond the sectors representing the masses, provokes with each showing, as in a revolutionary military incursion, a liberated space, a *decolonized territory*. The showing can be turned into a kind of political event, which, according to Fanon, could be “a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard.”

Militant cinema must be able to extract the infinity of new possibilities that open up for it from the conditions of proscription imposed by the System. The attempt to overcome neocolonial oppression calls for the invention of forms of communication; *it opens up the possibility* (Solanas and Octavio, 1969:229).

The possibility that film, as a mass communication platform, opens up is manifested aptly through the communicative process which Eco (1979:8) defines as “the passage of a signal (not necessarily a sign) from a source (through a transmitter, along a channel) to a destination.” And, because films create images embedded with codes that have the “power to signify”, films – through their system of signification – are able to stimulate “an interpretative response in the addressee.” Codes modify meaning and a person’s perception because, as Eco (1979:8) states, “a code is a system of signification, insofar as it couples present entities with absent units. When – on the basis of an underlying rule – something actually presented to the perception of the addressee stands for something else....” Simply put, this is the symbiotic relationship that establishes the semiotics of communication and the semiotics of signification.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory for this study is post-modernism and semiotics. However, these will be strengthened with post-colonialism, Marxism and realism.

Gregg (1998:12-13) argues that post-modernism is “concerned with words and texts, and take the position that there is no single, objective reality.” He further states that this affinity for “words and texts” is due to the fact that “postmodernists are always looking for hidden

meanings [because] they do not expect to pin down reality." Consequently, in relations to films, he declares: "... but the postmodernist would advise us to deconstruct the films we watch, to look for the unstated assumptions, the hidden agendas of those who made them." In essence, as Greggs (1998) surmises, the "postmodernists believe that we should not take any films at face value." Therefore, this argument assumes that film analyses can be effective within the context of social semiotics because, as Hill (2005:95) argues, "postmodern cinema contains signifying systems." These systems, according to Hill, carry with them both the values of capitalism and the contradictory signs of the struggle produced within it."

This pursuit is germane to the concerns of postcolonialism because, as Homi Bhabha (1994) points out, "the wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of ... ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant voices even in dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities." As a result, Eleanor Byrne (2005), taking into cognizance the varied articulations of Bhabha in this particular study, states:

Bhabha suggests that what are commonly viewed as characteristically postmodern concerns might easily be found in the context of colonial and anti-colonial narratives and histories from the postcolonial world. His proposals are based around the peculiar narratives and identities that colonialism produces both for the colonizer and the colonized. The experiences of both conditions are arguably highly differentiated and diverse depending upon the cultures involved ... and change historically through different periods of colonization (Byrne, 2005:52).

Accordingly, Smith and Owens (2008:187-188) posit that, "the diverse subject matter of postcolonialism is intimately connected to the structure and process of world politics...

[and] as a result, [International Relations] scholars have begun to see the world in new 'post-colonial' ways ... also making use of both traditional and non-traditional sources for understanding the world such as literature, poetry, and film." Postcolonialism was informed by Marxism since the structure it was founded on was shaped by Marxist dialectics from which, Gabriel (1982:9) propounds "the concept of ideology stems."

African films are integral to the formation of Third Cinema since the thematic concerns of a number of African filmmakers are synonymous with Third Cinema's major themes as Gabriel (1982:14-20) points out; namely: class antagonism; struggle to preserve the cultural make-up of a society; a break away from Christianity by the oppressed classes because it is a dominant ideology; the struggle for the emancipation of women, and armed struggle against imperialism and class enemies on the home front. As a result, Gabriel (1982: xi) argues that "the main aim of Third Cinema is to immerse itself in the lives and struggles of the peoples of the Third World." This objective is hinged on Marxist theories that espouse the opinion "that the effects of global capitalism are to ensure that the powerful and wealthy continue to prosper at the expense of the powerless and the poor" (Hobden and Wyn Jones, 2008: 144-145). Most films "take place in a realist context" because it is believed that "idealism is less filmable than realism" (Gregg, 1998:12).

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN FILMS ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This chapter examines international relations in selected African films. As a result, it is an interpretative response to primary data through critical reading of filmic texts. This is achieved through content analysis, which is an approach that seeks to discover thematic patterns. Consequently, this chapter identifies and analyzes IR themes in African films by analysing coded messages in narrative forms.



David Cook (1996:879) describes film as “an entertainment commodity”. However, for Raymond Bellour (2000:21), “the film is a text”. While one presupposes that a film’s value is inchoate since the pleasure derived is temporal, the other, contrarily, suggests that film is determinate because it is a discourse: a discourse, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001:4) is “socially constructed knowledges of reality”. This difference notwithstanding, there is a similarity innate in the two meanings: the implied reality that film is consumed. Unfortunately, that which is consumed and “possibly afford some amusement ... [is] likely to do harm,” argues Plato in *The Republic* (1999:71). Conversely, he points out that “he whose desires are drawn toward knowledge in every form will be absorbed in the pleasures of the soul, and will hardly feel bodily pleasure ...” (Plato, 1999:178). Plato’s declarations may be primordial, but they do call attention to the dual functionality of creative process: the banality of art and its ability to provoke an action. Therefore, as Gregg (1998) argues, “it is always possible that a film will stretch our minds or at least fill in a few of the blanks in our body of knowledge, even as it entertains us” (1998:3). Gregg is one of the only two Western scholars renowned for their seminal works on the subject of international relations on film.

The other is Cynthia Weber. While Gregg (1998) explores IR themes in feature films or film narratives, Weber (2005), on the other hand, focuses on how IR theories manifest in them. For the former (1998:2), feature films or film narratives give out “information about the world we live in and myriad interactions among its countries and peoples.” But, for the latter (2005:xx), feature films or film narratives are “vehicles through which students can rethink IR theory and IR myths [since] popular films point to how politics, power, and ideology are culturally constructed and how the culture of IR theory might be politically reconstructed.”

According to Aristides Gazetas (2000:3), feature films or film narratives are “a major source of information and expression about our world in imagining ourselves” and he is of the belief that, first, “they are a means of symbolizing events that situate the viewer in different space-time perspectives” and, second, “they also become “experiences of experiences,” giving expression to different cultural identities or representations of the Other” (4). Finally, Gazetas (2000:4) submits that film narratives “can become important ideological weapons for other filmmakers.” As a result, he states:

... our contemporary world has become an image culture of instant replays. We play out our social identities and the roles of others in a diverse ocean of images that illustrate conflicting cultural positions on one’s identity and power. Film narratives also allow us to revisit and recapture the past, reevaluate the present, and project into the future world that imaginatively extends our abilities to function as human beings (Gazetas, 2000:3).

Gregg (1998:2-3) tends to agree with Gazetas since he is of the view, also, that feature films have a role to play in our understanding of the world around us. Gregg (1998:2) premises his

argument on the fact that films are “one of the most common and most powerful instruments for dispensing information.”

These statements suggest that a feature film or a narrative film is a medium with didactic ability. Besides, it implies that film helps unravel some of the complexities of life in every facet of human endeavour. Consequently, the potency of film in controlling the human psyche cannot be obfuscated. This is because film is a medium of mass communication, and mass communication, as Tudor (1974:29) argues, is “not a social process.” The implication of this position is that traditional mass communication does not allow interaction because it is not designed to encourage immediate feedback which could have necessitated a balance of power between the sender and the receiver. In other words, as conceived, with traditional mass communication no negotiations are intended since it is not an effective two way process. This view is what gives support to further arguments by Tudor (1974:30), which posit that “‘messages’ are generally created once and for all; they cannot often be adapted to immediate responses from the receiver.” To this end, Tudor (ibid) submits: “There is an asymmetry of control and authority as between communicator and receiver: the one has all and the other virtually nothing.” The implication is that receivers as consumers are powerless. They lack the ability to influence the content of the messages they receive via the media, and they are vulnerable since they are susceptible to various degrees of influences. This condition of powerlessness and vulnerability that typify the media consumer is made possible because “the media man dictates the beliefs and values which characterize the shared culture (either in self-conscious cynicism or by default), and he also largely controls the structure of social relations between the two” (Tudor, 1974:32). In the context of film, a filmmaker is able to foster “beliefs and values” and foist these on a society

in a subtle manner through images he envisions will serve his purpose since, according to Zavarzadeh (1991: 91-92): “Films ... are often regarded as reflections, reports, or at the least interpretations of reality ... The camera (or any other device), however, does not simply capture “the real.” What it grasps is ... “the ‘natural’ [naturalized] world of the dominant ideology.””

Thus, film as a medium is a gadget that is imbued with ideological tendencies since it is the camera that defines reality, and how the filmmaker manipulates it creates a simulacra of the dominant ideology. Turner (1993:12) gives credence to this opinion because he argues that the camera “embodies a theory of reality, an ideology, because it sees the world as the object of a single individual’s point of view. In other words, the film format is regarded as a tool that is used to entrench a dominant social order since they privilege an “ideological construction of the real” (Zavarzadeh , 1991:1). However, this argument does not go uncontested.



In spite of the fact that films are believed “to be neutral aesthetic acts of entertainment” since the format may be considered art – a condition that suggests that the form of a film should be the major determinant of its meaning – it is vital to understand how media meanings are constructed and consumed through the discourses propounded by form. This is an imperative because understanding the culture industry is of public interest since, as Nel (2007:5) points out, “the media has the potential to influence, control and stimulate progress and change in society.” Also, it is essential that man in society should understand the socio-dynamics responsible for the images, symbols and vocabulary deployed by the

culture industry because “the media is the place where the changing cultures and values of society are being displayed, constructed and communicated” (Nel, 2007:6).

Golding and Murdock (2000:73) posit that images, symbols and vocabulary used by the media are the outcome of “the play of power” between “economic organisation and political, social and cultural life” of any community. And, as far as they are concerned, in order to understand how society “interprets and responds to their social environment,” it is important to know “the ways that communicative activity is structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources” (Golding and Murdock, 2000:73).

This posture and its implication are of import when one takes into consideration what Thomson-Jones (2008) says. In as much as she agrees that film is an aesthetic practice, Thomson-Jones (2008:4) acknowledges that “film is not an independent art form because the filming process does not contribute to the artistic value of the final product.” Actually, she is stating the obvious because it is common knowledge that the final product is the function of the post-production process, which may have been subjected to the yoke of the “unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources” which Golding and Murdock (2000) suggest in their argument since it is axiomatic that the outcome of the post-production process is the product of manipulation, which makes it plausible for the film maker to serve his or her goal. If, as Roger Scruton argues and quoted by Thomson-Jones (2008:5), “the camera simply records how an actual subject actually looked at a certain moment in time [as a result] the resulting image has no aesthetic interest as an artist’s interpretation,” then it will be safe to suggest that Scruton ignores the fact that the film is considered “a sequence of images that are combined in any way that the film artist wants

through editing” (Thomson-Jones, 2008:7). The consequence of this is made explicit by Monaco (1977:396) who states that “the art of film lies almost entirely in the design of effective stimuli” which then implies that “form should serve the purpose of content” (Monaco, 1997: 400). This position resonates with the ideas of Siegfried Kracauer (cited in Monaco, 1977:396 and 400) who argues that content must take precedence over form because film is “anti-art” since “film had to be manipulative” and it “does not exist simply for itself, as a pure aesthetic object; it exists in the context of the world around it.” This assertion is true of African filmic texts.

Cham (2004:49) speculates that African films aim at correcting “the distortions and stereotypes propagated by dominant Western cinemas [and he argues that] that is more in sync with the realities, experiences, priorities, and desires of their respective societies.” These statements suggest that some African films speak to the circumstances and aspirations of the African people. For instance, Diawara (2010:23) points out that Ousmane Sembene’s films’ “characters questioned the order of the world around them, demanded change, and challenged our view of Africa as a continent outside of history.” As a result, Diawara (2010:23) concludes that, in some African films, the “camera is turned against the colonial and neo-colonial forces in Africa.”

A perusal of the trajectory of development of African films reveals that a particular pattern defines the thematic preoccupation of ideologically informed African filmmakers and this, in turn, establishes the purposes of their filmic texts. Mostly, many African filmmakers put “value in the African image and giving it voice, in opposition to Hollywood and colonial cinemas which denied Africans a proper language and a place in modern history” (Diawara,

2010:23-24). But Cham (2004:48) summarises this concern more clearly when he says that filmmaking in Africa is “a form of discourse and practice that is not just artistic and cultural, but also intellectual and political.” As a result, he concludes that filmmaking in Africa is:

... a way of defining, describing, and interpreting African experiences with those forces that have shaped their past and that continue to shape and influence the present. It is a product of the historical experiences of Africans, and it has direct bearing and relevance to the challenges that face African societies and people of African descent around the world both in the present moment and in the future. Thus, in looking at filmmaking in particular ... one is looking at particular insights into ways of thinking and acting on individual as well as collective realities, experiences, challenges and desires over time. African cinema functions as a mode of entertainment. At the same time, it assigns itself a pivotal role in definitions, enactment, and performance of African notions and ideologies of individual as well as community and humanity (Cham, 2004:48).

This peculiar perception may be responsible for the view point which surmises that “there is a relationship between history/politics in society and history/politics in the text, which may culminate in the decolonization of the screen and repositioning of the cinema as the site for what critics are calling political contestation” (Ukadike, 2004: 160). This “political contestation” manifests itself in diverse forms, and it also puts the notion of African cinema into dispute. According to Thackway (2003:2), some African filmmakers have in recent years “rejected the term ‘African cinema’ [because they] have argued that the term is often used to stigmatise works from the continent, encouraging Western viewers and critics to see them as a homogenous entity.” However, she points out in the same vein that “other filmmakers continue to defend the term ‘African cinema’ [since] it reflects the specific historic, cultural and geographical context in which African filmmaking was born and continues to develop” (ibid). This peculiarity is what Thackway (2003:3) considers the “dominant and repeated preoccupations that emerge in sub-Saharan Francophone African films.” These concerns, she argues, are “the questions of representation, identity, and

voice". This similarity in thematic concerns is the product of the fact that "filmmaking in Africa by Africans is fundamentally a postcolonial activity" (Armes, 2006:2) that aims at using "the cinema as a means of promoting consensus based on a set of shared values and ideologies" (Chapman, 2003:202). Thus, it is ideological and it is a response to global politics. In essence, the African colonial experience is an integral part of the conditions that have led to the emergence of the film in Africa. And, to this end, the film in Africa may be read as a rebellious act against the status quo; films in Africa do not champion utilitarian functions of the film which Jeffrey Richards (cited. in Chapman, 2003:202) advocated with regard to British films: "... either to distract or to direct the audience's views into approved channels, by validating key institutions of hegemony ... and promoting those qualities useful to society as presently constituted...." Instead, some African filmmakers, just like most Third World filmmakers, use films as "a compelling means of mass persuasion, cultural consolidation, and consciousness-raising" (Cook, 1996:877) because film, as Solanas and Getino (1969:225) argue, "offer an effective pretext for gathering an audience, in addition to the ideological message they contain." Through the themes that African films explore, it could be argued that film in Africa "provides discovery through transformation" (Solanas and Getino, 1969:226).

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Gregg (1998:15), in his very influential work on international relations on film, identifies specific themes that Western films have proffered "insights into". These are: the dilemma of sovereignty, nationalism and its discontents, civil strife and subversion, decision making and crisis management, war, economic interdependence and development, ethics and

international law, the clash of cultures and, finally, the domestic roots of international relations. Despite the fact that Gregg (1998:7) opines films are not necessarily absolute in their objectivity, especially when they are historical accounts, since they “reflect the knowledge, the perspective, and the vision of those involved in their making”, he nonetheless enumerates the significant role that films play in the understanding of international relations.



First, Gregg (1998:3) submits that films are very important because “they dramatize the abstract idea and the mundane event” that characterize the teaching and learning of international relations and its theories. Second, he (1998:4) surmises that films are very significant to the understanding of international relations because “they confront us with aspects of the subject that might otherwise languish on the periphery of our attention – concepts, issues, events that seem remote and dry and relatively uninteresting until explored by moviemakers. ...” Third, he (1998:4) states that films are imperative for the understanding of international relations since “movies typically dramatize by personalizing ... [they] focus on individuals who become surrogates for groups, for armies, for governments, for nations. Ideas are personified [and] conflicts between ideologies and interests take the form of conflicts between individuals.” Fourth, Gregg (1998: 5) argues that films “serve as valuable history lessons” because “by building bridges [that connect IR scholars] to increasingly remote but still important times and events ... [therefore] movies can help [people] identify with these events [by providing] the historical context in which they took place.” And, finally, it is his opinion that films aid “a better understanding of international relations by serving as catalysts for debate and further inquiry” (Gregg, 1998:6).

Gregg’s findings are not the exclusive preserve of films produced in both First World (Hollywood) and Second World (Europe) film industries since the themes films from Hollywood and Europe explore, if not all, can be teased out from films by African filmmakers. Therefore, through the thematic and narrative analyses of *Black Girl*, *Sarafina!*, and *Tsotsi*, this study shows that African films are veritable instruments in the teaching and learning of issues of international relations and its theories.

Migration and Clash of Civilizations in *Black Girl* as Guardian of Popular Memory



Andre Gunder Frank (2004:86) in his essay, "The Development of Underdevelopment" argues that "'dual' societies and economies in the underdeveloped countries" are the product of apparent disparity in income and discrepancy in culture. In enunciating the dynamics between the two societies and economies, he regards the "evident inequalities of income" as historical artefacts created as a result of the fact that "contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries." And, in his estimation, the nature of the relationship between the "satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries" defines "an essential part of the structure and development of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole" (Frank, 2004:86-87). As a result of this uneven symbiosis, Frank submits thus:

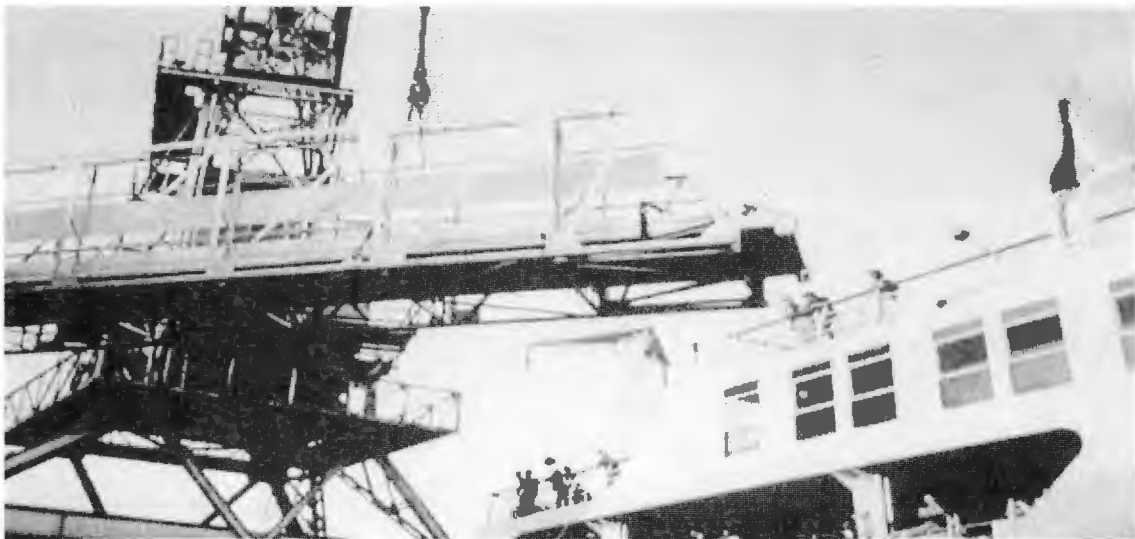
Each of the two parts is supposed to have a history of its own, a structure, and a contemporary dynamic largely independent of the other other. Supposedly, only one part of the economy and society has been importantly affected by intimate economic relations with the "outside" capitalist world; and that part, it is held, became modern, capitalist, and relatively developed precisely because of this contact. The other part is widely regarded as variously isolated, subsistence-based, feudal, or precapitalist, and therefore more underdeveloped (Frank, 2004:87).

It is the aftermath of the "intimate economic relations with the "outside" capitalist world" and the deplorable consequence of "the historical experience of the colonial and underdeveloped countries" (Frank, 2004:86) that Sembene Ousmane explores in *Black Girl*. Besides, he queries the ideas classical economic liberalism espouses. According to Nau (2012:292), classical economic liberalism "introduced two new ideas":

The first was the relative equality of the parties in a relationship. This was the political aspect of liberalism ... and it involved the notion of property rights. The baker, brewer, and butcher had title to the fruits of their labour and were roughly equal in status,

unlike the master and slave or the cardinal, bishop, and monk. The second idea was that these merchants exchanged goods in a marketplace free of violence and coercion, a marketplace of free and competitive exchange. This idea was crucial because it ensured, through competition and the relative equality of participants, the valuing of goods and services on the basis of economic price, not on the basis of inheritance or institutional practice (path dependence, as emphasized by liberal perspectives) or on the basis of coercion and relative power (as emphasized by realist perspectives).

