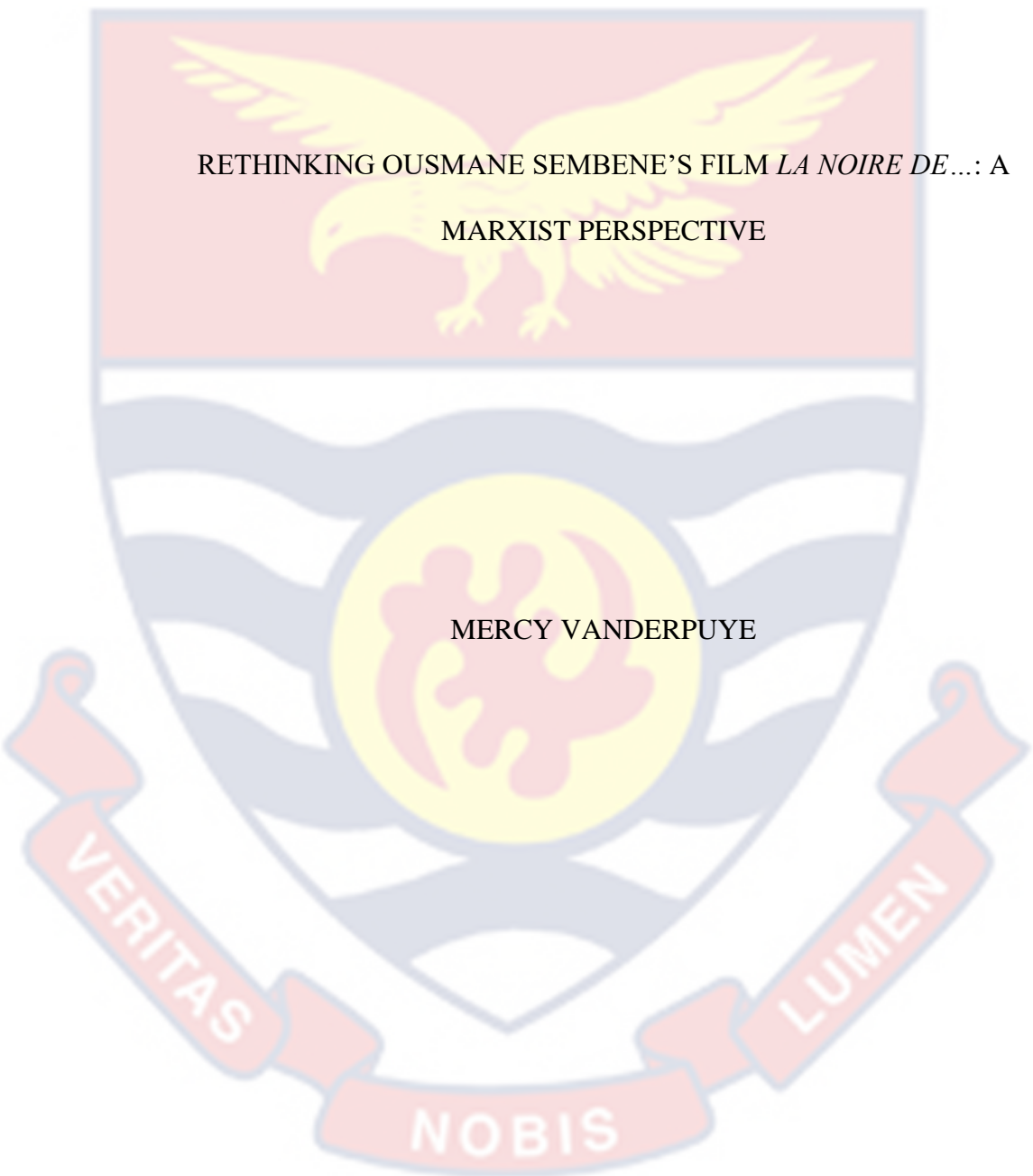


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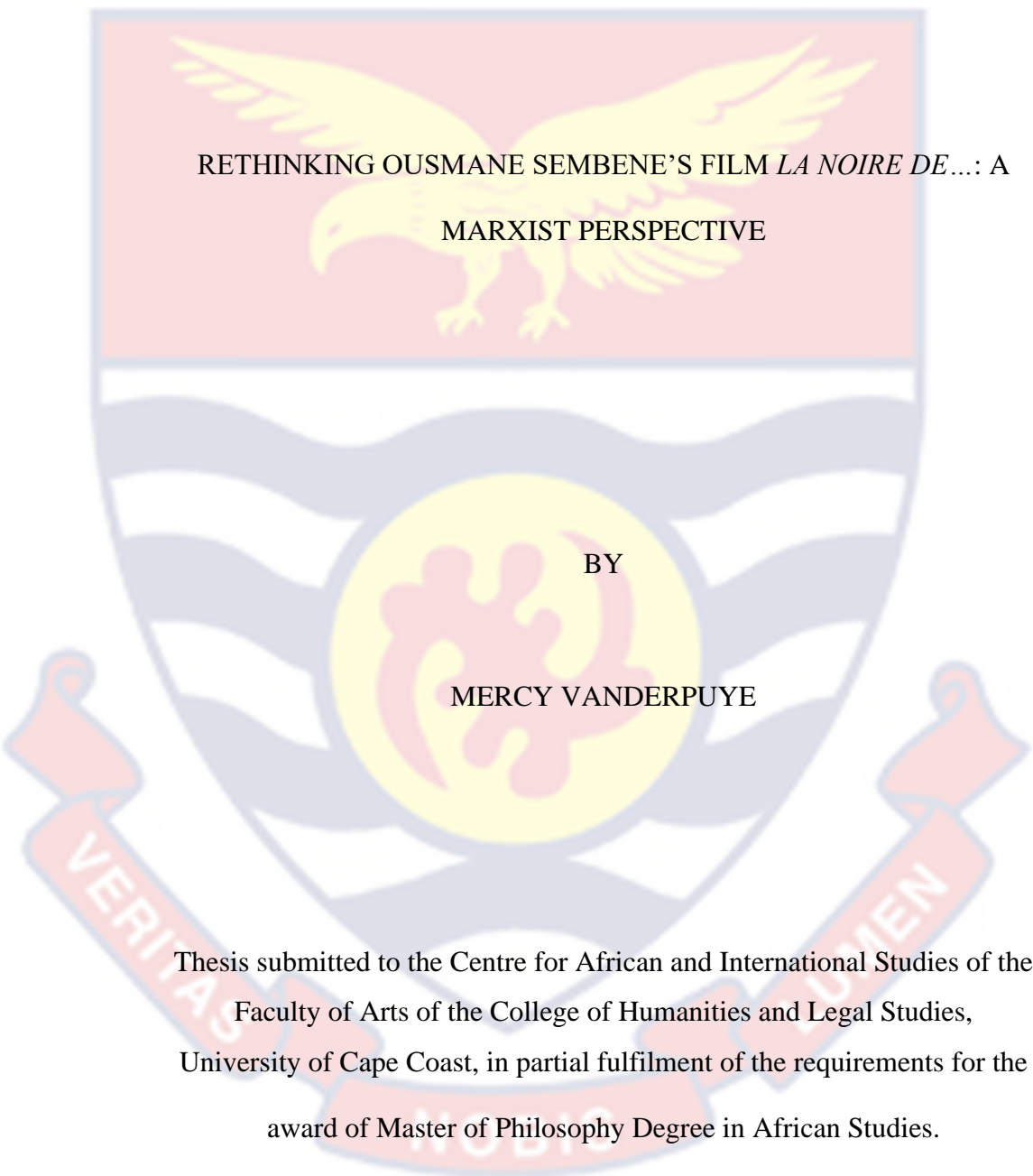


RETHINKING OUSMANE SEMBENE'S FILM *LA NOIRE DE...*: A
MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

MERCY VANDERPUYE

2022

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The background of the page features a large, semi-transparent watermark of the University of Cape Coast crest. The crest is a shield-shaped emblem. At the top is a red horizontal band containing a yellow eagle with its wings spread. Below this is a white band with blue wavy lines. The center of the shield is a yellow circle containing a red stylized human figure. At the bottom of the shield is a red banner with white text. The text on the banner is partially visible as 'VERITAS' on the left and 'LUMEN' on the right.

RETHINKING OUSMANE SEMBENE'S FILM *LA NOIRE DE...*: A
MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

BY

MERCY VANDERPUYE

Thesis submitted to the Centre for African and International Studies of the
Faculty of Arts of the College of Humanities and Legal Studies,
University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of Master of Philosophy Degree in African Studies.

DECEMBER, 2022

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

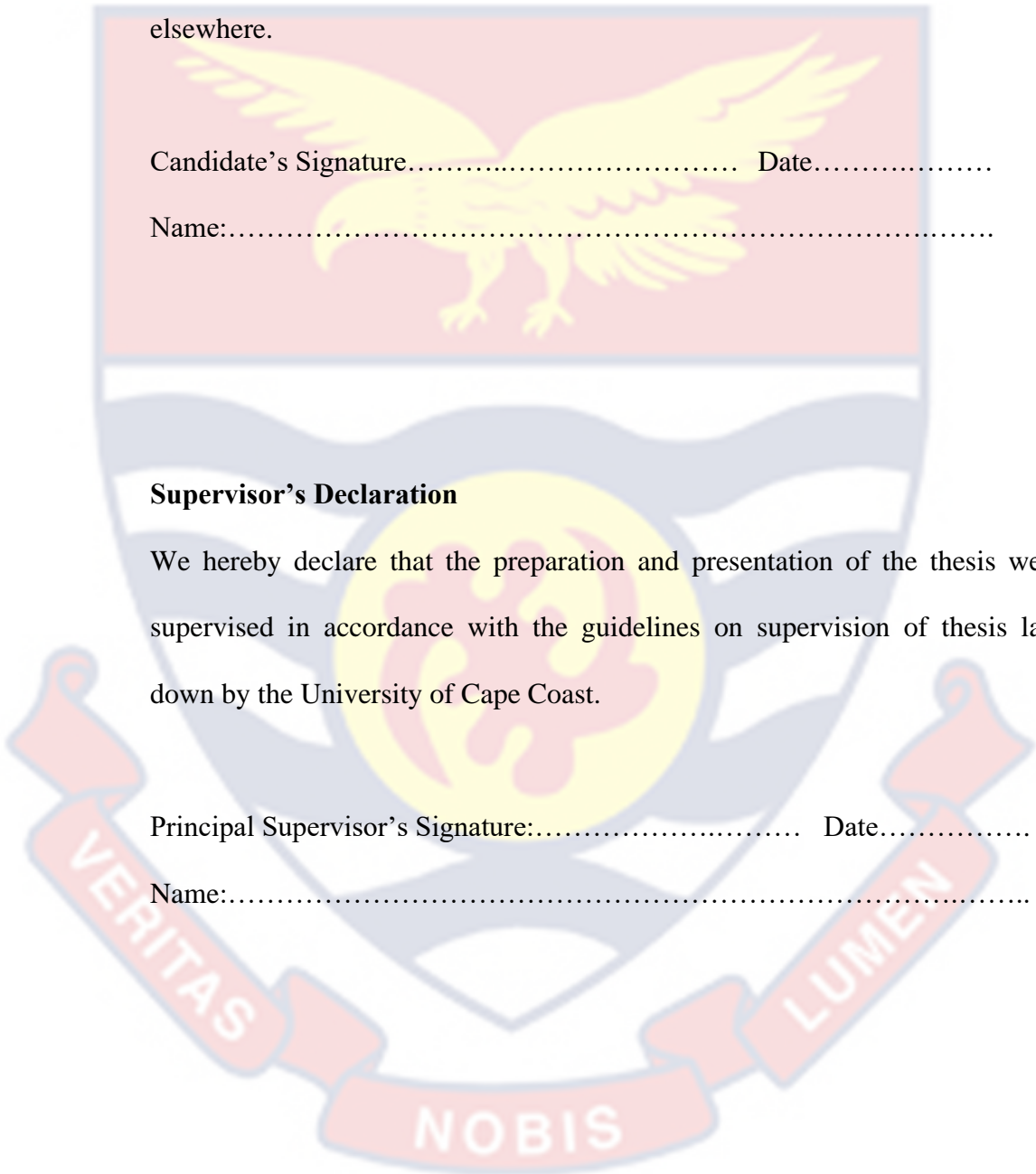
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Supervisor's Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

La Noire de... is the first full-length film to be directed by an African, Ousmane Sembene. Indeed, the numerous analytical studies the film has been subjected to give a clear indication of how thought provocative it is. These previous studies have focused on themes such as migration, neo-colonialism, identity, etc. However, Ousmane Sembene's association with Marxist philosophy bears out a curiosity about whether an alternative reading of his film can be done to reflect that Marxist orientation. An opportunity to extend the interpretations towards this direction seem yet to surface. Therefore, through the use of a Marxist conceptual framework, I seek to expand the alternative approaches to understanding the film. This alternative provision is aimed at sensitizing readers on the changing trends of exploitation in our societies and possible mitigating steps. The method of study is qualitative, the design is descriptive and data is analysed through the logical analysis of related concepts in the world of the film. The finding is such that the narrative of *La Noire de...* resonates with a typical Marxist understanding of how the dynamics of social work drives the evolution of human society.

KEYWORDS

Africanness

Alienation

Capitalism

Marxism

Socialism

Historical materialism



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DEDICATION

To everyone who has contributed to my academic journey.

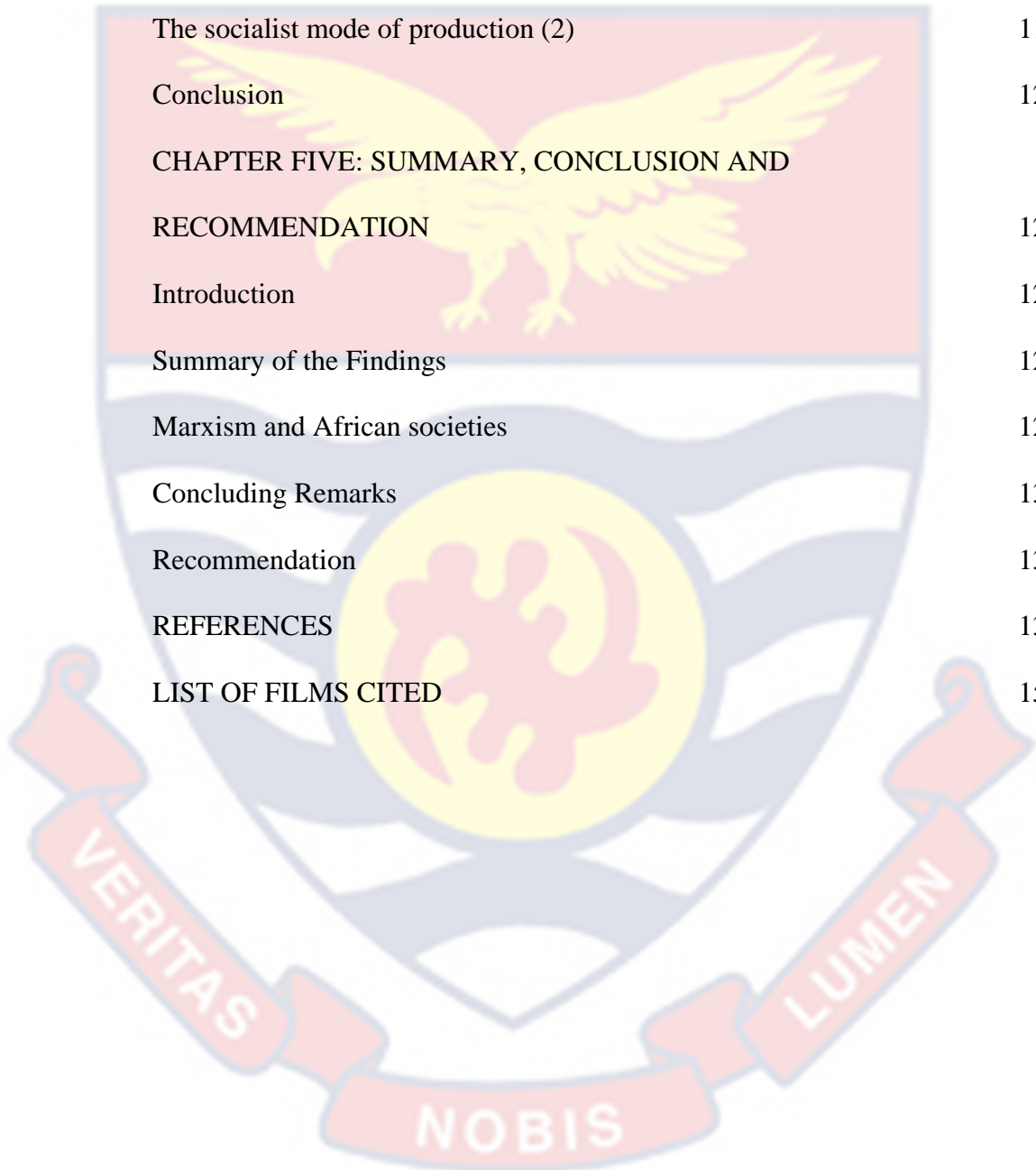


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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAI-	Consortium audio-visuel Internationale
FESPACI-	Federation Pan-Africain de Cinéates
FESPACO-	Festival Panafricain du Cinema de Ouagadougou



CHAPTER ONE

IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION FOR *LA*

NOIRE DE...

Introduction

Synopsis of the film

The film, *La Noire de...*, revolves around Diouana who comes from a poor village on the outskirts of Dakar. Diouana is jobless and so she wanders the city of Dakar in search of a job. Upon several walks through the city of Dakar without finding a job, she encounters a man who informs her about a city square in Dakar where job seekers sit in wait for potential employers. Diouana then starts visiting the city square in Dakar every day in wait for a potential employer just like the other job seekers who frequent the square. One day, an unnamed character referred to by Diouana as Madame, comes to the city square looking for a worker. Carefully observing the ladies present at the square, Madame chooses Diouana from amongst the unemployed women as the one she wishes to employ her services. Diouana is chosen because she remains calm while the other ladies present belligerently demand the job offer from Madame.

Madame spells out to Diouana the services she (Madame) wants from Diouana; childcare duties. Diouana gracefully accepts the offer. On the day Diouana receives the job offer, she runs happily through her village proclaiming how lucky she feels to have gotten a job from a white woman. On Diouana's first day of work, she presents a gift to Madame. Shortly after some time, Madame and her family decide to return to France. Before Madame travels from Dakar to France with her family, Madame extends an invitation to

Diouana to also join them (Madame's family) in France and to continue working for the family. Diouana is ecstatic about the invitation to France. Diouana desires to continue with her former work position, as a nanny. She also hopes to live a better life in France and so she accepts the invitation.

Diouana shortly travels to France to continue her work.

After a while in France, the exact opposite of her expectations occur. Diouana's working conditions were far from what she had envisaged. Diouana receives unkind treatment from Madame. She is also overwhelmed with other chores like cooking, cleaning, laundry, visiting the grocery shop, and caring for the children. This gets Diouana confused as to what exactly the nature of her job is in the house. She (Diouana) expects to care only for the children in France as she did back in Senegal and would also be able to go out and discover France as promised by Madame. Sadly, she never leaves the apartment unless she is to visit the grocery shop. In France, Diouana is confined to the apartment of her Madame where she (Diouana) engages in other roles which include cooking, cleaning, washing, etc; a clear contrast to her previous working condition in Senegal.

Diouana begins to be treated harshly by her employers including not being paid her wages. She becomes increasingly aware of her "imprisonment" in the house of Madame as time goes on. She starts to doubt Madame's real motive for bringing her to France. After realizing she could no longer tolerate her working conditions and Madame's imposing character anymore, Diouana begins her quest for freedom. This quest for freedom ultimately resulted in an unexpected twist of events where Diouana commits suicide by slashing her throat in the bathtub of Madame's home.

Background of the Study

Life experiences, be it social or political circumstances encountered personally or as witnessed by an artist or even others may influence, knowingly or unknowingly, the ideological beliefs and hence, the professional storytelling pattern of the persons in question (Tyson, 2006; Barry, 2009; Agyekum, 2013). As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1972, p. xv) articulates "Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even an area of concern by social and economic forces in a particular society". For that matter, Nartey and Kakraba (2011) are of the view that the artists, including filmmakers, cannot help but make works that are reflective of the socioeconomic issues of their time particularly when the need arises. Artists put these reflections in numerous pieces of artworks and out of the numerous channels, the world of fiction has mostly been resorted to for this purpose (Insaideo, 2020). This makes Ousmane Sembene's background, in particular, a needed insight to work with and redirect certain preliminary inductive determinations on what to expect from the subject matters of his films, particularly, *La Noire de...*

Ousmane Sembene is described by Professor Manthia Diawara (as cited in Scott, 2007) as Africa's most important filmmaker and he is the standard against which all succeeding filmmakers must be judged. Sembene evaluates all matters regarding Africa, especially on issues of racism and colonialism. He was born in Ziguinchor, Senegal, in the year 1923. This is a period in which Senegal was under colonial rule and therefore exploitation of both the country's natural and human resources was optimally in use (Scott, 2007; Gadjigo & Niang, 2021; Bakari, 2008). At the prime of his life,

Ousmane Sembene is known to have engaged in many trading activities like carpentry, mechanic, bricklaying, fishing, etc. after he had quit middle school (Ness & Cope, 2016; Gadjigo, 2010a). Sembene was later drafted into the French army in 1944 during World War II and was later discharged after the war (Gadjigo, 2010b; Scott, 2007). When Ousmane Sembene returned to Dakar, he joined in the long industrial strike action orchestrated mainly by the workers of Mali and Senegal demanding equal opportunities for all rail workers irrespective of race (Demissie, 2008).

In late 1947, unemployment in Senegal became a challenge. This forced Ousmane Sembene to move to France in search of a better life (Gadjigo, 2010b; Demissie, 2008). As Ousmane Sembene began to work in France, he saw and experienced the oppression and challenges faced by immigrants. Through a thorough observation of the nature of the challenges faced by most immigrants, Ousmane Sembene found that the problem was related to labour (Ness & Cope, 2016). The identification of this problem became Sembene's motivating factor to join the French Trade Union and later the French Communist Party in 1950 (Ness & Cope, 2016; Demissie, 2008; Gadjigo & Niang, 2021). Samba Gadjigo (2010b) records that during Ousmane Sembene's leisure, he attends seminars on Marxism and communism and reads available works of literature on Marxist ideology, political economy, history, and works of fiction. Ousmane Sembene became an active member of the French communist party where he took part in several protests including helping in the organization of strikes against the shipment of ammunition from France for the Korean War and the Indochina War. During this political activism, Ousmane Sembene came into contact with

several communist writers from whom he got influenced by the works of Claude Mckay and Jacques Roumain (Gadjigo, 2010b; Ness & Cope, 2016).

In the year 1960 when Senegal had gained her independence, Ousmane Sembene returned to his home country, after a thirteen-year stay in France, where Léopold Sédar Senghor had taken over as the first President of the Republic (Demissie, 2008; Gadjigo & Niang, 2021). Ousmane Sembene observed that the population he intends to share his art with is predominantly illiterate. The awareness of the level of illiteracy in Senegal and Africa at that period awakened the fears of Ousmane Sembene as he realized the barrier imposed by illiteracy in getting the much-needed audience for his novels. So, cinema which imbibed audio-visual advantage became a breakthrough answer (Virtue, 2014; Davies, 2015; Scott, 2007). For this reason, he resorted to the film medium as a preferred alternative that has wider appeal regardless of the educational background of the audience (Gadjigo, Faulkingham, Cassirer & Sander, 1993; Demissie, 2008; Russell, 1998). To improve his skill for the new task, Ousmane Sembene applied for a scholarship to study film. This Scholarship was granted to him by the Soviet Union to attend the Gorki Institute, Moscow, in 1962 for one year. During Ousmane Sembene's training, he learned under the supervision of a soviet filmmaker, Marc Donskoi (Gadjigo, 2010b; Scott, 2007; Spass, 1982). After he graduated, he returned to Senegal. This new knowledge that he acquired became a turning point in the artistic works of Ousmane Sembene. Upon making a couple of short films came his first full-length film, *La Noire de...*, a piece that earned him international recognition (Bakari, 2008; Dima, 2014).