In *Black Girl*, the African filmmaker calls attention to a 20th century type feudal practice supported with violence and coercion within a capitalist structure. While he engages with and brings to the fore the critical notion of “the development of underdevelopment”, he guides his camera lens on the subject of cultural assimilation, which was a condition that encouraged both physical and metaphysical migration. The consequence of this reality as conceptualized by colonialism is what may be described as the clash of cultures.



In his essay, “Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory,” Teshome Gabriel propounds the idea of film as the guardian of popular memory and, in this essay, he argues that popular memory “considers the past as a political issue [and] it orders the past not only as a reference point but also as a theme of struggle” (Gabriel, 1989: 53-54). This position, in

essence, is in consonance with the views Solanas and Getino (1969:226) express in their iconic treatise, "Towards the Third Cinema", in which they argue that "revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which illustrates, documents or passively establishes a situation; rather, it attempts to intervene in the situation as an element providing thrust or rectification."

In *Black Girl* (1965), Sembene Ousmane dramatizes "the past as a political issue... a reference point [and] as a theme of struggle" by setting the stage for what is a clash of cultures, with the amber of this conflict fanned by economic considerations as the subject of "migration and cross-cultural tensions" is subsumed within the primary discourse.



According to Gregg (1998:205):



Culture has long been a critical secondary factor in shaping the way the international system works. We can see the clash of cultures as states and peoples define friend and foe, welcome or reject immigrants, succeed or fail at negotiating table, and communicate or engage in a dialogue of the deaf in literally dozens of situations....

In *Black Girl* there is a preponderance of these conditions: people defining friend and foe (the mistress versus Diouana), people welcoming immigrants (the mistress' guests in France), people succeeding or failing at the negotiating table (the mistress and her spouse versus Diouana), and people communicating or engaging in a dialogue of the deaf (Diouana versus her boyfriend on one hand, and Diouana versus her mistress, her mistress' spouse and the children). Within each of these scenarios, the issues that international relations are concerned with are interrogated and contextualized through dramatization. Consequently, the themes of war and diplomacy, power and balance of power, hegemony and nationalism, identity and the notion of globalization are played out in ways that show how "individuals who became surrogates for groups, for armies, for governments, for nations ... [personify] conflicts between ideologies and interests [which] take the form of conflicts between individual protagonists" (Gregg, 1998:4).



To comprehend these discourses as they pertain to international relations, it is important to recognise that the film is simply not about colonialism but, as Gregg (1998:4) argues in

relation to a different filmic text, that *Black Girl* “ceases to be simply a generic term for the relationship between European powers and the peoples in the Southern hemisphere and becomes a dramatic and often violent confrontation with economic causes we can comprehend and consequences that are visibly tragic.”

The film is about a young, black Senegalese girl, Diouana, hired in Dakar by a white French couple as a governess. She goes to France with her white employers, who are on vacation in their home country. Suddenly, her job description changes as she transforms into a common maid who does menial jobs for her employer in order for her to earn her board. Diouana sees this as exploitation, and she resists the mistress’ transformation to a slave master.



This physical crossing of borders and in job description find a parallel metaphysical dimension when Diouana parts with an African mask in appreciation to her employers for offering her a job.



The filmic text's explication of the swinging between the real meaning of Diounna's being and the consequence of her ill informed choice makes Sembene Ousmane's *Black Girl* a criticism of the notion of cultural hybridity – a condition which Simon Gikandi (2005:9)

defines as “to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time.” In other words, the film questions the validity of Afropolitanism, which Gikandi (2005:9) argues means “to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions ... to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states.” In the world of this film, Afropolitanism can only beget a tragic drama of sorrow. The film, therefore, is what Akin Adesokan (2008:37) describes as an “anti-imperialist consciousness, political engagement and didacticism.” Ousmane’s concern, consequently, is akin to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s (2000:92) postulation with regard to the functionality of African cinema. According to Wa Thiong’o (2009), “cinema in Africa has developed in the context of the fierce struggles of the colonizer and the colonized and their aftermaths in the postcolonial era.” This implies that the cinema in Africa is NOT simply to entertain, but to dramatize what Wa Thiong’o (2000:92) says is not only the “relations of wealth and power but also of the psyche.” In other words, *Black Girl* provides insight into the various abstract perspectives on international relations – power, institutions and ideas – and the cultural purity of humanity which globalization threatens.

Wealth and power – albeit political power – are commodities of value that nations and individuals strive to acquire since they are symbols of status. And, when they have these, they protect them by *every means necessary* because both help maintain a certain social hierarchy. Therefore, war may be inevitable if the stability of such states or individuals appear threatened. As a result, Nau (2012:29) states: “war, according to the realist perspective, is a consequence of anarchy, the decentralized distribution of power in the international system.”

In *Black Girl*, the power the white mistress holds becomes diluted the moment the black governess or maid, Diouana, resists the former's hegemony. This results in anarchy, a condition that "means there is no leader or center of authority that monopolizes coercive power and has the legitimacy to use it" (Nau, 2012:30): The mistress' home in France is her territory, a place where she enjoys sovereignty which implies that "no other actor can exert power over it or intervene in its domestic affairs" (Nau, 2012:29). However, Diouana threatens this sovereignty with her actions by disobeying her white employer who she considers an exploiter.



But, because power "from the realist perspective is concerned with material capabilities, not influence or outcomes" (Nau, 2012:31), Diouana remains the underdog because her employer is the one with power and influence. In her attempt to forge a balance of power –

“a process in which states seek to ensure that no other state dominates the system and an outcome that establishes a rough equilibrium among the states” (Nau, 2012:33) – she realizes that she cannot form alliances – no one to align with against the greater power in this tussle for sovereignty and power transition – because, as she states, “I am alone” in “a black hole – France”.

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Diouana’s attempt at challenging a dominant power in spite of the fact that she cannot muster equal “material capabilities” makes her to acknowledge that “anarchy places a premium on self-help”, a condition which Nau says is “the principle of self-defense under anarchy in which states have no one else to rely on to defend their security except themselves” (2012:30). Consequently, she declares: “If I don’t eat, I will not take care of the children.” How did the warring principal actors, Diouana and her mistress, get to this state of anarchy in which a preemptive war, initiated by Diouana, is unavoidable?

The trajectory of events in the filmic text, the war between Diouana and her employer – two personages representing two ideologies, defined by their economic status – exemplifies escalated conflict that results when tact and diplomacy fail to prevail in a relationship and it disavows the possibility that may be inherent in liberalism and its thoughts on diplomacy. Diplomacy is “the way in which states interact with and relate to one another through repetitive processes and practices,” and Nau (2012:36) states further that diplomacy:

Assumes that individuals and groups behave more on the basis of how other groups behave toward them than on the basis of how much relative power they possess or what their initial cultural or ideological beliefs are. Just as anarchy is a central concept in the realist perspective, *reciprocity*, or how states respond to one another, is a central concept in the liberal perspective.

In *Black Girl*, the white employer is ill-mannered towards Diouana, the maid. Her condescending attitude towards Diouana triggers an equal response from the employee who is eager to assert her independence at any cost. The unilateral actions of both parties depict one as the superior actor who has little or no regard for what liberalism preaches – giving “more attention to interdependence than independence or self-help” – and the other as a small power faced with a security dilemma. Since “cooperation is not automatic” (Nau, 2012:38), an outbreak of war would have been averted if both parties allowed “communications, negotiations, and compromise” to reign. Thus, the outcome of the conflict between both powers is a relative or zero sum gain instead of an absolute or non-zero sum gain: For Diouana, she gains nothing material over what she had before and her mistress loses her maid – who commits suicide. As defined, relative or zero sum gain emphasizes “the increase one side gains over the other” and absolute or non-zero sum gains is “the increase each side gains over what it had before” (Nau, 2012:42).



From the above prospective, what is obvious is the fact that when there is no communication, there cannot be any negotiations. Therefore, conflicts ultimately end in violence. However, for entities – states or individuals as surrogates – to “overcome the security dilemma that drives mutual armaments and conflict” (Nau, 2012:25), they must have shared values, norms and beliefs. In this filmic text, however, both protagonists have different ideas. Accordingly, their values, norms and beliefs are at variance and this, in turn, impacts on the construction of their respective contrasting identities. As Nau (2012:45) notes:

... identities are collective or shared, not autonomous, and can be constructed only through repetitive, social interactions. Known as *social constructivism*, this constructivist theory sees identities emerging from communicative action, social discourse, and the shared knowledge that participants develop. Actors engage in speech acts, essentially substantive communications about truth claims, to influence, persuade, and learn from one another. In this process, they shape *shared identities* that define them and their counterparts. Thus, social constructivists argue that anarchy in international affairs is not fixed. Rather *anarchy is what states make of it*,

meaning state behavior is not defined by the position states hold in the distribution of power or by reciprocal interactions in international institutions but, instead, by the shared or external identities they construct.

Diouana and her mistress have nothing in common because they lack “identities emerging from communicative action, social discourse, and the shared knowledge that participants develop.” They both have their independent or internal identities, which Nau (2012:45) argues “involve the internal ideas that organize and differentiate [people’s] domestic political, cultural, or economic life and history and influence their behavior in external relationships. These internal identities are distinct from the shared or external identities ...”

The story that Ousmane tells shows that he has no regard for liberal thoughts. He treats with disdain ideas pertaining to reciprocity, and he queries interactions among actors supposedly imbued with the attributes capable of enthroning peace should they engage in negotiations. For Ousmane, it is the relative distribution of power among actors in the international arena that is of importance because it is what, in his view, sustains legitimacy; it is his belief, as illustrated in the filmic text, that the right to use power in international relations should be steeped in an actor’s deep moral convictions. This position is in tandem with what Teshome Gabriel (2000:97) regards as “making the invisible visible.” These positions in turn echo Frank Ukadike’s (2000:28) theory which states that “the cinema in Africa awakens African consciousness, to discover the truth of their lives, constituting a powerful and invaluable tool for communication and education.” It is in the light of this discourse that the significance of popular memory comes to the fore as a catalyst. According to Gabriel (1989:53):

Once memory enters into our consciousness, it is hard to circumvent, harder to stop, and impossible to run from. It burns and glows from inside, causing anguish, new

dreams and newer hopes. Memory does something else beside telling is how we got here and there: it reminds us of the causes of difference between popular memory and official versions of history.



In *Black Girl*, it is the pull of popular memory that wrestles with the lure of Globalization 3.0, which is intrinsically tied to the identity perspective (Nau, 2012:264). If the global playing field has been flattened, then there is no room for imperial tendencies, except for the fact that international institutions and failed post independent African leaders have deprived African societies of the development that can foster a knowledge economy, which drives economic growth and social development. As far as Ousmane is concerned, his filmic vision envisions the actual intent of colonialism as Nau (2012:266) describes it –“the age of colonialism, in which European states ... conquered peoples and territories ... and exploited

the resources of these continents” – but Ousmane’s position is that the “age of colonialism” (Nau 2012) is over and Africans should, in the same measure, obliterate any false consciousness and embrace their true identity. In essence, Ousmane’s *Black Girl* articulates Fanon’s (2004:182) position as regards one of the consequences of colonialism: “Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: “Who am I in reality?””

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In the words of Amilcar Cabral (1970:5), “... in culture there lies the capacity (or the responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history...” This is the message of *Black Girl* as represented in the mask. That is the politics of Sembene Ousmane.



*That morning...
I went to the square as usual.*



*as I did every day,
to wait for destiny.*









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from all those reaching hands



*I was getting up
when the lady came towards me*







Sarafina!, Civil Strife, and the Dilemma of Sovereignty



The narrative of *Sarafina!* (1992) is the story of Apartheid South Africa as the denizens of Soweto are shown negotiating the terms of democratic peace by dramatizing their resentment for the minority Apartheid government. Through song, dance and a passion for violence, the film interrogates the themes of social injustice, political inequality, and economic instability as it espouses Francis Fukuyama's argument around the plausibility of the "universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (cited. in Mingst, 2004:65). However, the historical upheavals that the film re-enacts speak to IR issues of civil strife, nationalism and sovereignty. Consequently, *Sarafina!* questions liberalism's "belief of the rationality of humans and in the unbridled optimism that through learning and education, humans can develop institutions to bring out their best characteristics" (Mingst, 2004:63). This seems the obvious theoretical postulation since, in

Sarafina!, “learning and education” fuel aggression which, ultimately, begets conflict that leads to war.

Set primarily in the black homeland of Soweto, *Sarafina!* chronicles a season in 1976 when civil unrest calls to attention the abuse of human rights suffered by the black majority as unleashed by the state apparatus engineered by the Apartheid system. However, what is most significant in this arrangement is the fact that the preferred system of government by the white minority instituted a pre-Westphalian order in South Africa 300 years after the Treaty of Westphalia, which was enacted in 1648, which abolished “rules by religious authority in Europe [and] provided the foundation for international relations ...: the notion of the territorial integrity of states – legally equal and sovereign participants in an international system” (Mingst, 2004:18). However, the black reserves that the white apartheid government created as “separate political units to which blacks in [South Africa were] attached as citizens rather than as citizens of South Africa” (Christopher, 1982:129), were not considered independent states by the international system.

Prior to 1994 when the first democratically government was elected, apartheid separated the people of South Africa by showing prejudice against non-whites politically, legally and economically (Lopata, 2006). As a result, its laws established “a utopian, totalitarian system intending the unilateral separation of the black and white races in South Africa” (Loubser, 1996). According to Lopata (2006:9):

Under apartheid, South Africans were classified as whites (people of European descent) coloreds (people of mixed race), Asians (including Indians and Pakistanis), and Bantu (black South Africans). Each race by law had to live in their own areas; be educated separately; use separate hospitals, libraries, and movie theatres; and obey laws forbidding them to intermarry. Blacks were at the bottom of this ranking of South Africans, white at the top.

Black South Africans and others not of European descent were denied basic human rights, such as the right to wages equal to those of white South Africans. Blacks were relocated against their will and had to carry passbooks to move about the country. Anyone who tried to make changes to this system could be arrested. In this way, whites maintained their power in all aspects of life in South Africa until 1991.

Nevertheless, the entire segregation policy was founded on religious authority, and the religious principles foisted by the church informed the relations between the states in South Africa: the stronger state, which was exclusively controlled by the white minority, and the weaker state, which were the Bantustans. The psychological booster the church provided the founders of the apartheid system and in upholding it as the government of choice is summed up by Nelson Mandela (1990:34) when he said, "Convinced they were the elect of God, they went about perpetrating a crime against humanity with unequalled determination, brutality and confidence." The history of this conviction, however, was traced by Loubser (1996) in his essay, "Apartheid theology: A "contextual" theology gone wrong?" In his effort to trace and establish the church's complicity, Loubser (1996:321) states:



South African history can be divided structurally into three paradigmatic phases, a Dutch (1652-1795), a British (1795/1814-1924), and an Afrikaner phase (1924-1994). Each of these structural phases also brought about a shift in the theological arguments pertaining to racial matters. The theological argument of the Dutch phase – in support of slavery – underwent a paradigmatic change after the emancipation of the slaves by the British in 1834. Thereafter, Afrikaners began to resist racial equalization. Karel Tregardt gave "the equalization of coloureds with whites" as one of the reasons for the Great Trek (1834-1838) [and] Anna Steenkamp, in her famous Voortrekker (pioneer) diary, said that the equality of coloureds and Christians was contrary "to the laws of God and the natural distinction of descent and faith." For the first time the conviction was documented that God had ordained the divisions of colour and that it might not be suspended. This was an indication of the direction in which racial theology was to develop.

The mounting suppression of Afrikaans culture and language by the British imperialism towards the end of the nineteenth century prompted a widespread national awakening among Afrikaners (1861-1881) which also signalled a new theological

phase. Typical romantic nationalistic notions, such as the divine election and mission of the Afrikaner people, were formulated in terms characteristic of nationalisms in the rest of the world.

But, Loubser (1996) suggests that religion effectively buoyed apartheid principles by instilling in its principal actors a belief in a pre-ordained superior status, a condition which catapulted South Africa back to a time before the Westphalia Treaty. First, he points out that S.J. du Toit was the first person to make a conscious attempt at using the facts of the Bible to justify apartheid by arguing that Genesis 11 demonstrates that “the diversity of tongues (people) was the will of God” and that Acts 2:5-12, Revelation 5:9, Revelation 7:9 and Revelation 14:6 “prove ... that God even maintains the diversity of nations and languages before His throne in heaven” (Loubser, 1996:322). The implication of this, according to du Toit, is that God has commanded that “every nation must maintain its separate identity”. Thereafter, Loubser (1996) argues that after the social dislocation that was experienced between 1924 and 1938 in South Africa due to urbanization, “power was vested in the hands of Afrikaners, and they needed more than ever to formulate a coherent political plan for the future” and he asserts that “the ecumenical conference of the 1920s would emphasize the necessity for such a blue print.” However, it was the Missionary Policy of 1935 that nevertheless provided the required impetus. Thus, the ideology of apartheid was subsequently given teeth by the Dutch Reformed Church through, *inter alia*, a peculiar policy declaration (Stoker and Potgeiter, 1935, cited in Loubser, 1996):

The traditional fear of the Afrikaner of equality between black and white originated from his aversion to the idea of racial intermarriage. The church frankly declares himself to be against this kind of mixture and against anything which could promote it, but in the other hand, does not begrudge the native and coloured a social status as noble as he attain. Every-nation has the right to be himself and try and develop and uplift himself. Where the church is thus against social equality in the sense of a disregard for the racial and cultural differences between black and white in the daily

intercourse, it wants to promote and encourage social differentiation and spiritual and cultural segregation, to the benefit of both section (Loubser, 1996:324).

The innate contradiction arising from the directive of the Church notwithstanding, it is obvious from the above excerpt that the Church tacitly approved of discrimination as orchestrated by the state under the authority of the white hegemony. It is with this understanding that a reverend gentleman, J.W. Coetzee (cited in Loubser, 1996), declared in an essay, "The history of Calvinism in South Africa", that "no equality meant: "recognize the ordinances of God and do not try to make equal that which God had not made equal."

The tenacity of the purveyors of apartheid to give biblical muscle to their beliefs, as a result, found strength in the postulations of Abraham Kuyper, as Loubser points out. According to Loubser (1996:325):

South African students studying at the Free University of Amsterdam found a useful ally in the works of Abraham Kuyper ... Although his theology was conducted against the background of French and German imperialism, his ideas were appropriated by Afrikaner theologians in a manner that he himself would have rejected.

Kuyper propounded a theology that the proponent of apartheid regarded as giving credence to the stratification of society. However, his extrapolation, according to Loubser (1996), only "identified different social spheres" in terms of the devolution of powers as it relates to state, society and church. As Loubser (1996:324) surmises, Kuyper was of the opinion that "these spheres are related to one another because each falls directly under God's sovereign authority." In essence, Kuyper's estimation – according to Loubser (1996:324) – is that "each sphere has a certain authority of its own, which is called "sovereignty in its own sphere." Loubser notes that Kuyper's arguments were inferential.

On the other hand, the 1947 pronouncement by Evert P. Groenewald (cited in Loubser, 1996:325) gave the Council of Dutch Reformed Churches "the biblical proofs for apartheid". According to Groenewald (as summarized by Loubser), there are seven biblical injunctions on apartheid:

- God's words advocate the unity of the human generation.
- God deliberately divided the human generation in races, peoples, and tongues.
- God intended for people differentiated by natural circumstances to maintain their apartheid.
- God intention was for the principles of apartheid to be applied to every facet of life.
- God's benevolence is upon those who honour apartheid.
- A belief in Christ does not eliminate natural differences.
- God pre-ordained stronger nations to cater for weaker ones.

The apartheid regime perpetuated a weakness that, unfortunately, ensured that the Bantustans that were created by the apartheid system were not catered for. Instead they were deprived of their autonomy through acts that "were designed to assure white settler dominance and would guarantee European institutions of private property and capitalism would become firmly implanted" (Daniels, 1989: 329). The institution of ordinances that stripped the homelands of their sovereignty impacted on the cultural identity of the natives since the apartheid system also imposed the use of Afrikaans on the natives, a situation that made Mandela to state that the policy of the African National Congress (ANC) "is that all South African citizens have a right to their language [and] culture...." (Mandela,1990). Also, they were created not to succeed socio-politically because they lacked the infrastructure that would have guaranteed development in spite of the suggestion by the Church that was

in the contrary. Consequently, Edward Tiryakian (1967: 209) argues that “Even if each of ... Bantustan areas were brought into being and capable of supporting its own tribal population, several factors would mitigate against the long-term survival of Bantustan areas” Consequently, it is Tiryakian’s (1967:209) view that the Bantustans were doomed because a flourishing Bantustan will:

- “Have drastic economic repercussions on the white industrial society whose structure is contingent on large supplies of low-skilled Africans, a significant percentage of whom are migrant labourers.”
- “Be strongly resisted by Africans who see in the Bantustan idea of “tribal development along its own line” a disguised attempt to perpetuate African backwardness and white domination.”
- Provoke isolation of the Bantustan by African states that consider tribalism “an anathema to the modern political conscience of African nationalism.”



The deplorable conditions in the black homelands were heightened by the fact that “approximately 86% of the land [in South Africa] was owned by the white minority, while the black majority subsisted on 14% of the land base” (Whyte, 1995, cited in Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1998). Christopher (1982:128), in “Partition and population in South Africa”, argues that “economically the black areas were left to stagnate because the inhabitants, lacking a role in the political processes of the country, were unable to alleviate their condition by influencing the white-controlled parliament”. As a result, Percival and Homer-Dixon (1998:284) indicate that “under apartheid, the average population density of the former homelands was 10 times the density of rural ‘white’ South Africa.” Under this circumstance, they sum up the quality of life in the poverty-stricken black homelands: “Rural areas [were] unable to support their growing populations: soil [was] degraded, water resources [were] inadequate and decreasing in quality, and fuelwood [was] scarce” (Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1998:286). In spite of this, urban migration by black South Africans was prohibited after Police forcibly relocated blacks to the homelands, and the aftermath of the forced migration was a population explosion in the homelands: between 1960 and 1980, the population in the homelands escalated from 4.5 million to 11 million (Wilson, 1991, cited in Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1998). The acute poverty experienced by the majority of South Africans, who have been discriminated against by the minority engendered the conditions that Percival and Homer-Dixon (1998:280) argue may make possible civil conflict:

Scarcity and its interactions produce several common social effects, including lower agricultural production, migrations from zones of environmental scarcity, and weakened institutions In order for these social effects to cause heightened grievances, people must perceive a relative decrease in their standard of living compared with their aspirations, and they must see little chance of their aspirations being addressed under the status quo ...

High levels of grievance do not necessarily lead to widespread civil violence. At least two other factors must be present: groups with strong collective identities that can coherently challenge state authority, and clearly advantageous opportunities for violent collective action against authority. The aggrieved must see themselves as members of groups that can act together, and they must believe that the best opportunities to successfully address their grievances involve violence.



The propensity for violent conflict through the mobilization of group identity is what *Sarafina!* articulates as a filmic text. Although the film captures the 1976 rebellion “led by black South African students opposed to the requirement that instruction in public and private schools be conducted in the Afrikaans language” (Stewart, 2011:62), yet it is an astute response to the brutality of a socio-political and economic imperialism that stymied a people’s aspiration for freedom in every ramification. In using songs relevant to the struggle for liberation, the film gives credence to the argument that “popular music played an unusually important role in the resistance movement during the Apartheid period (1948-1991) of South African history” (Shoup, 1997:73). To this end, Lesley Reed (2006:22) states: “Through music, people expressed their suffering, hopes, and grievances. Music was also used as an organizing tool to spread news and inspire people to act.” In essence, music was instrumental towards achieving “identification with one’s ethnic group [which] was necessary for survival and advancement within apartheid’s ethnically divided political system” (Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1998:292). However, the significance of music in black South African communities during the apartheid era is in the fact that music was a subversive element used to undermine the minority government. Reed (2006:2) states:

In the 1970s and 1980s, as young people became more involved in an increasingly violent revolution, songs of struggle became filled with more anger and energy. Key to that energy was *toyi-toyi*, a high-stepping march done at protest rallies. These songs and marching step stirred the people’s feelings of anger and grief into acts of bravery. *Toyi-toyi* was even considered a sort of weapon – the sight of thousands of

black South Africans chanting and marching full speed ahead scared even well-armed government troops.



The theme of subversion also finds expression through the dramatization of the effect of espionage. In the film, a black police officer, Constable Sabela, recruits one of Sarafina's friends to spy for the state police by threatening to kill the boy's father. Coerced, the boy –

Guitar – feeds the state information that leads to the arrest of one of the students, who covertly subverts the state apparatus, during a midnight raid. Guitar’s confession leads to the necklacing of Sabela while the students sing “about the fate of all those who betray their people to the White man” (Shoup, 1997:85).



Sarafina! is a convincing argument in support of constructivism since it concurs with the notion that “state behaviour is shaped by elite beliefs” and that “power exists in every exchange among actors” (Mingst, 2004: 75-76). For instance, the apartheid system was forged around the belief systems of a handful of white South Africans in authority who, in turn, galvanized the white, Boer populace towards an erroneous conviction “that the laws of God were opposed to equal rights for natives and Afrikaners and that such equal rights violated common sense” (Daniels, 1989:331). Just as Hendrik Verwoerd is considered the “Architect of Apartheid” because of the part he played in the formulation of the state policy while he was Minister of Native Affairs and, later, as the Prime Minister of the Union of

South Africa, in the same vein, F.W. de Klerk set the Union “irrevocably on the road to a new dispensation.” According to him, “the goal with the removal of discrimination is to give all South Africans full rights in every sphere of life.” In accordance with the idea that “state and national interests are the result of the social identities of these actors” (Mingst, 2004:75), *Wikipedia* notes that “Verwoerd felt that the political situation that had evolved over the previous century under British rule in South Africa called for reform [and] Afrikaner nationalism was [thus] skilfully mobilised by leaders in the theological, political, cultural, economic, agricultural and industrial sectors as well as in government service.” Under his watch, the parliament promulgated the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959), The Bantu Investment Corporation Act (1959), the Extension of University Education Act (1959), the Coloured Persons Communal Reserves Act, Act No 3 of 1961, and the Preservation of Coloured Areas Act No 31 of 1961. Contrarily, another type of “state and national interests” made de Klerk to announce the following to the Ninth Parliament of the Republic of South Africa on 1 February 1991:

Today I wish to emphasise the positive but shall also make announcements on that which has to be abolished.

The initiatives of the past year have prepared the way for a new South Africa. Our task this year will be to give greater content to our vision of what the new South Africa should be like. Simultaneously we have to give impetus to our resolve to build a new South African nation.

There were centrifugal forces that promoted confrontation, hatred, and violence; that thrived on envy, suspicion, and fear, and which alienated South Africans from one another.

Against this the vision of a new South Africa brought most South Africans increasingly closer together. In most hearts there is the yearning for peaceful solutions and co-operation. The majority are tired of the negative and destructive. They wish to take hands but do not know how to do this.

These facts place the responsible and positive leadership corps in our country before this challenge:

The time has arrived for nation-building...

Therefore: No matter the pressure or from whence it comes, I shall not be instrumental in creating a dispensation here that is out of step with the basic values and ideals of the world's successful democracies and economies.



De Klerk's pronouncement is a denunciation of the previous state behaviour shaped by the elite beliefs of those considered the progenitor of apartheid. Their norms and practices alienated peace and social justice from the land, and deprived a certain people of colour prosperity, effective educational, health, and welfare services. Above all, these people of colour were disenfranchised. What de Klerk embarked on as enumerated above is definitely founded on the notion that "if a state identifies with other states, then there is no anarchy" (Mingst, 2004: 75). Again, this is the direct opposite of the practice in place prior to the time he launched what he called "the process of fundamental reform." In other words, his actions confirm what Mingst (2004:75) say constructivists' belief is: that "identities change as a result of cooperative behaviour and learning."

Nelson Mandela's posture as one of the foremost leaders of the struggle against apartheid also helped define the state behaviour of the various black homelands, the other states within the Union of South Africa. When he made the famous statement at the Rivonia Trial, Mandela defiantly established the tone of the struggle against apartheid, and this etched his identity and his elite belief in the consciousness of the ordinary black South African:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live

together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

His proclamation maintains that “power exists in every exchange among actors” and the source of Mandela’s power, within the context of constructivism, is definitely the desire of his people – the national need to be free from institutional oppression.



The above discourse shows the power individuals as leaders wield and their actions do impact on the making of foreign policy. Verwoerd’s actions and those of subsequent apartheid heads of state in South Africa led to economic sanctions against South Africa as the state was given a pariah status by the international system, which the United Nations (UN) embodies.

According to the *UN Chronicle* (1994:2), “Black South Africans – some 73 per cent of the country’s population – were systemically denied fundamental rights and liberties, not

allowed to participate in the political life of the country, and subject to repressive laws and regulations.” Based on the UN record, “only 13 per cent of the land in South Africa [which] contained some of the most arid and infertile areas” was designated Bantustans despite the fact that “Africans outnumbered Whites by more than 4 to 1.” Because the UN’s General Assembly and its Security Council recognized apartheid as “a threat to international peace and security”, four years after apartheid was institutionalized as a state policy, the UN reacted to the development by placing “the wider question of racial conflict arising from South Africa’s apartheid policies on the Assembly’s agenda.” In defiance of the UN call for South Africa “to abandon its apartheid policies in the light of the principles of both the UN Charter and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” the apartheid government regarded “Assembly’s decisions as illegal and unacceptable and in violation of the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs [and] consistently rejected the Assembly’s appeals and resolutions.” Nonetheless, as a result, through Resolution 1598 (XV) of 1961, the UN “for the first time defined apartheid as a danger to international peace and security [and] it asked States to consider taking a broad range of separate and collective actions to influence South Africa to abandon its racial policies.” The UN General Assembly, basically:

... called on States to: end diplomatic relations with the South African Government; close ports to all South African flag vessels; prohibit ships from entering its ports; boycott all its goods; ban exports to South Africa; refuse landing and passage facilities to all aircraft belonging to the Government and companies registered under South African laws; and called for a voluntary embargo on the supply of petroleum products and strategic raw materials to the country. From 1962 through 1988, the Assembly repeatedly urged the Security Council to impose mandatory sanctions against South Africa (*UN Chronicle*, 1994:3).

The film dramatizes the theme of boycott through the insistence of the young protesters who urge their parents to jettison the stores owned by the Boers. In essence, it argues that

the actions of individual elites impact on the lives of the mass publics who “have the same psychological tendencies as elite individuals and small groups,” opines Mingst (2004:150). Above all, the mass publics do have influence on foreign policy (Mingst 2004:150). However, the UN is largely absent in the text. The significance of this silence will be addressed in Chapter Five of this study. However, it is obvious that global injustice, which is the by-product of globalization, was unleashed on the marginalized indigenous peoples of South Africa by the British and, also, the Boer trekkers whose original home country was The Netherlands. Revisiting the critical theory position, Nau (2012:431) states:

Land, the most cherished possession of indigenous peoples, was systematically appropriated or, more accurately, stolen from them. Indigenous tribes were stripped of their livelihood and, even worse, of their culture, identity, and dignity. They were dismissed as primitive, uncivilized, and uneducable.



The scenario Nau (2012) paints above galvanizes a people towards declaring war against a greater power that is “always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal” (Measheimer, 2004:54).

The Union of South Africa was a regional hegemon which used apartheid tools to suppress other states in the geographical region of Southern Africa, including the bantustans. As a result of this state behaviour, the apartheid system disregarded some of the “bedrock assumptions” (Measheimer, 2004) of the international system. For instance, it made insignificant the dictum that suggests that “there is no “government over governments.”” (Measheimer, 2004). Also, the apartheid government discountenanced the fact that “great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other.” (Measheimer, 2004). Besides, the purveyors of the apartheid system in South Africa underestimated the assumption that “survival is the primary goal of great powers [which implies that] states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order.” (Measheimer, 2004). And, finally, the apartheid regime failed to recognize that “great powers are rational actors [who are] aware of their external environment and ... think strategically about how to survive in it” (Measheimer, 2004). In *Sarafina!*, the text explicates these political discomfitures which, therefore, brings the subject of “security dilemma” not just to the doorstep of the apartheid system and the oppressed indigenous people of South Africa, but to the international system. As defined (Mearsheimer, 2004:57), the security dilemma “reflects the basic logic of offensive realism. The essence of the dilemma is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decreases the security of other states. Thus,, it is difficult for a state to increase its own chances of survival without threatening the survival of other states.”

***Tsotsi*: Development, Identity and the Future of Post-Apartheid South Africa**



A cursory look at this filmic text suggests a thematic concern that borders on the rebirth of a hardened criminal from one of the ghettos of South Africa: the brawling township of Soweto, which is an adjunct community of Johannesburg. David aka Tsotsi, whose angst is fuelled by aloneness and estrangement, is a moral degenerate “immersed in a cruel and capricious world of random violence” (Brussat and Brussat, 2005) which he and his cronies unleash on unsuspecting personages. A brutal enforcer of his ideals, Tsotsi embodies a threat to the tranquillity and security of the *nouveau riche* that now dominates the new South Africa just as it is a present danger to the old order in the new South Africa. However, beyond the critique of the social malaise that confronts the post apartheid South Africa, the filmic text is a copious dialectics around the grim poverty that is scattered about the black communities, which are vestiges of the apartheid instituted homelands. As a result, first, *Tsotsi* highlights the issues of development and, then, contributes to the discourse around the search for identity for post 1994 South Africa.

“Wealth is unequally distributed in the world,” argues Nau (2012:363). This may be the characteristic that defines the nature of the international system as perpetuated by the dominant centre, which is emblematic of the world’s capitalist structure, in order to sustain a balance of power. However, in South Africa, the unequal distribution of wealth was spread by the apartheid system with the help of a cross section of the international community. And, thereafter, successive democratic administrations in South Africa have continued to face and perpetuate the status quo inherited from the apartheid system despite their commitments to reversing it through the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). As a result, Roger Southall (2007:67) points out that the “BEE has also become highly controversial, critics arguing variously that it serves as a block to foreign investment, encourages a re-racialisation of the political economy, and promotes the growth of a small but remarkably wealthy politically connected 'empowerment' elite.”



Former American President, Ronald Reagan (1986:642), described apartheid as a “rigid system of racial segregation wherein black people have been treated as third-class citizens in a nation they helped to build.” As a result of this, in a speech which in delivered to the American nation on July 22 1986, he declared: “America’s view of apartheid has been, and remains, clear: apartheid is morally wrong and politically unacceptable. The United States cannot maintain cordial relations with a government whose power rests upon the denial of rights to a majority of its people, based on race.” In spite of this recognition by the Reagan-led American government, the US President was in agreement with the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who he said “has denounced punitive sanctions [against South Africa] as immoral and utterly repugnant.” In justifying his support for Thatcher who he adjudged “is right”, Reagan (1986: 642) said:

The primary victims of an economic boycott of South Africa would be the very people we seek to help. Most of the workers who would lose jobs because of sanctions would be black workers. We do not believe the way to help the people of South Africa is to cripple the economy upon which they and their families depend for survival...

Alan Paton, South Africa's great writer, for years the conscience of his country, has declared himself emphatically: "I am totally opposed to disinvestment ... it is primarily for a moral reason. Those who will pay most grievously for disinvestment will be the black workers of South Africa. I take very seriously the teachings of the Gospels, in particular the parables about giving drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. I will not help to cause any such suffering to any black person.

To this end, Reagan (1986:643) enthused: "Nor will we." Consequently, he declared:

Wherever blacks seek equal opportunity, higher wages, better working conditions, their strongest allies are the Americans, British, French, German and Dutch businessmen who bring to South Africa ideas of social justice formed in their own countries. If disinvestment is mandated, these progressive Western forces will depart and South African proprietors will inherit at fire-sale prices their farms and factories and plants and mines. And how would this end apartheid?

Our own experience teaches us that racial progress comes swiftest and easiest not during economic depression but in times of prosperity and growth. Our own history teaches us that capitalism is the natural enemy of such feudal institutions as apartheid.

Reagan's epistle to the American nation and, by extension, to the South African black nation seems to provide justification for America's support for apartheid; unfortunately and ironically, in standing up for apartheid, Reagan was of the assumption that America's support for apartheid was in the best interest of the black South African who should be hopeful that the US engagement with the apartheid government guaranteed an entrenchment of democratic practices in South Africa. This American attitude was akin to the British policy of 'constructive engagement'.

In as much as Britain's 'constructive engagement' with Pretoria prior to 1994 was perceived by the British to be in the interest of the black nations in South Africa, James Barber (1991), however argues that the British support for apartheid was fuelled more by the country's "nightmares about South Africa" and, according to him, "the most vivid must be one in which there is a breakdown of order leading to the flight of whites. The nightmare is not only the suffering that would accompany the disorder, for blacks and whites alike, but the realization that many of the whites have the right of abode in Britain." The British benevolence is, therefore, a ruse since it served her self interest when one considers the significance of Barber's (1991: 727) position:

... in a serious crisis there could be a major immigration problem as [British] passport holders headed for Britain. For that reason even if for no other, it is Britain's interests to promote a peaceful and prosperous South Africa that will encourage British passport holders to stay where they are.

Within the same context, it may be argued that aspects of Reaganomics, as elaborated in Reagan's speech, was founded on warped logic informed by American national interests when one takes cognizance of the fact that Israel – a major American ally – had a military pact with apartheid Pretoria (Echevarria, 2010). Also, "common critique of official American understanding of apartheid holds that the US Government was obsessed with Cold war concerns between 1948 and 1994 ... and therefore did not appreciate the actual dynamics of developing countries, including South Africa" (Herbst, 2003:83-84). Besides these two factors, the Reaganomics discourse was twisted because the apartheid system was not just a feudal institution, but it was capitalism at its best. A feudal society, according to Shimko (2005:15) is "a fragmented place of numerous small political entities entwined in a confusing and complicated mishmash of political authority." This ideal situation that fosters

feudalism found impetus in the creation of the Bantustans by the apartheid regime in South Africa. According to *South African History Online*:

The Bantustans were a major administrative mechanism for the removal of Blacks from the South African political system under the many laws and policies created by Apartheid. The idea was to separate Blacks from the Whites, and give Blacks the responsibility of running their own independent governments ...

For example, ... ten homelands were created in South Africa. These were the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Venda, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa, and QwaQwa. The homelands were designed for specific ethnic groups. For example, two homelands of Ciskei and Transkei were created only for the Xhosa people, while Bophuthatswana was created only for the Tswana people, KwaZulu was only for Zulu people, Lebowa for the Pedi and Northern Ndebele, Venda only for Vendas, Gazankulu was for Shangaan and Tsonga people and Qwa Qwa was for Basothos.

The Apartheid government made it legal for Blacks to become citizens of their independent Bantustans. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 was passed, which allowed Blacks living throughout South Africa as legal citizens in the homeland designated for their particular ethnic group. The Act did not give Blacks South African citizenship or civil and political rights. Blacks had rights in their "Homelands," but they were not completely independent. Other laws included the Bantu Authority Act, Act 68 of 1951, which provided for the establishment of Black homelands and regional authorities, with the aim of creating greater self-government, and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, Act 46 of 1959, which separated Black people into different ethnic groups. Each group had a Commissioner-General who was tasked to develop a homeland, which would be allowed to govern itself independently without White intervention.

In the 1970s, the South African government declared four of the Bantustans "independent". These were the Transkei in 1976, Bophuthatswana in 1977, Venda in 1979, and Ciskei in 1981. The remaining Bantustans remained self-governing, but had no independent rights. Bantustans were to become independent from South Africa. This was a strategy to push all Blacks out and have them isolated from South Africa. It meant that Blacks would have to support themselves in these areas.

The local homeland economies were not developed. Bantustans relied almost entirely on White South Africa's economy. Farming was not very viable largely because of the poor agricultural land in the homelands. In addition, Blacks owned only thirteen percent of South Africa's land. These farm lands were in a poor condition because of soil erosion, and over grazing. As a result, millions of Blacks had to leave the Bantustans daily and work in the mines, for White farmers and other industries in the

cities. The homelands served as labour reservoirs, housing the unemployed and releasing them when their labour was needed in White South Africa.

Although the homelands were designed to “give Blacks the responsibility of running their own independent governments” as *South African History Online* asserts, yet that never happened since it was common knowledge that the power to self-determination was in the hands of the minority apartheid Pretoria government since it controlled the homelands through its Acts, ordinances and iron clad military style police force. As a result, the promulgation of the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, the law which made blacks South African legal citizens in the homelands, did not translate to South African citizenship or civil and political rights. In essence, blacks only had rights in their Homelands, but they were not totally independent because they were still subjected to the whim and caprices of the white hegemony. This is the type of environment that Shimko (2005) describes as “a fragmented place of numerous small political entities entwined in a confusing and complicated mishmash of political authority.”