The historical setting of the film is worthy of attention. The original short story from which the film was adapted had its narrative set in 1958 – shortly before independence (Virtue 2014; Goldman, 2019). However, the film version resituated the setting in a post-colonial era. One may wonder what might have informed Ousmane Sembene’s change in setting despite maintaining the same storyline. Insightful as his answer is, it is instructive to quote him; “I had to show how neocolonialism kills us... I had to show that the issue is not to commit suicide but to fight because colonialism is not over” (as cited in Virtue, 2014). This statement echoes Ousmane Sembene’s motivation for the change in time of the film’s setting. This is because when Sembene returned from France to Senegal, he observed that the plight and conditions of the ordinary Senegalese had not changed even after the colonizer had left the shores of Senegal. Since Senegal had achieved independence, it is tempting to inquire about the undesirable conditions Ousmane Sembene had in mind. Ousmane Sembene was referring to the “economic and social structures in place” (Ness & Cope, 2016). Consequently, Ousmane Sembene believed that the political power gained in Senegal was inadequate for full emancipation; political independence was a smokescreen that left the real challenges disguised and hence unattended to (Davies, 2015; Ness & Cope, 2016).

As a philosophical ideology, Marxism asserts that the economic system is the ultimate driving force of society (Adeniyi, 2017). So, the quest to foster any change must be directed at the real challenge, the economic base for that matter. Consequently, Sembene’s conviction of trying to convey the message of change through the restructuring of economic factors underpinning politics

might have simply shown a Marxist understanding of what neo-colonialism means to him.

Films are meant to communicate ideas, and so must *La Noire de...* be. These messages may be presented as either intentional or being inferentially deduced by the audience (Tyson, 2006; Carvalho, 2009; Edgar-Hunt, Marland & Rawle, 2010; Barsam & Monahan, 2010; Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2017). One of the ways of getting to the core of the film is a critical exploration of the filmmaker's life experience. Sharon Russell (1998) is an advocate that Ousmane Sembene's works should be seen in the light of this assumption. Following this, it will be prudent to look into Ousmane Sembene's life experiences for some further clarity on his works.

Ousmane Sembene's involvement in various trades before becoming an astute filmmaker gave him first-hand experience of the conditions of the working class (Ness & Cope, 2016; Demissie, 2008). His works evidence this history. For example, Ousmane Sembene's first published book, *Le Docker Noire*, chronicles his life experience as a Docker in France. Also, *God's bits of Wood* was inspired by his involvement in the railroad workers' strike that took place in 1947 (Russell 1998; Ness & Cope, 2016). Again, the film, *La Noire de...* was an inspiration he had from a published newspaper about a black girl who died in France (Virtue, 2014; Nunn, 2019; Nelson, 2017; Jones, 2020; Davies, 2015; Petty, 2000). The list of various experiences that triggered his art continues, but the point is that Ousmane Sembene's films predominantly constitute a gateway to his life experiences. This provides further insight that Ousmane Sembene's active involvement in Marxism alone serves as an

inspirational stimulus to wonder where and how to trace Marxist imprints in his works.

The motivation for choosing Ousmane Sembene's *La Noire de...* as my text for study derives from the film's recognition as the first feature film to be written and directed by an African from West Africa (Powell, 2021; Diawara, 1992; Langford, 2001; Scott, 2007; Nunn, 2019; Knox, 2021). Alexis Tcheuyap (2011) and Frank Ukadike (1990) maintain that the birth of cinema in Africa occurred at the pinnacle of Europe's industrial revolution. During this period, the colonialists produced films that misrepresented and distorted African ideals (Ukadike, 1994; Ukadike, 2002).

The story of the hunt, it seems, will always glorify the bravado of the hunter if the narrative is told by the hunter. Africans had the opportunity to tell their own stories in the late 1960s and one such story is the film *La Noire de...* (Tcheuyap, 2011). As widely acknowledged as the first feature film to be written and directed by an African from West Africa, *La Noire de...* should awaken the anxiety of the audience relative to what issues the African craves to address about his own seemingly distorted image and other social issues, especially now that the camera has been turned to the African by no one but the African himself.

There are several accepted frameworks of analysis intended to read out the meanings of films. One such perspective is the philosophical approach. This approach requires a focus on a statement a film puts out. This perspective rides on the belief that films can be evaluated based on intellectual, moral, philosophical, and cultural underpinnings (Petrie & Boggs, 2012; Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2017). If *La Noire de...* typifies a narrative whose

meaning derives from the philosophical approach, then we must further inquire what philosophical statement the film harbours. “If you don’t work, you won’t eat”. This single expression revealed through Madame’s dialogue at 34 minutes and 33 seconds into the film is an insightful driven commentary that draws prima-farcie Marxist philosophical concerns relative to the film. The expression above is an ostensible reminder of the Marxian ideal that governs social relations. Social relations necessarily require the existence of not only individuals but also the concession of the reality of their activities in relation to the material conditions of their life (Marx & Engels, 2000). From the nature of this premise, Marx makes a deduction which yielded the conclusion read by Engels at Karl Marx’s burial grounds that “mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before he can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc” (Lepore, 1993).

In *La Noire de...*, it is the pursuit of securing her basic necessities of life that ushers the protagonist, Diouana, on her adventurous spree from Senegal to France. As Feuerbach’s eleventh thesis admonishes philosophers to change the world that has already been interpreted according to different philosophies, I ask the question, how did Diouana set forward to change her world through her search for greener pastures abroad? Did her mode of relations with her environment reveal something other than racism and an oppressive mistress? Was she successful in the end? Does her action reveal some reflective futuristic consequences to human society? All these questions have intriguing answers when the film is analysed in the light of Marxist philosophy. It is this imprint of Marxist ideology in the film that incites an interesting motivation on my part to want to explore further. Consequently, I

seek to show that that *La Noire de...* is a cinematographic manifestation of Marxist ideology.

Statement of the Problem

A titan of African cinema, Ousmane Sembene, has distinguished himself in Africa and beyond, earning for himself the epithet of a demigod in African Cinema (Tcheuyap, 2011; Pfaff, 1993; Willemen, 1992). His films are therefore of high interest in both African and Western scholarship. This explains why over the years, several scholars have focused attention on studying his films, particularly *La Noire de...* According to Vieyra (1987), the rich content of *La Noire de...* stems from the conviction that it is thought-provoking and hence, could be subjected to numerous interpretations. Vieyra's comment on *La Noire de...* has over the years been corroborated by the varied patterns of analysis of the film. Scholars have often focused on diverse thematic areas such as identity, neocolonialism, migration, a portrayal of African women, domestic servitude, and resistance (Chung, 2016; Adam, 2017; Kumar, 2017; Ellovich, 1977; Virtue, 2014; Nunn, 2019; Mohdin, 2016; Nelson, 2017; Goldman, 2019; Davies, 2015; Pallister, 1992; Spass, 1982; Hopkins, 2019; Jones 2020). There is, however, some evidence associating Ousmane Sembene with Marxist ideologies (Pfaff, 1993; Cutler, 2017; Ness & Cope, 2016). That said, it is often suggested that the lived experiences and ideological orientations of filmmakers inform their artistic impressions (Tyson, 2006; Barry, 2009; Agyekum, 2013; Thiong'o, 1972). In spite of Sembene's Marxist association, previous analyses of this film have neglected a Marxist interpretation of it. I suppose this neglect creates a gap which when addressed can generate a discourse that expands our understanding and

appreciation of the film. This study, therefore, offers an alternative reading of *La Noire de...* from a Marxist perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to enrich the debate on the analysis of the classical piece, *La Noire de...* It seeks to challenge readers and film critics to look beyond the existing interpretations already suggested by scholarship. The study pushes the frontiers of interpretations relative to *La Noire de...* as it seeks to demonstrate how Marxist philosophy resonates with narrative of the film.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

There are three major ways accepted as independently valid hermeneutical alternatives for reading out a meaning of a text, namely; the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world the text creates (Barton, 2000; Carvalho, 2009). The world behind the text, on one hand, aims at drawing an interpretation of a text by focusing only on placing the text squarely within its historical, cultural, or social circumstances (Harrington, 1990).

By way of delimitating the study, any allusion made to the background history of Ousmane Sembene and the social context of the film's production is only indicative of a stimulus that motivated the idea to seek evidence of a Marxist interpretation within the film narrative itself. Therefore, the historical background of the film shall not be the focus of gathering data for the interpretation of the current study.

However, in drawing out the supposed Marxist interpretations from the text, the study departs from relying on the world behind the text as the

interpretive framework. On the other hand, without the need for further recourse to the historico-cultural context that may have inspired a text, an interpretation of a narrative could equally be reached by considering the block of narrative as a sufficient basis (Barton, 2000). The hermeneutical approach called the world of the text rides on the assumption that the literary elements within a piece of art alone are sufficient in conveying adequate meaning without reference to the authors' intended motive or any other historical context within which the text was produced. Consequently, this study constrains the focal boundary of the analysis of the film to the block narrative of *La Noire de...* as a complete and adequately sufficient scope for reading and deriving a Marxist interpretation of the study.

Significance of the Study

Imruh Bakari (2008) acknowledges that if there exists a tragedy at all in Africa, it will be the fact that a significant number of African film audiences are unfamiliar with Sembene's films. The neglect is of serious concern if it leaves out knowledge that is relevant to events that border on human society either directly or indirectly. Film is one of several media of communication, which particularly combines plot, character, sound, setting, etc. to communicate a course of idea, philosophy, or even propaganda. Several (written) texts have popularized the understanding of Marxism in general and historical materialism in particular. Nonetheless, because film imbibes an audio-visual medium in sharing a viewpoint, it also appeals to parties whose interest in learning leans on the art of film watching. This makes film analysis a basis for awakening and nurturing consciousness, and hence a revolutionary tool for propagating change. Thus, the main importance of this study is to

reinforce the awakening of consciousness through audio-visual means, by providing a Marxist perspective from which to conceive, analyse and appreciate the dynamics of social work, exploitation, and suggested way(s) of achieving social justice.

Notwithstanding, this work shall also contribute to the body of knowledge on the analysis of the film in particular and on Marxist readings of texts in generally.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis. This introduction shall provide readers with a general background of the study, thesis statement, scope of the study, the identified lacuna, purpose of the study and the significance of the study.

The second chapter shall focus on a review of the literature. This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first section attempts to answer the question of African cinema. The second section of the chapter shall focus on the existing interpretations of *La Noire de...* The aim is to identify an opportunity the existing literature creates for a contribution to be made. The final section of this chapter explains the theoretical framework to be employed as the interpretive lens for this study.

The third chapter shall focus on the research methodology and also examine the various approaches to studying African cinema. This is to show how African cinema has been studied over the years and how a Marxist approach lends itself to the analysis of African cinema today.

The fourth chapter is essentially argumentative. It focuses on the Marxist analysis of *La Noire de...* by juxtaposing the characters and their

characterization to Marxist themes in order to project the Marxist credentials of the film.

The fifth and final chapter shall present a summary together with my observations intended as an affirmation of the Marxist orientation relative to the film, *La Noire de...* It also concludes the chapter with some recommendations for further studies as well as the importance of a Marxist reading of African text to the African society.

Conclusion

The Chapter has provided a summary of what this research work seeks to do. It commences with a look at the background of the study, which considered Ousmane Sembene's life history as well as his motivation for pursuing a career in filmmaking. The knowledge of his past inspires a new interpretation of his seminal film, *La Noire de...* This chapter further highlights the contribution of this study to the existing body of work on Marxist interpretations of films in general and the analysis of the film in particular.

CHAPTER TWO

AFRICAN CINEMA AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Introduction

The preoccupation of this chapter is a review of related literature according to three main segmentations. The first segment is focused on various conceptions associated with African cinema. To do this, I shall first review literature from various perspectives advanced in conceptualizing African cinema. I shall proceed to expose the gaps in these perspectives and consequently suggest a suitable criterion for conceptualizing African cinema. The second segment shall focus on a review of the existing literature focusing particularly on the various perspectives from which *La Noire de...* has been analysed. The review of the available literature on *La Noire de...* shall expose available opportunities for advancing alternative analysis of the film. The final segment of this chapter shall focus on explaining the theoretical framework to be employed for the study

What is African Cinema?

The phrase “African cinema” consists of two separate words; “African” and “cinema”. When the term “cinema” is mentioned, there seems to be some consensus about its meaning. The term “cinema” is derived from the French word, *Cinéma* which also comes in part from the Greek word, *kinein* which means movement (Dick, 1998). “Movement” here refers to the impression of motion of images on a screen. Cinema according to Charles Musser and Andre Gaudreault (2018) can be understood as a product of a technological system that involves the projection of motion pictures onto a screen.

However, problems seem to clamp down when the term “African” is used in describing cinema. Does “African cinema” imply films directed by a person of African origin? Does it suggest that films whose medium of expression is in African languages? Does it imply that the content of the films must be based on a unique experience of Africans? Or perhaps, is the term merely used for convenience as Vitus Nanbigne (2011) observes? This means that the question of African cinema largely revolves around what meaning we ascribe to Africanness. It is suggested, particularly by Uduma Oji Uduma (2014) that the word “African” itself is difficult to decompose because the supposed African identity seems to have been compromised by issues surrounding slavery, colonialism, balkanization, and formal education. Because the controversy largely revolves around the qualification “African”, I shall examine the conditions for Africanizing cinema through concept analysis of various philosophical criteria offered to deconstruct the meaning of African. Given the various arguments raised in the extant literature, there are at least four major themes to engage my attention. I organize them under the geographic, communitarian, culture, and the Naysayers criterion.

The Geographical Origin Criterion

The earliest scholars known to deconstruct the Africanness of a body of knowledge are Pauline Hountondji (1996) and Peter Bodunrin (1991). What their notable effort achieved was to focus on the identity of authors in classifying the identity of a related piece of literature. On that count, a piece of literature is African if the author is an African. Some scholars like Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, George Sadoul, etc. have followed the precedent to define African cinema. As one of the earliest filmmakers to begin the conversation

about which films can be tagged as “African”, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra links the Africanness of a film to the director’s citizenship (Tcheuyap, 2011). Accordingly, any film that claims to be “African” must have the director originate from Africa. Let us hear Vieyra on what it takes for a film to be classed as African.

For a film to be African, is it enough for it to be directed by an African? Certainly, because when a film distinguishes itself with its relation to African civilization, it can be called African. That means a film directed by an African about Europe is African as long as it reveals a black way of thinking (Tcheuyap, 2011, p. 11).

Vieyra’s suggestion appears ambiguous at first. One, it could mean that African films are directed by someone of African origin. The other meaning is that it is the content of the film that makes it African. Vieyra settles this challenge in his endnotes when he adds that a film directed by a non-African about Africa cannot be considered African but can only be considered as having an African inspiration (*ibid*). This clarification in his endnote suggests that it is the origin of the director that Vieyra alludes to and not the content of the film. This criterion is further extended by George Sadoul (as cited in Diawara, 1992) to include the film’s producer, the technical crew, and the cast as well as the medium of expression of the film being in an African dialect. In effect, the film’s production process and its entirety must be done by only Africans and the targeted audience for the films must also be Africans in order to qualify as an African cinema. This provision by Sadoul would reject several

films especially, those from the Francophone African countries where most of their crew and actors were French, non-Africans for that matter.

The main issue with the geographical origin criterion relates to the scientific argument on the genesis of the human race. The origination of the human race, evidence suggests, is located in present-day Africa (Diop, 1999; Appiah, 1992; Osahon, 1998; Hasegawa, 2011). It was from here that the first human evolved and its subsequent population spread to other habitable places on the earth. Some of the environmental conditions in these new places caused mutations in some of the human populations that had migrated from Africa to distant lands. This resulted in the emergence of a difference in complexion, white-skinned persons. This new complexion was made possible through gene mutations (Appiah, 1992; Osahon, 1998). Thus, scientific research has revealed that man's geographical origin dates back to a single location today, which is Africa. To this end, it suffices to say that every human being is, in the end, an African. As a result of the geographic requirement, all existing films available to man were produced, directed, edited, cast, and funded by someone who is one way or the other ultimately of African origin.

Consequently, it follows that all works, including films, can securely and confidently be described as ultimately African films. Now, using the geographical criterion as a basis for differentiating Africanness will be an obvious blunder based on the preceding reasoning. Now, granted that an individual qualifies to be named as an African, would that qualification be premised on a race or biology? The point I am trying to convey here is that biology and social conceptions take radically different trajectories. For the criterion to be absolutely meaningful, it needs to clarify what it means by an

African in the first place. Are African qualities given by morphological features? Do proponents of the criterion mean an African is someone who currently resides in any of the African countries? Is it someone who feels African? There is a need for proponents of this school of thought to clearly define who qualifies to be an African. Until such clarity is achieved, the criterion would only reveal her vagueness on what it means to identify a cinema as African.

The Communitarian-based Criterion

Another criterion for conditioning Africanness as far as existing literature is concerned is the communitarian model. Kwame Gyekye (2010, p. 104) holds that in indigenous African societies, the individual is regarded as “an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated, atomic individual”. As a result, a communitarian value places premium on shared interest. It is this concept of communal interests and values that distinguishes a group as a society from a mere pursuit of individual interest. Historically, African cultures (prior to colonialism) were largely made up of several households who trace their ancestry through a common lineage known as clans. The responsibility of the clan is to impart knowledge, social conventions, and skills to members in order to foster allegiance to communal goals, provide security and provision for everyone (Abraham, 2010). So, the major means of production, land, was equally available to individuals according to their capacity to work on it. Even those who returned from exile had ownership of land to sustain their livelihood. No room was given for the privatization of the means of production (Achebe, 1958; Nyerere, 1968).

Proponents of the communitarian view include the Innocent Onyewuenyi (1991), John S. Mbiti (1970), and Uzodinma Nwala (1985), among others. Supporters of this view hold that Africans exemplify the communitarian mode of production as described above. They argue that any basis for distinguishing the African from particularly the Western culture must be based on the said communitarian ethos. Onyewuenyi and his supporters argue that Africanness is communitarian in character and that any piece of work seeking to be African-related but fails to highlight the communitarian mode of being is not African. The reason for the significant emphasis on communitarian values is that the Western way of life, in contrast with the African way of life, is conceived as individualistic. Consequently, a cinema is considered “African” if the plot of the film demonstrates or stresses communitarian values. Such a communitarian value is exemplified in the film *Yaaba*. When Bila and Nopoko got involved in a fight with other boys in the village, Nopoko sustained a knife injury which made her ill. When she got ill everyone in society comes to visit and tries to help her recover and a couple of suggestions were given to the family of the victim. Here Nopoko’s illness is taken to be of communal concern.

The proponents of the communitarian approach, Onyewuenyi (1991), Mbiti (1969), and Nwala (1985), are of the view that for a work to be African, it must be free of the remnants of estrangements imposed on the Africans by colonialism. This is due to the conviction that, for them, Africanness is synonymous with anti-colonialism. The fundamental basis for their position is that colonization changed the authentic African way of life of the traditional African (Wiredu, 2010; Wa Thiong’o, 1972). Driven by this decolonization

mission, several African political leaders, like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and others launched a reactionary effort to resurrect African cultural components based on notions prominent in the pre-African socio-political milieu. It must be noted that decolonization does not mean that Africa shall automatically revert to its way of life prior to colonialism. William Abraham (2010) submits that the penetration of colonialism, education, and foreign religions completely changed the socioeconomic relations and the rationale behind the organization of indigenous African societies. This was made possible by introducing altering the socioeconomic structure of African societies. For instance, Nyerere (1968) asserts that the land which was communally owned became privatized with the advent of colonialism.

Owing to this supposed distortion, there is a conscious effort by Africans to organize a society that depicts the African way of life which colonialism altered. This conscious organization of modern society to look like Africa before colonialism is communitarianism. What this means is that communitarianism only appears here as a model for replicating or emulating the African society that existed before colonialism, particularly the communalist mode of production (Nkrumah, 1967). Africa, Walter Rodney (1973), asserts, transitioned from communalism to capitalism. So, communitarianism is suggested as African because it retains features typical of the traditional ways associated with African, communalism (Nkrumah, 1969). Consequently, communitarianism is said to be African because it takes up features of ways of life believed to be typical of the Africans before colonialism, communalism. There is a seeming agreement among scholars that

communalism is a mode of production of every society experienced (Rodney, 1973; Howard, 2002; Wiredu, 2010; Mawere and Mubaya, 2017).

Accordingly, communalism is not a unique historical epoch of Africans. To be sure, one may have thought that it will be prudent for Africans to appropriate this way of life as theirs because even though such communal living is not unique, Africans were the first to nurture it. However, there are scholarly traditions that seem to deny this premise. The Natufian society (a culture found at the Fertile Crescent located within the Middle East) is cited as probably the very first society to have transitioned from the stage of hunting and gathering to the first known society, a communalist society (Campana & Crabtree, 1990; Bar-Yosef & Valla, 1990; Bar-Yosef, 1998; Verhoeven, 2011; Yeomans, Richter & Martin, 2017). Consequently, it seems further better reasons are required to warrant the appropriation of communalist identity in Africa's name. What this suggests is that films depicting communitarian values cannot be appropriated in Africa's name simply because the supposed justification is not unique to those called Africans. Thus, it is problematic to base Africanness on communitarianism.

The Culture Dependent Criterion

Another growing position contends that Africanness can only be found in the African culture(s). According to proponents of this criterion, any work that desires to be labelled "African" must reflect an African culture. Thus, any film qualifies as African if it reflects African culture. Scholars who have made culture the central theme in deconstructing Africanness include Theophilus Okere (1976), Okolo (1993), Frank N. Ukadike, and Eddie Ugbomah (1994). Uduma (2014), and Peter Bisong (2020). Uduma (2014) suggests that although

there exist several cultures in Africa, there can be a common cultural denominator that runs through all African cultures. He continues that once this is identified, that culture shall form the basis for Africanness. Bisong (2020) also adds that a body of work can be created outside of Africa without an African cultural element, but if such works solve problems that have relations to Africa, then such works can be safely assigned the African tag. This would mean for Bisong that African cinema would include films produced outside Africa whose content does not reflect African culture(s). Bisong's addition is quite commendable because it gives African cinema some form of fluidity.

My observation is that, in general, the argument advanced by numerous scholars for earmarking culture as a defining indicator of Africanness is intuitively plausible. Ordinarily, the first point of call in identifying a cinema as African should emanate from the African culture(s). However, the cultural criterion raises a slew of unanswered concerns. Granted that such common culture is found and would serve as the denominator for rendering a cinema as African as Uduma (2014) suggests, would this found culture remain static or it is also bound to change? If kept static, will it not end up stifling creativity in filmmaking?

Cinema as a form of art should therefore be given the space for fluidity, dynamism, and creativity. So, erecting barriers to prohibit dynamism all in the name of keeping to a specific cultural identity seems a limiting gesture. Again, my issue with the culture criterion as a basis for defining what should constitute African cinema is the current trend of globalization and its infiltrations into different cultures. From clothing to music to food all seem to have been altered by cultural miscegenation in ways that sometimes make it

difficult to decipher typical African from European. It is also premised on this notion of cultural miscegenation that some scholars like David Murphy (2000) have argued that Africanness and Westernness cannot be appropriated by any group of people. His view represents what may be called “Naysayers of African cinema”, a view that suggests that cinema cannot reasonably be clothed with any identity.

It would be relevant to inquire from Murphy, whether assimilating something into one’s culture necessarily means that the beneficiaries had no original culture in the first place? The point is this. Assimilation is possible only when there are some initial cultural elements to synthesize with the borrowed elements. I do not necessarily dispute the importance of advancing the defining element of cinema from cultural synthesis. The difficulty in admitting this criterion relates to the concern that it makes no relevant effort, as the search for a criterion requires, to articulate a clear basis upon which the pre-existing culture has any association with a group of people in the first place. This is to say that even in cultural diversities, it is not impossible to identify original elements of identity.