This political structure, unequivocally, was aimed to guarantee socio-political injustice since, according to Ozler (2007), “the local homeland economies were not developed. [Consequently] Bantustans relied almost entirely on White South Africa’s economy,” and this made the black communities to remain subservient to the white government since the political configuration engendered capitalism at its finest: as *South African History Online* indicates above, “millions of Blacks had to leave the Bantustans daily and work in the mines, for White farmers and other industries in the cities.” Because of the systemic impoverishment of the black South African as orchestrated by apartheid, Berl Ozler (2007:501) argues that six years after the birth of a democratic South Africa, “more than

two-thirds of Africans in South Africa lived in poverty, while more than 40% lived with less than \$2/day.” However, Ozler points out that “the substantial improvements in mean expenditures for coloureds resulted in a significant decrease in poverty [and] the poverty headcount among this group went down from 50% in 1995 to 35% in 2000.” According to Ozler, “there was no change for Asians and whites; that is, the headcount rate remained at a very low level for Asians and at virtually zero for whites.”

The import of the above discourse is in the suggestion that the racial groups that apartheid privileged between 1948 and 1994 remain the same ethnic groups along racial lines that are benefitting the most in the post apartheid South African society. Basically, this continuous disparity is essentially the function of the development policy that the apartheid system encouraged. Development, as defined by Nau (2012:363) “involves material, institutional, and human progress. It involves the growth of material resources, which enables people to consume more and enjoy better lives – better nutrition, housing, sanitation, and health.” However, it is important to recognise also that “development is not just about growth but also about control of resources because resources serve larger social and political goals, such as national security” (Nau, 2012:363).

The denial of these forms of development that Nau describes by the then apartheid South African government, therefore, did not only hinder human resource development among the black South Africans, but it also triggered social upheavals that threatened the national security of the apartheid state and the Bantustans. According to Nau (2012:363), human resource development “measures the education, housing, and health status of the country’s workforce.” Apart from the non-existent apartheid policy towards the development of the

homeland as it concerns the human resource development of the Bantustans, apartheid, which was propped up by major players in the international system, ensured, also, that infrastructure that will promote “democracy, knowledge resource, and economic incentive structures” were dislocated in the homelands and, thereby, ensuring that blacks in South Africa may not acquire the required education that will qualify them for employment outside the field of agriculture and the mines where they have been deemed to low-skilled employee status. These manipulations definitely give credence to the realist perspective of international relations (IR) which is of the view that hegemons will always seek ways to maintain “status quo power” since they always “strive to gain power over their rivals” (Mearsheimer, 2004:59). In South Africa, the apartheid system did not just wield military might vis-à-vis the capabilities of the black homelands, but it also ensured that the black population did not have the competitive advantage which good education, good housing and good health care may have guaranteed. The filmic text, *Tsotsi*, decries this apartheid legacy, an uneven distribution of resources, that the black communities in South Africa have been bequeathed.

The unsavoury, undulating black township landscape which is stripped of any decency juxtaposed with the affluent Johannesburg suburb, two contrasting places which the film uses as setting in telling the present day South African story, deplore the harsh realities of contemporary, democratic South African society that still reflects the history of social injustice and inequality as perpetrated by the apartheid system.



Presley Chweneyagae



I'm hungry.
Do you want something?



The fine distinction which this filmic text provides suggests that crime is intrinsically linked to poverty. Therefore, it may be considered a critique of domestic and international policymakers who, as foreign-policy elites, failed to facilitate a cohesive social environment that would have hindered the culture of violence in South Africa. This failure is illustrated vividly through an excerpt from William Blum's book, *Rogue State* (2000), as published in the *New African*, which highlights some 150 instances when the US, Britain and France voted for apartheid and its policy at the United Nations (UN) between 1979 and 1986. Some of the General Assembly resolutions that were designed to help alleviate the socio-economic conditions of the black majority in South Africa but were resisted by the US and, sometime, with Britain and France are as follows:

- 12 December 1979 – Resolution 34/931: Assistance to the oppressed people of South Africa and their liberation movement.

- 15 December 1980 – Resolution 35/174: Emphasising that the development of nations and individuals is a human right.
- 16 December 1980 – Resolution 25/206J: Assistance to oppressed people of apartheid South Africa and their national liberation movement.
- 28 October 1981 – Resolution 36/13: Condemns collaboration of certain states and transnational corporations with the apartheid South African government.
- 9 November 1981 – Resolution 36/18: To promote cooperative movements in the developing countries includes: (agriculture, savings and credits, housing, consumer protection, and social services, etc)
- 18 December 1982 – Resolution 37/199: Declares that education, work, health care, proper nourishment, national development, etc are human rights.
- 22 November 1983 – Resolution 38/25: The right of every state to choose its economic and social system in accord with the will of its people, without outside interference in whatever form it takes.



The deplorable conditions in *Tsotsi* indicate that black townships, the homelands and their denizens were victims of globalization; that is, within the context of the voting pattern championed by the US and its allies in the UN Security Council. According to Richard Ballard *et al* (2005:620):

South Africa serves as a textbook example of how globalization plays itself out in the semi-industrialized world. Capital has been the primary beneficiary as productivity and the return on investment dramatically improved The state has been largely constrained by domestic and foreign capital and has made significant concessions at

the macroeconomic policy level. Labour has been the primary loser in this process Large numbers of organized workers have been retrenched, casualized and/or forced into the informal economy leading to a further expansion of the burgeoning underclasses. Some workers have done well. Senior managers and certain categories of skilled workers (including professionals) have experienced rising incomes, but they constitute a tiny proportion of the overall labour community....

One distinctive feature of the South African case is that the globalization process was simultaneously accompanied by a political transition from apartheid to a democratic order. The substantive compromise of this transition was the incoming regime's support for neoliberal economic policies in exchange for capital's acceptance of black economic empowerment and some affirmative action. The result has been a globalization process tinged by colour. Black entrepreneurs have become the primary beneficiaries as they have been included in new investment from both foreign and domestic capital and have been provided with concessionary loans by the state and/or its financial agencies. Skilled black personnel have benefitted enormously as the corporate sector has scrambled to meet equity targets in managerial and staffing structures. Black managers and workers have been prioritized in public sector employment, but *black has also been the colour of most of the victims of this neoliberal globalization* (emphasis mine), an unfortunate legacy of the overlap of race and class categories bequeathed by apartheid.

In essence, the economic benefits of a democratized South Africa did not filter down to everyone, especially the majority of the black populace. This is because a transition from mercantilism that then embraced the norms of liberal economics that is powered by statism only worsened the plight of the black majority who lacked the skills required for upward mobility in the workplace. When the new democratic government in South Africa subordinates "all economic activities to the goal of state building which includes the maintenance of the state's security and military power" (Mingst, 2004:237) – an attribute that is the defining element of statism – as implied in the above argument by Ballard *et al*, economic policy becomes "subservient to the state and its interests, [and] politics [then] determines economics" as Mingst argues (*ibid*). Mings's argument gives credibility to what Lewis Nkosi (1971:37-38) says:

... some would prefer a gradual absorbing of the black African middle classes in white-controlled Africa to ensure that when majority rule comes the economic institutions remain much the same; but even more important, that a small African class would have a vested interest in preventing too quick a take-over by the radicalised hungry masses.

In this circumstance, the lower echelon of black people who have been the poor, the neglected and the marginalized during the apartheid era, remains the underdog in a democratic South Africa since they lack the comparative advantages that liberal economics cherish. Since white capital remains the fuel that runs the South African economy, it is safe to argue that “politics and the state are used to curb [the black] man’s natural aggressiveness and conflictual tendencies and to make economic policies that enhance state power” (Mingst, 2004:243). As a result, Ballard *et al* (2005: 620-621) submit:

The net effect of this coupling of economic globalization with democratic transition has been devastating. According to the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Comprehensive System of Social Security for South Africa, unemployment stands at 36 percent for all overall population and at 52 percent for African females. Poverty is pervasive and according to recent committee of enquiry for the Department of Social Welfare, stands at an astounding 45 to 55 percent. About 10 percent of African people are malnourished, and at least 25 percent of African children are stunted. Evidence suggests that key development indicators such as unemployment and the number of households without a breadwinner are deteriorating. The level of inequality is also getting worse. South Africa has always been one of the most unequal societies in the world.

The failure of the new South Africa leads to the re-emergence of an old subversive element whose agenda now has both political and economic undertones, and the events in *Tsotsi* exemplify these. In reminiscence on the socio-political significance of the *tsotsis* in South Africa’s body polity, Nkosi (1971:33) states:

In South Africa the *tsotsis* are the real *drop-outs* from a system which seeks to turn them into placid, compliant citizens under an intolerable regime. The *tsotsis* refuse to do this, and instead have become outlaws. They reserve for themselves a freedom of action which is denied other law-abiding citizens; and though most citizens fear and abhor their criminal tendencies everyone intellectuals especially, envies them their limited freedom, which is the condition of any *outlaw*, their preparedness to strike back at white society, their bravery and their strutting bravado; secretly the “cult of violence” in which the *tsotsis* acts out the unadmitted dreams of the oppressed majority is entertained by most black South Africans....

Yet the *tsotsi* is not simply a romantic outlaw; in times of national crisis he has shown himself prepared to assume political responsibility as well as to lend a hand when violence occurs.

Post apartheid South Africa is a society with a national crisis: crime remains in the new order and the nation is still in search of its true identity. And, in assuming its “political responsibility” as well as lending “a hand when violence occurs,” *Tsotsi* engages in a discourse that may suggest that the insecurity of urban South Africa is *fait accompli* and its future is entwined with the manifest destiny of the poor townships since, according to Gary Kynoch (2005:497), “the poverty, social dislocation, and institutionalized racism that stemmed from state policies governing African urbanization laid the foundations for a violent environment.” Therefore, in spite of democracy and the attendant wealth of a select group of privileged black South Africans, the crippling impoverishment which a majority still suffers demands a new form of agency. Ballard *et al* (2005:622) sum up the urgency of this new challenge when they submit that:

... in a country whose politics were defined by an ultimately overwhelming anti-government movement, there is only limited institutional continuity between the movements of the 1980s and those of the late 1990s. The key explanation for the newness of today’s generation of social movements is that old avenues of opposition were absorbed into the post-apartheid government, thus leaving opponents of the government without a ‘voice’ with which to express or a mechanism to organize opposition This marks a change in the political opportunity structure as well as the activation of new boundaries and therefore the creation of new sets of political actors.



The absence of a covertly politicized anti-government opposition post-1994 has in essence led to what Ballard *et al* (2005:622) describe as “the reinvention of South Africa’s social movements” with the *tsotsis* at the apex, defining the tone of social discourse in a South Africa which Kynoch (2005:494) says “is often referred to as a post-conflict society, with the implicit understanding that the end of the struggle against apartheid in 1994 ushered in a new era.” However, if the “violence of the apartheid period is seen almost entirely as a product of the struggle against the racist regime,” Kynoch (2005:494) argues that “unlike many other post-conflict societies, South Africa continues to suffer from horrific rates of violence.” In explaining the official crime statistics for 2013/2014, the Pretoria based Institute for Security Studies on its website submits that “while overall the violent (‘contact’) crime rate has decreased by 0.8% in the recently released statistics, the particular types of violent crimes that cause the most fear and trauma have increased.”



Within this discourse, the *tsotsi* as a political force constitutes a new state: a potential hegemon with fire power. Kynoch (2005:494) attributes the *tsotsi's* easy access to weapons to "the outbreak of politicized hostilities in the mid-1980s" and, as a result, he argues that "South Africa's endemic urban violence ... is not a post-conflict affair, but rather a continuation of generations of violence" (495). Basically, it is possible to assume that the current state of anarchy consequent upon the embrace of the norms of liberal economics in the post-1994 South Africa as manifested through the violence that the *tsotsis* perpetuate is a form of struggle for power. If one were to agree with Mearsheimer (2004:61) that "power considerations affect the intensity of fear among states" and that "great powers located on the same landmass are in a much better position to attack and conquer each other" (62), then it may be argued that the *tsotsi* as a "potential hegemon", according to Mearsheimer (2004:62), is:

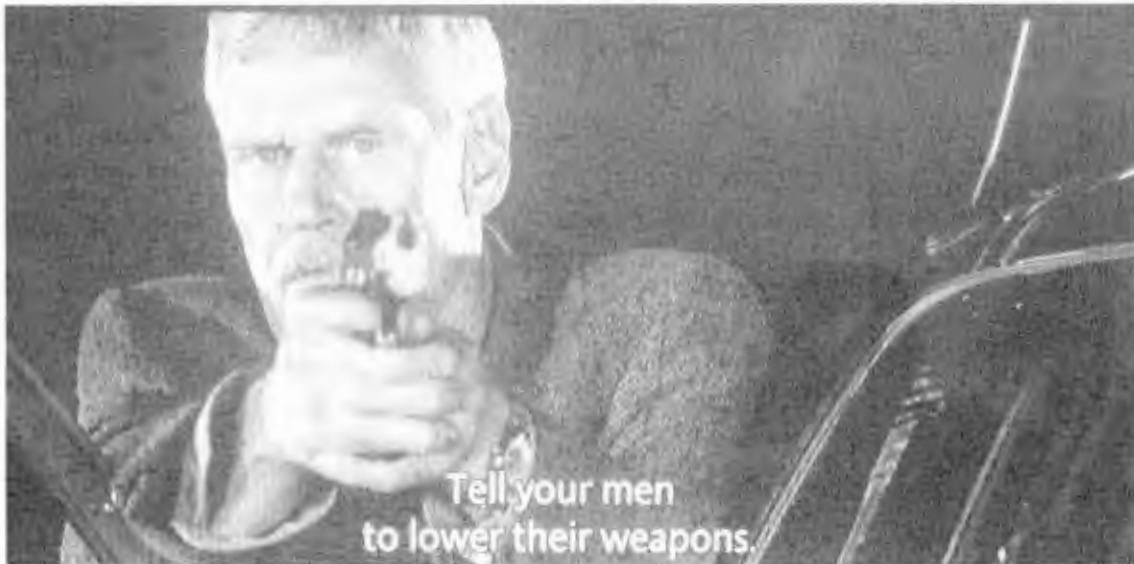
... more than just the most powerful state in the system. It is a great power with so much actual military capability and so much potential power that it stands a good chance of dominating and controlling all of the other great powers in its region of the world. A potential hegemon need not have the wherewithal to fight all of its rivals at

once, but it must have excellent prospects of defeating each opponent alone, and good prospects of defeating some of them in tandem.



Fear is the power that the *tsotsi* uses, mostly, to establish his legitimacy and he uses this as the weapon of choice before unleashing violence on the South African state. However, within classical realist discourse, bipolarity “is the power configuration that produces the least amount of fear among the great powers, although not a negligible amount by any means,” argues Mearsheimer (2004:62). The reason for this, he says, is because “there is usually a rough balance of power between the two major states in the system.” That the South African state does not cede its sovereignty to the reign of the *tsotsis* in the filmic text does not mean that the *tsotsi* has failed. Rather this filmic text, which Rita Barnard (2008:548) describes “as the latest historical staging of a quasi-mythic plot, a staging that vividly captures the differences between apartheid’s racist police state and its successor – a postcolonial polity whose legitimacy ... is far from secure,” forces on the reader’s psyche the

plethora of issues that the nation state grapples with, especially on the subject of the future of a democratic South Africa.



First, *Tsotsi*'s dramatization of life in post-conflict South Africa is an argument that suggests that "war is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself" (Clausewitz: 2004:297). Through its plot, it supports Thomas Schelling's (2004:301) argument that "the usual distinction between diplomacy and force is not merely in the instruments, words or bullets, but in the relation between adversaries – in the interplay of motives and the role of communication, understandings, compromise, and restraint." Above all, it is a statement on "the diplomacy of violence". While it eschews violence, it trumps up the idea that "diplomacy is bargaining" since "it seeks outcomes that, though not ideal for either party, are better for both than some of the alternatives" (Schelling, 2004:301).

Since war, according to Clausewitz (2004:300) "is an instrument of policy", *Tsotsi* is reinforcing the argument that in "... diplomacy each party somewhat controls what the

other wants, and can get more by compromise, exchange, or collaboration than by taking things in his own hands and ignoring the other's wishes" (Schelling, 2004:301).



Another issue that *Tsotsi* pontificates on is the question of South Africa's national identity. According to British historian, Paul Johnson (cited in Reagan, 1986:643), "South Africa is an African country as well as a Western country." Within this context, therefore, it may be argued that South Africa does not have one single national identity, since its values are an eclectic mix of both African and Western values. The significance of this reality is that the

nation's identity is as disparate as the many races that constitute South Africa. With this in mind, it is pertinent to argue then that South Africa as a nation is an imagined community. Benedict Anderson (2007:256) describes a nation – in “an anthropological spirit – as “an imagined political community.” According to him:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their communion ['Now the essence of a nation is that all its subjects have much in common, and also that they have forgotten a great deal.']

In as much as South Africa is a country of “‘fractured’ memory”, as Cheryl McEwan (2003:741) points out, and in as much as it is a society that is apt as an imagined nation, *Tsotsi*, the filmic text, tend to opine that South Africa is still a society where “citizenship is more than a set of political rights granted by the state” (McEwan, 2003:740) because citizenship “encompasses the economic, social, and political relationships between social groups and structures of power that mediate the standing of individuals in the polity (Staeheli, 1994, cited in McEwan, 2003). To this end, *Tsotsi* is interplay between the dynamics of IR realism and liberal perspectives, and it forges pragmatically the best of both IR theories.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL SEMIOTICS IN AFRICAN FILMS

This chapter explores the social function of films and the political dimension of film grammar. In interrogating the notion of “film as an Agent, Product and Source of History”, the chapter analyses the politics of communication within the context of social semiotics and international relations.



The social function of filmic texts is diverse. Some films amuse. However, this medium is not just a form of entertainment since it can express “deep-seated myths and ideologies central to the functioning of modern, Western industrialized countries” (Mayne, 1993:20). In this case, film – Lacanian film theories argue – is “an imaginary deception, a lure blinding us to an underlying symbolic structure” (McGowan, 2003:27). Some films distract. This ability to imbue what may be regarded as a negative social behaviour on spectators is summed up by Walter Benjamin (2005:62) as “the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage.” This pejorative apotheosis is derivable from the notion that modern mass culture is “increasingly dedicated to what we would now call consumption and conspicuous leisure ... one where pleasure was derived from artifice and show, from the more or less imaginary but in any case brilliant imitation of life” (Elsaesser, 1987: 72). This ubiquitous depersonalizing function of films can only be summed up with the words of Siegfried Kracauer, who said: “When a serious conversation is deemed to be a distraction, then the pursuit of distraction is indeed serious business” (cited. in Elsaesser, 1987:72). This declaration is in spite of his belief that “distraction is, for a modern urban population, a legitimate mode of aesthetic experience, more truthful to their historical situation than

the objects or experiences put in circulation as “*Kultur*” (cited. in Elsaesser, 1987:82). Films educate. This ability to instruct is informed by the medium’s “claim to present an alternative to written history” (Deshpande, 2004:4458) and this capacity is what Hayden White (1988:1193) describes as “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse.” However, in as much as this “*historiophoty*” is tenable within the ambit of historical documentation, White nonetheless argues that “no history, visual or verbal, mirrors all or even the greater part of the events or scenes of which it purports to be an account, and this is true even of the most narrowly restricted “micro-history.”” The reason for this is that “[e]very written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification exactly like those used in the production of a filmed representation” (1988:1194). Therefore, to “translate” a given written account of history into a visual-auditory equivalent without significant loss of content” is implausible, White (1988:1193) argues.

Consequently, Monaco (1977:6) argues that “a film ... is not reality.” This implies that film is a fictional creation. However, fiction is not an abstraction. According to Wilbur (2001:18), “fiction unfolds around three basic plots: man against nature, man against man, and man against himself.” What this means is that art imitates life. To this end, Wilbur (2001:19) submits that “plot is whatever happens in the story, which can be anything in life,” and as a result, he asserts that this is “one of the most stimulating ways to develop a fiction.” It is this notion of creation as imitation that informed Aristotle’s worldview as enumerated in his work, *Poetics*. Rehashing Aristotle’s position, Monaco (1977:7) declares:

... art was best understood as a type of mimesis, an imitation of reality dependent on a medium (through which it was expressed) and a mode (the way the medium was utilized). The

more mimetic an art is, then, the less abstract it is. In no case, however, is an art completely capable of reproducing reality.

This, no doubt, is a double entendre. However, this ambiguity has a measure of clarity. If art is not reality since it is not “an unmediated understanding of the world” (Descartes: In Irvin Wohlfarth, 1979:70), then it means that a work of art is open to the creative machination of the producer as informed by his ideological posture. Therefore, film as art, as Monaco (1977:7) argues “does not completely eliminate the intervention of a third party between the subject and the observer.” As stated earlier, this is “dependent on a medium and a mode.” And, to a large extent, it is also dependent on the imagination of the creator where ideas, first of all, are formulated as abstraction before they manifest as an art form. According to Monaco (1977:10), “[t]his spectrum of abstraction is only one way to organize the artistic experience; it is not in any sense a law.” The significance of his statement comes to light in a probing question asked by the scholar himself: “How and why does art get produced?”

According to Monaco (1977:12):

Whether we approach the artistic experience from the point of view of production or of consumption, there is a set of determinants that give a particular shape to the experience. Each of them serves a certain function, and each in turn yields its own general system of criticism.

He represents this argument graphically thus:

DETERMINANT:	Sociopolitical	Psychological	Technical	Economic
FUNCTION:	Utilitarian	expressive	art for art's sake	Careerist product
SYSTEM OF CRITICISM:	ethical/ political	psycho-analytical	esthetic/ formalist	Infrastructure

It is Monaco's opinion that "the political determinant is primary [since] it is this factor that decides how an art or work of art is used socially" (1977:12). He argues that "[c]onsumption is more important here than production [because] the political determinant defines the relationship between the work of art and the society that nurtures it" (*ibid*). The reason for this is not mind-boggling, but McGinn (2005:53) puts it aptly and more succinctly. According to him, "the very act of looking through one thing to see another gives us pleasure, as if our eyes were performing a magical feat – traversing one domain of reality to reach another."

McGinn's perspective evokes the existence of a subtext in every work of art just as in a film, and he ascribes this to what he calls "*imaginative seeing*". He argues that this process "enables us to connect the world of imagination and the world of perception" (2005:53). Because "the face on the screen becomes a means of psychological revelation to which the viewer's eye is attuned," McGinn (2005:52) concludes that "viewing the screen is a dynamic interplay between two minds, the actor's and the audience's." His analysis, however, ignores the unseen hand that propels the actor towards a specific expression: the director. According to Bare (1971:1), "[t]o understand fully the subject of cinema is to delve deeply into the inner workings of the one who (today more than ever before) shoulders the greater responsibility for what reaches the screen. And this, most experts will agree, is the director" because he or she is "the true "author" of the finished film." Between the director, the actor and the audience, there is no denying the fact that there is the possibility of the distortion of the information or message that a film or the work of art is meant to convey. This is one of the pre-occupations of Nichols (1981) in his study on ideology and the image. According to him (1981:2):

Communication and exchange are always signifying acts and part of what they signify or represent is our own place within the process of communication and exchange, be they base or superstructure. Language, especially when it is conceived of semiotically as including all forms of communication based upon signs, whether they are words, clothes, gestures, or moving pictures, belongs to neither base nor superstructure but is a necessary element of all material social practice. Language organizes differences into information that, as coded process, conveys meaning. All human activity that involves communication and exchange ... produces meaning. The elements of this production that represent the needs of the dominant class order are ideological elements.

The definition of ideology is a contested site. Marx says ideology is “false consciousness” (cited in Gabel, 1997:175) but Althusser disagrees with Marx’s definition since, as quoted by Mayne (1993:13), he thinks Marx’s definition suggests that ideology is a “simple distortion of the economic realities of a given culture.” However, Althusser – as quoted by Mayne as well– emphasizes that ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” Either way, both definitions suggest an engagement with and a reaction to socio-cultural issues which may have political undertones. However, Mayne (1993:14) establishes the point of departure of both explanations given to the notion of ideology, when she argues that, “The key shift here is the move away from ideology as false consciousness, and toward a concept of ideology that emphasizes not only its interpretative function, but its necessary function in any culture.”

Because ideology, as argued by Althusser (1971), “has a material existence,” it becomes imperative to seek new modes of engagement with the notion, especially since “ideology appears to produce not itself, but the world. It proposes obviousnesses (sic), a sense of “the way things are,” within which our sense of place and self emerges...” (Nichols, 1981:2). As a result, Nichols (1981:1) states:

Ideology arises in association with processes of communication and exchange. Ideology involves the reproduction of the existing relations of production (those activities by which a society guarantees its own survival). Ideology operates as a constraint, limiting us to certain places or positions within these processes of communication and exchange. Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself ... Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the process of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have.

The nuance that ideology has a tinge of propaganda is obvious in the above discourse because the assertion that “ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals [and that ideology is] the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself” suggests that cultural products are instruments of propaganda and, as tools of mass communication, they are designed “to influence the ideas and attitudes of individuals” (Willey, 1935:195). In this sense, it is being suggested that film, as other forms of art “has been so widely used for political ends” (Ross, 2002:18). This implication is well articulated and subsumed in the following definitions of propaganda. According to the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (1938), propaganda is “an expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence the opinions and actions of other individuals or groups with to a predetermined end.” In the same vein, Alfred Lee (1953:18) states that propaganda is “an expression overtly set forth or covertly implied in order to influence the attitudes and through the attitudes, the opinions and actions of a public.” And, finally, F.C. Bartlett (1940:6) argues that “propaganda is an attempt to influence public opinion and conduct – especially social opinion and conduct – in such a manner that the persons who adopt the opinions and behaviours do so without themselves making any definite search for the reasons.” These, however, differ from Hans Speier’s (cited in Ross, 2002) definition of propaganda. According to Speier, propaganda could be defined as “activities and communications from a government to its own citizens,

other governmental personnel, or foreign audiences in general.” The significance of this particular definition, through its *modus operandi*, is what Gaitonde (1974: 49) encapsulates, when he says:

METHODS of governing the thinking and behaviour of working people in the bourgeois countries form a very complex and ramified system. An important part of this system is the conditioning of man’s psyche, his feelings and emotions.

Bourgeois propagandists believe that by giving free play to man’s feelings and instincts they can paralyse his power of reasoning. Thus ... the American sociologist M Choukas, characterises propaganda as exclusively a device for manipulation, whose inherent function is to mislead people. He bluntly states that playing on men’s passions and emotions is one of the means to neutralise the ability to think, a characteristic of human being.

Another US expert on psychological warfare, P Linebarger, reasons along similar lines. He maintains that by invoking men’s subconscious (*sic*) feelings, one can “convert lust into resentment, individual resourcefulness into mass cowardice, friction into distrust, prejudice into fury.”

Bourgeois sociologists understand propaganda as influencing a person in a situation where there are conflicting points of view on the matter.

The difference in definition notwithstanding, it is the common denominator in these definitions that is important: “the deliberate attempt to influence mass attitudes on controversial subjects by the use of symbols rather than force” (Rosten, 1947: 118). As a result, Rosten argues that “It is crucial to recognize that it is *intention* [emphasis not mine] that lies at the heart of propaganda. This must be stressed, since it is often crudely assumed that the *effect* [emphasis not mine] of a publication (or a movie) upon those who see or read it determines whether or not propaganda is involved” (118).

If “*intention*” is what defines what propaganda is, then films produced by African film makers are not propaganda since it is the “*effect*” that these films have on their spectators that is really the motivating factor that defines the African film maker. Thus, the significance

of the African filmic texts is shaped by their film grammar because this is what establishes them “as agents and products of history” (Ferro, 1983: 357). And through this film language, they are able to refute, first, the “Western cinematic representations of Africa [which] helped to reinforce the dominant Hegelian vision of Africa as a continent with no history and no culture” (Murphy, 2000: 239). And, then, the African film maker’s vision of film grammar is of import due to his or her understanding of films’ “inherent and distinctive characteristics as a vehicle of thought and emotion” (Siepmann, 1946: 1273).

According to Edward W. Hudlin (1979:47), language is “a system of symbols which combine in some ways but not in others and whose combinations determine meanings, however, allows many items not previously thought of as languages suddenly to become candidates for that title.” As a result of this, he further argues: “philosophers of language should concern themselves with the claims of many film theorists that cinema art is a candidate for a language system, either by itself or as a part of some other, pre-existing language system.” Hudlin (1979:47-48) enshrines his position on the following discourse: “Films are thought to be “read” like novels, meaning (1) the filmic language is considered logomorphic, and (2) editing is thought to constitute a syntax. Thus words are compared with shots, sentences with sequences, paragraphs with scenes, cuts and fades with punctuations.” In spite of this, he challenges the views of the Russian formalist, I.V. Pudovkin, with regard to how film meaning is derived. According to Hudlin (1979:48), “Pudovkin’s model for the interpretation of film would require the meanings of images to be conventionally fixed” because of his presumption that “the meanings of words are conventionally fixed.” Hudlin’s disagreement with Pudovkin is informed by the following explication:

Pudovkin compares the making of a film with the laying of bricks: each separate brick (i.e., each visual image) is likened to a word, and the “linkage” between bricks (i.e., editing) is claimed to be analogous to the syntax found in literature.

But Pudovkin’s use of this analogy is sometimes confusing. The striking thing about a wall of bricks is that each brick maintains its integrity as a brick, regardless of the order in which the bricks are laid. By contrast, the integrity of the word (i.e., its meaning) shifts according to context. Pudovkin’s bricklaying analogy therefore seems incompatible with his comparison between editing and syntax. Moreover, if Pudovkin’s account were substantially correct, one should imagine that a reader would get almost as much understanding from reading a film script as he does from viewing the film based on it.

Pudovkin’s views are unacceptable within the context of this study which frames its argument around the dialectics privileged by postmodernism. If the meaning of language is public as Hudlin (1979:50) points out, then it is imperative to postulate that it is “the relationship between the work [of art] and the audience” that is of utmost significance as the “reader” of the filmic text grapples with the meaning of “an abstract idea, or a set of ideas [as] conveyed to an audience by means of metaphor and the association of ideas” (Hudlin, 1979:51). This position is in consonance with Sergei Eisenstein’s views with regard to “the significance of shots [which he submits] is determined by context, and that “from the collision of two different [shots] *arises* a concept” (Eisenstein, 1979, cited in Hudlin, 1979) or what Andre Bazin describes as “abstract result” (1968, cited in Hudlin, 1979).

What is unequivocally obvious in these arguments is the fact that a public may interpret a filmic text, as suggested by Eisenstein (cited in Hudlin, 1979), “based on the cultural associations which these images have for an audience.” The nuances of this particular discourse may be the very foundation on which a social semiotic approach to the study of meaning in films is founded because it privileges the “functions and social uses of semiotic systems” over the concerns of ‘Mainstream semiotics’” (Hodge and Kress, 1988:1).

In arguing that social semiotics “attributes ...meaning to power”, Hodge and Kress (1988:2) outline what they consider the important defining elements of this field of enquiry in relation to how “culture can be seen as a form of communication [that is] organized in ways akin to verbal language, [that is] ... understood in terms of a common set of fundamental rules or principles” (1). As a result of this, they argue that social semiotics is about “the complex interrelations of semiotic systems in social practice, all of the factors which provide their motivation, their origins and destinations, their form and substance [and it is inclusive] of speakers and writers or other participants in semiotic activity as connected and *interacting* in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts.” This “social contexts” include the idea that Jacinta O’Hagan (2000:138) labels as “civilizational identity” which is a notion that defines states through culture. The agency of “civilizational identity” is paramount even more now where a preponderance of elements of Western popular culture aims at obliterating any gains that have been made in the 19th century by societies that had encounters with colonization under the aegis of “colonialism’s humanitarian mission” which Martha Finnemore (2004:109) says was “to “civilize” the non-European parts of the world – to bring the “benefits” of European social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements” to Africa and other colonized societies. Thus, if culture is indispensable in the 21st century in making sense of International Relations as O’Hagan points out when she states that “culture is becoming a central organizing principle of international relations, shifting the focus away from states as the foundation of international order”, then it is of import to understand the issues of international relations through the “social contexts” of semiotics. This argument is fundamental when one takes cognizance of the fact that “differences in culture ... create differences over policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and

commerce to the environment” (Huntington, 2004:166). In other words, culture defines how a people or an individual member of a community uses sign as icon, as index or as symbol. Although Wollen, as Hudlin (1979:54) points out, argues that “cinematic language is mainly indexical and iconic”, yet it is logical to argue that in films symbols play an equally important role in their semiotic interpretation since “cinema art as a language for communication with an audience stresses the symbolic function of the photograph [just as] the cinema as an imitation of nature emphasize the indexical function of the photograph [and as] a vehicle for expression concentrate on the iconic function of the photograph.” This position tallies with Eisenstein’s (cited in Hudlin, 1979:51), where he states that “like other languages, film language rests on a pre-existent code, a code based not on artificial convention, but on psychological laws and associations.”

This “psychological laws and associations” is not established in a vacuum because it is a by-product of culture. Thomas S. Shaw (1994: 84) argues that culture “works in two ways in the construction of identity.” To elucidate on his premise, Shaw (1994:84) posits that culture:

...mediates reflection on the attributes or relationships that are felt to characterize a self; simultaneously, culture works to permit individuals to index their social position by marking solidarity with a moral community and expressing loyalty to that community. Solidarity and loyalty are expressed not so much through the referential meanings of explicit statements as through the tacit understandings invoked by gestures and styles that index membership in a status category.

The implication of his argument is expressed in the opinion that suggests that identity is a “signifying practice” which invariably makes people to voluntarily utilize “a range of sign vehicles in an ongoing process of communication that is both intrapersonal and interpersonal and that simultaneously serves both psychological and social functions” (Shaw, 1994:84). Consequently, an individual’s motives and goals can be teased out from

the identity symbols and signs that he or she employs during communicative activity (Shaw 1994). This act suggests that individuals are not dormant but are active participants in the production of meaning since “they take an active role in substituting meanings that they hope will enhance their status and self-image and, also, by showing how they select categories and styles that reaffirm their loyalty to local moral worlds and status domains” (Shaw, 1994:87). This statement confirms the argument which T.V. Paul et al (2004) makes, when he says that “deep forces are transforming international relations, pushing traditional power politics away from national agendas” (1). Film as an art form is one vehicle that is being used to hold in abeyance traditional power politics from national agendas. However, the contributions of African filmmakers to this field have not been effectively interrogated beyond the exigent demand of cultural studies. But, it is this study’s view that through the analysis of social semiotics in African films, it will be obvious that issues of international relations are not the exclusive preserve of Western films.



Mayne (1993:14) is of the opinion that “in order to understand how cinema functioned ideologically, it was not enough to submit films to a test to determine a political content distilled and rendered from the vehicle of the film. Rather, it was the “vehicle” itself – the situation of film viewing, the nature of film language – that required explanation.” What Mayne calls “the situation of film viewing” may be aligning with John Fiske’s (1989) pronouncement on text and social subjects in his discourse around active audiences and how they make meanings. According to Fiske (1989:62), “the social subject has a history, lives in a particular social formation ..., and is constituted by a complex cultural history that is both social and textual.” As a result, he submits that the subjectivity of the social subject “results from “real” social experience and from mediated or textual experience [and that

this] social subjectivity is more influential in the construction of meanings than the textually produced subjectivity which exists only at the moment of reading.” The argument suggests that cultural nuance that defines a reader’s identity has a prolific impact on the production of meaning more than the form of a text, which is universal and technological. Therefore, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, if “films are thought to be “read” like novels”, which implies that the “filmic language is considered logomorphic, and editing is thought to constitute a syntax,” then signs may be considered significant and what they signify may provide insights into a body of knowledge that may lead to the proliferation of new discourses, especially as they relate to International Relations. This discourse advocates the reappraisal of hegemony theory which M. Gottdiener (1985:982) disavows since it advocates the view that “corporate domination of mass culture in a class-stratified society has as its ultimate consequence an industrial control of consciousness.” In as much as hegemony theory may pander to both liberal and realist instincts, Gottdiener (1985: 982-983), however, takes a radical swipe at this principle by declaring that:

Hegemony theory is reductionist because of its primitive understanding of human subjectivity. By asserting that class consciousness is controlled in the interests of the bourgeoisie through the mediation of mass culture, hegemonists assume the unity of all thought and beg the more essential theoretical question concerning the constitutive nature of the human subject. Consciousness itself can never be controlled in the manner suggested by this theory because it implies the existence of a homogeneous human subject who has been produced by modernity and whose mental state has a reflexive thought capacity that is indistinguishable from either consciousness or even subconsciousness. At its core, therefore, the assertion of consciousness control commits the fallacy of idealism, attributed to Lukacs (1971), that implies that the mental activity of individuals can be separated so easily from the material conditions of their existence that consciousness can be “false”.

In as much as studies like Fiske’s (1989) and the Levi-Strauss’ (1952) definition of culture as “a fragment of humanity which ... presents significant discontinuities in relation to the rest

of humanity” concur with Gottdiener’s argument that gives equal importance to the process of articulation and interpretation, there is no denying the fact that one of the three separate stages of mass cultural semiosis that Gottdiener (1985:996) recognizes is “one that involves the creation of meanings by producers themselves” through the process of transfunctionalization. For this study, it is the creation of meaning by African filmmakers in ways that shift the focus on readers as regards their interpretation of signs and codes that is significantly pursued in spite of the fact that one recognizes the relevance of the discourses Michel Foucault’s *episteme* (cited in Orr, 1986) engenders as it relates to the “attitude adopted by a socio-cultural community with respect to its own signs.”

Signs are “parts of semiotic theory most valuable to the study of communication,” argues Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (1993: xvi). And, according to her, they are the “smallest elements of meaning in interaction” and they “work through their ability as pointers [to] serve as a kind of shorthand, pointing or referring to something absent (1993). This definition echoes the one given 17 years earlier by Eco (1976: 16) when he defined sign as “*everything that, on the grounds of previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else.*” Roland Barthes (1964:39) defined the sign in a more cogent way when he said that it is “a compound of a signifier and a signified”. Although these words are Saussurean terminologies, Barthes, however, laid down the inherent idea vividly by stating that the “plane of the signifiers *constitutes the plane of expression* and that of the signifieds the *plane of content.*” With this as a premise, Leeds-Hurwitz (1993:23) concludes that signs may be interpreted as “a dichotomy” because of their “two-part relationship”; however, she also recognizes Charles Sanders Peirces’ enunciation which proffers that signs may be interpreted as a “trichotomy”. Her definition of both “dichotomy” and “trichotomy” as they

apply to the interpretation of signs pitches Ferdinand de Saussure's manner of analysis (dichotomy) against Peirces' "trichotomy" by establishing the details that make both similar just as what sets the two apart. Nonetheless, she argues that both "schemes should not be viewed as contradictory [because] Peirce was simply slightly more explicit than Saussure." As a result, Leeds-Hurwitz (1993:23) states:

As outlined originally by Saussure, each sign comprises a duality, such that it can be understood to have two parts; these he termed the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier is visible or on some way present (such as a flag); the signified is invisible but referred to (the country to which the flag belongs and which it represents). In other words, the signifier is the explicit aspect of the sign, present during the interaction, a material presence of some sort; the signified is the tacit element of a sign, what might be termed an "immaterial" presence, something literally absent yet functionally present because it has been invoked.

Peirce divided signs differently, proposing a triad: the *sign* or *representatum*, the *object*, and the *interpretant* In this scheme, the representatum is parallel to Saussure's signifier, identifying the present part of the sign; but Peirce divided Saussure's signified into two: the object (that which the representatum refers) and the interpretant (the meaning conveyed by the representatum about the object whatever was not previously known about the object but here conveyed) ... Peirce's scheme serves as an elaboration of Saussure's, making Saussure's the more basic and essential....