The Cultural Syncretic Criterion

My empathy rests profoundly with the cultural criterion as the defining element of African Cinema. The reason is that intuitively when the question of Africanness is asked, one is more likely to point to culture as the defining element. That notwithstanding, the culture criterion has shown to be problematic because it seems to focus intellectual resources solely on the past. This is evidenced in Amilcar Cabral’s (1973) call for a return to the African past as a way of reinstating Africanness. As Kwame Nkrumah (1967) and

Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani (2020) suggest, it will be extremely challenging, or perhaps an impracticable feat to reconstitute the communalist essence of Africanness in this present era owing to modernity and technological advancement. The cultural criterion is, therefore, necessary but not sufficient.

To complement the cultural criterion, I propose what may suffice as a sufficient condition with recourse to Kwasi Wiredu's proposal as found in his work, *on defining African philosophy*. In keeping with African culture, this sufficient condition intends to inject some fluidity required for cinema to reflect the evolving nature of social dynamics. Wiredu (1991, p. 105) suggests that we dilute the African past with whatsoever "...worth from the intellectual resources of the modern world" that can be extracted or appropriated. This idea is supported by Kwame Gyekye (1997) who maintains that there is absolutely nothing wrong with borrowing from other cultures so long as the things being borrowed are relevant to the borrower. This is because the culture of a people change to enable the people to adapt to the prevailing conditions when existential conditions change (wa Thiong'o, 1972; Gyekye, 1997). Salient examples illustrate this conviction. The conversation and invention of automobiles began in Europe (Nyamwange & Nyamwange, 2014) and the idea was to solve the problem of transportation within their society. Once other societies realize that such technologies would equally solve their problem, they appropriate and weave them into the fabric of their society. So, if a solution is found elsewhere to a problem that equally applies to another, it seems to make little to no sense not to find means to accommodate such problem-solving avenues as theirs.

To this extent, I construe Africanness to mean the traditional African culture(s) and any other foreign cultures that have become part of the living traditions of Africa. Consequently, African cinema can be defined as films that reflect the traditional African culture(s) as well as other cultures or ideas that have been assimilated and as part of the fabric of African society.

Review of the varying understanding of *La Noire de...*

In this section of the chapter, I pursue two goals. I begin by reviewing the available literature on the analysis of *La Noire de...* I proceed to show the opportunity that the various literature creates for a Marxist reading of the African film, *La Noire de...* to be realized.

Françoise Pfaff (1993) explores the uniqueness of Ousmane Sembene's films in general, indicating that Ousmane Sembene's films are very unique in both content and style. In explaining such uniqueness, he points out Ousmane Sembene's frequent commitment to highlighting socio-political themes; a notable feature duly acknowledged by film critics in general. He further reveals an interesting trend wherein Ousmane Sembene's films portray a plot similar to a typical African tale, according to which "good" is always set in contrast with "evil". Ousmane Sembene's use of this African tale-like storytelling in his films is purposely to expose and speak against various injustices which seem to be finding a comfortable place in post-colonial Africa. This is evident in all his films as his main characters are made conscious of certain injustices through a "juxtaposition of opposites in the context within which they evolve" (Pfaff, 1993, p. 17). Some of the contrasting things employed include but are not limited to "poverty versus wealth", "good versus evil", "the old versus the new", "powerful versus weak"

etc. This constant use of conflicting elements found in Ousmane Sembene leads Pfaff to contemplate whether they are indicative of imbibing Marxist elements as suggested by critics or whether Sembene's film style is more in tune with the African way of storytelling.

Pfaff's (1993) comparative assessment of Ousmane Sembene's films, among other things, exposes a critical feature. Pfaff's article indicates that there has been a long-standing tradition of associating Ousmane Sembene's film with Marxism. The Marxist interpretation, Pfaff says, has been reached by critics based on the juxtaposition of opposites such as "rural versus urban". To be sure, this position taken by critics is devoid of extensive analysis of film elements. The conclusions are therefore incomplete and hence an unfit basis for making a convincing determination of Marxist imprints in Ousmane Sembene's films. In terms of contribution, therefore, I seek to complement such studies with a conclusion derived from an extensive analysis of film elements as presented in *La Noire de...* After reviewing Pfaff's perspective on the broad outlook of Ousmane Sembene's film, I focus on *La Noire de...* to analyse the many themes that academics have related to the film's understanding.

Janis Pallister (1992) avers that *La Noire de...* focuses on the portrayal of the African woman. While Rosa Ellovich (1977) finds such submission as a deviation from the filmmaker's intent, Sheila Petty (2000) submits that there is a temptation for anyone to suggest that the film is about the African woman just as Pallister holds. Petty's argument stems from the fact that the film is highly focused on the experiences of a young Senegalese woman. Petty further points out that the film's meaning lies in the historical and political scope

within which it was situated and this is how she thinks the film must be analysed. Ellovich, on one hand, argues that the film goes beyond women to reflect major themes including alienation, neo-colonialism, cultural contact, misunderstanding, etc. all of which are evident in the relationship between the main characters, Diouana and Madame.

Pallister (1992) on the other hand claims that the African woman has suffered and continues to suffer some sort of alienation. In support of his case, the author takes Sembene's film, *La Noire de...*, he points out the experiences of Diouana to support his earlier assertion. Pallister further associates Diouana's alienation in the film with that of race, social class, illiteracy, and her inability to speak the French language. For Pallister, the film having a black woman as a protagonist and closely following her as she moves from her home country (Senegal) to a foreign land (France) through the actions and inactions of the people around her reveals the stereotypical attitude the African woman has been subjected to. This stereotype keeps the African woman in some kind of alienation. Pallister concludes by saying that social class, in general, is a major factor that breeds alienation.

Pallister's (1992) article hints at a social gap that causes sharp class divisions in society. From the Marxist standpoint, this social gap obtains a different meaning from Pallister's usage. This social relation in society shows the class division Marx observed in human society. The class one belongs to is dependent upon the individual's relation to the means of production. The individual who owns the means of production is classed as the Bourgeoisie and the one who owns no means of production other than his or her labour is classed as the Proletariat (Miller, 1995). The proletariat class, by virtue of the

lack of ownership of the means of production, is vulnerable in society. It is the vulnerability on the part of the proletariat which, like Diouana experienced in her adventurous move to France, lends the underprivileged class to exploitation. Pallister's work, therefore, hints at pieces of evidence consistent with Marxist ideas. The work gives a clear indication of substantiating the relation of characters in the spectrum of Marxist social relations. What the current study does is to exploit such elements through characterization to build a Marxist underpinning of the film *La Noire de...*

Beyond the topic of socioeconomic inequality that Pallister underlines as the film's message, some academics believe the *La Noire de...* reflects the concept of neo-colonialism. Nancy Virtue's (2014) is one of such scholars. Virtue's article was to look at how the changes made from the original text into the film version paved way for the interrogation of the idea of neo-colonialism and subsequently make the African film audiences sensitive and conscious of the dangers of neo-colonialism. She submits that Sembene was faithful to the plot of the story which was adapted into the film medium. One of the major changes the author observed in the film version of the original story was the historical framework within which the film was set. In the written story, the setting was during colonialism whereas film version was resituated in the period shortly after independence.

According to Virtue, this action of Sembene was geared towards clearly sensitizing the African populace on the effects of colonization on the African identity. The transition from colonialist into the post-colonialist setting is to reiterate the need for African people to build their own identity in this present era. It was also to emphasize the place of art in the reconstruction

of the African identity because the original text from which the film was adapted only focused on the condemnation of colonization. Virtue's point is that the changes Sembene effected in the film were very purposeful and strategic aimed at reshaping and remoulding the African's conscience on the dangers of neo-colonialism.

Virtue's article draws the reader's attention to the neo-colonial imprints in the film through a comparative study of both the literary text and the film. The work is also a reminder to the Africans concerning the effects of colonization. Kwame Nkrumah (1972) posits that neocolonialism is an expression of capitalism. If neocolonialism is being likened to capitalism, then this study shall dwell on the established notion of the film as preaching neocolonialism to argue for the existence of capitalism as a mode of production in *La Noire de...* Furthermore, in an attempt to reclaim African identity and ward off neocolonialism, the work also reveals the relevance of the arts in the reconstitution of Africanness. Affecting a similar side of the agenda, this study employs the Marxism as an alternatively effective framework for sensitizing the audience on the ills of exploitation; albeit through the film medium.

Doyle Calhoun (2020) centres his analysis of *La Noire de...* on the suicide scenery of Diouana. He argues that the scene of Diouana's suicide carries a very symbolic meaning which seems to have escaped the lenses of critics and analysts. So, his work sets out to explore this very gap. Firstly, Calhoun holds that Diouana's suicide can be likened to the form of anti-colonial resistance which historically took place, especially during the period when slaves were being transported on a ship abroad. In the process of the

transit, slaves were said to have committed suicide to satisfy their quest for freedom. Secondly, he suggests that Diouana's "X" shaped view relative to her hairstyle taken from a high-angle shot indicates a mark often used as a way of identifying slaves in the history of French colonization. Thirdly, Diouana's choice of a place of suicide (bathtub) means that she has offered her body as a ritual sacrifice just like how the traditional French and Senegalese Muslims killed sheep as a sacrifice in bathtubs during aid-aldah. Fourthly, Diouana's act of slaughtering her throat is seen as an act of silencing herself. Calhoun concludes by saying that Diouana's act of suicide is an extreme rejection of neo-colonial enslavement. In sum, the suicide scenery is said to evoke the historical imagery of the colonial experience and the treatment of it with the contempt it supposedly deserves.

Doyle Calhoun's work insightfully demonstrates how suicide could stand for resistance and liberation. In other words, to gain one's freedom, bloodshed is sometimes inevitable. This idea posited by Calhoun regarding the ultimate freedom as exemplified by death makes sense of the sort of revolution of the proletariat which Marx and Engels (1848) suggest could be characterized by violence. Therefore, Calhoun's article serves as a reference point in analysing the idea of revolution relative to the kind of Marxist reading this study hypothesizes.

Steven Nelson (2017) asserts that the film uses failed migration as a pretext to expose neo-colonialism. This failed journey to the "Promised Land" calls the viewer's attention to issues of racism, neo-colonialism, and Senegal's continued dependence on France. According to Nelson, Ousmane Sembene consciously used Diouana's predicament to reveal how even after

independence, Senegal continues to depend on and accommodate an appreciable number of French nationalists in Senegal's economic and political affairs. This, Nelson holds, makes Senegal nothing other than a neo-colonial state. He further expresses Sembene's effort at showing how complicit the African is in her status as a neo-colonial victim. Nelson reads such an impression from the scene where Diouana was present at a square looking for a job. When Madame got to the square, Madame was surrounded immediately by other job-seeking African women present. Madame however rejects all of them and offered the job to Diouana, who is seen seated idle, as though she (Diouana) was uninterested in the current happening. Diouana accepts the offer to work given by Madame. Here, according to Nelson, Diouana's acceptance of the job offer makes her complicit as a neo-colonial victim.

Exploring the issue of domestic work in *La Noire de...*, Spass (1982) shares a similar view with Nelson as the former argues that the film presents domestic help as a form of neo-colonialism. Arun Kumar (2017) also admits that the film is a considerate narrative that reflects neocolonialism with a focus on the seeming relationship between the oppressor (Madame) and the oppressed (Diouana). Spass indicates that Diouana's acceptance to engage in domestic work marks her consent to be exploited; albeit inadvertently. Nelson finally concludes that the square where women gather to seek job opportunities as domestic workers can only be likened to a modern-day slave market where victims "willingly" sign on to be exploited.

Nelson's (2017) article comes across as an interesting piece as it reveals how domestic servitude could be construed as a mode of neo-colonialism. It goes further to reveal the exploitative nature of being a domestic worker. A person becomes vulnerable to exploitation once he or she decides to work for someone. According to Marxism, the survival of a person who owns no means of production is to trade off his or her Labour (Ball, 1995) and this is exactly the situation Diouana finds herself in. Consequently, Nelson provides clues that are relevant to establishing class relations in Marxist terms, particularly the defining property of the proletariat. Again, relative to Marxist analysis, Nelson's article, in the long run, suggests the basic condition that triggers exploitation; the decision to sell out one's labour power in the quest to earn a living.

As various academics have discussed how the film may be considered to emphasise neo-colonialism, others have also maintained that the central theme of *La Noire de...* is focused on identity. The kind of identity is nevertheless not the same. Andrea Yu-Chieng Chung (2016), on one hand, opines that *La Noire de...* reflects a theme of a loss of social identity. She believes that the story is a representation of Senegalese's struggle with the coming of colonialism, as we see Diouana's trouble finding her social identity. The reason for her position is that Diouana, after commencing work in France, realized the differences between her working conditions in France and back in Dakar. Back in Dakar, she only took care of the children but in France, she is made to do all the house chores including taking care of her employers' children. According to Chung, Diouana encountered an identity crisis as she questions herself, "Why this apron? What am I in this house? Why am I here?"

Am I a nursing maid or a housemaid?" She also links Diouana's loss of identity to the various positions the Dogon mask, which Diouana gifted to the couple, occupied in the film.

According to Rachael Langford (2001), the mask Diouana gifted to her employers implies Diouana's want for a reciprocal and just working relationship with them (employers). However, her employers appear ignorant about the implication of the gift offered to them. Chung adds that the background music played was to help Diouana find her African roots. On the other hand, Hakeem Adam (2017) argues that the kind of identity in *La Noire de...* is in connection to the presence of the Dogon mask as used in the film. He identifies Diouana with the mask. For him, the mask's presence and position at any point in the film reflected Diouana's situation throughout the film. He adduces evidence from the various positions Diouana takes as illustrated with the Dogon mask. In Dakar, the mask was placed on the wall together with other objects (indicating some form of acceptance and peaceful coexistence between Diouana and her employers) but in France, it was placed alone on a plain white wall (this indicates some form of hostility that will occur between Diouana and her employers). The latter position of the mask, to him, defines Diouana's isolation and loss of identity. When Diouana wants the mask she had given to her employers, its ownership creates tension between her and Madame as Madame refused to give it to her. Adam says that Diouana wants the mask because it is the only thing in France that reminds her of her roots. He avers that the mask is the representation of the African identity in the film.

Chung's contribution focuses on Diouana's loss of her place in society. Chung premised on the questions Diouana begins to ask herself. However, it is worth noting that Diouana's questioning of her place in society relates to, first of all, the dawning moment of becoming conscious of her predicament. This very fact opens up a new dimension for understanding Diouana's actions and inactions as the plot unfolds. For Marx, before the proletariat undertakes the revolutionary action, the proletariat builds self-consciousness of the exploitation first (Ball, 1995). Both Adam's and Chung's concerns about identity crisis are eye-opening but it leaves subsequent sequences in disunity. Thus, the use of the Marxist framework is adopted as an alternative tool that harnesses the question of identity crises with subsequent aspirations, actions, and inactions of the protagonist.

Moving away from the theme of identity, some suggests that *La Noire de...* can be understood as a film that highlights the struggles of a black female. One of such scholars is Zoë Hopkins (2019) who holds that *La Noire de...* is a reflection of rupture and resistance, particularly the resistance of a black female. Such resistance is demonstrated by the main character's (Diouana) journey in the film. Diouana was filled with so much joy about going to work in France but a few days after arrival realized that her thought of France was nothing but enslavement and imprisonment. Diouana's enslavement eventually leads her to commit suicide. The author argues that death becomes synonymous with freedom for Diouana. Death is seen as the only escape root which Diouana can take. It is the only thing that makes it impossible for her white employers to continue using and exploiting her labour. This for Hopkins is a serious mark of resistance and rebellion on the

part of Diouana. Hopkins observes that Diouana was separated from her very nature as a person, the physical world around her, and her family. Hopkins refers to such isolation as rupture; the act of having been separated from one's cherished environment or situation.

Hopkins' view establishes that Diouana was being used and exploited by her white employers and sought to liberate herself by committing suicide. This literature though focuses on resistance, it takes on a subtle Marxist viewpoint. It shares the Marxist idea of the proletariat being the one to stand against and fight to extinguish exploitation (Ball, 1995). The literature gives further indication that a Marxist perspective underpins Diouana's being. Hopkins provides two essential concepts which I deem workable ingredients for a Marxist analysis of *La Noire de...*; the concept of resistance and the concept of rupture. Based on the said concepts, the thesis seeks to evaluate Diouana's journey throughout the film, whilst determining how these themes compare with the concept of historical materialism. By so doing, the thesis seeks to build an alternative perspective of Hopkins' concerns, by subjecting the author's "resistance" theme to the Marxist analysis of a proletariat's effort to extinguish exploitation. Again, Hopkins' concerns for the concept of rupture would be subjected to the Marxist understanding of alienation to determine the extent to which Diouana's stay in France exhibits a Marxist sense of an alienated living condition. Beyond this, another meaning read into the film is that *La Noire de...* is a reflection of a migrant's ordeals in a foreign nation.

Other scholars also focused on the migration of the protagonist in the film and its related implications. Abigail Goldman's (2019) overriding goal

for instance is to investigate the evolving factors that necessitated the migration experience in *La Noire de...*, *Bleu, Blanc Rouge* and *Pieces D'identities*. Since the focus of the study is on *La Noire de...*, I shall focus solely on the ideas Goldman shares about *La Noire de...* Pursuant to this quest, Goldman (2019) on one hand, explores how Ousmane Sembene's film, *La Noire de...*, perceives the migrant's experience from the point of view and experiences of the characters. To do this, Goldman chose films whose characters willingly migrated to Europe and not through any involuntary means as occasioned in the past by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. With particular attention to *La Noire de...*, he observes that financial difficulties from the character's original country of residence are responsible for Diouana's migration to Europe.

The central argument of Goldman's analysis is that the film medium was employed by Ousmane Sembene to illustrate the neo-colonial relationship between Africa and France with the latter's intention to make profit. In support of his view, he adduces evidence from the relationship between Diouana and her employers. He holds that just as during the colonial regime wherein colonizers exploited the resources of the colonized to advance their countries, the end of colonialism birthed a new kind of exploitation. This new form of colonialism was to ensure the exploitation of the less developed countries, of which domestic work is inclusive. In the film, when Diouana moves to France, she never receives her wages for all the work he undertakes. When she begins to rebel, she is labelled as an ungrateful person by her employer. Goldman avers that Diouana serviced her employers, yet she benefitted nothing from the servitude. Goldman submits that this action by

Diouana's employers is no different from the extraction of the colonized resources to enrich the colonizer's state at the expense of the exploited economies. Diouana's experience as a migrant who gets exploited by her employers, Goldman notes, was a result of the inequality in society.

Davies Oscherwitz (2015), on the other hand, holds that Diouana's experience foreshadows the experiences faced by some immigrants in the West. Oscherwitz sees the film as an allegorical tale of post-colonialism which attempts to show that after decolonization, the first world countries have resorted to a new form of colonialism. He further argues that the main theme of *La Noire de...* is the exhibition of exploitative relationships found in the employee and employer relationship, between Diouana and Madame respectively. Just as decolonization took away the erstwhile colonizers' power to continue exploiting and subjugating the colonizer, Madame lured Diouana to France so that she (Madame) could continue to assert her controlling power over her (Diouana).

He further adds that the film was politically directed to show that France's prosperity is derived from its exploitation of Africans (France's colonial subjects). He adduces evidence from Diouana's experience with her employers. The juxtaposition of the scene of Diouana's death with the beach scene suggests that Africa has been sacrificed for the prosperity of Europe. Premised on this assumption, Oscherwitz concludes that the film partly reveals to the audience the basis of France's wealth; the exploitation of its colonized Africans. The author is convinced that the presence of exploitation during colonialism and after colonialism is a result of the social classes that exist in the world.

The concerns raised by Oscherwitz's and Goldman's revealing analysis of the film indicate that the order of social classes in society facilitates the exploitation of one party by the other. The literature further explores the nature of exploitation and the very way social classes facilitates exploitation. All these are commendable outputs from the literature under review. Consequently, it provides an insightful basis for engaging crucial Marxist themes such as exploitation and social class relations. In support of the thesis, the study, therefore, seeks to relate these elements (exploitation and social relations) to the senses in which Marxism construes these terms.

Other critics, such as Lieve Spass, believe that the film uses the labour of a domestic servant to highlight the inherent exploitation of such a job. Lieve Spass (1982) explores the issue of politics in the film, *La Noire de...* Spass avers that the story is centred on Diouana, her journey to France, and her consequent suicide. For him, Diouana's journey and death in France can be linked with the Senegalese soldiers who helped France to fight both World War I and II and consequently died. He continues that the political side of the film reveals that the African elites are complicit in this oppression that the Africans faced at the hands of erstwhile colonizers. The evidence for him is glaring in some of the scenes in the film. For example, he cites Diouana's boyfriend as not objecting to Diouana's desire to travel to France to work. This is because since Diouana's boyfriend displays knowledge of the history of Senegal and the pride he takes in being an African and its values as we see African flags and other pictures displayed in his room, one would have thought that he would have vehemently objected but did nothing to discourage when Diouana expresses her desire to go and work in France as a domestic

servant. Again, the scene where the public letter-writer asked the little boy to take off the mask, for Spass, signifies a rejection of African values among the growing era of African literates. The film serves as a critique of both the political and the intellectual class on how they sometimes contribute to ensuring that colonialism flourishes in different forms; albeit unknowingly.

Spass (1982) brings to light the political perspective of *La Noire de...* where African elites are considered as partakers in the neo-colonial affair involving Africans as victims. Spass cites Diouana's boyfriend as the representation of the African elite present in the filmic space who did not oppose Diouana's going to France. I contend that it will be unfair and inaccurate to cite Diouana's boyfriend as the African elite who plays a role in this neocolonial state by not opposing Diouana's journey to France. The reason is that from Diouana's comment after she had told the boyfriend of her intent to go to France, one could infer that the boyfriend had always objected to that idea. The evidence lies in Diouana's own words. She says, "He is angry. He's going to say: that's domestic slavery. My mother has agreed, I'll go to France". It is for this reason that I argue that Spass's citation of Diouana's boyfriend as exemplifying African elites as complicit in the neo-colonial era is difficult to agree with. If Spass had cited the conversation between Diouana's employers and their guests regarding the state of Senegal after independence, that would have been, perhaps, much more convincing. This is because the guests' discussion was a tone of confidence in Senghor's occupation of the Presidency. They believe that once Senghor was in power it was safe for the French to make a return to Senegal. An argument from this line would have been appropriate in advancing his argument of how African

elites (For instance Senghor and his government) play a role in the neo-colonial affair. The challenge for the current study is to dovetail the conversation from neo-colonialism to where it all starts: the means of production.

Aamna Mohdin (2016) and Lyell Davies (2015) applaud Ousmane Sembene for having made a great introspection of his country in the film, *La Noire de...* concerning the aftermath of Senegal's independence and the impact of colonialism on the formerly colonized. This depiction was made possible through the story of a Senegalese worker (Diouana) who moves to France in search of a better life. The film reveals some effects of colonialism on the formerly colonized Africans. Some Africans feel that it is best to look to the West for a better future instead of their home country and that is why they migrate abroad. So, Ousmane Sembene uses his main character, Diouana, to show some of the ordeals the indigenous Africans had to go through at the hands of a former colonizer. The film serves as a kind of alarm that forewarns the African of a likely danger that awaits him or her to think of the West as a "promised land". Mohdin postulates that even though inhabitants are now no longer slaves in Senegal, they will continue to be recognized as colonial objects in the colonizer's nation. The reason is that, according to Mohdin, within the colonizer's society, Africans are constantly degraded to embody specific stereotypes. He draws out evidence from the film as we follow Diouana to France for a guest to make fun of her and her country regarding how even after colonialism the Senegalese feel unnatural as free men in their own country.

Davies (2015) also points out the traumatic experiences that await migrants in an erstwhile colonizer's land. He argues that migrants are faced with some sense of uneasiness and uncertainty as they try to find their place in a new country. Coupled with this initial state of mind of Diouana, she is bombarded with working conditions that she sees as downgrading in France. It is this experience and trauma that leads to her eventual suicide to gain freedom. Mohdin and Davies aver that the relevance of *La Noire de...* resounds to date even after several decades after the film's release.