If signs are the "pivotal notion" of semiotics as Thomas Albert Sebeok suggested (cited in Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993), then their interpretation and their essence are non-negotiable within the purview of semiotics. According to Eco (1979:65), "semiotics is mainly concerned with signs as social forces" because he is of the view that "there is always a sign every time a human group decides to use and to recognize something as the vehicle of something else" (Eco, 1979:17). This definition that shows causality between two events may have been hinged on Barthes' (1964:41) exposition on "*sign-functions*". According to Barthes (1964:41), "the sign-function bears witness to a double movement, which must be taken apart. In the first stage ..., the function becomes pervaded with meaning. This semantization

is inevitable: *as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself....*" In order to understand how signs work, it is crucial to recognize that signs may be considered as utterances, and utterances, according to Eco (1979:151), "are usually considered emissions of sounds ... [or] production of signals." As a result, he (1979) declares: "I utter when I draw an image, when I make a purposeful gesture or when I produce an object that, besides its technical function, aims to communicate something." As "emissions of sounds", Eco (1979:151) argues that the production of signs implies that the producer has engaged in a laborious activity: "First of all the labour of *producing* the signal; then the labour of *choosing*, among the set of signals that I have at my disposal, those that must be articulated in order to compose an expression, as well as the labour of isolating an expression-unit in order to compose an expression-string, a message, a text." Eco (1979:152) does not exclude the receiver of the utterances from this labour which the producer of signs must engage with "in order to articulate them in 'acceptable' strings of sign-functions" that guarantees "their semantic acceptability and *understandability*". From his perspective, when he receives an utterance or "a sentence, even though I do not have to labour in order to produce the sign-vehicles, I do have to labour in order to *interpret* them." Consequently, he (1979:152) opines thus:



Obviously I can send my messages in order to mention things and states of the world, in order to assert something about the organization of a given code, in order to question or to command. Either to send or to receive these messages (or texts) requires that the sender should foresee, and the addressee isolate, a complex network of presuppositions and of possible inferential consequences. In exchanging messages and texts, judgements and mentions, people contribute to the changing of codes. The social labour can be either openly or surreptitiously performed; thus a theory of code-changing must take into account the public reformulation of sign-functions and the surreptitious code-switching performed by various rhetorical and ideological discourses.

The social labour inferred in the above discourse is akin to what the film director does with the many shots taken during filming and during editing. Ultimately, the choice of one shot over the other is determined by how the chosen frame helps formulate the ideas of the filmmaker and how it enhances the intent of the director through the montage that is assembled to articulate the story. However, beyond this process, the reader of the visual text produced also engages with the text from a subjective position in order to interpret the content as influenced by his or her orientation. As a result, as Eco (1979) argues, there is a “public reformulation of sign-functions” which is consciously or unconsciously subjected to ideological influences within rhetorical situations that are prevalent at the time of the discourse. In this case, it is thus accurate to propound that “the degree to which intention and interpretation will match depends on context” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001: 8) since the “same sign could be transparent to a producer and not to a receiver, or vice versa,” as Hodge and Kress (1988:22) argue. This gives credence to what has been regarded as the experiential meaning potential which Kress and van Leeuwen (2001:22) say “refers to the idea that material signifiers have a meaning potential that derives from what it is we *do* when we articulate them, and from our ability to extend our practical experience metaphorically and turn action into knowledge.” This, of course, is what is intended through the use of icon, index and symbol in semiotics. However, it must be emphasized that their signification is not automatic because, as Hodge and Kress (1988:22) point out, “the bonds between signifier and signified [are] subject to the whims of an inscrutably powerful collective being, Society” This is the reason why an outsider will not know the meaning of a symbol.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: SOCIAL SEMIOTICS AND THE IDEOLOGY OF SIGNS

The forces of production and the relations of production constitute the mode of production which, invariably, may be influenced by both intrinsic and external determinants. Therefore, the mode a producer of a cultural product privileges may foreground the meaning of the form just as the icon, index or symbol deployed in the text. In the following analysis, how filmmakers use the symbolic function of photography and a transfunctionalization that spurs connotative readings of visual texts are at the core of this section. In the filmic texts that are referred to in this section of this study, it may be argued that the various filmmakers through the dramatization of their various concerns of international relations as manifested in the lives and experiences of the films' protagonists operate out of a conviction that "objectively conceived "reality"" is the outcome of what is considered the historical truth around any discourse. Therefore, it could be suggested that Ruthellen Josselson (2010:869) puts it aptly, when she states that narrative is "central to how we conceive of ourselves [when] we create stories of ourselves to connect our actions, mark our identity, and distinguish ourselves from others." As a result, to understand these visual texts, one must recognise that they are better approached as narratives and, therefore, the following declaration by Jossellen (2010:869-870) is paramount to appreciating the significance of their mode:

Questions about *how* people construct themselves and others in various contexts, under various conditions, are the focus of narrative research. Narrative research paradigms, in contrast to hypothesis-testing ones, have as their aims describing and understanding rather than measuring and predicting, focusing on meaning rather than statistical analysis, and recognizing the importance of language and discourse rather than reduction to numerical representation. These approaches are holistic rather than atomistic, concern themselves with particularity rather than universals, are interested

in the cultural context rather than trying to be context-free, and give overarching significance to subjectivity rather than questing for some kind of objectivity.

Within this context, the following interpretations of specific icons, index and symbols should be perceived as scholarly efforts that are aimed at understanding lived experiences since this study aims for, what Jossellen (2010:870) calls “the understanding of lives in context rather than through a prefigured and narrowing lens. [In essence], meaning is not inherent in an act or experience but is constructed through social discourse ... [and] meaning is generated ... by the explicit linkages the researcher makes between this understanding and interpretation”, which is the meaning constructed at another level of analysis.

Sembene Ousmane and the Politics of *Black Girl* in IR



According to Hodge and Kress (1988: 122), “Social semiotics treats all semiotic acts and processes as social acts and processes.” Basically, it is their belief that every social interaction is defined by the social dynamics that correlate with the material position of the participants and, to a large extent, this may be codified in what could be regarded as a subtle struggle for the balance of power. To this end, they (1988:122) argue:

What is at issue always in social processes is the definition of social participants, relations, structures, processes in terms of solidarity or in terms of power. Semiotic processes are means whereby these can be tested, reaffirmed, altered. Hence questions of power are always at issue, whether in the affirmation of solidarity or in the assertion of power; whether in the reproduction of a semiotic system or in the challenge to that system.

In *Black Girl*, the narrative that Sembene Ousmane employs is a dramatization of this social process that Hodge and Kress (1988) define in specific terms. In the visual text, there is a sense of “social allegiance” – Leeds-Hurwitz (1993:27) defines this term as solidarity, group

identity and ideology – expressed by the filmmaker and Diauna and, on the other hand, the filmmaker tends to be in alliance with Diauna in her intense interrogation of the issues of power and the assertion of power, which is subsumed in her relations with her boss, the white lady who symbolises imperialism in its neo-imperial form. In essence, the nature of the relationship between Diauna and the filmmaker on one hand and between the filmmaker and the white boss of Diauna, on the other hand, which is indicated by the plot, is a metasign that “conveys information about how to interpret other information” (Leed-Hurwitz, 1993:27) in the filmic text. This finds express manifestation in the text’s plot and in some of the deployment of certain symbols and icons in the visual text.

For France, its relationship with the citizens of her colonies in Africa in terms of her immigration policy was defined by the terms of France’s assimilation policy. However, the feasibility of this policy and the rapprochement that was intended by it is what Ousmane contests in this film. As explicated in this visual text, everything assimilation was designed to achieve is at variance with the outcome of the social process that *Black Girl* dramatizes through its narrative. According to Georges Mauco (1950:14-15), fifteen years prior to the making of *Black Girl*:

Assimilation consists in taking a free part in communal life on a footing of equality. In this sense assimilation presupposes adaptation. The interest of the foreigner is the same as that of the receiving country, since adaptation makes both for the individual happiness of the immigrant and for improvement in his professional and social output. Adaptation of this sort can only occur in an atmosphere of confidence that only thrives under democratic conditions, where all individuals take part in communal life, on a footing of equality, and where assimilation policies, nationalist propaganda and, a fortiori, ill-treatment of minorities are ruled out.

Free participation in the life of the community also seems necessary from the point of view of national cohesion. It is mind not race which ensures national unity. 'A nation is a soul', said Renan, 'a spiritual principle; it is an urge to live together, a plebiscite renewed every day.' But the foreigner will take a real part in national life only if he has

access to French culture and to communal life as a whole, and equality of status in the matter of social advancement.



Black Girl begins in France where a ship docks and the black girl is introduced engaged in interior monologue; her boss's spouse drives her home from the seaport. The movie, thereafter, slips into Dakar where a mask image looms largely. Diounna recounts her story: life in the shanty and her quest for economic independence and this "wait for destiny" brings her face to face with the most exploitative denigration. And then, mask on her face, she announces to the world: "I've got a job". Another cut takes her back to France where she endures subjugation and shameful gestures from the boss and her guests. The fight for the mask – by the white and black women – is a kind of comic relief. However, the significance of this scene is in what motivates both women: while one *wants* it as the 'spoil of war' the other *needs* it because of nationalistic sentiments. When the black girl says "It is mine", it means this is her cultural heritage and this message sinks into the viewer's

consciousness faster than the boss's claim which echoes as lame because the mask in question is alien to her French culture: for her, the mask is an artefact – a commodity – fit for decorative purposes.



The mask in Africa is, however, a vehicle through which the denizens of the continent engage their ancestors to provide spiritual and supernatural support for various human undertakings. And to articulate the significance of the African mask, Paul S. Wingert (1973: 56) states:

Wherever they appear they are associated with practically all of the elements fundamental to the life forces distinctive of an area. In brief, they often function as agents of social control; for this reason, they conform to both prescribed general appearances and established procedures. Masks, in some tribes, serve instead of figures, as ancestral representations or as containers of their power. In other instances, even in the same tribe, they depict deities which were revered and petitioned accordingly; while in still other regions, masks were under the control of fetishers or diviners.

In this regard, Ousmane's use of this element of identity, which the mask as an icon signifies, proclaims that the French citizen has no right to the mask since its sign-function is that of a totem through which ancestral spirits may assume the form of masks to dramatize cosmological principles and assist in transmitting knowledge through generations.



What emerges in this contest for the ownership of the mask is the notion of cultural citizenship which Nick Stevenson (2007:256) argues "should be concerned with both having access to certain rights and opportunity to get your voice heard, in the knowledge that you will have the ear of the community." From these scenes in the visual text, what is apparent is the ideological battle that pitches the advocates of cultural citizenship against those that propound the death of citizenship. The narrative of the mask as an icon and its significance to the black girl as extrapolated from the conversation leading to the physical face-off between "the stronger and weaker states" gives an indication to what the ideological

motivation of Sembene Ousmane is as a filmmaker; that is, if Kress and van Leeuwen's (1988:34) definition of ideology in relation to the arrangement of discourse in texts is anything to go by. According to them, for "particular ensembles of discourses appearing in texts" to produce desired effects, ideology must be conceived as a "useful and necessary mediating term." The implication of this avowal is summed up by them (1988:34) thus:

... mediating in the sense of accounting for arrangements of discourses (and accounting indirectly for changes in discourses as well as in discursive practices) and mediating in the sense of accounting for relations between articulation/realisation (where discourse and mode are both articulatory phenomena) and other social practices, organisation and events.

Plot as used in *Black Girl* is a tool employed as an object that signposts the filmmaker's ideological intent. If an object is "anything made by human hands for human purposes" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993:127), then plot in *Black Girl* may be read as a sign designed to make the African reader of the text become acculturated to the idea of "cultural and ideological decolonization" (Taylor, 1991:104).

Another ideological agenda of the filmmaker emerges when *Black Girl* is read as a social commentary. The text lambasts consumerism which, as Stevenson (2007:257) argues, "merely undermines the practice of citizenship." The position that the film articulates suggests that citizenship is not just a political configuration when it is considered as the totality of an individual within a polity: citizenship has a cultural dimension which may have a spiritual significance that may be embodied in works of art like the mask. Unfortunately, consumerism does not acknowledge this essence because "it commands an entire vocabulary, centred on the specification of the 'aesthetic': [In other words] a work of art is designed for, and/or has aesthetic properties and effects" (Williams, 1982:122).



The final trip to Dakar is without Diauna. But the mask as an icon returns to its rightful society. On the subject of identity, the return of the mask to Africa is an index suggestive of continuity, a notion Leeds-Hurwitz (1993:156) argues “refers to maintenance of the status quo over time [because] a particular sign is associated with a particular meaning or meanings within a culture or subculture.” Thus, Stone (1962:94) states:

Identity is established as a consequence of two processes, apposition and opposition, a bringing together and setting apart. To situate the person as a social object is to bring him together with other objects so situated, and, at the same time to set him apart from still other objects.

In articulating the grammar of identity though, Ousmane ignores the notion that language, according to Strauss (1959:15), is “central to any discussion of identity”. By making Diauna – the African girl – to form and express her thoughts in French in this text, Ousmane negates

Strauss's (1959) argument that "... a proper theoretical account of men's identities and action must put men's linguistics into the heart of the discussion." Nonetheless, Ousmane's choice of French as the language of interaction/discourse in the filmic text may also be read as an advocacy for a globalized civil society. In this case, he may have foregrounded another discourse which Madan Sarup (1996: 75) argues *inter alia*: "... our sense of identity must not be limited to being either 'white' or 'black' [since] there has always been an intermingling of the two." Although this is a contradiction within the context of cultural nationalism, Sarup (ibid) argues, that "... identities do not remain static [because] they change according to the strength of social forces, the dynamics of class, nation, religion, sex and gender, 'race' and ethnicity." Gabriel (1991:31) nonetheless opines that films "followed a path from 'domination' to 'liberation'" by moving from the first phase, in which foreign images are impressed on the audience through an alienating fashion, to the second and third phases in which recognition of 'consciousness of oneself' serves as the essential antecedent for national and, more significantly, international consciousness." As a result, the use of flashback in *Black Girl* "dips into the past to comment on the future, so that within it a flash-forward is inscribed" (Gabriel, 1991:34). This is the statement the mask makes, when it chases the master, and this scene highlights the importance of the film as the guardian of popular memory. Consequently, the use of the mask is symbolic. First, it is my position that the mask is representative of the many faceless Africans whose future has been mortgaged by their societies after political independence. And, the mask embodies, also, the duality of the New African who is struggling to connect with his past as he yearns to embrace the present in its totality.

***Sarafina!*: The Issues of International Relations as Social Semiotic Discourse**

Sarafina! writes back, somewhat, to a few questions that Roland Barthes (1975:47) pursues in *The Pleasure of the Text* when he asks: “If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Isn’t storytelling always a way of searching for one’s origins, speaking one’s conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectics of tenderness and hatred?” What is entrenched in Barthes’s (1975) discourse is the idea that “the alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception” as Benjamin (2007:63) argues, and this film, which is based on Mbongeni Ngema’s play of the same title, is a visual text that resonates with the themes which both theorists typify in their works. In this filmic text, the father figure, though mostly absent in the black homes in a veritable form, is present in the black people’s perception and this absurd reality is the catalyst that moulds the texture of the events and establishes the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the narrative. Therefore, Mandela as an index – a sign “based on contiguity or causality” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:21) – and his tribulation in the hands of the apartheid government – which is a symbol, “a merely conventional link as in Saussure’s ‘arbitrary’ sign” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:22) – represents the plight of the entire black nation in apartheid South Africa, and this is the notion that permeates *Sarafina!* in a manner that affirms Norman K. Denzin’s argument which states that “the metaphor of art as ideology not only mirrors life, it structures and reproduces it” (Denzin, 1991, cited in Gazetas, 2000). Therefore, the social semiotic interpretation or reading of *Sarafina!* rests on the signification of Nelson Mandela as an icon – a sign “based on identity or likeness” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:21) – with symbolic weight.

Unlike *Black Girl*, *Sarafina!*'s linear plot is of no major significance towards the semiotic interpretation of the text. However, in spite of the fact that its structure is chronological, the film remains what Aristides Gazetas (2000:4) calls "a fusion of the past and present by reconstituting the ways memory and imagination validate" [Africa's] narrative films. It is through this technique that the reader of this particular visual text encounters *Sarafina!*'s politics on a failed state and the film exposes the underbelly of diplomacy, on one hand, while it re-enacts a diatribe between nation-states, on the other hand, that calls for the intervention of diplomats (Sarafina and the apartheid representative). These concerns of International Relations manifest themselves connotatively in the text.

According to Robert Rotberg (2004:157-58), a failed state is the consequence of "[d]estructive decisions by individual leaders" whose actions "subvert prevailing democratic norms" when they "patronize an ethnic group, clan, class or kin" while "[o]ther groups feel excluded or discriminated against." In as much as the leadership of apartheid South Africa never pretended "to operate for the benefit of all the nation's citizens" before becoming partisan, the proponents of apartheid South Africa, as an index, created the environment that embodied the qualities of a failed state because, as Rotberg (2004:159) argues:

... failed states are tense, conflicted, and dangerous. They generally share the following characteristics: a rise in criminal and political violence; a loss of control over their borders, rising ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural hostilities; civil war; the use of terror against their own citizens, weak institutions; a deteriorated or insufficient infrastructure ...

Failed states also face rising attacks on their fundamental legitimacy. ... The people's sense of political community vanishes and citizens feel disenfranchised and marginalized. The social contract that binds citizens and central structures is forfeit. Perhaps already divided by sectional differences and animosity, citizens transfer their allegiances to communal warlords. Domestic anarchy sets in. The rise of terrorist groups becomes more likely.

The essence of failure as described above informs *Sarafina!*'s opening montage: a train that roar through the still hours of the morning as it transports cheap labour from the black township of Soweto to the urban areas like Johannesburg; thereafter, camera pans and focuses on subversive township elements who, under the cover of darkness, commit arson as a sign of protest; finally, Sarafina awakes to the looming image of the communal warlord to whom her allegiance has been transferred – Nelson Mandela – and she says to his portrait picture on the wall, "Good morning, Nelson."



Within this context, the absence of national and individual security and public order insinuates itself into the narrative as the plot unravels the larger consequence of the nervous condition that captures the reality that was apartheid South Africa. The ambience of the opening montage and the events it dramatizes are a sign that foreshadows "the social and political discourses that carry the formative ideological frameworks governing the communication and exchange of ideas depicted in film narratives" (Gazetas, 2000:5) which was the very element that suggests that failure is imminent in a state: absence of "basic

medical care and education, social services, a social safety net, regulation and supply of water and energy, and environmental protection” (Rotberg, 2004:159).

The quiet footsteps beating the earth in silence in the opening sequence, as rebels coalesce in an effort to deal a blow on the emblematic apparatus apartheid structure uses to indoctrinate and suppress the black townships, affirms the argument that “every film narrative makes a connection between the “reality” of the image (mimesis) and the cultural constructs of society. Therefore, each narrative (digesis) contains within its illusionistic framework a convincing power to reconstitute reality based on actual events”(Gazetas, 2000: 5). As a result, the silence that permeates the bulk of the opening scene of this visual text may be adjudged “a transparent signifier of exclusion from a relationship and lack of power” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:45). However, when Sarafina breaks the silence with an iconic “Good morning, Nelson”, the semiotic situation changes because the notion of “the other” and fear borne out of systemic entrenchment of inferiority complex evaporate while up-turning the idea of “knowing your place” as signalled by “a basic equation between the ordering of bodies in physical space and the relationships between persons in social space” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:52). Therefore, in Sarafina’s words – “Good morning, Nelson” – what the apartheid system deprived the black South African has been restored: the two forms of social organization – solidarity and power. The familiarity which her tone signifies expresses the bond between her and the “warlord” she has transferred her allegiance to and this warmth elaborately signifies the relationship between Nelson Mandela and the black community: a seamless hierarchy devoid of an obvious social class structure. “Good morning, Nelson” is a signifier of closeness and equality without projecting any sense of formality, or hostility towards a mean non-equal. Thus, this ‘proxemic’ is a signifier of non-

existent marker of power differentiation between Sarafina, who symbolises somewhat the people of the black townships, and Nelson Mandela, the actual epitome of the black struggle and aspirations of the black race in South Africa. The fulcrum of this non-differentiation of both entities may rest in Mingst's (2004:150) argument which propounds that "[m]ass publics have the same psychological tendencies as elite individuals and small groups. They think in terms of perceptions and images, they see mirror images, and they use similar information-processing strategies."

Before Sarafina truncated the silence that hitherto enveloped the wee hours in the opening montage, Dareell James Roodt, the filmmaker, uses certain frames in the visual text to establish the relationship of the text to the world the text dramatizes and, also, to enunciate the political intent of the filmmaker thereby configuring clearly the social signification of the visual texts. According to Hodge and Kress (1995:60), "social relationship is crucial to the effectivity of the [text because] without it, its ideological content will be inert." The frames at the centre of this discourse are the images below and the one on the next page:





In the image on pages 140 and 141 respectively, one of the rebellious citizens bombs the blackboard in a classroom while another rebellious denizen of apartheid South Africa Black Township targets the globe icon on the table in the classroom. While one action signifies the obliteration of the tool the apartheid system uses to obfuscate history, the other action signifies, first, that “state failure threatens global stability [since] international security relies on states to protect against chaos at home and limit the cancerous spread of anarchy beyond their borders and throughout the world” (Rotberg, 2004: 158); and, second, that the South African black community is vociferous about the silence and complicity of intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations. Consequently, in as much as Hodge and Kress argue that “ideologies are without a voice” the actions the two frames capture signify through attestation that “only human agency can have social effects” (Hodge and Kress, 1995:60). Besides, these actions constitute a form of antilanguage which Michael Halliday says “create[s] an antiworld, a set of meanings and values that inverts those of the

dominant society” (Halliday, cited in Hodge and Kress, 1995:68): According to this filmic text, subversion is the antilanguage which *Sarafina!* privileges.

Subversion finds expression in another form in *Sarafina!* through the manipulation of the ‘occasion’ which the morning assembly on the school ground provides the morning after the arson. In an address by the Headmaster in which it appears he is lambasting the school pupils for the destruction that visited the school property, the ordering of elements in specific frames during- semiotic production signifies that the “ritual space” provided for legitimate school activities has been turned into an occasion for subversive discourse in which the Headmaster reverses the role of the “ritual space” by exploring what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001:10) describe as the experiential meaning potential, which they say “is the idea that signifiers have a meaning potential deriving from what it is we *do* when we produce them.” The import of the Headmaster’s words become explicit when one considers the significance of sign-function of the graffiti vis-à-vis the content of the image in conjunction with his utterances:

“Govern[ment] ... I don’t like what you’re doing, and I want it to stop! All right?!”





This subversive double entendre finds expression, again, in another set of frames that suggests that the Headmaster is speaking to the coercive apartheid system in spite of the fact that the students are his immediate audience. However, it is what the door signifies and the angle from which the shot is taken that is of a larger semiotic significance in the next four pictures: The meaning of the door is implied in the sign-function of graffiti: “Govern ... open the door”





The entrance of light, as the camera changes from a medium shot from within the classroom to a long one that gives a panoramic view of the school grounds, dissipates the darkness that envelops the classroom and, indirectly, short changes the people in the black townships in South Africa. And when this is juxtaposed with the graffiti, "Govern[ment] open the door", the filmmaker's obvious intended discourse emerges through the obscurant parallelism; that is, the filmmaker is addressing issues of fundamental human rights as they pertain to the pre-1994 apartheid South Africa. In order to appreciate the intended signified, the full import of an argument by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 42) has to be taken into consideration. According to them (2001:43):

The field of discursive practice is social and therefore historical, and cannot be understood without a sense of the historical/social contingencies of the arrangement and configuration of practice mode. Nor can we hope to understand fully the shaping and the availability of modes and discourses without a clear sense of the embeddedness of semiosis in the social, and of its historical shaping.

Historically, apartheid South Africa was one of the eight states that abstained from voting for the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted in 1948 (Nau, 2012:480). In simple terms, this act discountenanced everything that was enshrined in the document which, among other things, "covered the panoply of rights long advocated by western states: political participation and civic freedom; entitlements to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and health care; and freedom from fear of bodily harm" (Nau, 2012:480). South Africa's refusal to acknowledge the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which established what Nau (2010:480) describes as "the obligation of states to individuals rather than of individuals to states" meant that the state was sworn to its deprivation of certain individuals of their basic rights: civic freedom and other social entitlements. Therefore, the graffiti, "Govern[ment] open the door" as scribbled on one of the walls in the school

compound is a referent for a social condition: not just a clarion call for the liberation of those incarcerated by the apartheid government, but it is also a call for the unfettering of the mind and all that apartheid has shackled. The light that pours through the door and consumes the darkness symbolises hope which the words of the Headmaster – “The schools are your only chance” – signify. But then, when the Headmaster declares, “If you don’t want education, do not come to school”, his vituperation becomes a component of the signs within a code system. Subversion is imbued in the tone the Headmaster uses as he rebukes the militarization of the school grounds by the apartheid government in South Africa and, besides, his words may be considered a direct invitation to the apartheid regime to utilize the endless positive possibilities that schools provide towards the proper education of the black populace just as it is the place that will surely edify the agents of the states - symbolized by the armed soldiers roaming the school grounds - and guide them towards self-discovery of what is the truth. Since “codes are culture-bound and context-specific” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993:59), the shared cultural experiences of the users become the site for the interpretation and understanding of the intended message and therein lays the symbolic value of the occasion.

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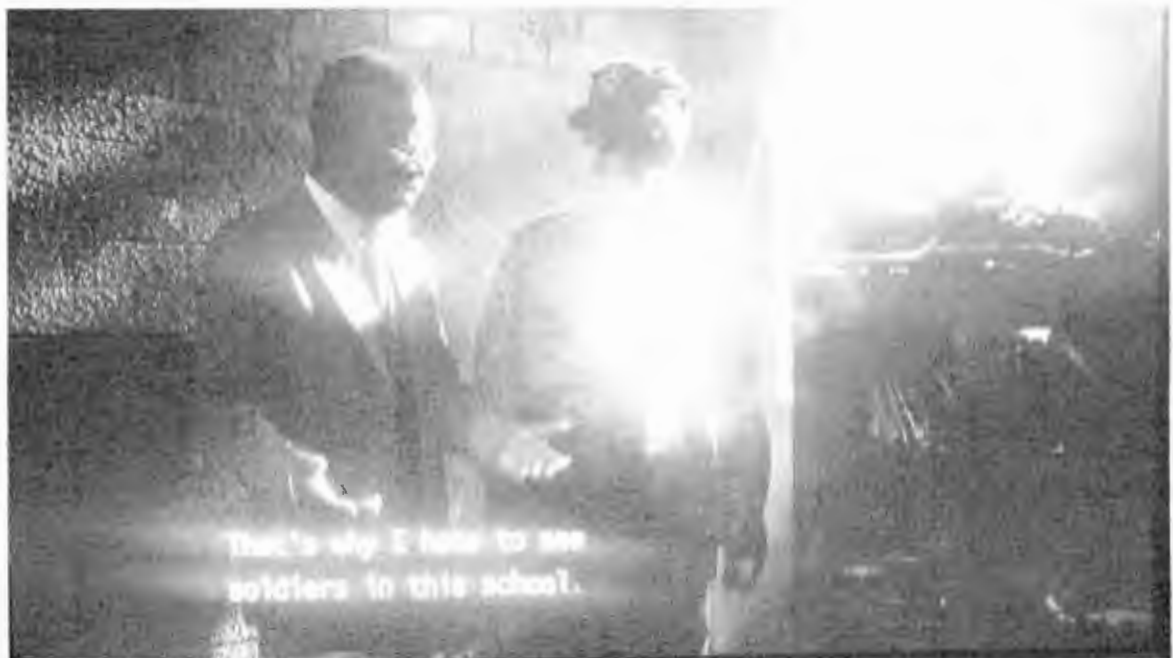
The school as an object of significance is also illustrated through the emblazoned cross on the walls of the classroom which the rebelling students torched (See image below). As a religious icon, the cross, according to John Moreland (1999:198), is regarded as “the symbol of Christ's passion and death, the promise of future Judgement and Salvation”. However, he argues that the import of the cross as “the supreme symbol of salvation” is made more apparent when the icon is perceived as an image that “transcends the boundaries between this world and the next” (Moreland, 1999:200). The religious significance of this sign also has a political connotation.



The cross sign is suggestive of the fact that a segment of the South African populace “associated Christian redemption with political freedom” as Anthony Balcomb (2004:6) argues. In essence, in spite of the complicity of the Dutch Reformed Church through its active participation in the legalization of apartheid as a state policy, a position that has been argued in this study prior, other studies have shown that the evangelical churches actively

played a role in the liberation struggle that eventually led to the collapse of apartheid in South Africa. Therefore, the cross is a tacit acknowledgement of the role of the church, on one hand, as purveyors of colonialism and, on the other, as freedom fighters actively engaged in the course of events that led to the democratization of South Africa. Therefore, the church's symbolism is valued in terms akin to that of a political and an economic ideological battle ground for the soul of a people. The next pictures show same significance.





According to Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1986:16), "... the manifest "political" role of the missionaries [in South Africa] was inherently ambiguous" and, to this end, these scholars submit that the missionaries:

... played a vital part in the more general process of colonization; for while the incorporation of a subject people always involved some degree of material coercion, it was the subtle inculcation of European values that was especially crucial Indeed, precisely, because this mode of penetration was ostensibly apolitical – and rarely seen to be objectionable because it was rarely seen at all ... it had enormous historical force. But the story does not end there. We also suggested, at the outset, that it was in the relationship between the two dimensions of the historical role of the missionary that the contradictions of the colonial process are revealed.

In patiently nurturing the Protestant subject in South Africa, the missionary made it possible for him to become a colonial object. Once they had been enticed, often unwittingly, into conversation with Christianity, [they] were drawn into a dialogue whose terms they could not but internalize – a dialogue that cast them as citizens in a world of rational individualism. In this world, they were told, they could fashion their own lives by exercising free choice; personal achievement would be rewarded by the accumulation of goods and moral worth. Practically speaking, this meant cultivating for the market or selling their labour. After all, they had been taught to put time to work, and to want what money could buy. In other words, they were not merely prepared for wage labour and for cash cropping, the two sides of the role of peasant proletarian that was to become the lot of most black South Africans.

In spite of the deceptive agenda of the church in the early years of its infiltration into the black South African communities, the Comaroffs (1986) argue that “ ... the ultimate power of Christianity in South Africa is enshrined in the fact that it took many decades for blacks to cast aside the language and ideology of the mission; to move, that is, from revelation to revolution” (1986:18). The march “from revelation to revolution” is what preoccupies Balcomb (2004) in his study, “From Apartheid to the New Dispensation: Evangelicals and the Democratization of South Africa.”

In as much as Balcomb (2004:22) argues that some of the evangelicals were engaged in a conscious exploration of “the implications of the gospel for society and politics” in an effort “to work toward a more democratic South Africa [devoted to] the strengthening of the self-confidence and dignity of blacks, [and] addressing the needs of both traditional and modern Africans” (Balcomb, 2004:23), it is his (2004:5) view that “[t]he role that Christianity has

played in the democratization of South Africa has been significant.” Consequently, he states (2004:5-6):

The Freedom Charter of 1954, the precursor of the present constitution, was compiled primarily by people who ‘had gone through mission schools and colleges, and it was this strong bible knowledge that informed them how to phrase, articulate and put into shape the sentiments of many people who were wanting a summary of the vision of the oppressed for a free and democratic South Africa’.

Christianity features on almost every page of the 1977 four-volume record of African politics in South African history edited by Karis and Carter. Records of speeches made at the early establishment of the South African Native National Conference, the forerunner of the African National Congress, read like the charismatic sermons of evangelical preachers. ‘The harvest is great’, said Rev. John Dube, the first president of the African National Congress, ‘but the reapers are few. Millions of those for whom Christ died are sitting in the darkness of and superstition, and almost crushed under the iron heel of heathen oppression.’ Decades later, at the dawn of the new dispensation, Christianity’s impact was as pervasive as ever. David Chidester in his annotated bibliography of Christianity in South Africa, notes that virtually all the major political parties, including the ‘secular’ African National Congress, laid claim to the message and authority of the gospel in their election campaigns in 1994.

All this demonstrates the profound importance and influence of the Christian message on the South African political scene, from the earliest rumblings of democracy in the nineteenth century to its achievement on 27 April 1994.

The essence of this discourse is in the idea that the church is a two-edged sword and the meaning of this symbolism is embedded in the indexical sign on the wall, which is associated with Christianity in the South African body polity.



Besides the import of the cross, the poised hands of the Headmaster and the light seemingly penetrating the heart of the police officer are of some semiotic significance – salvation as prescribed by Matthew 11 verse 28: “Come to me: all that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” This is a subversive act connotatively since it suggests the superiority of the one (the black Headmaster) over the other (the White policeman), which then makes the occasion a reversal of the status quo. This echoes the spirit of Black Theology, Liberation

Theology, and African Theology as they articulate the Church's "profile and influence as instruments of change [as they take] sides with the ideals of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus.[That is] a kingdom of justice, righteousness and peace where goodness will always prevail" (Balcomb, 2004:28).

Within this physical context that also impinges on the social context, the communication situation in the frames on pages 148 and 149 is designed in a particular way in which the interaction between the Headmaster and the students (p.143-144), on one hand, and between the Headmaster and the police officer (p.148-149), on the other hand, is understood as an embedded discourse in a semiotic product that gravitates towards a subversive agenda.

This subversive element emerges through the interrogation of what Kress and van Leeuwen call "the organization of the expression" (2001:6). Basically, in *Sarafina!*, the filmmaker's choices – in terms of locale, composition of the frames, and the light that permeates the environment – enhance the seditious trope that confirms that the filmic text as a "cinematic fact" is indeed a "cinematic apparatus" (Mayne, 1993:45). The implication of this is that the film, as contrived by the filmmaker, "produces an ideological position through its very mechanics of representation." In other words, Mayne's claim that "ideology is not imposed upon the cinema" (1993:45) is debatable since, as Christian Metz (1982) submits in *The Imaginary Signifier*, "shots are the creations of the film-maker." In other words, the filmmaker's arrangements of frames signal the material meaning of the text and, as a sign, it imposes a certain reading on the reader of the text. For this reason, Metz in his study of film as a narrative (1974:16) submits: "It seems to me, indeed, that the narrative lends itself to

structural analysis because it is primarily, in some way, a real object, which even the naïve listener clearly recognizes and never confuses with what it is not.” However, Metz points to the fact that the meaning of a film as a narrative is derived through “filmic ordering” via both synchronic and diachronic perspectives: the former, according to Metz (1974), informs “the literal sense of the film” (118) while the latter perspective influences reading and meaning derivable from a filmic text since “filmic orderings are codified primarily for purposes of connotation, rather than denotation” (118). Metz’s conclusion echoes through Michael Silverstein’s argument which states that “sites of interaction can be recognized as nodes of signifying practice indexically revealing knowledge and values (and therefore identities) that people instantiate and contest in the semiotic production of genred cultural events” (2013:328).

The significance of Silverstein’s statement comes to the fore when some of the exigent pontificating ascribed to semiotic Marxism is taken into consideration. According to Albert Bergesen (1993:3), the inversion of the base/superstructure paradigm which has been made possible through semiotic Marxism is of the view that “no longer is power and control derived from the dynamics of the base, from the ownership of the means of production. Now it comes from control of the state apparatus.” The awareness of this transformation has turned the camera, in the hands of the African filmmaker, to an instrument that allows him or her to create signs with embedded meaning and this signifier suggests that “representation is not only a matter of *speaking about* but also of *speaking for*. That is, it concerns politics and hegemony” (Chowdhry and Nair, 2004: 16). This declaration is in tandem with Kress and van Leeuwen (2001:68), who argue that “meaning does not only reside in discourse and design, it also resides in production. [This is because meaning] ...

results from human engagement with the world, and the resources we use in articulating and interpreting meaning comprise of both semiotic modes and semiotic media.”

This same subversive perspective that permeates the encounter between the Headmaster and the police officer informs the inscription on the walls behind the soldiers on the school grounds: “MK” and “AK” are icons that are the signifiers of subversion during the era of armed liberation struggle and, as graffiti, they loom over the agents of the state.

The MK stands for *Umkhonto weSizwe*, which was the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) that was launched in 1961. According to *South African History Online*:

The most significant catalyst that led to the taking up of arms was the Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960, where the government violently crushed a peaceful anti-pass demonstration organised by the Pan African Congress. This demonstration led to the deaths of 69 people, with 186 wounded. Also in the Western Cape Township, Langa, 3 people were killed and 27 injured in clashes with police over the burning of passes. The state’s heavy-handed response to the peaceful demonstrations and the subsequent banning of the ANC and SACP the following month dealt serious blow to the ANC and its allies. Therefore, in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of liberation organisations ... ANC and SACP members were convinced [that] the time had come to rethink the approach towards the struggle and move from ‘passive resistance to the ‘armed struggle’.

The MK is, therefore, a human agency which is a term Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998:970) define as “the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.”



The “changing historical situations” as *South Africa History Online* enumerates above fostered the desire to achieve a balance of power through another means that counteracts the apartheid agenda of silencing the voices of opposition. And, as T.V Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (2004:5) argue, “[t]he key means by which states balance one another are building up arms through internal production or procurement from outside sources, and by forming military alliances.” In this case, the ANC and its allies turn to Russia for military alliance and presence of the AK 47 signifies this pact. Therefore, the AK 47 is not just the weapon of choice, but it is a symbol of political ideology, which is foreshadowed in the encounter between the Headmaster and the police officer: the west (capitalism) versus the east (communism). As a weapon of choice embraced by the freedom fighters, it is a representation of their ideological belief. As a shadowy figure, it is a signifier of the Cold War: the AK 47 is a Russian product that is used in the guerrilla warfare designed by the ANC’s military wing. On the other hand, apartheid was perpetuated by the west; that is, interpreted as the US and Western Europe. What AK 47 therefore represents in this

discourse framed by the camera is the notion that its presence “provides the context in which the [South] African liberation struggle must be understood” which is, as Ntongola Ntalaja (1979:14) sums it up, “as been defined by Amilcar Cabral as the rejection of the negation of their historical process, the regaining of their historical personality, and their return to history through the destruction of imperialist domination.” This anti-imperialist agenda is what Ronald Reagan labelled as terrorism in his address to the American nation on 22 July 1986 when he said: “... there is this calculated terror by elements of the African National Congress ... designed to bring about further repression, the imposition of martial law, and eventually creating the conditions for racial war.” Reagan’s declaration may not be perceived as an objective statement in spite of its innuendo when America’s history of support for apartheid in the UN is taken into cognizance. As a result, this political undertone points one towards Shimko’s (2005:294) argument with regard to how America defines terrorism. Quoting a “harsh critic” of the US hegemony, he states: “the condemnatory label [is] being deployed to the enemies of U.S. interests while being withheld from U.S. friends and clients, no matter how opprobrious their conduct might otherwise be.”





If the MK and the AK 47 signify terrorists and a tool of terrorism respectively, then killing Sabela through the infamous “necklace” is an act of terrorism within the US worldview.

According to Reagan (1986):

The most common method of terror is the so-called necklace. In this barbaric way of reprisal, a tire is filled with kerosene and gasoline, placed around the neck of an alleged collaborator and ignited. The victim may be a black policeman, a teacher, a soldier, a civil servant – it makes no difference, the atrocity is designed to terrorize blacks into ending all racial cooperation and polarize South Africa as a prelude to a final climatic struggle for power.

Although Reagan called the necklace a “common method of terror” yet it is an act of defiance that signals subversion since it undermines the apartheid strategy that employs local surveillance through coercion. Fundamentally, it is also the obliteration of local alliance and treacherous complicity by members of the black township.



Sabela embodies an official who abuses his power for personal aggrandisement. But his main crime is that he is a Black detective working for the apartheid controlled police force

and his use of the *sjambok*, a heavy leather whip mostly synonymous with the apartheid era, confirms Sabela’s complicity and treachery against his kind. Not just that, he is the conduit that channels information to the apartheid forces by using oppressive tactics to coerce information from unwilling participants like Guitar. Unfortunately, his double standards are ironies: in his reverie he fashions his destruction and, in his case, ideology is a false consciousness.





*Guitar, of all people,
the quietest boy in the class.*

The dramatization of power politics – “a realm of conflict and competition for power among states” (Shimko, 2005:121) – is a symbolism for other forms of national security strategy.



I felt sick inside.



It is, also, a symbol for what Shimko (2005:128) calls “gradations of power” since this drama is an interplay between the forces that coalesce in the filmic text in order to explore the realm of the preponderance or hegemonic stability theory. This theory, according to Shimko (2005:128), distinguishes states according to “their degree of power and degree of satisfaction ... [and the latter] refers to whether a state is essentially satisfied or dissatisfied with the current international order and its place in it.” There is no denying the fact that black South Africans’ lived experiences, when juxtaposed with that of the minority rulers of the South African state, situated the homelands in an axis that may be aptly described as dissatisfied state.