This literature reflects on the issues of migration and the predicaments immigrants are faced in a foreign land. It highlights some of the impacts of colonialism on the colonized. It shows how a migrant experiences trauma in a foreign country. This literature further highlights the issue of an existing class differential after decolonization. The idea of class differentials was depicted through race differentiation. The literature further shows how the nature of exploitation takes although colonialism is officially ousted. The victim of exploitation is no longer bound to his slave master, but this is not the only means for one to suffer exploitation. What this study does is further the discourse in terms of illustrating the vulnerability of the working class who owns no means of production in society. Pope John Paul II (2008, p. 11) points out that work is very fundamental to the existence of man. The relevance of work in society is to make life "more humane" for everyone to live. For a better understanding of the issue of work and how it affects human society, particularly the working class, a Marxist analytical approach promises to enrich the substantial message encoded in *La Noire de....* Only the attempt to do so remains untapped.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Historical materialism is a theory propounded by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels following their engagement with the works of George William Fredrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Historical materialism follows from the core prescriptions of dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism rides on two major tenets. The first tenet is that matter is the primary thing that exists (Pals, 2006; Britwum, 2017). Here, matter must not be understood in terms of physical substances. For the Marxist, matter is the way that man produces his basic necessities of life like shelter, food, clothing, etc. (Russell, 1945; Ball, 1995; Fromm, 1967). Secondly, this material base (which consists of matter in the Marxist sense) functions according to the dialectical laws namely: the law of negation of the negation, the law of transformation of quantity into quality, and the law of the interpenetration of opposites (Engels, 2001). The laws of dialectics indicate that things change and that nothing is constant (Trotsky, 1942). The human society is equally subject to the dialectical laws of change. The study of society's evolution is referred to as historical materialism (Stalin, 1938; Helemejko, 2012). In other words, historical materialism is a result of the direct extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the course of human history. Historical materialism is, therefore, a theory that attempts to explain human history and development by looking at the material conditions that underpin human existence (Taylor, 1908; Baur, 2017; Shimp, 2009; Chakrabarti, 2020).

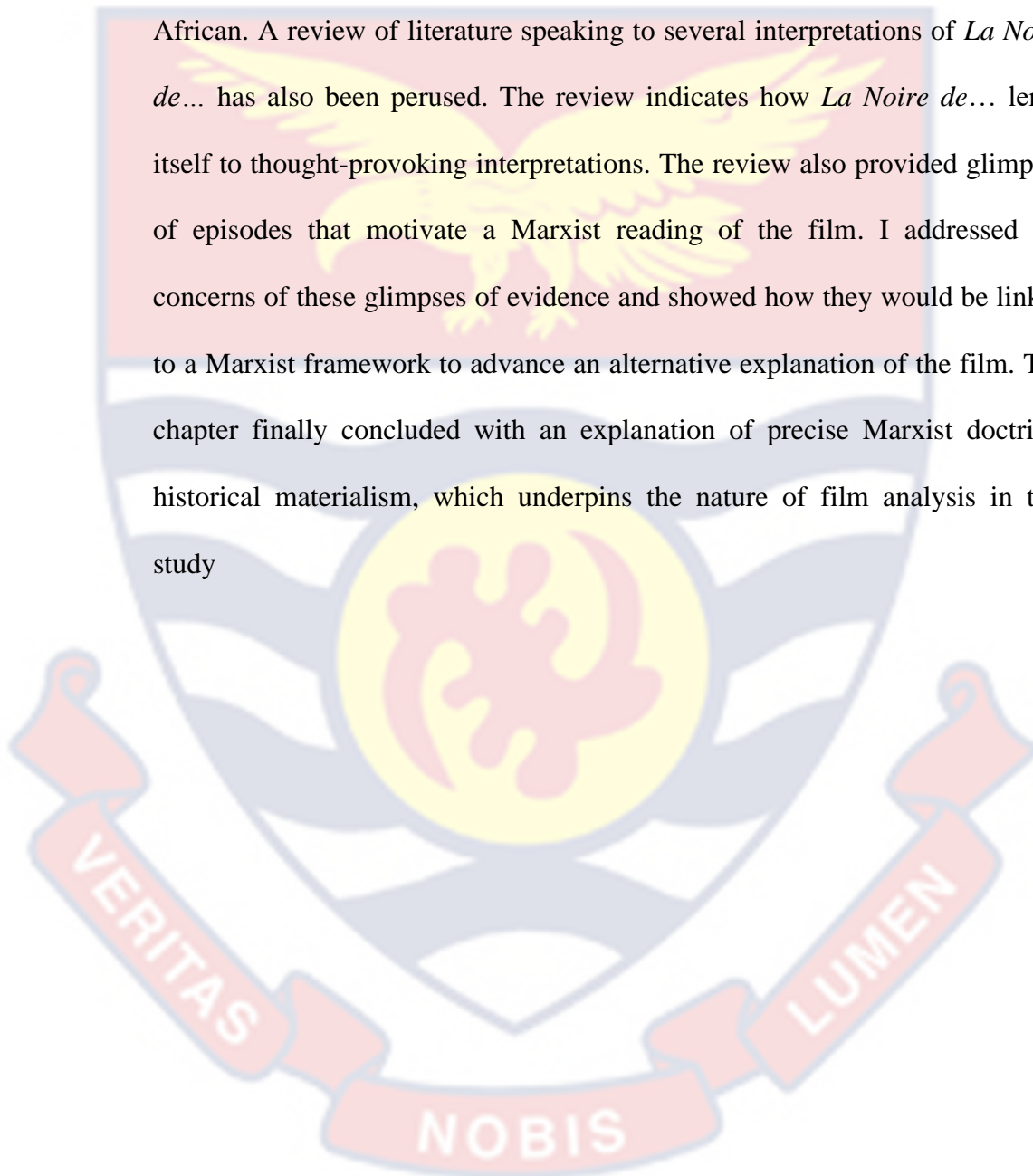
According to this theory, the course of human history is not static, in other words, the history of man changes. The nature of the factor that propels the evolution of society is the contradicting or opposing relationship that exists

between the owner of the means of production and the labourer owing to exploitation of the latter (Marx & Engels, 1996; Shimp, 2009; Boucher, 2012). This is to say that the existing human society at a given time (thesis) attracts its opposing elements (antithesis). A revolutionary struggle ensues between the thesis and antithesis and a new face of social relations emerges, a synthesis for that matter (Malik, 2019). The drive that propels the change in society, contradiction, evolves from hunting and gathering to communalism, to slavery to feudalism, to capitalism, and consequently towards socialism. Based on this established theory of society's evolution, the study shall interpret the characters together with their existential conditions and the unfolding plot from the historical materialist frame of reference.

In the context of applying historical materialism, the study deploys the concept of film as a microcosm of reality as conceptualized by Petrie and Boggs (2012). This means that film in the remit of this study mirrors the larger human condition that characterizes our day-to-day activities. Consequently, in this study, the setting and characters of *La Noire de...* are adopted as representing the existential conditions of the human world, a mirroring of the socio-economic order of the larger society. As I intimated, historical materialism underscores the progression of society within a complex relation that exist among productive forces, consciousness and labour power. However, these forces have broader context of application that is not exhaustively captured by the plot of the film. To bridge this gap, the concept of film as a representation of a larger reality enables the interpretation to be carried by generalizing the plot, characters, characterization, dialogue, etc as representing the broader context of social relations within the society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have underscored the various arguments put forth to define African cinema and provided the various challenges associated with the definitions, and thus put forth a projected definition of what makes a cinema African. A review of literature speaking to several interpretations of *La Noire de...* has also been perused. The review indicates how *La Noire de...* lends itself to thought-provoking interpretations. The review also provided glimpses of episodes that motivate a Marxist reading of the film. I addressed the concerns of these glimpses of evidence and showed how they would be linked to a Marxist framework to advance an alternative explanation of the film. The chapter finally concluded with an explanation of precise Marxist doctrine, historical materialism, which underpins the nature of film analysis in this study



CHAPTER THREE

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF AFRICAN CINEMA

Introduction

The substance of this chapter is concerned with the methods for carrying out this research as well as the various methods by which African cinema has been studied. As regards the method of undertaking this research, I present in this chapter a detailed account of how the research is to be conducted. Once the method for carrying out the research has been fully addressed, I also explore the various approaches to the study of African cinema.

Concerning the ways that African cinema has been studied, after perusing the available literature, I have identified seven major approaches to the study of African Cinema. The approaches include (i) cultural, (ii) thematic, (iii) regional, (iv) genre, (v) cultural deconstructivism, (vi) third cinema, and (vii) postcolonial. In furtherance of the discourse on approaches, the chapter seeks to enrich the debate by constituting the Marxist theory as an interesting alternative framework for studying particularly African cinema. To be sure, Marxism is not a new approach to the world of African literature.

Several African novels have been explored from a Marxist perspective by numerous scholars (Sacks, 1978; Udumukwu, 1991; Anawi, 2009; Asika, 2014; Ogundokun, 2014; Mwetulundila, 2016; Adeniyi, 2017; Adesina, 2017; Tarhamba, Osori & Envoh, 2018; Nkalubo, 2021). Some of these African novels include *Things Fall Apart*, *Devil on the Cross*, *Petals of Blood*, *God's Bits of Wood*, *Matigari*, *Wizard of the Crow*, *Violence*, and *Blood in the Creek*, among others. What seems lacking however is the utilization of Marxist

reading as a constitutive framework for analysing particularly African cinema. The chapter, therefore, exploits the opportunity of the neglect to explain the application of the various approaches and to demonstrate how Marxist reading, in particular, lends itself to the study of African cinema today.

Research Method

The research method to be employed for the study is qualitative. The approach to advancing the search would be focused on analysing a text, otherwise called textual analysis. The study is also descriptive in nature as it aims at describing (Marxist) events as they occur in the film. As a library-based research, the sources of data collection for the study will be published books, journals, as well as other online publications. Taken as a form of text, the primary source of information for this study is *La Noire de...* Also, other primary texts involved are the Marxian literature: ideologies that can safely be attributed to the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Secondary materials to be used for the study include articles, journals, books, internet sources, etc., that will be relevant to the subject matter under study. Instruments to be employed in the collection of data include observation and dispositions typical of critical thinking skills; analysis, evaluation, interpretation, synthesis and explanation.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data will be used to get the needed information and to achieve the objectives set out for the study. The primary data constitutes the film (*La Noire de...*) and Marxian literature which will be used to gather data for this study by way of analysis. By analysis of the film, I mean breaking down the whole of the film into its various components in order to make meaning.

Focusing on the characterization of the main characters in the film, the current study intends to find out what Marxist class stratifications are present in *La Noire de...*, what modes of production is or are presented in *La Noire de...*, how does the mode of production shape the consciousness characters in *La Noire de...* and finally how the mode of production in *La Noire de...* traverses from one qualitative state (of exploitation) to another qualitative state (of emancipation)?

The secondary data, particularly the existing interpretations and analysis of the film, shall be evaluated. From here, I will then apply argumentation to generate criticisms and appraisals needed to support the Marxist interpretation that the study aims at advancing. After this is done, I will then put out an interpretation of the film following its juxtaposition with the Marxist themes. Finally, the analysis of the current study will be explained to show how the basic elements of film can be said to be quintessentially Marxist in orientation.

Data Analysis

Concept analysis will be used in analysing the data. Here, the data (film) shall be broken down into the individual elements of the film in order to arrive at the meaning of the whole film by focusing particularly on character and characterization. This is to get a general sense of how the basic components of the film come together to provide a meaningful plot to the viewer. The focus is to use tools of logical argumentation to explore how these basic elements of film in their separation tie in with the themes of Marxism.

Understanding the methods African Cinema has been studied

Regional approach

One of the several approaches to studying African cinema is the regional approach. One of the scholars of this approach who readily comes to mind is Manthia Diawara. The evidence of this allusion can be found in *African cinema: Politics and culture*. In this book, Diawara discusses the nature of African cinema from regional perspectives as well as showing how the different countries in Africa experienced economic and political semblances in film production and distribution. Vitus Nanbigne (2011) submits that Diawara chose to study African cinema mainly because of the continent's tremendous cultural diversity. Paul Willemen (1992) claims that Diawara's book, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, is the very first attempt in English that presents a complete review of the historical issues and difficulties of African cinema. The area of interest within Africa that occupied Diawara in the writing of this book forms the organization of his work.

The regional basis is focused on the Anglophone, Lusophone, and Francophone areas albeit with a special chapter on Zaire, the former Belgian colony. The study of these three primary categories is done in conjunction with the filmmakers' experiences and conditions. Each region is divided into two sections. The first is the pre-independence epoch, while the second is the post-independence age. One important aspect of Diawara's book is that the categorization of film activities among the three zones is done in terms of each region's distinct political, cultural, and aesthetic predispositions. Nanbigne (2011, pp. 26-27) asserts that Diawara's approach is to construct some kind of historical context from which the politics and filmmaking in Africa can be

comprehended, with a particular reference to financial issues as well as film distribution and how these factors have affected African filmmaking. One observes that the overall periodization that emerges in the book makes visible the distinction of three stages in the developmental phase of African cinema:

(a) the colonial period (b) the transitional period (c) the period beginning with the foundation of Federation Pan-Africain de Cinéates (FEPACI) and the achievement of Festival Panafricain du Cinema de Ouagadougou (FESPACO).

Diawara provides a historical trajectory on the development of African cinema in the Anglophone regions. He acknowledges that cinema was alien to Africans. Film or cinema as a medium of communication is a very powerful tool of persuasion that was introduced by Europeans to the African continent. The motivation on the part of the European to introduce this audio-visual medium to the African continent was to 'civilize' the 'uncultured' African (Tcheuyap, 2011). This line of justification is not convincing because their so-called 'civility' was rather a pretext to exploit and colonize the Africans. One of the things that Europeans introduced to Africa was cinema. Cinema, as a persuasion technique, was used to support or ensure the continuation of colonialism, as well as to legitimize the need for the act (Ukadike, 1990). So, during the colonial period, Diawara emphasizes, the type of cinema that was developed at the time was largely propaganda films, and educational films (these educational films were primarily used to instil European culture in Africans as well as establish the groundwork for a neo-colonial system even during post-independence).

This idea above is also corroborated by Nanbigne (2011) who mentions some propagandistic films that tried to venerate British. This was done by also highlighting the benefits of British rule for its subjects. Nanbigne adds that the real motive of these propaganda films was to enlist Africans to the frontlines of the World Wars. Films like *Attack on the Chinese Mission*, *The Sneaky Boer*, and others are notable examples. Diawara continues the conversation about colonial cinema with a look at post-colonial cinema. He analyses the nature of filmmaking in the Anglophone regions between the 1980s and the 1990s, as well as the role of indigenous people in the region's development and eventual collapse. Because Diawara highlights the issue of a perceived distinction between Anglophone and Francophone film cultures, the next paragraph will throw light on the cinema of the Francophone regions.

Diawara provides a historical background on the nature of cinema in Francophone Africa. He explores the impact of French assistance and the kind of funding for film production and distribution in Francophone Africa. Diawara provides a comprehensive overview of the French Ministry of Cooperation's activities, including their accomplishments and shortcomings. He agrees that there has been a wider range of artistic outcomes after 1963, partly as a result of the operations of the French Ministry of Cooperation, where a significant number of Black African films have been made by Francophone Africans. Diawara cites the case of British colonies where the British took a proactive approach to the development of African cinema by permitting some sort of filmmaking to take place but under strict supervision. The French, on the other hand, appear to have taken a repressive approach that

attempts to prohibit Africans from making films anywhere other than France. Following independence, this strategy eventually crumbled.

The French now resorted to other types of reactive techniques. One example is the Consortium audio-visual Internationale (CAI), a non-profit organisation tasked with producing newsreels on behalf of African countries. This organisation provided the French some leverage, an opportunity to reinstate another form of colonial control. Diawara attacked this avenue for neo-colonialism that limited the postproduction of films and newsreels to the control of France. This, he claims, has subjected African cinema to the demands of French technocrats, with no Africans participating in the postproduction process. Despite the flaws of the organization, the ministry enabled a significant number of African filmmakers to thrive. The filmmakers that survived helped form a body that became recognised as FEPACI and also aided in the establishment of the Ouagadougou film festival, FESPACO. He applauds governments in Senegal, Ghana, and Burkina Faso for attempting to fix some neo-colonial problems in order to ensure a type of nationalisation of their cinemas.

Unlike in Anglophone and Francophone African countries where cinema was addressed during and after colonialism, there was no notable cinema in Lusophone African regions prior to their liberation fight. The only time film was mentioned was for two reasons: propaganda and erotica. When the Lusophone African countries gained independence, they lacked trained filmmakers, filmmaking infrastructure, film technicians, etc. They had to build their cinema from scratch. Unlike the Francophone and Anglophone African countries, which had gained a significant amount of knowledge in filmmaking,

technicians, and film infrastructures to enable them to continue making films, the Lusophone African countries had no choice but to build their own cinema from the ground up.

Reading Diawara's work gives the impression that the author is concerned with more than just passing on knowledge to the audience. Diawara, in my opinion, comes across as an activist who is enthusiastic about the advancement and growth of African films and offers realistic solutions, particularly policy ideas, for the future. Suffice it to say that the regional approach provides a historical context for the nature of filmmaking and informs us of where we are coming from as a people. This is extremely important, but it leaves room for a greater appreciation and understanding of the motivations of African filmmakers for the purpose of rigorous involvement in cinema production throughout the post-independence era. In other words, there is a need to understand the content and motivation of the early films produced. The avenue that sought to further this course is the deconstruction approach

Socio-Political Deconstruction approach

Frank Ukadike approaches African films through the lens of deconstructivism. Ukadike's seminal work, *Black African Cinema*, maps out a broad area for study which traces the history of African film production from colonial times to the postcolonial era, whilst examining the themes and cinematic techniques of selected films and explaining their social, political, and economic significance.

Ukadike has taken a counter-hegemonic attitude towards African films. Practically, almost all of his publications on the subject (African films) are focused on how the European unfavourable image of Africans has had a significant impact on the representation of Africans on the screen. To begin his deconstruction agenda, Ukadike began with the history of how Europeans began to represent Africa. This knowledge is found in his article, *Western film images of Africa: Genealogy of an ideological formulation*. He asserts that the negative and stereotypical portrayal of Africans predates the invention of film. Cruel distortions were prevalent in the creative works of European writers and academics alike. Among the European writers who have misrepresented Africans in their writings are Henry Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Daniel Defoe, etc. The motive of the Europeans was to inform the world that as Ukadike writes, “Colonialism was a valuable philanthropic ‘civilizing mission’ inspired by the necessity to stamp out ignorance, disease, tyranny, and usher in the ‘best’ cultural patterns...” (Ukadike, 1990, p. 31).

Eventually, several of the literary works which represent the African people were adapted for the cinema. According to Ukadike, this was the beginning of African misrepresentation in films. For instance in the film *Birth of a Nation*, one observes the presence of black characters in the film first, although the film had no original black characters. The characters seen as black are whites who have been painted black. The black characters were portrayed as ignorant and sexually aggressive around white women, animalistic, and even portrayed as unworthy of having any human rights. These depictions in the film reflect the oppressive nature that was promoted and embraced by many white Americans concerning the black race. Other

films that perverted African traditions and portrayed Africans as savage, ignoble, barbarous, and inferior, include *Congorilla*, *Tarzan of the Apes*, *Men of two Worlds*, *Saunders of the River*, *Day Break at Udi*, etc. Consequently, from the 1960s when Africans started to make their films, Ukadike (1994) says that the emerging films of the late 1960s represent a reactionary effort in response to the daunting portrayal of themselves (Africans) that they encountered under colonialism.

Ukadike (1994) states that despite the hegemonic, skewed, and false narratives pushed by Europeans, the African film form after independence is evolving and adapting its own distinctive film forms in terms of story, philosophy, and aesthetics to fit African cultures. Ukadike avers that films made by Africans in the 1970s are typified as films in search of an African language and themes, whereas films made in the 1980s expanded on the themes of the 1970s and saw the materialisation of more aesthetically pleasing films while at the same time demystifying colonial distortions and misrepresentation of Africans during the colonial epoch. For this reason, Ukadike (1993, p. 43) avers that following the historical and political circumstances that birthed African films, Black African cinema has taken shape as an "... 'alternative' cinema, which, simply put, deconstructs dominant cinemas by expressing views of people who are considered as the 'other' ”.

Ukadike observes in his exploration of the Anglophone and Francophone filmmaking arenas that a few filmmakers had been successful owing to their passion for the medium and their hard work. This action ensured the sustenance of the development of filmmaking in Africa. That

notwithstanding, there are two most devastating problems faced by African filmmakers: financial and technical. In light of the fact that these are critical issues, Ukadike believes that “black African cinema has attained aesthetic and artistic maturity” and he is very optimistic that African filmmakers now employ western techniques “to forge their own cinematic language and style” (Ukadike, 1994, p. 4).

Ukadike’s deconstructivist approach raises an important awareness aimed at correcting the erroneous image of Africa as projected onto screens by Europeans. In short, this approach pays attention mainly to the past for the purpose of demystifying certain false ideas. One question remains so long as this approach is concerned. Must we focus our attention on the past alone? I argue that it is good to look into the past. However, there is also the need to focus on one’s current circumstances as well in order to forge forward for progress and development. Perhaps the postcolonial approach makes a better attempt at this (focusing on the current situation).

Postcolonial approach

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2007) hold that the term “Postcolonialism” was first used by historians to mark the period after the Second World War when some states were referred to as postcolonial states. “Postcolonial” here also designates the period after colonization. They further note that it was during the late 1970s that literary critics began to use this term to discuss the various effects of colonization on the formerly colonized. From the explanation of postcolonialism by Ashcroft, et al, it is obvious that the nature of filmmaking in Africa will definitely be informed by

the colonial experience with the focus of the emerging films aiming often at anti-colonial issues.

Following the above definition of postcolonialism, it then suggests that Postcolonial films reflect the African experience with the colonial oppressors as well as the aftermath of colonialism. According to Nanbigne (2011), the objective of these postcolonial films is to establish a difference in the way that both the Africans and colonialists express their culture and politics. These films frequently depict a somewhat return to the African past as exemplified in *Sankofa*. Stephen Zacks (1995, p. 13) observes that the nature of films within the post-independence era which focuses on efforts to “review precolonial African conditions in relation to post-colonial problems” has only one purpose at heart. It is to create a “distinctive African film language”. He arrives at this conclusion following a comparative analysis of the approaches and categorizations suggested by both Manthia Diawara and Teshome Gabriel.

On films that highlight the African colonial past as well as the aftermath circumstances, Mhando and Tomaselli (2009, pp. 30-31) call it the “Cinema of difficult Dialogues”. They have classified these films into several categories with examples. They include films that reflect the colonially imposed conflict of wars which are exemplified in films like *Camp de Thiaroye*, *Guimba*, *Sarrouinnia*, etc. Another category is what they refer to as films that are reflective of the slave experience such as *Sankofa*, *West Indies*, *Asientos*, etc. The subject of genocides in Africa as well as its accompanied traumatic experiences is one of the categories of postcolonial films highlighted by Mhando and Tomaselli. Examples of films cited to support this category include *100Days*, *Lumumba*, etc.

Although the Postcolonial perspective may overlap with the deconstruction approach, the postcolonial approach exudes its own unique ways. This is because it goes beyond deconstructionism to tackle issues of capitalism and neo-colonialism. This notion is corroborated by Zacks (1995) who submits that postcolonial films also attempt to fight neocolonialism and make known the ways by which capitalist ideas are represented. Films that interrogate the postcolonial state of Africa particularly capitalism and neo-colonialism are exemplified in the works of filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene who is very particular and critical of the African postcolonial societies. For some critics, African postcolonial films are in effect, a contradiction mainly because of the usage of a Western and European mode of expression (cinema).