In this regard, the angst that Sarafina emits and the pleasure that Sabela’s mien embodies are indexical because both expressions spell out the dynamics between the satisfied and the dissatisfied states. Satisfied states, according to Shimko (2005:128), “are interested in preserving the international status quo, whereas dissatisfied states are revisionist states

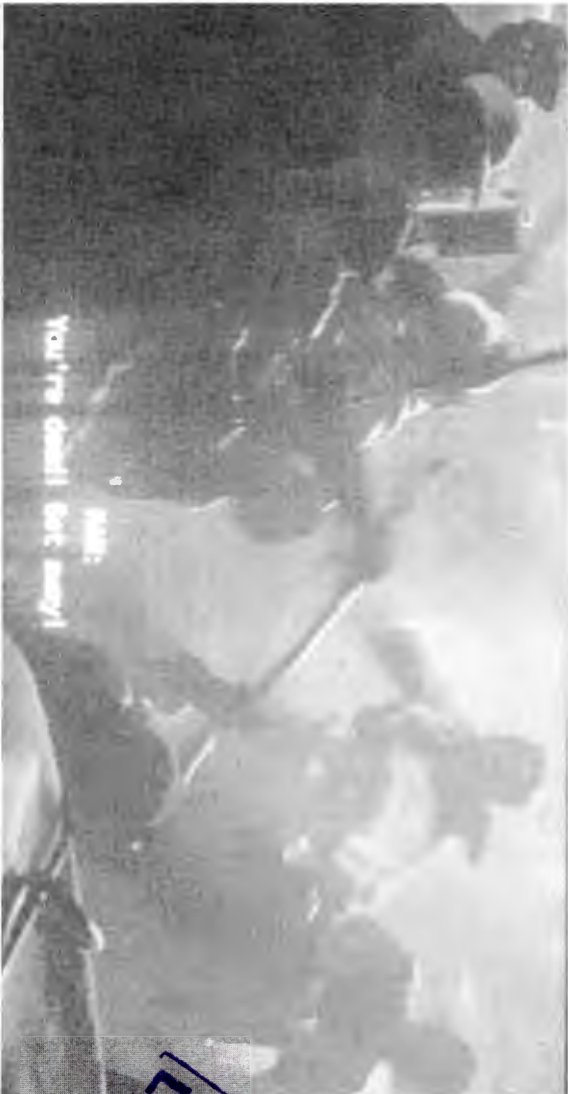
that want to change the existing quo.” It is this motivation that informs Sarafina’s declaration: “our day will come.”



“Our day will come” is a double speak and, connotatively, it states the judgement day that awaits both Sabela and the apartheid regime. For Sabela, judgement day is the day he is necklaced whereas, for the South African state, it is the freedom that is foreshadowed.



MAN:
Secretly, we
you're in the



MAN:
You're dead! Get away!



I thought of Oswald
driving to the office at 10:30.

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Sabela's fate, which is entwined with that of the apartheid state, is a symbolism that is the manifestation of what constitutes the "issues of power and resistance" in international politics. According to Stephen Gill (2003:xi):

Power structures and power relations emerge from and are connected to agency and to political actors: this involves the consciousness and collective action of elites, classes, and movements. Power is also related to how social forces are imagined, motivated and organized. Power is mediated, channelled, mobilized and institutionalized through political and civil society; that is states, political associations and other organizations, in ways that serve to constitute historical structures of global politics.

At the same time, various forms of power are connected to different forms and patterns of resistance. Resistance can be active or passive, localized or global, negative or creative. Transformative resistance involves not only negation but also creation and the personal and the political. It is often connected to actions and the conduct of leaders that exemplify and inspire collective action. Examples of leaders who succeeded in this regard – despite extreme conditions of oppression, poverty or incarceration – include ... Mandela.

In *Sarafina!*, Sarafina is a mirror image of Nelson Mandela and, like Mandela, she champions what Gills (2003) calls "transformative resistance", which are "forms of resistance that may serve to constitute historical alternatives" (2005: xi), which, in this case, is tantamount to what may be regarded as jungle justice: these actions which constitute the "transformative

resistance” are informed by both the personal and the political as suggested in the images above. Thus, as a representation of the icon, Mandela, Sarafina exudes in the filmic text a canny demeanour that “unsettle[s] established categories and disconcerts the reader”(Brown and Ainley, 2005:53) vis-à-vis society’s assigned gender role. And, in personifying Mandela, she exemplifies this postmodernist thought and personifies the astuteness that Mandela is known for in his negotiation with the oppressors of black South Africa. However, indexically, the use of the female form to re-enact the masculinity Mandela embodies is a discourse with a feminist agenda in terms of its symbolic significance. Therefore, Sarafina as Mandela is a deconstruction of masculinity; that is, when it is acknowledged that “[d]econstruction rests on a transformed conception of close reading” as Irving Wohlfarth (1979:71) argues. According to him (1979:72-73), within this context:

The critic no longer paraphrases a *vouloir-dire*. Instead of (dis)ingenuously conspiring with the meanings the author dreams, “genuinely analytical reading” accentuates the self-defeating statements his wishful thinking actually makes. Instead of aiming at “complete interpretation,” the analyst fastens on the “marginal or apparently trivial” (DH, x) details that “unsettle” the integrity” of the total scheme. To use an analogy based on the kind of clear, binary distinction that turns out to be no less “undecidable” for being unavoidable, texts could be said, on this theory, to unravel with their left hand what they weave with their right. This would not be a harmoniously balanced “on the one hand/on the other hand” that could be rhetorically or dialectically juggled. The right hand does not (want to) know what the left hand is (un)doing. If the right hand is “blindness” and the left “insight,” then insight can only occur blindly, underhandedly. The terms are thus reversed. Clear and distinct ideas are the enabling blindness that gives protective cover to a groping, stammering, disabling form of insight, which “is able to move toward the light only because, being already blind, it does not have to fear the power of the light”.

Wohlfarth’s (1979) argument is significant because it establishes the justification for the reversal of roles by the genders in the filmic text. This is because, in *Sarafina!*, matriarchy is privileged in an otherwise patriarchal society: it is Mary, the History teacher who pays the

ultimate price with her life, who attempts to rewrite history correctly while the historically privileged gender monkeys a “false consciousness” and, also, it is Sarafina who leads the charge by her peers in a well orchestrated rebellion against the status quo, not just in the extinction of Sabela, who is the turncoat working for the forces of oppression from within the homeland, but in a confrontation with the actual face of oppression. Thus, when it is time to negotiate with the enemy, the male voices are silent, and it is Sarafina’s that ricochets on the walls of the chamber of torture and death, the John Vorster Police Station. According to *Wikipedia*, “[d]uring the apartheid-era, the police station in downtown Johannesburg, South Africa was a notorious site of interrogation, torture and abuse by the South African security police of apartheid resistance fighters.” As the following frames reveal, Sarafina’s mien during her interrogation is a signifier of the stoic temperament of hardened freedom fighters, and this posture and the audacity with which she speaks with her interrogator references Siegfried Kracauer’s position, as Thomas Elsaesser (1987:70) points out, which states that “cinema theory is most relevant where it conceived of film as part of a new mode of representation ..., recognizing the momentous political significance which a new experience of (gendered) subjectivity plays in the general field of a social semiotics.”



Within this discourse, what comes to the forefront is the film’s attempt at using Sarafina as an iconic representation with a social meaning. She is not just a sign, but Sarafina is an interpretant and, as interpretant, her construct puts the filmic text in the arena of feminist discourse.

According to Deborah Knight (1995:42), [p]oststructuralist theory turned woman into a sign (turned woman into “woman”), susceptible to semiological analysis, and as a sign, “woman” was treated as having a language-relative status. [She argues that] “Woman” named no sort of referent; it was a signifier, whose meaning (or meaning-effect) was said to be produced discursively.” One of the major discursive contexts that have informed the meaning-effect of “woman” is gender-relation, a concept that Pepe Roberts (1983:175) posits emphasizes “women’s subordination to men” and, as a result, “the subordination of women serves the interests of ... capitalism as well as those of men.” The reality imposed by this gender inequality, she argues, fostered what socialist feminists consider primarily as ‘double oppression’ since the “woman” is not just alienated from “the site of the reproduction of labour power in the [homelands]” but also assumed to have played no major role in the struggles for national liberation. Roberts (1983:177) rebuffs this position by asserting that the “woman” has been “involved in mass popular resistance.” Allison Drew (1995:1) is in agreement with Roberts when she says: “... despite the significant roles played by African women in their anti-colonial struggles, they remained politically and economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis men” because “of a public/private dichotomy in social relations that legitimizes the construction of politics as a male domain and relegates women to the domestic sphere.”

Consequently, in as much as the filmic text is contrived as a media product that lambasts the apartheid system for the dehumanization of the black South African, yet it is designed to interrogate the “ideologies that justify [women’s] differentiation from men” (Drew: 1995:4). This is exhibited in Sarafina’s antagonism directed at her mother when she visited the latter at an affluent suburb in Parktown (Johannesburg) where she works as a domestic help for a

white family: Sarafina rebukes her mother for her passive nature and, then, disregards her mother's admonishment with impunity. The discourse around tactics by mother and child is a signifier for what Temme Kaplan (cited in Drew, 1995:5) calls female consciousness which she says is "an important dimension of women's collective mobilisation." As Drew explains, "female consciousness stems from women's nurturing role in the socially-defined sexual division of labour and refers to women's awareness of themselves as producers and nurturers of life" (5). However, she argues that "the types of consciousness generated, are continually restructured based on derived ideas" (6); for instance, feminism which "seeks to modify or transform pre-existing gender relations to allow women and men equal rights and opportunities within a particular socioeconomic framework" (7). From this perspective, Sarafina's recompense for her earlier disrespectful mannerism towards her mother signals a contrite gesture that the filmic text accentuates thus:





The contribution the filmic text makes within this context appears to emerge from a plausible upholding of the idea of “womanism” which is a radical variant form of feminism. This alternate feminism, according to Daphyne Ntiri-Williams (cited in Kolawole, 2002:95), is an exigent response to a condition she says is “unfortunate” because:

...the majority of Africana women on public platforms have rejected feminism for a multiplicity of reasons ... they are perplexed over the racist origins of the feminist movement ... they have found little solace in the doctrines and mission of the feminist movement. The realities, struggles and expectations of the two groups remain on different planes. The privileges and disadvantages still belong to the dominant group.

Therefore, if feminism is an anathema since it privileges an oppressive culture or a hegemonic ideology, then the “activists desire to challenge gender in the social milieu from a location of pluralist struggle against all forms of oppression” (Mary Modupe Kolawole, 2002:95) has to be channelled through a veritable platform which, in this case, is Black womanism. According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (cited in Kolawole), Black womanism is “a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving a balanced

presentation of Black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks.” As a result of Ogunyemi’s culture laden definition, Kolawole (2002:96) asserts:

... womanism better accommodates African women’s reality, identity and dynamics of empowerment. This is an inclusive approach as opposed to an exclusive, polarised one. Womanism emphasises cultural contextualisation, the centrality of the family, the importance of including men and that it is not a ‘man-hating’ gender ideology.

The values that Kolawole (2002) highlights above are the same that *Sarafina* espouses in the images on pages 177 through 180 and, through these frames in particular, the filmmaker enhances his “use of film for propaganda purposes and debates about culture politics (Mulvey, 2009:115) because feminism, according to Mulvey (2009:52) has emerged as a crucial new cultural and political force” since “[f]eminists have considered image and representation as a political issue.” As a result, *Sarafina* does not portray the film’s protagonist, Sarafina, through what Mas’ud Zavarzadeh (1991: 208) calls “the traditional feminine code of alluring sexuality,” and it refuses, also, to represent woman as an entity “reduced to that in her which is openly visible.” In essence, according to *Sarafina*, “woman is [not] a surface” (Zavarzadeh, 1991).



The implication of this discourse is that in some radical way, *Sarafina* speaks to IR’s concern with the issue of women’s rights as human rights and, according to Mingst (2004:303), “women’s rights, like other human rights issues, touch directly on cultural values and norms, yet like other human rights issues, they have gradually become a globalising issue.” The ascendancy of women’s rights as human rights became prominent after the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights. According to Mingst (2004:305), “the Vienna Declaration asserted, “The human rights of women and of the girl-child are inalienable, integral and

indivisible part of universal human rights. ... The human rights of women should form an integral part of the United Nations human rights activities, including the promotion of all human rights instruments relating to women.”

Within this visual space, too, “woman” does not only claim her political signification, but she is presented as symbolic of a mother figure and, as the third order of simulacra, Miriam Makeba, also known as “Mama Africa” is an icon in *Sarafina!*. As a symbol, Miriam Makeba becomes the personification of a medium or object that embodies the message that is intended: a producer and nurturer of life which, in turn, is the referent for the notion of female consciousness. Above all, if simulation is about a “world where the play of signs and images proliferate and become meaningful only in relation to other signs and images” (Alvaro Ramirez, 2005:82), then the meaning of “mama Africa” as icon is fathomed within the purview of forms of identification. According to Jackie Stacey (1999:196), “identification has been seen as the key mechanism for the production of identities” since, as Freud opines (cited in Stacey), it is “the original form of emotional tie with an object.” The use of Miriam Makaba as a sign, therefore, appeals to the sensibilities from the perspective of identification “as potentially empowering and expressive of resistance” (Stacey, 1999:198). Besides, her star qualities and the elevated pedestal she has been placed on within the black South African community helps in “contributing to the construction of the ideals of feminine attractiveness circulating in culture at any one time” (Stacey, 1999:201). Makeba’s attractiveness as a role model is in her inspirational stance against apartheid and her renowned aspiration for the liberation of the motherland, South Africa. Her choice of music as a weapon resonates through *Sarafina!* which, to a large extent, may be considered a musical drama. This, of course, is homage to the role music played in the liberation struggle.

The leadership role ascribed to women in *Sarafina!* through Sarafina (the protagonist), Mary – the History teacher (Whoopi Goldberg) and Sarafina’s mother (Miriam Makeba) has a diplomatic significance. Through their actions, they do not just come across as “powerful female stars [who] often play characters ... punishing patriarchal narratives” (Stacey, 1999:201), rather they emerge as accomplished diplomats within the radical and rational traditions. However, these two do coalesce within the realist tradition.



Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux (2009:1) defines diplomacy as “a method of political interaction at the international level – and the techniques used to carry out political relations across international boundaries.” As a result, Leguey-Feilleux (2009) argues that “at the core of the concept of diplomacy is the idea of communicating, interacting, maintaining contact, and negotiating with states and other international actors” Nonetheless, Leguey-Feilleux (2009:23) acknowledges that “international society keeps changing and diplomacy keeps evolving as a matter of course to serve its purpose and facilitate the interaction of its

members.” But, he concludes thus: “The changes are normally a reflection of what international society has become, for better or worse.”

The demands of a changing international society, which Leguey-Feilleux refers, necessitates a tripartite classification of diplomatic traditions and, in *Sarafina!*, the radical tradition that portrays diplomats as revolutionaries is dominantly favoured: Sarafina and Mary epitomise radical diplomacy as “subversives in an international society” (Sharp, 2009: 33) whereas Sarafina’s mother believes in the tenets of rational diplomacy as her actions belie the tumultuous events around her. For her, the affairs of human beings “are best addressed by the application of reason, both to the challenges and opportunities which they face and to the process by which arguments over what to do about them are settled” (Sharp, 2009: 39). The two different approaches, notwithstanding, speak to the desires of both sets of individuals: the issues of power, which is at the core of the realist tradition.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: OF VISUAL POLITICS

This study engages with the filmic text as a discourse and with the understanding that any discourse may be approached as fluid and subject to multiple interpretations; that is, when Ernesto Laclau's (1988:254) argument as regards discourse is taken into consideration. According to Laclau, "the concept of discourse describes the ultimate nonfixity of anything existing in society." Also, this study perceives the filmic text as a cultural object with "multiple levels and forms of meaning" (Denzin, 1986:680). This perspective, although it is steeped in the symbolic interactionist theory, hinges on Jean Baudrillard's 1972 disposition which opines that meaning emerges "out of the interactions in which an object is involved. [As a result], these meanings are constituted at the denotative, connotative, and mythological levels ... through the operation of a complex network of practical activities that produce, at the level of use, exchange, the symbolic, and the value laden systems of equivalence, ambivalence, and difference" (Denzin, 1986:680). In essence, both scholars are of the view that permanence is not an absolute feature of a discourse's outcome. Therefore, it is apt to submit that the assertions this study makes are open to further discourses since they are not necessarily cast in stone.

So, what are the defining elements of the narratives that constitute discourse in the selected films that indicate that African filmmakers have a political intent or message in their films? The answer to the question is enmeshed in the grand narratives that these filmic texts are based on and, also, on the emergent themes of this discourse.

A close reading of these texts indicates that each of them has as its launch pad the grand narratives that have always been the centre piece of cultural studies in Africa: colonization, decolonization and post colonialism. These lived experiences did not just enunciate the black man's pain, but they also portray the white man's burden in this season of anomie in which western civilisation appropriated unto itself the right to dominate other civilisations politically, economically and culturally. This encounter did not just fan embers of nationalism influenced by conflicting ideologies, but it heralded decolonization. According to Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson (1965:1), "the emergence of nationalism has everywhere been accompanied by the search for a history that will lend dignity and validity to a newly asserted demand for a separate existence among the peoples of the world." While the three filmic texts speak to this idea unequivocally, in the same vein, they reaffirm Frantz Fanon's (2004:1) thoughts on decolonization: "decolonization is always a violent event" [as *Sarafina* indicates, and] "decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder [because] decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation" (Fanon, 2004:2). Unfortunately, what this reality suggests is that national independence is never tantamount to a utopian state dreamt of euphorically during the years of liberation struggle as portrayed in *Black Girl* and *Tsotsi*. This is because, according to Fanon (2004:53), "the masses battle with the same poverty, wrestle with the same age-old gestures, [and they remain a victim of] a world of underdevelopment, a world of poverty and inhumanity." However, while these filmic texts re-enact the grand narratives the visual texts rupture, simultaneously, the same grand narratives because the issues of international relations in the 21st century are not entirely

validated by these three grand narratives in the lived experiences in contemporary African societies. This postmodernist reading defines some lived experiences as consequences symptomatic of the Cold War philosophy. For instance, the plight *Black Girl* highlights is the end result of liberal economic principles while the ANC deference to Russia and Cuba for support during the liberation struggle brings *Sarafina!*'s readers to a time when the US and the Soviet Union were locked in ideological battles. On the other hand, the story that *Tsotsi* perpetuates is about the reinvention of a nongovernmental agency.

The next element that lends credence to the idea that the era of grand narratives – as the main determining factor in the conceptualisation of and creation of any contemporary African texts – is probably over is the thematic concerns of the three visual texts. Again, based on close readings, the following may be inferred as the central controlling ideas that inform the cohesive nature of the various texts in this study: clash of cultures, nationalism, espionage and subversion, decision making and crisis management, civil strife/war and the dilemma of sovereignty, economic interdependence, globalization, diplomacy, development and human rights. These are the themes that constitute the bulk of the themes Gregg (1998) identifies in his seminal work on international relations on films. However, a more comprehensive study on African films must be undertaken to establish the validity of Gregg's (1998:9) claim vis-à-vis the assertion: "while feature films have much to say about some aspects of the field [IR], they are virtually silent about others. [Therefore], the result is a picture of the puzzle of international relations from which important pieces are either missing or seriously underrepresented."

On the second research question, this study argues that African filmmakers extensively employ icon, index and symbol ideologically to address issues of international relations. It is not earth shattering to declare that films use signs to disseminate their meanings. However, it is pacesetting to argue that African films by African filmmakers do attest to how the issues of international relations may be manifested through social semiotics. This position may run the risk of pandering to the dialectics of the politics of admission; nonetheless, it is justifiable to advocate a decentring of film canons within the discourse of international relations on films because the concept of power within an international context is not alien to African films and, as dramatized in the selected visual texts, individuals do “serve as surrogates for some larger group or interest” (Gregg, 1998:11). Thus, within an afro-centric paradigm, it is a fact that films do engage with international politics howbeit indirectly in some cases.

The ideological slant of African films does not alienate them from mainstream film studies since certain film theories explain the correlation between films and issues of international relations. Based on this study, the two dominant film theories that are discernible in the visual texts are the apparatus theory and the feminist film theory. The apparatus theory, according to Wikipedia, “maintains that cinema is by nature ideological because its mechanics of representation [camera and editing] are ideological. [Besides this prospective] the central position of the spectator within the perspective of the composition is also ideological.” However, it is the contention of this study that cinema is not ideological naturally since ideology is imposed on it by the creators of films: the cinema as an institution is a complex tool subject to the whims and caprices of funding agencies, the directors, the cinematographers and the editors. The other prominent theory visible in these selected

visual texts is the feminist film theory. Employed to engage with issues of human rights, its intent is principally to undermine the concept of the passive role of women in films just as it is about what this study may consider an anti-male gaze.

In essence, the conclusion derivable from this study is the emphatic declaration that African films can certainly be used to teach and learn international relations since the films' narrative discourses are within the purview of the theories of international relations from the following perspectives: liberalism, realism, Marxism, constructivism and feminism.

However, the most significant contribution that this study has made to scholarship is in the fact that this is the first study on international relations on African films. It is envisaged that this study will provide an impetus for future elaborate foray into this subject in ways that will explore more visual texts from across Africa.

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