Although cinema is a non-African invention, Africans saw it to be an effective, powerful, and forceful product of technology that has the ability to condition the thought process of its audience, and communicate the African experience while at the same time countering the negative portrayal of African by the Europeans (Langford, 2001; Emelobe, 2009). This explains why Africans adapted cinema as a medium of expression. Zacks (1999) observes that in spite of the fact that postcolonial films were mainly targeted at capitalist and neo-colonial resistances to Western ideologies, the postcolonial African films are in a state of evolution where it is moving away from ideological restriction and African essentialism to being influenced by the dictates of Western film styles which will require other means to approach its appreciation.

Around the 1990s, the political situation in Africa was dominated by problems such as democracy, human rights, and gender issues, particularly those affecting women, the environment, and so on (Haynes, 1999). According to Jonathan Haynes, these are challenges that easily capture the attention of Western benefactors monetarily where neo-colonialism and imperialism are given life. He goes on to say that this makes it nearly impossible to address issues of cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism directly. He further explains that international donors' actions have influenced political resistance to take up various forms, even at the grassroots level, where it manifests itself in everyday life. He further said that cinema in Africa has been fairly successful since the end of colonialism. He blames Africa's economic collapse as well as the failures of African states for being responsible for the state of African filmmaking, particularly on filmmakers' ability to reach their own local market.

Jonathan Haynes (1999) observes that even films touted as the most successful in Africa are sometimes riddled with paradoxes. He names Ousmane Sembene as a suspect in that regard. In his film *Guelwaar*, for example, Sembene "argues" against foreign aid. However, the film's credits reveal a number of Western governmental and non-governmental groups which is indicative of Sembene's acceptance of foreign aid. On the subject of soliciting funding from the West to finance his films, Ousmane Sembene was not unconcerned with the criticism levelled at him for receiving foreign funding from the very people he supposedly criticises in his films. He emphasises that the support he receives from foreigners, particularly the French, has had no impact on the political tone of his works and that it is the

lack of funding in Africa that puts him in that position to seek funds where it is available (Virtue, 2014).

It should be noted that while some postcolonial films addressed capitalism and neo-colonialism, others were pensive in nature. During this time, some films sought to examine and interrogate the newly independent African states' present predicament as well as their sociocultural conditions. Some of the themes that can be found in the extant postcolonial films include a clash between tradition and modernity, the corruption and insensitivity of African leaders, the misuse of political authority, etc. Films that readily come to mind that highlight the aforementioned themes are *Heritage Africa*, *Finye*, *Guimba*, *Xala*, *Le Mandat*, etc. For instance, the film *Heritage Africa* can be said to reflect the theme of tradition and modernity. *Heritage Africa* chronicles the life of a black district commissioner. This man was born an African and bore a symbolic African name which is Kwesi Atta Bosomefie. "Kwesi" in Ghanaian parlance refers to a male child born on Sunday. Atta also means one who is a twin whereas "Bosomefie" means an illustrious ancestor who has been born again. Due to an apparent definition of civilization by the colonialist, he anglicises his names "Kwesi" to "Quincy", "Atta" to "Arthur", and "Bosomefie" to "Bosomfield". The main character's adaption to the colonialist way of life becomes an embodiment of what Frantz Fanon refers to as the colonized intellectual (Fanon, 2004). The main character's adaptation to the colonial way of life however comes at a cost. It leads him to a stage of alienation from his culture and people including his family. When things finally dawned on him, he reclaims his African heritage including his traditional names before giving up his ghost.

On the theme of corruption and insensitivity, they are exemplified in Ousmane Sembene's film, *Le Mandat*. This film explores the cultural and political situation of a newly independent African state after inheriting political office from the erstwhile colonial oppressors. The newly formed African governments are presented in the film as incompetent and disinterested in the situation of ordinary individuals, particularly the vulnerable people in society. As the government is mandated to safeguard and defend the citizens' interests, they use their portfolios to loot and exploit the state. Other films that also highlight the incompetence, corruption, and insensitivity of the African government include *Zan Boko*, *Xala*, *Guimba*, etc

From the general perspective, the post-colonial approach derives from special devotion to politics and economics. To be precise, the approach is, to the very core, a critique of not only the West, but also the social, political, and economic situations in Africa. Evidently, the approach lays its focus solely on the former colonial oppressors and how Africans themselves are contributing in many ways to impede the continent's development. The approach is an eye-opener for Africans to look both within themselves and without as the calls for the liberation of Africa deepens. While the postcolonial method is useful for studying African cinema, it is silent on unearthing the richness of cultural heritage, and the subsequent role culture plays in the formation of African cinema. The culture of the African people is one of the unique forms of aesthetics in films. Subsequently, a conversation began to fill the supposed neglect. The product of such discourse emerged as another orientation to studying African cinema. Its' name is the cultural approach.

Cultural studies approach

This method focuses on the cultural foundation and scope of African cinema studies, notably on cinematic forms and aesthetics. In support of this viewpoint, Martin Mhando (2000) claims that African film is not a monolithic concept. He holds that there are cultural disparities among the continent's nation-states. Mhando considers culture to be an equally significant way to study African cinema, despite the fact that it has hitherto been understudied. He suggests that attempts should be made to discern tendencies in African cinema that are not limited to colonial language groupings such as Anglophone and Francophone Africa, but rather to construct culturally distinctive cinematic inclinations. Nanbigne (2011) highlights African oral tradition as the cultural specificity suggested by Mhando as the way forward for the study of African cinema. Mhando goes on to criticise the Eurocentric perspective with which African cinema has been addressed. Western critics have frequently addressed African cinema from a thematic standpoint. Whereas this thematization has frequently been centred on the character of the didactic films produced under colonialism rather than on artistic and aesthetic approaches. Mhando suggests that African cinema be studied through the prism of certain cultural tendencies. To this point, it appears that Mhando's suggestion of a cultural approach to the study of African cinema, which focuses on shifting away from Eurocentric readings of African films and instead focuses on the distinctive cultural context of films, points to a sort of deconstructionism. Mhando's purpose with this deconstructionism is to put an end to Western conceptions of African culture, just as Ukadike does in his various works. Mhando's approach appears to overlap with Ukadike's

approach, but Mhando's cultural study approach is specifically detailed because it focuses mainly on culture whereas Ukadike's perspectives combined culture and politics.

Mhando emphasises three reasons for his proposed cultural approach (as cited in Nanbigne, 2011). The first argument advanced is that such an approach will emphasise how hegemonic ideas, such as the Greco-Roman dramatic aspects incorporated into films shape cultural experience. He continues that the influence of Western production structures and reception tendencies also determine the path or structures that other cinemas including Africa should take. I have a little reservation agreeing entirely with Mhando that the Western structure and reception determine the path of African film production. I contend that inasmuch as Western ideas may impact African filmmaking, films produced after colonialism did not always follow the same trend as Western films which were largely for commercial purposes.

Ukadike (1990) records that following the end of colonialism, African filmmakers preferred instructive or advocacy films. The goal was to restore African society by reinstating Africans' confidence and heritage which had been obliterated by colonial rulers. As a result, the films of the time were heavily influenced by oral tradition and African storytelling. Some of the elements of oral African tradition and storytelling include characters such as Griots and tricksters, the use of proverbs, myths, indigenous music, etc. Some of these elements can be found in films such as include *Xala*, *Mandabi*, *Borom Sarret*, *Yeelen*, *Yaaba*, *Moolade*, *I told you so*, *No tears for Ananse*, *Zan Boko*, etc All identify themselves through forms such as oral narrative, image

construction, pace and rhythm, and so on, which are frequently unique from the Hollywood approach.

The second argument Mhando makes in favour of the cultural approach to the study of African cinema is one of self-reflexivity. On the subject of self-reflexivity, he refers to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (2014, p. 279) who construes self-reflexivity as “films that in some way foreground the filmmaker, the film’s production, its textual procedures, its intertext, or its reception”. Self-reflexivity is more of an inward-looking examination where the individual begins to question his or her own way of looking at things. To make his point clearer, Mhando used his films, particularly, *Yombayomba*, *Mama Tumaini*, and lastly *Maangamizi* as case studies. He maintains that the self-reflexivity method allowed him to highlight the cinematic inspirations he represents within an ideological setting. In *Yombayomba*, for example, he claims that he portrays Tanzania’s experience with socialism and that he tackled the matter from the perspective of a social realist.

According to Mhando, the final argument for this method is its potential to allow African film to be studied in other fields. Mhando asserts that this approach has the potential to provide other important tools that can be used in analysing other approaches to African films such as semiotics, feminism, and Marxism, among others. Mhando believes that to understand African cinema, it is vital to tie films to social interaction in the environment, historical circumstances, technical advancement, ideas, attitudes, and other concepts held by the African people.

The cultural approach to the study of African cinema as suggested by Mhando is very interesting. First of all, I share in Nanbigne’s (2011) critique

of Mhando where he (Nanbigne) argues that while it is necessary to study African films through a cultural perspective, other elements such as economics and politics are equally significant for the same course. Nanbigne bases his claim on the conditions surrounding the origin of cinema in three countries (Ghana, South Africa, and Algeria). Ghanaian cinema was birthed at a period when Pan-Africanism was being promoted. In South Africa, film was experienced in a political context, whereas in Algeria, film evolved as a political tool. Nanbigne's criticism of Mhando demonstrates that the cultural approach is not the primary driving factor of cinema in various nations, making it an insufficient method for the study of African cinema and hence the need for other approaches to emerge. Lastly, the strength of the cultural approach to the study of African cinema as presented by Mhando's insight is quite amazing because it frees the study of African cinema from the constraints of a relatively fixed approaches by providing the study of African cinema with a plethora of alternative approaches to its study.

Genre Approach

The Genre approach focuses on films designated as belonging to particular genres. Genre films are defined as films that are "based on subjects, themes, or styles that have become familiar because they have been used often" (Petrie & Boggs, 2012, p. 354). Some universal examples of genre films include horror films, film Noir, comedy films, drama, science fiction films, fantasy films, etc. Some evidence has surfaced suggesting the reality of an African-based genre. Proponents of this approach include Martin Mhando and Ferid Boughedir. These two scholars argue that there exists a plethora of

African films that can be grouped according to specific genres based according to the ideology and the style (aesthetics) of the film.

Mhando's examination of the nature of African cinema revealed one style that is distinct in African filmmaking. It is the didactic cinema genre. He dates the origins of this genre back to the colonial era when didactic films were produced for the viewership of the colonized. The didactic film often places the viewer in a receptive mode. During this time, films were specifically designed for Africans as educational mediums where instructions and teachings can be grasped easily by illiterates who need to be taught (Mhando, 2000). Ousmane Sembene's "night school cinema" is among those that have been associated with the didactic genre. According to Nanbigne (2011), the FEPACI also encouraged African filmmakers to use cinema's educational values. As a result, several filmmakers used documentary filmmaking techniques to incorporate aspects of realism appropriate for a classroom experience or context. Mhando (2000) cites Ingrid Sinclair's film *Flame* as an example of a didactic film that elicits a receptive response from the audience.

Away from Didactic film as a genre in African cinema, Ferid Boughedir also brings to light many trends through which African cinema can be classified. Ferid Boughedir has observed that there exist some genres in African cinema which can be grouped by the "theoretical positions of their auteurs", their general impact on the film audience as well as how these films function. Boughedir identified about six tendencies within African cinema. They include political, moral, cultural, commercial, self-expressive, and narcissistic intellectual trends (as cited in Zacks, 1995; Nanbigne, 2011). He

characterizes the Political trend as a genre within African cinema as films that reflect the goal of awakening the consciousness of the African people to fight for a collective purpose. Ousmane Sembene is one director who comes to mind. The themes of Ousmane Sembene's films are mostly political in nature.

His films attempt to raise awareness among African audiences about societal injustices and the necessity to combat the mechanisms that perpetuate such injustices.

Ousmane Sembene is known to have made a strong statement about the political aspect of his films, as well as their intended purpose. He says "I am not trying to make cinema for my buddies or for a limited circle of specialists; what I am interested in is exposing problems of the people to which I belong..." with the motive of raising "...their consciousness..." (Weaver, 2004, p. 135). For example, *Guelwaar* is a film about foreign aid. It attempts to sensitize the African populace about the unworthiness of foreign aid and the need for Africans to look within themselves to see how best they can manage their own affairs. In the last scene of the film, we find children in the foreground tearing open bags of food donations and spilling their content unto the ground; a symbolic denunciation of foreign aid. *La Noire de...* is also been recognized by some film critics as one that aims at sensitizing the African populace on the ills of neo-colonialism (Virtue, 2014; Ellovich, 1977; Kumar, 2017; Oscherwitz, 2015). Other films that drive similar agendas include *Ceddo*, *Emitai*, *Soleil O*, etc.

Another trend noted by Boughedir in African cinema is the moralist trend. This approach aims to depict a type of short-sighted political analysis that individualises the African society's predicament. Filmmakers in this

category have a tendency to attack the unpleasant aspects of their society without seeking to analyse the root cause of the societal problem. Films that fit this category frequently rely on an individual's benevolence towards society. They believe that it is only the individual who has to change, not the existing societal systems. They believe that social institutions have little bearing on the disintegration of morality. According to Boughedir, these films focus on "sacrificial lambs" and what Shaka (1994, p. 82) describes as "westernised young women in wigs and mini-skirts" who after going down a bad path, lead all those who imitate them into cultural and ethical vilification. When watching these films, the audience is put in place as a high moral individual. From this position of an elevated scale in terms of morality, the individual is influenced to laugh at morally corrupted characters in the film.

The film *Baks* is a typical example that belongs to the moralist genre. *Baks* is, without a doubt, the first African film to address the issue of street children and narcotics. It chronicles the story of Idrissa, a defiant young man who drops out of school and joins a group of thugs who live on Dakar's beaches. He becomes estranged from his family and is "adopted" by his new peers who introduce him to thievery and narcotics. To complement his sense of belongingness to the new association, Idrissa changes his name to "Boy Idi". His parents become disappointed in Boy Idi and what he had become. So, Boy Idi's mother contacts the police, and an investigator sets out to track down the gang; a clear indication of despising wrong moral values. Some other films that fit this category include *Karim*, *Lambaaye* by Mahama Johnson Traore, etc.

The commercial genre is another trend that Bougedhir identified in African cinema. He defines this genre as films that concentrate on entertaining the audience by selling emotions such as laughter, love, terror, violence, and so on. According to Bougedhir (as cited in Shaka, 1994), the filmmaker never admits that their work is designed to be commercial. These films conceal themselves beneath concerns of nationalism, moralism, and even satire. This tendency's structure frequently imitates the established box-office hits of Hollywood films. *Pousse Pousse* is a Cameroonian film directed by Daniel Kamwa, which is similar to the *Romeo and Juliet* story. *Pousse Pousse* highlights a concrete social practice within traditional African societies, particularly the issue of the practice of dowry. It seems very strategic that the director chooses comedy in addressing the motive of the film. The film is centered on Pousse Pousse, a tricycle driver, who wants to marry Rose. Pousse-Pousse ends up spending all of his life savings to pay the usual dowry to his demanding future father-in-law, Daddy Besseke, because the dowry was continually being raised by his father-in-law. Clearly, Daddy Besseke is positioned as the character who abuses the norm of dowry. This is because the greed of the to-be father-in-law knows no bounds. On the day the wedding was to take place, Daddy Besseke abducts his own daughter. One may also look up to Eddie Ughomah's *the Mask* as a notable example with special box-office referenced to the James bond films.

Another genre described in African cinema is the cultural trend. Films falling under this umbrella focus on re-examining African cultures in contemporary times, particularly in the aftermath of colonialism. Films belonging to this particular genre are not so much focused on glorifying

African folklore. Their main motive is an attempt to restore the way of life and thoughts of the African people that conform with the ideas of the general population. Here, Filmmakers frequently blend a critique of what is often considered a bad tradition with a truly accurate assessment of what the general public will regard as the ideal way of life. This is what Souleymane Cisse tries to do with *Muna moto*. It tells of the ill-fated destiny of two lovers. *Muna moto* attempts to criticize some aspects of African culture. The film portrays the love story of Ngando and Ndomé. It is Ngando's desire to marry Ndomé. However, Ndomé's family insists that the traditional dowry be first paid. Sadly, Ngando is impoverished and incapacitated to carry out the custom of settling Ndomé's dowry. Ndomé ultimately becomes pregnant and gives birth to Ngando's child. According to village tradition, Ndomé ought to marry a man capable of paying her dowry. The village folks agree that Ndomé should marry Ngando's uncle, who has three sterile women already. Out of anguish, Ngando takes Ndomé hostage on the day set for the marriage to take place; indicating clearly that post-colonial Africa offers Africans the opportunity to relook at certain traditions and practices. Other notable film examples include *Cinq jours d'une vie* by Souleymane Cisse, *Saitane* by Oumarou Ganda, etc.

Again, Boughedir identified self-expression as a genre in African cinema. With regard to films in this category, Boughedir says that their popular recognition is determined more by their form than by their content whether political, cultural, or moral inclination. The key objective of such films is to allow the director to present his or her point of view to the audience as he or she makes a film employing a particular subject matter as the pretext. These films are frequently considered to satisfy Western film critics while

failing to captivate African film audiences (Shaka, 1994). Timité Bassori reveals in *Twenty-five black filmmakers* that with his film *La femme au couteau*, he brings to the fore his personal experience and other observations in life and the subject matter he employs as the pretext that allows him to express himself is the issue of African tradition at a crossword in a period of modernity.

La femme au couteau revolves around an unidentified young intellectual who comes home after spending several years in Europe. During his time in Africa, this young man experienced a very strict upbringing. When he returns to Africa, he is unable to balance his European lifestyle with his African traditions. This causes him to have frequent hallucinations of a woman wielding a knife at him. This reoccurring image of the woman with a knife frightens him and prevents him from having sexual relationships with women. He then seeks medical assistance from both traditional practitioners and western practitioners, but to no avail. *Touki Bouki* by Djibril Diop Mamberty is another film that can fall within this category.

The final trend observed is the narcissistic intellectual genre. This genre is often considered a sub-category of the self-expression genre (Zacks, 1995). Boughedir believes that this genre displays an author's subjective opinion. Shaka (1994) defines this category as belonging to the group of filmmakers who have been separated as a result of their engagement with the West and have magnified their personal problems to the level of a national issue. This category of films frequently emphasizes the tension between the past and present. An example of a film belonging to this genre is Daniel Kamwa's film *Boubou-Cravate*.

Boubou-Cravate revolves around Gilbert, a young African diplomat who returns from Europe to his birthplace, Africa. When he returns, he struggles to reconcile his African culture with the European norms he has become accustomed to. Everything in his apartment is of European culture, from kitchen utensils to furniture and even music. The film emphasizes Gilbert's cross-breed culture, which is enhanced through his costume. Gilbert is dressed in a cravate (a French term), which is a necktie with a "boubou"; this is a classic African outfit. In his home, he employs Joseph as a servant. Gilbert, according to Joseph, is a Europeanized black man who has gone away from his African culture. When Gilbert was shown eating mango with cutlery, the way the domestic help stared at him indicated a man who has become estranged from his culture as a result of his involvement with the West. This theme of seeming conflict between tradition and modernity was emphasized by the servant's play of African music in the last scene. Other notable films of this genre include *Les tams tam se sont tus*

It is commendable on the part of Boughedhir to have been able to categorize African films into various patterns other than the universally known genres in film. Genre is only based on a category of films that possess distinctive styles. This means that for a film to belong to a particular classification or style of a sort, it needs to abide by the particular genre's codes and conventions. The genre approach to the study of African cinema focuses on forms other than the central idea or message of African films. This leaves an untapped opportunity to be explored when studying African cinema. It is the thematic approach.

Thematic approach

As the name implies, the thematic approach to the study of African cinema focuses on themes in the study of African films. A theme is the central message or a recurring subject matter that emerges through the interpretation of a literary work (Agyekum, 2013; Resario, Aboagye & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). It should be emphasised that while the thematic approach and the genre approach may overlap in terms of the topics addressed in the films, they differ in significant ways. Nanbigne (2011, p. 37) suggests that for the genre approach critics pay attention to specific “...codes, motifs, narrative techniques that bear similarities and function in similar ways...” within the film, whereas the thematic approach recommends the utilisation of particular matters regardless of the narrative styles and techniques deployed.

Nanbigne (2011) cites the South African film critic Keyan Tomaselli as suggesting that there are multi-dimensional approaches to studying African filmmaking that does not always follow popular Hollywood patterns. Some of the topics he describes as being featured in African films include the dichotomous confrontation between individual and societal obligation, the connection between social rights and dictatorship, corruption within neo-colonial systems, rural community urbanisation, and so on. Beyond the aforementioned aspects, Tomaselli highlights various thematic concerns based on the political affairs and ideologies of African filmmaking to encapsulate subject matters ranging from the portrayal of socioeconomic concerns to insignificant issues about sensuality (Nanbigne, 2011).

Professor Manthia Diawara is another scholar who wades in on the discourse of thematic concerns of African films. In his article *African Cinema*

Today, he proposes three major themes for the appreciation and comprehension of African film. The social realist narratives, a return to the source, and the historical clash between Africa and colonialism are the three major areas. On the social realist narrative theme, Diawara describes it as films that draw on

...contemporary experiences and oppose tradition to modernity, oral to written, agrarian and customary communities to urban and industrialized systems, and subsistence economies. The filmmakers often use a traditional position to criticize and link certain forms of modernity to neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism. From a modernist point of view, they also debunk the attempt to romanticize traditional values as pure and original. The heroes are women, children, and other marginalized groups that are pushed into the shadow by the elites of tradition and modernity (Diawara, 1989, p. 111).

He adds that social realist films employ narrative styles such as melodrama, satire, and comedy in their narrative. This theme, he believes, is the most popular of the three patterns he identified. The reason for this is that it incorporates components of oral tradition such as music, dance, and even theatrical and music stars. He claims that to arouse the audience's interest in the film, the filmmaker turns controversies surrounding elites into jokes, introduces the current fashion trends and city slang, and deals with issues such as polygamy, witchcraft, women's liberation, and contemporary politics,

among others. For instance in the film *Xala*, Ousmane Sembene shows the situation of the new African elites who have taken over the administrative and managerial affairs of the country from the colonialist. As a satirical film, he takes the character El Hadji's curse of impotence following his marriage to his younger wife to symbolize the incompetence of the new African governments following their takeover from the colonialists. Mention can be made of films like *Le Mandant*, *Finye*, *Baara*, *Pousse Pousse*, etc as examples of this category.

The second theme Diawara (1989, p. 115) envisages within African cinema is what he termed "the historical colonial confrontation". Films within this category deal with the confrontation between Africans and their erstwhile colonial oppressors. He suggests that, on the one hand, the majority of African audience's watch these films with pride, and finally, a history of the period is being documented from the point of view of an African. Some European viewers, on the other hand, describe them as controversial, ill-implemented, and reminiscent of the 1960s' nationalistic rhetoric of violence. He lists films such as *Heritage Africa*, *Sarrounia*, *Camp de Thiaroye*, etc as belonging to this category.

Diawara also intimates that historical colonial confrontation films frequently spur film viewers to associate with African folks' resistance to both European and imperial powers. Flora Gomes *Mortu Nega* is undoubtedly a historical confrontation film. *Mortu Nega* is a fictional account of Guinea-Bissau's years of struggle and war for independence and emancipation from the Portuguese. The film depicts the struggle of a lady, Diminga, who journeys to the front lines of the battle with food and other items for her husband. She

witnesses the destruction and dead bodies on the land while searching for her husband. Consequently, the battle for independence was won and was accompanied by widespread drought. Other historical films include *Ceddo*, *Emitai*, *Sambizanga*, etc

The third theme identified by Diawara is the “return to source” As the theme’s name implies, it is expected that films will be predominantly focused on the African culture before their encounter with the Europeans. Diawara cites three major reasons why African filmmakers gravitate toward this direction. They include being less explicit with political messages in films in order to escape censorship, exploring pre-colonial African traditions that have the ability to contribute to today’s challenges, and ultimately searching for a new cinematic language. The primary goal of these films is to justify the existence of an African way of life prior to Africa’s contact with Europe and subsequent colonialism. Diawara explains,

Unlike the films about historical confrontation which are conventional on the level of form, these films are characterized by the way the director looks at tradition.

It is a look that is intent on positing religion where anthropologists only see idolatory, history where they see primitivism...the close up in these films, like most of the narrative devices, serve to inscribe the beauty of characters and their tradition (Diawara, 1989, p. 123).

Gaston Kabore’s *Wend Kuuni* is cited as classic example of this category which depicts the Mossi Empire in all its glory, complete with trading centers. The film also demonstrates that African women did not wait for the advent of

Europeans to begin fighting for their rights. Similar return to source films includes *Yaaba*, *L'exilé*, etc.

Third cinema approach

The term “third cinema” suggests a replication of the term “third world”. The third world, according to Russell (1998) and Shohat and Stam (2014), often refers to those countries outside the power construct of the first and second countries that are considered poor, inferior nations, backward, colonized, and neo-colonized nations emerging from colonial domination. It is therefore accurate for Haynes (1999) to refer to the postcolonial predicament of the colonized people as a third-world situation. Although the third cinema approach may overlap with other approaches to the study of African cinema like the postcolonial approach, there is a seeming thin line between them. In furtherance of the post-colonial approach, third cinema takes combative views against inequalities, unfairness, oppression, etc., and a desire to oppose such inequalities and exploitation. Films of these filmmakers have been recognized then as Third Cinema and their aim is to strive to tackle the dynamics, procedures, and accompanying repercussions of such developments, as well as to engender public interest in a matter.

The use of third cinema in characterizing film originates from the Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino who refer to it as a liberation cinema, which stands in contrast to both first and second cinema styles (Shaka, 1994; Marzano, 2009; Pedregal & Errazu, 2019). In a broader sense, Roy Armes (1987) as cited in Shohat and Stam (2014) defines third cinema as films produced by third world countries. Keyan Tomaselli and Maureen Eke (1995) also define third cinema in a strict sense as a cinema

aimed to fight imperialism and other forms of oppression. It is a cinema that employs a product of first world technology (cinema), localizes, and imbues it with traditions typified as African. Russell (1998) and Ewa Mazierska (2020) agree that third cinema deals essentially with a connection between culture as well as social change and is also opposed to the Hollywood filmmaking style.

The third cinema approach is also recognised as a collection of political tactics that use film to express the realities and hopes of the colonised (Tomaselli & Eke, 1995). This presupposes that third cinema is political in nature because as Shaka (1994) states, a critical look at the nature of third cinema in almost all the available literature on third cinema points to the conception of it as a revolutionary tool aimed at sensitizing the African audience towards the path of a social change. The emergence of third cinema as an alternative method of expression to Hollywood and European filmmaking was prevalent in three continents. These parts include Latin America (where it first emerged), Asia, and Africa (Marzano, 2009). This work dwells particularly on the African experience with the third cinema.

Russell observes that theorists who give conceptions of third cinema frequently attempt to describe it in ways that countries might advance towards politically revolutionizing the thought process of the African film audience. Paul Willems and Teshome Gabriel, according to Sharon Russell (1998), are the two critics who sought to show in a three-phased sequence the journey of African filmmaking from its evolution as an oppressed cinema to the conditioning of cinema where the African has open access to use it the way he deems fit. Third cinema then comes to its own when the supposed unbridled access given to the Africans is used particularly by the Africans to champion

the cause of achieving a revolution. In tracing this development, Willemen and Gabriel both define the first stage as an attempt to imitate the traits that make successful Hollywood films into their own work to achieve similar success. Here, African filmmakers tend to copy the narrative style of Hollywood films and then use those styles to house the films they intend to share with the African populace.

Willemen considers the second stage as the stage of confrontation where a national identity is established as a counter to colonialism. Filmmakers seek an ancient culture to contrast with the present distortions brought about by the colonists. Willemen says that filmmakers who take this route are more prone to idealise the past rather than strive for more authentic cultural manifestations. Gabriel also similarly conceives of the second stage, something he calls the stage of remembrance. He also adds that the stage of remembrance has the potential of falling into the web of romanticizing a false past.

As I remarked earlier, the final stage toward the evolution of African filmmaking is considered the stage of emancipation. The two scholars however disagree relative to how a film should be used in achieving the emancipation sought. For Gabriel in particular, emancipation requires a struggle and is therefore combative. Now, since film is an ideological tool, Gabriel's idea suggests that it must carry a theme of resistance (Nanbigne, 2011). Filmmakers should pay attention to the needs of the ordinary people in society in ways that entice further incitement for insisting on social change. Willemen, however, holds that the third phase should be concerned with films that correctly present the complex social nature of the existing society

(Russell, 1998). Although Gabriel and Willemen's idea of what the third phase should encompass may appear different on the surface, they can be considered as same in spirit. The reason is that both critics might be understood as advocating for a cinema that confronts the challenges of the current world.

From the three stages on the evolutionary path of African filmmaking to its liberation as suggested by Gabriel and Willemen, it is obvious that third cinema films also attempt to confront the changing trends and transformations that impact public discourses. Some of the issues that the third cinema seeks to address include race, class, religion, national integrity, etc. (Marzano, 2009). For instance when we take Ousmane Sembene's film *Moolade*, one realises that the film reflects the dynamic nature of the Senegalese community. In the film, we witness a socio-cultural liberation of girls from female circumcision. Beyond a reminiscing of the past interwoven with elements of modernity, Ousmane Sembene is also criticizing the culture of female circumcision and the abuse of the girl-child. Aside his criticism of the act, he also wishes to invite the African audience, particularly the Senegalese, by drawing their attention to changing trends that are occurring within the community.

Third cinema has however been criticized as no longer serving any good use (Wayne, 2001; Mazierska, 2020). The reason for such a claim is due to the fact that revolutionary ideas were more pronounced following the colonial era and as such after several decades of independence, such revolutionary momentum is very likely to stall. Wayne (2001) however, disagrees because films today can equally be employed as ideological tools to champion a course of action in our society.

The Marxist approach

Although third cinema and Marxism may share similar ideas of a revolutionary drive, they are quite different. The third cinema focuses on issues in society such as anticolonialism, imperialism, tyranny, race, identity, poverty, religion, class, cultural practices, etc. The very issues that third cinema concerns itself with are, in Marxist terms, approached from their fundamental root cause; the very means by which people produce their means of subsistence. The Marxist narrative, therefore, seeks to highlight the conviction that until the evils of society are pursued by primarily interrogating the mode of production within the society, the issues that third cinema seeks to tackle are inconsequential. Marxism aims at addressing the root causes of all these issues within the society and out of which other issues will ultimately be addressed. So, in short, where Marxism conceives of revolution by tackling the very foundations of the ills of society, third cinema approach concerns itself with revolutionizing the supervening superstructures, perhaps, more accurately presented as secondary ills of the society.

Marxism is basically a philosophical ideology propounded by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels. They assert that economic systems, in the end, shape all human relationships and the very systems of operation within communities (Adeniyi, 2017). Human history is regarded as a conflict between two contending economic classes. Marx and Engels argue in their seminal work, the *Communist Manifesto*, that the primary driving force behind human behaviour and history is the production, distribution, and exchange of resources. Marxism deals largely with an analysis of the existential conditions of man within the society particularly on the nature of work by man and its

attendant exploitation by another person (Tyson, 2006). Marxism then highlights how the way man produces his needs, power dynamics within the society together with social institutions, and how they all contribute to perpetuating the exploitation of man by man. With this revelation and understanding of how society has operated and continues to function, the aim of Marxism is to march society from the path of a capitalist society to the direction of the next phase of human society where exploitation is absent and equity prioritized; a socialist society for that matter (Conforth, 1975; Barry, 2009).

What this approach seeks to do is to provide an analysis of African films through the lens of Marxism. The analysis could be carried out in several ways. Some of the themes with which Marxist critics approach literary works are (a) to analyse whether a literary piece reinforces capitalist or imperialist ideals and then proceed to expose and criticize these ideas (b) Critics also look at how the literary text reflects the socioeconomic conditions of the time in which it was set, and what these socioeconomic conditions reveal about the Marxian understanding of the history of class struggle (c) one can also relate the overt meaning of a text to Marxist themes like the transition of one society into another, the revolution, class struggle, the concept of work and exploitation, etc. This way, the critic comes out with a deeper meaning of the film beyond its explicit meaning (Tyson, 2006; Barry, 2009).

In consolidating the relevance of the Marxist approach, it may be prudent to invite Ukadike once again into the conversation. Ukadike urges that any critical examination of African films must confront the reality of African life as it is lived and practised among the people. In achieving this feat, he

urges that the source of the ideas, in analysing anything that is useful to Africans, be it foreign or local, should be a matter of secondary consideration. I have earlier alluded to Kwasi Wiredu's similar concern about the relevance of cross-fertilization of knowledge systems in chapter two. Affecting the same side of the concerns raised, Marxism addresses current African economic issues where people and countries are exploited by capitalists and imperialists. Consequently, a Marxist reading of African films will equally in Ukadike's (1993, p. 15) words "confront the truth of African life...as lived and practised". This is the reason why this current study adopts a Marxist reading of *La Noire de...* The Marxist approach is a critical framework that can explain the day-to-day activities of man and reveal the source of inequality in society as well as the best way to achieve equity.

Conclusion

With related examples, this chapter explained and explored the various approaches to studying African cinema as well as the method for undertaking this research. The study also suggests that the theory of Marxism can be useful to the study of African cinema today since it presents an alternative insight into the dynamics of social work in our current socio-economic dispensation. By opting for a Marxist reading, I do not imply in any way that the previous approaches are irrelevant. I am only suggesting that there is room to serve African cinema with an alternative insightful approach. I want to enrich the discourse on how African cinema could be understood by taking up this chance.

CHAPTER FOUR

A MARXIST READING OF OUSMANE SEMBENE'S FILM *LA NOIRE*

DE...

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis and discussion of *La Noire de...* from a Marxist perspective. The analysis shall be done by focusing particularly on the main characters in the film. Characters in films, although fictional, often represent realities and issues that surround mankind and his or her society (Petrie & Boggs, 2012). The bringing of characters to life through actions and inactions, facial expressions, clothing, dialogue, etc. is known as characterization (Samone, 2017). Directors and authors alike employ characterization as a tool for espousing various themes which often embody the existential conditions of humans. Consequently, in espousing the Marxist underpinning of the film, I shall examine how the lived experiences of the characters reflect a Marxist ideology. In doing so, I shall dwell on unearthing the following salient Marxist themes (i) social class (ii) mode(s) of production; capitalism and socialism (iii) consciousness (iv) class struggle and revolution

Social Relation

Marxism classifies people not according to race, height, income, complexion, gender, religious affiliation, mentality, etc. Marxism understands classes in terms of an economic orientation particularly based on people's relationship with the means of production (Conforth, 1978b, p. 44; Tarhemba, Osori & Envoh, 2018). In Marxism, human beings are recognizable only in their capacity as an occupant of a role in the spectral nexus of property relations. In this way, one is either an owner of the means of production or not

(Taylor, 1908; Pals, 2006). Now, if one owns no means of production, how does the fellow proceed to make a living?

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) describe the proletariat as a modern-day working class person who lives only so as far as he or she finds an owner of a means of production to sell his or her labour power to. In recognition of someone who owns a means of production, Marxism gives the name bourgeoisie and for those that must sell their labour power to the latter to earn a living, Marxism calls a proletarian (Miller, 1995; Ball, 1995; Eagleton, 1976; Tyson, 2006; Marx & Engels, 2010). Thus, to set our analysis rolling, we must first establish such social relations, as it pertains in *La Noire de...* Diouana, the protagonist, is made to tell the beginning story of the world in the film through a flashback at about 11 minutes and 40seconds into the film. To introduce his characters, the director uses the technique of characterization through contrast, one of the most effective approaches to establishing characters.

Characterization through contrast involves the use of entities or elements whose attitudes, behaviours, aspirations, nature, etc. are in contrast with that of the main character (Petrie & Boggs, 2012). The scene establishes a public letter writer sitting at his post and Diouana coming out of a house. From here, the director proceeds to make known the characters through dialogue. A public letter writer queries Diouana immediately after she steps out of the wooden gate of their house. He asks “Diouana, where are you going?”. And Diouana responds: “To look for work”. Diouana’s answer invariably exposes an identity which has an inextricable link to Marxist social class structure.

On one hand, the public letter-writer owns his labour power and tools which constitutes his means of production. In relation to this background, Diouana's identity begins to show up in sharp contrast. Following the Marxist illustration, one must ask two questions to fully grasp the placeholder of Diouana's identity. (I) Does Diouana own any means of production? (II) How does she proceed to make a living? Since Diouana owns no means of production and must proceed to earn a living by selling off her labour power, she unavoidably satisfies the conditions typical of a proletarian.

The life of a proletarian cannot unfold without an antithesis, a corresponding bourgeoisie whose actions are required for instantiating exploitation (Taylor, 1908). Karl Marx & Fredrich Engels (1848, p. 15) point out that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle", precisely between the only classes known to Marxism, proletarian and bourgeoisie. In identifying the bourgeoisie character therefore, the first clue is to look at the antagonist; the one whose aspiration is a struggle against the proletarian. These background clues invariably stand Madame as the best of possible candidates.

There is notable evidence that corroborates Madam's identity as the bourgeoisie. Through Diouana's voiceover narration during that faithful day she finds a job, the same conviction is implied by what is known as "characterization through the reaction of other characters". This form of portrayal is simply understood as how other characters perceive of another person (Petrie & Boggs, 2012). To make it effective, the director ensures that a considerable amount of information about a character is sometimes conveyed through such carriers before the audience is made to experience the character

first-hand (*Ibid*). In this case, the director employs this technique to reveal the identity of Madame through a declaration made by Diouana; “We saw she was looking for a maid” said Diouana at 15minutes and 33seconds into the film. So, from Diouana’s comment, we gather that Madame was looking for hands to combine with her (Madame’s) resources to provide her some services. This has been the principal tool of all who occupy the place of oppressors throughout history, particularly, patrician, lord, guild-master and capitalist (Marx & Engels, 1848). For such an economic relation between the two breeds a situation where, as Nkrumah would say, “one class of citizen (the oppressed) toils and another (the oppressor) reaps where it has not sown”. So within the Marxian class structure, Madame’s ownership of the means of production accords her the identity typical of a bourgeoisie.

Again, an alternative way of picking out the class distinction in the Marxist sense is to study how the main characters use their free time or leisure. Maurice Cornforth (1978b) and Julius Nyerere (1968) submit that in a capitalist society, there is the worker and an idler, corresponding to the proletarian and bourgeoisie classes respectively. Typical of the idler, the Bourgeoisie group does not put their hands to work within the society. Yet, they accumulate wealth by feeding on the output of the working class, oppressing them the more and dominating the workers’ life with more work. The worker has only his or her labour to fall on in order to provide for his or her means of subsistence and as a result, has no time for leisure as the bourgeoisie loiters.

There are about four instances of leisure time that can be deduced from the film to consolidate Madame's cap as a typical idler and hence a bourgeoisie. During Madame's first leisure (9 minutes into the film when the French couple welcomed some guests), she is seen sitting around eating, drinking, and chatting with her friends. Again, 19 minutes into the film, we see Madame merely reading a book. At 20 minutes and 50 seconds into the film, there is another free time where Madame is sitting and chatting with her friends who have come to visit. Another instance of leisure is presented at 22 minutes and 20 seconds into the film. In this scene, Madame and her husband were seen chatting and enjoying some drinks. Shortly following their conversation, they both prolonged their leisure; Monsieur heads to the room to sleep while Madame goes for a walk. Madame uses her leisure to the fullest, a behaviour that is in sharp contrast with the routine of a typical proletarian.

In a sharp contrast, Diouana has no leisure time throughout the times she worked for the French couple. One observes that during all the times that Madame enjoys her leisure, Diouana is always found working. On Madame's first count of leisure, Diouana is seen cooking, cleaning the kitchen, and being at the service of Madame and her guest when they needed anything. On the second count of Madame's leisure, Madame calls Diouana to take the children out and take care of them because perhaps the children were disturbing her (Madame) as she enjoys her leisure reading a book. Again, during Madame's third leisure, Diouana is seen serving Madame's guests and afterward cleaning the kitchen. In the last and final moment of Madame's leisure, Diouana is seen within the shot of the couple's leisure working in the kitchen and later comes to tidy the living room where Monsieur and Madame are drinking and

smoking before they both prolong their leisure to sleeping and taking walks respectively. As I mentioned before, this scenario echoes the Marxian conception of the two existing classes in society where the Bourgeoisie idles about as the proletariat is constrained to work.

As Nyerere (1968, p. 5) says, “treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!”. By this, Nyerere means that working is part of the nature of man and for that reason, every human ought to partake in that venture to earn a living. So, those people whose ways of life allow them to earn a living through eternal leisure are loiterers; a modern-day equivalent of a capitalist. So, at best, the director’s portrayal of Madame and Diouana characterizes the Bourgeoisie- Proletarian class distinction.

Mode(s) of Production

It is a generally held belief that a human being or person is the fundamental unit of all societies. The community, on the other hand, is required for the human being to exist and develop to his or her greatest potential. As a single tree does not constitute a forest, similarly a single human being does not constitute a community (Gyekye, 2010). Thus, the existence of any community is derived from the bonding together of individuals. A community is therefore defined as a group of people bonding together with the goal of surviving and also for security (i.e., protecting their existence) (Curie, 1973; Mingle, 2015).

In any community, the bare essentials of existence, such as water, food, shelter, and clothing, are critical to man’s survival (Kautsky, 2000). The very means employed by a community to organize resources and production to meet its’ needs for sustenance is what is called Mode of production. Mode of

production is considered the economic foundation of any society (Boucher, 2012, p. 8).

Beyond the provision of sustenance, the mode of production is also responsible for putting an identity tag on a society. The evidence to this allusion is found in Marx's (1892, p. 122) popular claim that just as "the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist". In other words, Marxism looks at societies and identifies them by the efficient ways used in the production of their needs.

A community or society is characterized by interactions among other individual persons as well as a permanent settlement. But before the formation of society, man's survival was hinged on hunting and gathering. Following the development of individual existence came group living, which ushered humanity to the first stage of society, primitive society or communalism, then to slavery, to feudalism, and now capitalism, and hopefully towards socialism. It must be noted that the various stages of human society highlighted above represent various modes of production.

To identify the mode of production in *La Noire de...*, there is the need to first identify the means of production available to the working class. Means of production refers to the tools, technological capacity, plant and equipment, labour power, raw materials, etc. that are employed to carry out work (Boucher, 2012). In other words, means of production imply all there are for humans to combine their labour with for a production venture. Understood this way, *La Noire de...* depicts means of production to include human labour, children, house, and household properties. But what do these means of

production suggest in terms of the mode of production that characterizes the world of the film?

The Capitalist mode of production (1)

Capitalism is a term used to describe a socio-economic system that prioritizes the value of private property (Rand, 1962). This economic system glorifies class division. This system of class division is characterized by two classes of people namely the capitalist who rules over and exploits the working class through their (capitalist) ownership of the means of production. The other class which is the working class is made up of people who possess no private property other than their labour power (Ball, 1995; Miller, 1995; Kautsky, 2000). Since the proletarian owns no means of production, he or she is bound to, as Marx (1999) puts it, “enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will”. Since the proletarian owns no means of production, his or her survival is contingent on being employed by someone who owns the means of production in order to earn a wage as the former sells off his or her labour power to the latter (Shimp, 2009).

Suffice it to say that capitalism occurred during the industrial revolution where factories were set up and people were employed to work. Though Marxism has largely understood the nature and conditions of workers within a factory or industrial setup, Marx (2002) and Boucher (2012) suggest that it is not only through the direct production of goods within a formal industry setup that exploitation can take place under capitalism. As they argue, exploitation also occurs within service-providing sectors like secretarial and administrative work, and domestic servitude.

The defining property of capitalism, is private property (Rockmore, 2002; Rashid, 2017; Drysdale, 1969). The property of the capitalist, such as land, mines, and factories, is collectively known as “capital” in this economic system. These things are capital in the Marxist sense because they are basically an investment made to generate greater returns from the initial investment through the exploitation of man by another man (Pirenne, 1914). As such, capital does not necessarily imply money although money is equally very important in the capitalist economy and can be converted into capital. Money becomes capital on condition that the money being invested is used as a “bait” to generate greater value than the initial investment through the exploitation of another man. If money fails to generate a surplus value through the exploitation of man, then it cannot be termed “capital” in the Marxist sense. In this case, capital can be said to be anything that has the ability to produce value that is greater than itself provided that this greater value comes by way of unpaid surplus value accrued from the waged labourer.

In *La Noire de...*, the antagonist’s privately owned resources include her children together with the house and household properties. In what sense could these assets be rendered as capital? These are private assets at the antagonist’s disposal which draws Diouana’s labour into conditions appropriate for exploitation. Diouana is primarily employed to provide childcare. The expected contractual value was just that. However, Madame’s assets which are her investment open the door for the generation of greater value through the exploitation of Diouana. The initial value of childcare extended to other values like washing, cooking, cleaning, and going to the grocery shop to buy foodstuffs. Consequently, these duties outside childcare

that Diouana was made to undertake, constitute the greater value Madame's assets accrue. The house and household properties in this context are no more different from the various implements a worker uses in carrying out his or her daily activities. In other words, the house and household properties are tools of production.

Again, another feature of the capitalist socio-economic system is the freedom that the worker enjoys. The capitalist system is very much different from both the slave system and the feudal system. The difference is that workers under the capitalist socio-economic system are (a) not owned by their masters as they were in slavery and (b) they are not tied to the land as they were in feudalism (Nkrumah, 1967; Cornforth, 1978b). As such, the working class obtained some autonomy within the capitalist socioeconomic system. Even though the working class has choices, their choices are limited to deciding only who they work for, not the abstention from work. So, just as under capitalism the worker is at liberty to decide whom to work for, Diouana had this same autonomy as implied in her decision to search for a job. She was subsequently approached at the town square by Madame with the job offer. Here, Diouana's acceptance of the job offer to work with Madame is merely an exercise of that right and in principle, she could have also declined the offer of appointment.

Another feature of capitalism is the existence of competition (Popper, 2013). Capitalists strive to maximize profits. This puts workers in a stern situation where they have to compete with one another to bring the best over the shortest possible time. Invariably, this creates a situation in which, as Tom Rockmore (2002) admonishes, competition turns capital against capital and

worker against worker. The situation eventually leads to an increasing polarization where the middle class gradually disappears as the world divides into millionaires and paupers. The competition to maximize profit leaves the employer to inadvertently minimize employment and expect more output, a situation that invariably deepens unemployment (Drysdale 1969).

In *La Noire de...*, this kind of competition is exemplified among the supposed working class; Diouana and the other young ladies who sat at the town square to wait and look for potential employers each day. One realizes that although the workers appear nice to each other, the moment Madame comes to look for one amongst the lot with whom she would work, all the ladies begin to struggle at the scene in order to get the attention of Madame (employer). This way, capitalism has invariably turned workers against each other. All the potential employees present at the town square want to catch a glimpse of Madame, and in the heat of such competitive bidding, each proletarian cannot resist but to “stand” in the others’ way towards landing the job.

Some scholars suggest that Diouana is bound to suffer exploitation because of her underprivileged status in society (Pallister, 1992; Spass, 1982; Oscherwitz, 2015; Davies, 2015; Goldman, 2019). Lyrell Davies (2015) contends that Diouana’s invitation by the French couple to France was a premeditated move to exploit the young lady. Although this allusion was not explicitly stated in the film, it can be found in the original written text, *The Promised Land*, from which *La Noire de...* was adapted. Madame brings Diouana to France in *The Promised Land* because she wants a maid who will be easier to manipulate and can be compelled to work more than the French

maids she has previously engaged in France. Madame explains that French workers are both pricey and bothersome. One of her earlier French maids “even insisted on a day off each week” while another French maid who also has children of her own, “refused to look after the children (Madame’s children) and live in” (Ousmane, 1962, p. 88). Since the focus of the analysis is on the film, there is no need to point to the explicit evidence of exploitation Davies mentions which happens to be in the novel. So here, I have to focus on the exploitation that occurs within the world of the film.

Exploitation is a notable feature of capitalism according to Marxism (Miller, 1995). How does Marxism understand exploitation, and how does it explain its occurrence? Within the Marxist conceptual framework, the people that get taken advantage of are of the proletarian class; those who own no means of production apart from their labour. It should be highlighted that the transition from slavery to feudalism through to capitalism was merely a shift from one exploitative society to another. (Marx & Engels, 2010; Buzuev, 1987; Wolff, 2019). This means that exploitation was present in all the faces of society that existed with the exception of the primitive communes. However, the nature of exploitation differs in all three phases. For instance, during slavery, the slaves (workers) were only fed and clothed as their form of “remuneration”. Within the feudal system also, the serfs (workers) worked on the lands after which the serfs take a portion of the produce from the land and also give some portion to their Lords (masters). The uniqueness of capitalist exploitation rests on the fact that the capitalist system operated in the money economy which introduced the notion of wages and salaries as the form of

remuneration for workers within that system (Laibman, 2006; Ilegbinsosa, 2012; Shi, n.d.).

According to historical materialism, society moves through stages which we have identified as from communalism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and consequently marching towards socialism. The driving force that instantiates this dialectical change is the political economy; the science of the laws of production and distribution. The dynamics of production and distribution rise to the level where the social production of goods and services is accompanied by private appropriation (Kautsky, 2000). It is these dynamics of production and distribution of goods and services that sustain the reality of exploitation. To better grasp how this relation, social production and private appropriation positions the proletariat in a state of unavoidable exploitation, the marks of exploitation need to be grasped. They are alienation and surplus value.

The significance of alienation is the fact that it makes it possible for exploitation to thrive. Alienation is the separation of a labourer from his or her own product and the elevation of that same product over and above the labourer (Marx, 1988). Marxism understands that alienation occurs in four different dimensions and has been adequately explained in the *1844 Paris Manuscript*. The first kind of alienation is alienation from the act of production. This sort of alienation refers to a situation in which the worker has been detached from his or her activity. The activity does not belong to the labourer here. In other words, the worker neither controls nor initiates his activity. Alienation of the product of one's labour is the second type of alienation Marx identified. This is when a worker is estranged from the

product of his or her labour. Marx (1988, p. 71) defines product of labour as “...labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labour. Labour’s realisation is its objectification...” Marxism recognises the importance of objectification in human life. Under ideal conditions, the purpose of labour, the result, is a manifestation of man’s existence and an affirmation of man’s capabilities.

However, in the context of alienated labour, objectification becomes an alienating activity, and the object of labour is no longer under the control of its creator. The result of labour is no longer a reflection of man’s life as distinguished from other creatures. The appropriation of a labour product occurs when the activity of production is managed by someone else (usually the capitalist). As a result, the product or thing is lost to an alien power. Here, the worker loses control over how and what he produces, as well as influence over how his or her product is used. When a capitalist appropriates a worker’s labour product, it leads to alienation of the labourer from their work output. The third form of alienation Marx discusses is alienation from man’s species being.

A species being is described as a conscious creature whose activity is unrestricted and whose life is an object of thinking and contemplation for him or herself. It is the possibility of manifesting capabilities that typifies an individual as a human person such as conscious living activity. This distinguishes man from other living things. However, when alienation is at play, these capabilities are hindered by the role of the worker within the production process as the worker aims at satisfying his or her basic needs alone. This is because work serves solely as a “means for his existence”

(Marx, 1988). When both a man's productive activity and his product of labour become alienated from him, this sort of alienation happens. This is because man grows alienated from his nature and the environment in which he lives. Alienation from man to man is the final type of alienation. The presence of the three previously stated kinds results in this final type of alienation.

Although all forms of alienation are closely related, alienation from man is inextricably linked to alienation from man's species being. It is self-evident that man's personal development and evolution take place within a social framework. In other words, man can only grow, know himself, and develop within the context of his relationships with others. However, within the capitalist mode of production, man gets distanced from other men, owing to the fact that man's life activity and its products are controlled by others rather than himself.

In *La Noire de...*, an instance that is illustrative of the concept of alienation came across by way of characterization through the reaction of other characters. This type of alienation is where the worker is estranged from their production activity. The evidence is found in Diouana's working environment. In the film, Diouana has no control over the nature of her work. She is not the determiner of the factors of her work nor is she given the opportunity to have a say in that. It is Madame (bourgeoisie) who determines what to render as service, how and when to provide those services. This illustration is evident in *La Noire de...* as Diouana arrived for work, she was oriented to remove her heels and take up the apron. This was clearly socializing her to be alienated from other forms of life and to prepare for her

impending perpetual servitude. It was also an indication of where she is to confine her working experience, the home for that matter.

At 27mins 46secs into the film, Diouana takes her normal sleep after the day's work. However, Madame reminds Diouana of her status as a being whose use is to work and work only, as she is told to wake up from her sleep since she was not hired to sleep. The indication was being sounded clearly that regardless, she does not determine the conditions of her work, particularly what precisely to follow as her portfolio. From Diouana's monologue, we are made to know that she had been destined for a specific portfolio; to care for the children. Even so, there are clear guidelines defining the sort of care. Now, she is ordered about to move from the kitchen to the laundry and to work as a Nanny. At 29mins 41secs into the film, Madame tells Diouana to come out of the locked closet. She is declared useless by Madame because Madame had to make her own coffee that same morning. If her use is only a function of the service she provides, then clearly, she has become a mere extension of a machine. She is alienated from human species.

Diouana also suffers from alienation as estrangement from others. This feeling comes across by way of characterization through the internal actions of the characters. This kind of characterization occurs within the character's minds and emotions which often consist of secrets, fears, aspirations, fantasies, etc. (Petrie & Boggs, 2012). The director employs this form of characterization in order to reveal the inner reality of a character in question by taking the audience either visually or aurally into the mind of a character so that the audience knows what the character thinks about or remembers (*Ibid*). Diouana declares in a voice-over that, "My family is not here and I do not

know anyone here". This expression clearly indicates that Diouana has been detached from her fellow human beings and this is a result of her working activity. In France, she appears to be confined within the space of the employer's family where she carries out her working activity. Although there are people in the house (her employer), her relationship with them is only about work.

Melissa Oliver Powell (2021) and Lyrell Davies (2015) assert that the French couple recognizes Diouana in one sense only; a representation of labour value and cheap labour whose function is to ensure that the French couple lives a comfortable life. Similarly, Marsha Landy (2005) supports the notion that Diouana suffered alienation from her family and friends the moment she gets to France to work for the French couple. Diouana's life of solitary which eats her up through her devotion to work alone is just an indemnity which estranges her from human species.

Following the alienated conditioning of Diouana (as shown in the film), the condition of exploitation begins to evolve. Exploitation in Marxism is the expropriation of surplus value by the owner of the means of production through the exploitation of the labour of the worker. Surplus value is considered as the difference between the time typically spent by a worker in rendering services or producing a commodity in question and the value that is actually placed on him in terms of paid wages or salary (Miller, 1995; Pals, 2006; Ilegbinosa, 2012). Here, labour is invariably commoditised in terms of his labour power which is actually paid for with respect to labour time. Labour power is a unique commodity to the capitalist because of its ability to add value to something. Marx, therefore, observes that capitalism reduces man to

the status of a mere commodity. This means that within the institution of private property (capitalist socioeconomic system), workers are not recognized as ends in themselves but merely as means to the accomplishment of a task. In that way, they are literally mere extensions of machines that think to produce (Marx, 1988; Rockmore, 2002; Habermas, 1975).

To achieve the best from the productive time of labour, the proletarian is constrained to commit his effort and to practice a well-defined activity over time. This is essentially the modality of the division of labour which maximizes efficiency and increases the productivity rate of the worker (Drysdale, 1969; Miller, 1995; Rockmore, 2002). Now, owing to the alienation of the labourer from his or her own produce, it becomes possible for the bourgeoisie to appropriate the full market value of the products churned out from labour power. Commodities are priced in proportion to the cost of production including the wages of labour power. But the capitalist decides the labour time spent at work as labour is alienated from his species essence.

Labour is given an extended production time that yields labour surplus, or labour power greater than the value he is actually paid for. So, the labour time expended on the production is a fraction of what he is actually paid and this difference is what Marx earmarks as surplus value. As Marx's analysis shows, because the surplus value is produced by the surplus labour power, the corresponding surplus value must be due him (the labourer) and it is his faithfully. But this difference constituting the surplus value is what the owner of the means of production gratuitously appropriates and is accordingly the reason why Marx deems it exploitation (Roemer, 1982; Skillman, 1997).

In *La Noire de...*, we notice that Diouana owns her labour power which she sells to Madame (her employer) in terms of being a nanny to Madame's children. This job portfolio was the only area she executed while she worked for her employers throughout their stay in Dakar and this Diouana had pointed out at 38minutes and 19seconds into the film. She says, "In Dakar, I didn't do the cooking...or the laundry. I only cared for the children. I took them for walks, I took them to school...and brought them back home". She was devoted to this task alone which ensured a particular commitment to specialized labour as required for division of labour.

When Diouana moves to France, her portfolio incomprehensively changes as more work is added to her role as a nanny. She becomes a cook, a laundry woman, a cleaner, an errand girl, and a nanny. Clearly, the related work she does in the house was not part of the contractual agreement. So, the ordinary expectation from Diouana was her contractual salary unless anything beyond that is decided by the "benevolence" of Madame. As an alienated being from her human species, Diouana commits her labour time to do the services of all that she was not contracted to do. Therefore, Diouana complains saying: "...the kitchen, the bathroom, the living room. That's all I do! That's not what I came to France for! ... I came to take care of the children!".

Also, where Diouana needed to take her usual sleep Madame comes in to say, "I didn't hire you to sleep!". In the eyes of Madame then, Diouana becomes a mere extension of a machine. So, Madame takes from Diouana's surplus labour the attention and care she (Madame) needs for the sustenance of her household. Madame calls Diouana useless because she (Diouana) did not prepare Madame's breakfast. Clearly, Diouana's use is in her labour. Her

essence is fulfilled only by serving Madame's needs, she is an end not in herself but a seeming automaton whose self-fulfilment is invariably linked to satisfying Madame's needs.

I cannot pretend to know how much Diouana was expected to be paid in due recognition of her hard labour. But for the purposes of explaining the appropriation of surplus value by her Madame, we can easily make a rough computation of her unequal remunerations. During Diouana's stay and work in France, we know, from the plot that she never received any wages. Marsha Landy (2005) and Rachael Langford (2005) have voiced the same observation. Diouana's commoditized labour power was not remunerated as wages or salary. This denial automatically extends to the surplus labour she provided including her sleep time which she put to work.

In other words, the surplus value in the film includes the lack of remuneration for her labour power, not to talk of an equivalent one, and all other works outside the job agreement she undertook in France like being a cook, a washer, a cleaner, etc. So, the features of the capitalist socioeconomic system as they appear in *La Noire de...*; the prevalence of capital, freed labour power, competition and exploitation give the closest indication that limits the existing mode of production to capitalism.

The World of Superstructure/Consciousness

The theory of historical materialism suggests that society transitions from one mode of production to another. At any material moment, the knowledge of the prevailing mode of production is required to identify the next qualitative face of society. For society to transition to the next stage, certain conditions ought to take place and the icing of these factors is the

people realizing the need to enforce or implement steps to establish the change they want to see. Before the change in society occurs, it begins as a process of thought formation, which is where the analysis should equally begin. In Marxist philosophy, this world of thought is referred to simply as the superstructure.

Marxism recognizes two realities; matter and world of ideas (Conforth, 1978b, p. 81). On one hand, matter is simply the material conditions by which man produces his or her means of subsistence (Russell, 1945; Ball, 1995; Fromm, 1967). Matter is fundamentally the economic base of any society and it is on this base that the world of ideas rests (Pals, 2006). On the other hand, the world of ideas refers to the immaterial thoughts of a people in a related society (Williams, 1977). These thoughts are ideas and beliefs which are usually exemplified by religion, law, politics, science, family, arts, etc. (Eagleton, 1976; Conforth, 1976b; Pals, 2006).

This world of ideas is termed collectively as the “superstructure”. The world of ideas is instilled by the pillars of socialization such as the school system. The superstructure draws its identity or likeness from the mode of production (Marx, 1892; Adeniyi, 2017; Tyson, 2006; Williams, 1977). What this implies is that human’s thought processes within any given society are results of their social existence. In effect, those ideas may appear innocent, but essentially, they constitute a certain conscious culture that seeks to preserve the mode of production (Eagleton, 1976; Pals, 2006).

Terrence Ball (1995, p. 130) therefore introduces the superstructure as “a set of ideas, ideals, and beliefs that serve to legitimize and justify the arrangements and institutions of the society”. Each of these ideas and beliefs

serves one purpose; to legitimize and justify the existing differences in class, wealth, power, etc. that exist within the society. Now, the institutions given rise to by this world of ideas to do its bidding of preservation are what the neo-Marxist refer to as ideological and repressive state apparatuses (Adesina, 2017, p. 4). And they are the tools that control and influence the thought process of the working class.

So, Marx and Engels (1848) observe that in every society divided into classes, “the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class”. This means that the acceptable ideas in society pretend to favour the interest of all, but in substance, they tend to serve the interest of one class as it perpetuates and defends the same mode of production that benefits the ruling class. Let us take religion for instance, which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2012) describe as the opium of the masses. The concept of religion is to give humans hope for the afterlife. The real motive of religion here is to keep all content with what they have as they endure their state in wait for a better afterlife (*Ibid*).

However, the capitalist loiters who live on the labour of the proletarian really have no poor conditions here to endure (Pals, 2006). So in substance, the hopes of religion affect the proletarian class the most and causes them to abstain from rightfully and violently demanding what is appropriated from his or her (proletarian) hard labour. When this happens, it dulls their (proletarians) minds from being critical of their predicament. After all, they are to cast their burdens onto Jesus who cares for them, not the bourgeoisie who appropriates from them. This way, the working class is kept from forming a true picture of their situation. So, the proletarian mistakenly accepts the ideas that serve the

interest of the ruling class as neutral ideologies that serve the interest of all. These supposedly pretentious ideas which align themselves with one class against the other is known as “false consciousness” (Ball, 1995).

This false consciousness is a creation of the mode of production carried by all members of the society including the working class. In Louis Althusser’s view (as cited in Barry, 1995), the same notion is called interpellation. Interpellation, like false consciousness, is construed as a web of deceit constructed by the capitalist system to throw dust into the eyes of proletarians whom they (the bourgeoisie) delude into believing are free to make choices when in reality the system coerces them into thinking in ways that protect the existing mode of production. Marxism holds that true freedom thrives only in a society devoid of class division (Miller, 1995). The reason is that classism is inherently exploitative.

Marxism suggests that the capitalist exploitative system could only function so long as the workers fail to come to the realization that the consciousness inherent in society inures to the benefit of the ruling class and is meant to justify the “misery” of the working class (Ball, 1995). It is worthy to note that the superstructure arises from the mode of production where both the Bourgeoisie and the proletarian are unaware of the repercussions of their actions. So, one cannot lay the blame in front of the capitalist’s or Bourgeoisie’s door. The simple logic behind this reasoning is that it is not the individual who imposes his or her ideas on the system rather it is the particular mode of production that forces upon individuals within the society the very things we are led to believe to be of our interest (Popper, 2013).

Marx (1999a) holds that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”. What this simply tells us about the capitalist mode of production is that the capitalist is not a bad or evil person rather it is the system; the mode of production that conditions the necessity of economic treatment meted out to the proletarians. Marx and Engels (1848) from their study of the history of humans and their society project that once the proletariat comes to the realization of the true picture of their exploitative situation, it would lead to a workers’ revolution that would topple capitalism’s exploitative structure.

In *La Noire de...*, the indication of a superstructure is given by one of its major pillars, the school system. At about 17minutes and 3seconds into the film, there is a shot of a school building in the community of the poor in society where Diouana comes from. Since the superstructure reinforces the interest of the mode of production, it is very much obvious that the prevailing society in Dakar, as presented in the film, is already vulnerable to the illusions of the exploitative systems in place. For instance, Diouana is made to glorify the opportunity to feature as a proletarian as she was offered the job as a nanny. In one instance where she happens to be absent-minded, the director shows us her focus as Diouana says in a voiceover “I have to have work”. When she finally gets a job, she runs through the town jubilating and telling everyone she meets on her way “I had a job”. She was so elated about the fact that she finally has a job. The excitement about her job gives an indication of how people in the society exalt the status of being a proletarian in Diouana’s society.

As she lands the job, she must have thought of herself to be lucky and thus would have to be submissive to her employer who has given her a job to be able to fend for herself. I am in no way advancing the conviction that it is not dignifying to work. Work is beneficial to us because it forces us to adapt to our surroundings, provides some level of self-satisfaction, and ultimately helps us to be more human (Paul, 2008). Marx (1988) acknowledges that man is both a working and a social being. What I am seeking to show is that the way we produce our basic necessities, like Althusser rightly pointed out, orchestrates a deceitful thought system as if the proletariat's interest is best served when in fact, he or she is helplessly awaiting the venom of exploitation to eat her up.

In the scene where Madame and Diouana struggle for the possession of a mask she (Diouana) had gifted to her employers earlier in the film, Madame tells her husband, Monsieur, after having lost the fight for the possession of the mask, that Diouana is an "...ungrateful wench! After all I've done for her". What precisely is Diouana being asked to be grateful for? The director takes us through this as Diouana plays her thoughts to us in a voice-over. In addition to the job Madame offered her, Madame gifted Diouana her old shoes, slippers, and dresses. Viewers can also supplement the list with food and shelter provided Diouana as she works in Madame's house.

It may therefore seem at first sight that Diouana has her interest catered for whilst serving Madame. But the real question is that is Diouana's action really a sign of ingratitude? All the things that Madame gifted to Diouana are supposedly not something that painted Diouana as an end in herself but rather a means to keep serving Madame better. Diouana could only expend her

labour power when she is strong. The things from Madame to Diouana only serve to protect Diouana for the next day's work. Diouana was given slippers that were never meant to serve her outing interest but only to visit the grocery shop for items to cook with. The fact that Madame could not see how the basic things she gifted to Diouana served her (Madame) own interest is a clear indication of how capitalism can cloud our perception of the reality. The superstructure does indeed serve the interest of the mode of production.

As the proletariat is at liberty to take decisions within the capitalist socioeconomic system, the ability to rationalize also develops to the extent that they (Proletarian) now have the potential of becoming aware of the fact that the inequality and the exploitative situation they suffer is far from being their fault rather it is the system that ought to be blamed (Ball, 1995; Omaboe, 2018). The proletariat's increased misery, which Karl Popper (2013) has explained, is fundamentally an increase in exploitation of the working class by their employers. Popper adds that the increase in exploitation is not only in the number of workers but also in terms of the intensity of workload put on the table for the worker. It is from this increased misery of the proletariat class that they are bound to develop full awareness of their exploitative situation. Having come to this realization, they (Proletarian) now become intolerable of their situation (exploitation and inequality of the distribution of products and services) and then rise to revolt (Kenny, 2010; Atherton et, al. 2008).

In the film, initially, when Diouana was employed in Dakar, she felt fortunate to have secured a job and the working conditions appeared favourable to her which initially blindfolded her from realizing her exploitative condition. When Diouana moved to Antibes in France, the

working conditions gradually worsened as she gets alienated from human species. She “grows” from working as a nanny to serving in the following capacities concurrently: laundress, cook, cleaner, and housemaid. These additional unpaid portfolios earmark the preponderance of Diouana’s misery (Landy, 2005; Davies, 2015).

In France, she coped with her new working conditions for weeks but after several reflections on her current working condition, she comes to the realization of the workings of the mode of production. She starts to realize that something is wrong with her, particularly in the condition under which she works. In the film, this point of realization is evident in her monologue as she laments;

What am I here? The cook? The cleaning woman? And when the kids come, what else will I have to do? Did the mistress bring me here to shut me in? That is why she was so nice to me in Dakar. Now I understand. The mistress wanted a housemaid. That is why she picked me (Ousmane, 1966; 25mins 52sec).

This comment from Diouana indicates the removal of a veil of deceit from her consciousness. She now realizes who the true beneficiary of the (proletarian-bourgeoisie) relation is. It is Madame, the same person appropriating Diouana’s surplus labour under the guise of helping her. How does Diouana deal with the situation?

Class Struggle and Revolution

Marxism projects that once the proletariat attains self-realization of their exploitative situation, struggle between the classes and a subsequent revolution is inevitable. As Marx and Engels (1848, p. 14) hold, “The history

of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”, the very bait that lends the venting spree of revolution. Before society can change, just as the first law of Sir Isaac Newton envisions, external force is required (Farrow, 1999). This time, the force is to be occasioned by the proletarians in unison in search of liberation from the shackles of exploitation. The conscious efforts of class struggle are a timely seed sown in anticipation of a revolution (Marx & Engels, 1848).

Marx and Engels’(1848) clarion call to the proletarian class indicates that freedom is fought for and attained by the collective efforts of the oppressed, not handed down on any silver platter. The poor’s misery will continue, if not worsen, unless the force of revolution is deployed. This is because it appears that the only language that oppressors and “robbers” of people’s labour power understand is revolution. If the oppressed stay complacent, their oppressors and exploiters will continue to milk from their labour. Revolution is necessary for the oppressed people to seize economic and political power. The unison strength to seek a revolution is all they have. “Workers of the World” are urged to “Unite”. For “you have nothing to lose but your chains” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 67).

Marxism avers that capitalism is her own grave digger because it increases the misery of the proletarians and the latter is forced to react by way of seeking revolutionary redress (Marx & Engels, 1848; Pals, 2006; Kellner & Pierce, 2014). Having become fully aware of her exploitation, Diouana refuses to be bullied by the capitalist system and she reacts by rebellion. Diouana’s rebellion begins with her refusal to attend to her routine working activity.

First, Diouana fails to wake up early to prepare breakfast for her employer. This is evident at 27minutes and 27seconds into the film, one observes Madame making breakfast for the family. Madame was very furious at Diouana that morning to the extent that shortly after making breakfast, she rushes to Diouana's room to wake her from her slumber. Madame tells Diouana how she is disgusted by the sight of Diouana still lying in bed when she (Diouana) has work to attend to. When Monsieur enquires about the noise in the house, Madame replies; "I had to make coffee myself! She's useless! Soon I'll be the maid in the house!" This comment from Madame provides further evidence of the meaning read into Diouana's waking up late in the morning.

Shortly after Madame expresses her displeasure of Diouana's attitude, Diouana enters the kitchen to prepare breakfast for herself. As she is seen seated at the table stirring her cup of milkshake, Madame comes there to tell her that she will not be allowed to eat that morning because she has failed to do her chores. Madame says "If you don't work, you won't eat" (34minutes: 24 seconds). This particular expression echoes the guiding principle in the capitalist system. Apparently, the Bourgeoisie can eat even without working. However, for the working class, their survival is hinged on their ability to work. Now, Diouana who has refused to be cowed by the socioeconomic system she finds herself in says in her voice over "if I don't eat, I don't care for the children" (34minutes: 37seconds), an implied note that she is fed up with her condition and a clear sign that she is ready to go at all length to save herself from the misery.

Again Philippe, Madame's son, was instructed by her parents to go and play with Diouana while the couple head outside. When Philippe broke the news to Diouana about their playing together, Diouana snubs the child and said in a voice-over "The mistress deceived me. Let her take care of her son. You won't give me something to eat. So take care of your son by yourself...I haven't eaten. I won't work...I'm not my mistress' plaything". At this point, Diouana is overturning the economic status quo that is supposed to define the being of a proletarian. As I noted, she is supposed to work to feed herself. But she is refusing to accept the maxim that defines her, she is defying the odd typical of a proletarian identity. She thinks it is deserved of her to eat, then consequent on that she works. She takes her feed as a basic right, not one that is derived from putting her labour to use, but one that must accrue to her as a matter of right and as a necessary condition to serve.

As Engels' speech at the graveside of Karl Marx notes "mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before he can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc." (Lepore, 1993). Again, at 38mins 31secs into the film, Diouana continues her revolutionary drive. She takes the mask that she gifted to her employers from the wall and says "The mask is mine..." At this point, she has not only resorted to not attending to her work alone, but she is also reclaiming by force, any of her belongings that is in the custody of Madame. Later in the film when Madame arrives home at 45mins 24secs into the film, she notices four unusual things; (a) Diouana had not washed the dishes in the kitchen (b) the absence of the mask on the wall (c) Diouana did not take care of Philippe as he is found sleeping in a chair and (d) the living room has not been tidied. This indicates that Diouana has indeed failed to live

up to the expectation of her employers. Monsieur goes to Diouana's room to check up on her. Upon reaching the room, Diouana throws out the apron towards the door which lands straight on the shoes of Monsieur. This action of Diouana can be said to be an utter denial of her identity as a working class.

Karl Popper (2013) has argued that the realization of Marxian revolution is farfetched. His point is that it could be delayed by some tactics used by the bourgeoisie class. Once the capitalist realizes that a revolution is about to erupt from the working class, the capitalist will quickly listen to the demands of the working class by, for instance, raising their wages. When the working class's needs are met, they will no longer carry forward their revolution and thus, the revolution will be quelled (Popper, 2013). Monsieur having realized Diouana's unexplainable behaviour queries her "Do you want your money?" Hearing no response from Diouana, he reaches out to his pocket for 20,000 francs to give to Diouana and leaves. Diouana receives the money, bends down, and weeps. While she bends, Madame picks up the mask from Diouana's room and is ready to leave. In Madame's thinking, calm is restored and Diouana must return to her proletarian status. However, Diouana seems never to let anything of rightly hers into the hands of a masquerading cheat, an exploiter, who is determined to keep her in perpetual servitude. So, Diouana puts in all she has to free herself; the peak of the revolution unravels. Diouana quickly gets up and takes hold of the mask which is hers anyway. Diouana and her employer (Madame) begin to struggle for the mask. They both spin as they hold onto the mask for its possession.

Rachael Langford (2001) submits that within the gifting economy when a person gifts out something to someone, it has two implications. They are that (a) there is an implied return of the gift whenever the initial owner so demands and (b) the gift also implies a want of a reciprocal and fair relationship from the receiver of the gift. This means that when a party, say the receiver of the gift fails to execute her part in the negotiations by granting the giver of the gift a reciprocal relationship just as Madame exhibited, Diouana (the gifter) can still ask for a return of the mask; this Diouana clearly executes by claiming ownership of the mask. The struggle gets physical between both parties, as Diouana forcefully reclaims her mask. They turn the struggle circular which I suppose, is a symbolic description of the cyclical drive of dialectics. Diouana wins the mask back for herself, a victory she suggests (in her voiceover) marks the end of her exploitation. She says;

Never again will the mistress scold me. Never again will she say: 'Diouana, make coffee'. Never again: 'Diouana, make rice'. Never again: 'Diouana, take off your shoes'. Never again: 'Diouana, wash this shirt'. Never again: 'Diouana, you are lazy. Never again will I be a slave (Ousmane, 1966: 47mins 40sec)

Following the above declarations, she comes to the living room where Madame and Monsieur were seated and drops the apron she works with and the money on the table and leaves. According to Davies (2015), Diouana's rejection of the money from her employer is symbolic. It signifies the rejection of her (Diouana) status as a wage labourer. In other words, she has loosened the chain that held her in the bondage of proletarian servitude.

The socialist mode of production (2)

In the Marxian sense, a change from one phase of society to a completely different phase is termed a “qualitative change” (Cornforth, 1978a, p. 107). A qualitative change is simply a manifestation of a new phase that emerges from a confrontation between two opposing forces. Marx and Engels’ conditioning of historical materialism suggests that when capitalism finally gets negated, the projected thesis is socialism (a qualitative change for that matter). Socialism is capitalism’s inevitable successor (Stalin, 1938). The socialist mode of production is a socioeconomic system in which private property is abolished leading to a classless society. As a result, socialism promotes communal and social welfare over individual welfare (Marx & Engels, 1848; Struhl, 2007). This socioeconomic system is predicated on public ownership of the means of production. It is worthy to note that ever since the demise of communalism, society always has been divided into two classes: the exploited and the exploiter (Cornforth, 1978a; Ogundowole, 1988).

Marx and Engels (1848, p. 14) point out that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. Now, socialism comes into the equation to eradicate the existing social classes by negating that which makes it possible for exploitation; private ownership of the means of production. According to Marxism, this socioeconomic system represents a point in history where humanity would achieve freedom, particularly from exploitation, and alienation. The socialist mode of production fosters a free environment in which individuals can attain full development and self-fulfilment in society (Ball, 1995; Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, 1985).

It must be noted that in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1999b), Marx envisions two phases of a communist society. The first phase of communist society is distinguished by the fact that production will be conducted on an exploitation-free basis. The nature of the production will be such that everyone who contributes to it will be compensated duly for their efforts. The description of the first phase of communist society offered by Marx is socialism or what Tom Rockmore (2002) refers to as State capitalism. The reason is that it is the state that owns the means of production. Marx (1999b) affirms this notion when he suggests a political transition from capitalism to a communist society such that “the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat”.

The nature of production and its remuneration Marx talks about ties in with the issue of the division of Labour. This simply means that in socialism, there are typified relics of capitalism, particularly shedding its tentacles by way of division of labour. This division (of labour) is based on the prevalent distinction between those engaged in cognitive and physical labour, as well as between city dwellers and countryside dwellers. The nature of remuneration is such that a skilled worker earns far more than a non-skilled worker. The one who works more receives more (Berbershkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, 1985).

It must be noted that in this socialist phase, every individual works in the society. Unlike typical capitalist society, no one hangs around as a “loiter”. No one survives at the service of others without working. Anyone who refuses to work receives no payment or food. This socialist socioeconomic system for Marx is inevitably a transitional phase. Beyond this stage is a society where individuals no longer become ‘enslaved’ to the division of labour (Marx,

1999, p. 11). Now, this is the second phase of the communist society Marx is talking about. This new phase, devoid of the division of labour, is what Rockmore (2002, p. 59) refers to as ‘real communism’.

This second phase of the communist society is characterized by the withering away of the state for the means of production to rest or be owned publicly by the people (labourers). In this socioeconomic system, just like in socialism, there will be no form of exploitation of man by man; everyone works. The nature of work is such that the division of labour will be negated. Henceforth, the nature of work under ‘real communism’ is such that as Marx (1999b, p. 11) says “from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs”. It should be emphasized that if dialectics is an enduring wheel of constant change, then communism will not stay motionless or static. It will continue the trend of evolution by begetting her own antithesis (Berbershkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, 1985).

From the above description of socialism, its basic features are (i) the absence of exploitation (ii) the presence of a classless society and (iii) the absence of private property. To deduce socialism in the film, there is the need to identify the aforementioned features. Zoë Hopkins (2019) and Doyle Calhoun (2020) submit that Diouana’s death symbolizes freedom and resistance. The question that follows is freedom from what? or resistance against what? In *La Noire de...*, Diouana’s suicide can be said to be a protest against the dehumanization and ill working condition she has been subjected to. Thus, her death in the most direct sense signifies extinguishing the very audacity or opportunity to have her exploited by someone. As she dies, she

dissipates the bourgeoisie-proletarian dichotomy. For this time, the bourgeoisie must survive but on her own labour power.

According to the theory of historical materialism, a thesis would have to meet its antithesis for a new thing to emerge (synthesis). Now, the resultant synthesis from the struggle that ensues between the thesis (the capitalist mode of production) and the antithesis (the increased misery of Diouana's working conditions occasioned by the Madame which leads Diouana to the realization of her exploitative situation) is the socialist mode of production. This means that the revolution of the working class is a necessary condition required to usher humanity into the next phase of society, socialism for that matter (Boucher, 2012; Marx & Engels, 2000).

In *La Noire de...* Diouana's death symbolizes triumph for the proletarian class over the harsh capitalist socioeconomic system and a depiction of the denunciation of the very foundation of capitalism, its exploitation, and abuse of the working class. If her death implies freedom from exploitation, then invariably, a resultant classless society is a socialist state. I do not suggest, nor is it a presupposition of Marxism, that the proletarian class must die at all costs to eschew exploitation and usher in the new phase of society. As to whether or not the revolution will be peaceful Marx and Engels (1848, p. 48) say "it will be desirable if this could happen, and the communists will certainly be the last to oppose it".

Nkrumah (1972) also maintains that this transition to the next phase of human society is definitely going to be accomplished with violence. This presupposes that the revolution has the potential to be bloody or violent. However, the capitalist class gains its identity owing to the contrasting

presence of the proletarian class on whose labour power the former survives. This is deducible from the dialectical principle rendered as negation of the negation (Cornforth, 1978a, p. 93; Wilde, 1995, p. 275; Groisman, 2007; Engels, 1996; Novack, 1991). To understand or know something, it is required that one must know what that thing is not.

Dialecticians are convinced that a thing can only be known based on its relation to the opposite (Cornforth, 1978a; Wilde, 1995). For instance, assuming an individual is sent to the kitchen to bring a knife. This individual is not aware of what a knife is. The individual can go and pick up a plate, spoon, cup, etc. However, for the dialecticians, the only way out for the individual to make the correct choice is to be aware that spoon, plate, etc. are all constituents of non-knife. Therefore, to be able to pick out a knife, the individual must have negated the essence of plates, cups, etc in ways that stand the knife out.

Affecting the same side of analogy, the essence of a bourgeoisie is given by her contrasting proletarian class, and therefore the dissipation of one must necessarily lead to the collapse of any distinction whatsoever. There may be different types of people. There may be different races. There may be different sexes. But certainly, there cannot be different class stratifications that are sustained by ownership of the means of production. Where a proletarian does not exist, it makes no logical sense to speak of a bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie would have to put their own labour to work, and this process would negate the sense of capital because, by definition, capital should generate greater value through the exploitation of a proletarian, not the capitalist's own labour. Consequently, Diouana's death signifies a remarkable

way of annulling class distinctions. Diouana's death will constitute a socio-economic condition where private possession of the means of production offers no advantage to exploiting the labour power of others. Post-Diouana's death resonates with anticipations typical of socialism.

The final feature of socialism traceable from the film is the absence of private property. Whenever the term "private" is used in describing a thing, the implication is that there is restricted access to that thing in question. But in contrast, Marxism defines private property as anything that is utilised to generate profit or a greater value through the exploitation of another person. In other words, private property in the Marxist sense is a source of social power. Marxism considers property to be equivalent to capital within the capitalist system.

In *La Noire de...*, Madame's properties have been named to include her house and household properties as well as her children. Madame's private properties are deprived of the proletarian class which Diouana represents. So, upon Diouana's demise, the question is which group is being deprived of Madame's properties? The answer is no one. The reason is that Madame's properties are unable to generate greater value as there will be no one to employ under whose exploitation the greater value will come from. In other words, once Diouana who suffers deprivation exists no more, then the essence of Madame's properties fails to become private in the sense of giving rise to social power. This way, Diouana's death can translate to mean the annulment of private property of the means of production.

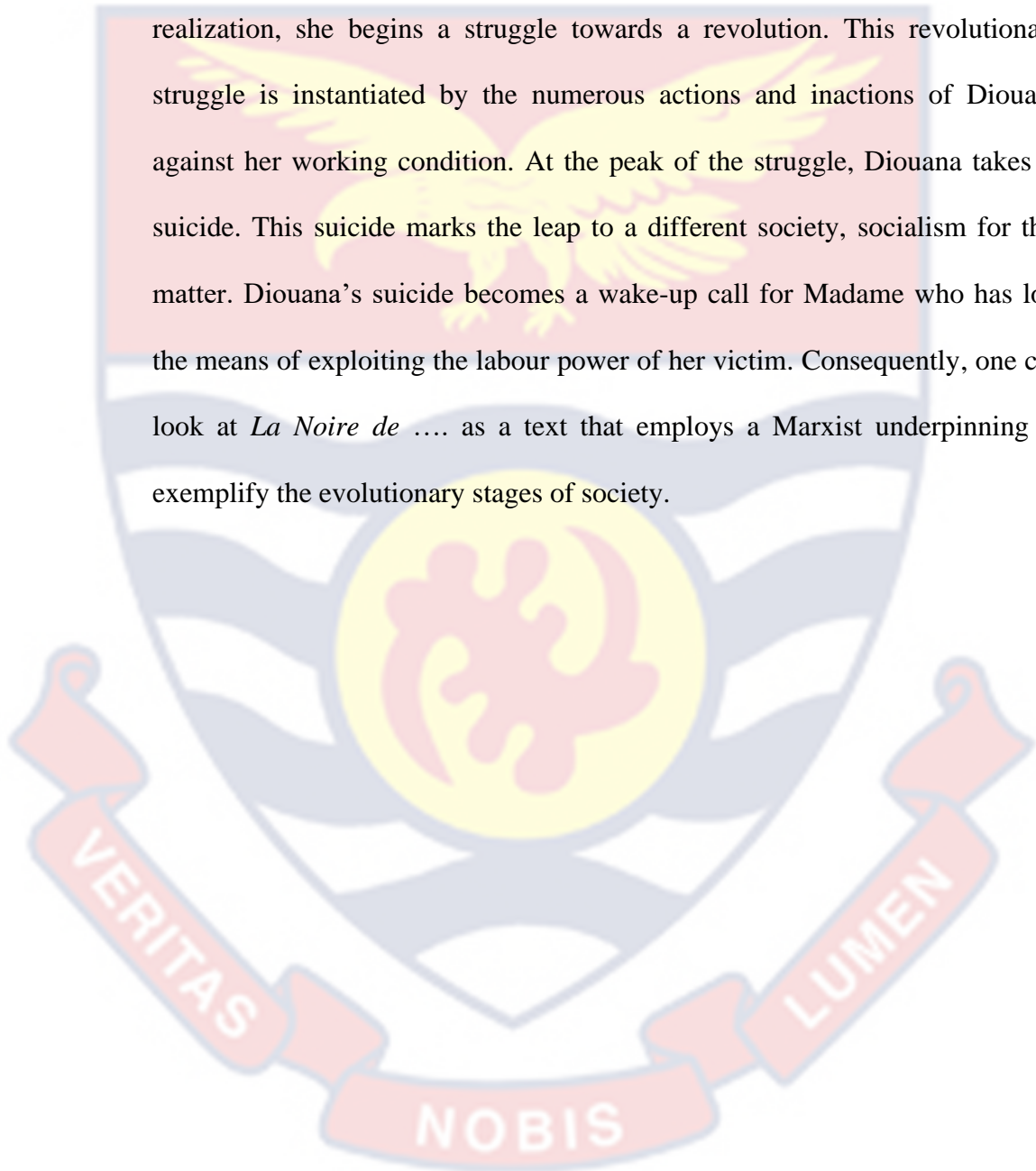
Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Ousmane Sembene's film *La Noire de...* from a Marxist perspective. Its' focus on Marxism was on the transition of society from one phase to a different phase of society. It particularly explains the transition from a capitalist society to a socialist society. This analysis was carried out using a component of Marxism which is historical materialism as its lens for the interpretation of the film. The plot of *La Noire de...* resonates with a Marxist understanding of how society progresses. In *La Noire de...*, the protagonist, Diouana, and the antagonist, Madame, are characterized to embody the existing class dichotomy within society; proletarian and bourgeoisie class respectively. It has been argued earlier that the first mode of production which represents the existing thesis is the capitalist mode of production.

Within the capitalist society, the analysis of the film reveals that the worker (Diouana) is only recognizable in terms of labour value and this leads Madame to treat her (Diouana) more like an extension of a machine. The film depicts how those in charge of the means of production take undue advantage of the working class's vulnerability, ignorance, naivety, and illiteracy to reap the rewards of their labour. Within the working activity, the worker (Diouana) gradually suffers from an estranged labour.

The analysis of the film reveals that within the capitalist system, the monetary compensation given to the workers (Diouana) in a form of wage is far less than the actual value that her labour is worth. This echoes the Marxian notion that in a society where class division exists, exploitation is inevitable. Marxism suggests that capitalism is the digger of its own grave (Adesina,

2017). This is because as the capitalist seeks to accumulate wealth, the workers are plunged into an increased state of economic misery. It is from this increased misery that Diouana becomes aware of her exploitation. This awareness constitutes the foundational antithesis. Following Diouana's realization, she begins a struggle towards a revolution. This revolutionary struggle is instantiated by the numerous actions and inactions of Diouana against her working condition. At the peak of the struggle, Diouana takes to suicide. This suicide marks the leap to a different society, socialism for that matter. Diouana's suicide becomes a wake-up call for Madame who has lost the means of exploiting the labour power of her victim. Consequently, one can look at *La Noire de* as a text that employs a Marxist underpinning to exemplify the evolutionary stages of society.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

The aim of this my study is to broaden the interpretational perspective of Ousmane Sembene's classical film *La Noire de...*, by employing a Marxist reading of the film. As such, the main objective was to analyse how the plot of the film makes sense within a Marxist frame of mind. After a thorough analysis, the study indicates that the film imbibes a Marxist orientation. What does such a Marxist reading of a film that has obtained numerous interpretations has to offer the African society? This final chapter presents a recap of the findings of the study and to further show how a Marxist-oriented teaching is relevant particularly to the African society.

Summary of the Findings

In this study, I posed four questions. The first question sought to investigate how the main characters in *La Noire de...* are related to the means of production. The analysis shows that Diouana, the protagonist, has no ownership of any property. In her state of lack, she embarks on a journey to look for someone who possesses what she lacks (property) in order to survive. The lack of property in this regard clearly identifies Diouana as a proletarian within the Marxist socioeconomic class stratification. Madame, the antagonist, on the other hand, happens to be a property owner who is also in search of someone who has no property. This will enable her to hire the propertyless Diouana to provide services by way of working with Madame's tools. The description of Madame puts her down to a Bourgeoisie identity. Accordingly,

the nature of the relation of the main characters to the means of production elicits a dichotomy typical of the proletarian-bourgeoisie class relation.

With regard to the second question, I sought to identify the nature of the means of production that the main characters are tied to. Knowledge of the means of production in *La Noire de...* ultimately leads to an understanding of the existing mode of production in the film. The findings reveal that the means of production in *La Noire de...* include Madame's house and household properties as well as her children. The features of the mode of production correspond better to the capitalist production and the socialist production.

At one point in the film, the mode of production can be said to be likened to capitalism due to the character's exhibition of features that align with capitalism. Some of the features of capitalism include the presence of capital, competition, some level of autonomy on the part of the worker in terms of choosing her employer, class division, and exploitation. The second mode of production identified in the film is likened to the socialist mode of production. Thus, after Diouana's demise, the analysis indicated the dissipation of exploitation, the change in status of a capital to a non-capital, and the absence of class differentials. All these are equally features that can be likened to the socialist mode of production.

Thirdly, I sought to examine how the mode of production influences the thought of the main characters in the film. The study established that the way that any society produces its needs, directly influences the thought of its inhabitants. Diouana's understanding and appreciation of the society she lives in are entirely influenced by the way that the society is organized (capitalistic society). First, Diouana's understanding of the society she lives in is that for

anyone who owns no means of production to survive, they must sell off their labour power. Diouana's society prepares the minds of the people towards grooming them into protecting the existing mode of production in society. This is evident in the situation of a school building within the society. And since the school system is a pillar of socialization, its role will be to do the bidding of ensuring that the mode of production is maintained. The other evidence that the mode of production of any society influences the reality of people is enshrined in the ethical values of society. This is portrayed in Diouana's expression of happiness and that of her community following the job offer she secures. This tells of how Diouana and her community, unfortunately, celebrates a proletarian for securing a job offer.

Finally, the I sought to investigate how the mode of production traverses from one qualitative state (of exploitation) to another qualitative state (of emancipation). The study indicated that the revolution that marks the qualitative change in *La Noire de...* is a result of the continuous intensification of class struggle that ensued between Diouana (proletarian) and Madame (bourgeoisie). As Marx and Engels argue, "this history of society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 6). The findings, thus, affirm the conviction that *La Noire de...* resonates with the themes of Marxism.

Marxism and African societies

How do we view our society today? How do we attempt to explain the problems that have bedevilled the African society we live in today? Many philosophers, Ludwig Feuerbach says, have mapped out several interpretations to account for these enduring questions. But Feuerbach says that, until Marx, what was lacking was an existing theory that provided a fundamental guide to

change the status quo. So, Marxism is an ideological framework whose key significance is meant to execute change.

Many scholars aver that although Marx died many years ago, the course he sought to engineer is still a relevant legacy to the current dispensation of human society (Fuchs & Mosco, 2012; Das, 2013; Rashid, 2017; Meisenhelder, 1995; Wright, 2018; Pals, 2006). Be that as it may, a study of this kind ought to be finished by indicating how the Marxist interpretation of an African text is of any worth, particularly to African societies. It is therefore appropriate to conclude by espousing the significance of a Marxist reading of *La Noire de...*, particularly in relation to the African society.

One of the main reasons why Marxism is an important reading is that it provides an alternative theoretical lens by which we can understand the world we live in. Marx's concept of historical materialism is a tool for explaining the history of human society. This theory's significance is that it provides a clear understanding and appreciation of the world today in ways that differ significantly from the current capitalist mode of production. Prior to Karl Marx, the origin and understanding of the surplus value had attracted the attention of several economists in Europe. However, the various economists failed to provide in detail the origin and the concept of surplus value although they agreed on the existence of a surplus value in the market economy (Shi, n.d.). Marx's contribution was the illustration of the origin of surplus value which lies in the unpaid work of the labourer (Marx, 1951; Slack, 2020).

Marxism teaches the scientific way by which common ownership of the means of production can be attained. Although all socialists behold private ownership of the means of production, its distribution and exchange remain

the evil of society, and until that is done away with, there will be no serious improvement in the welfare of all of humanity. Marx went a further mile to cast what seemed to be a utopian dream into scientific knowledge (Engels, 1996). It is worth noting that the earliest socialists before Karl Marx sought to achieve this goal albeit with different approaches.

One observes that in all the different approaches employed, there remains only one denominator. It is the conviction that all the earlier socialists before Marx thought socialism could be attained by way of appealing to the moral conscience, humanitarian goodwill, and benevolence of private owners (Taylor, 1908). Karl Marx observed that in the ways that his predecessors sought to achieve socialism, they still left “the cause of evil untouched” (*ibid*, p. 13). The “evil” in question here is the private ownership of the means of production. So, Marx suggests that for socialism to be realized, there is the need for the working class to wage a revolution that will lead to the seizure of private property from the hands of the few and be delivered to the community.

The emphasis of a Marxist reading is to sensitize African society to the problems of capitalism and the need to change things so that society can be improved. This study highlights the hidden fact of capitalism; that exploitation lies at its heart. The study comes across as a Marxist critique of capitalism. It critically analyzes the deep-rooted problems in African society today. What a Marxist reading of African films advocates for the African society is to look again at the way in which the society is structured today and force a movement towards a humane way of life; preferably socialism. This is because capitalism, which is the dominant mode of production in African societies today, fails to put the welfare of humanity at its center (Hallen, 2002).

The capitalist society in which the African continent finds herself can be described as a society that has been lubricated with a capitalist touch and highly imbued with a “bourgeoisie passion...(and) bourgeoisie egoism” (Dada, 1985, p. 31). To tamper profiteering ambitions with a sense for humanness, a Marxist reading aims at prickling the African populace not to be satisfied with capitalism. This way, Africans will demand better and improved conditions of living even if socialism and communism may be said to remain a dream.

One of the sensitizing missions of a Marxist reading of African condition is to recognize how capitalist society is detrimental to African development and the need to have a home-grown African structure that aims to recover and modernise the pre-colonial communal living (Alofun, 2014; Nanbigne, 2021). According to David Rooney (2007), Kwame Nkrumah once intimated that the free-market economy is detrimental to the growth of any African society as it ensures that African states continue to wallow in poverty. So, there is a need for Africa to cultivate a home-grown economic structure that draws on the traditional communal spirit.

The home-grown structure will be African socialism. This way, the interest of all will be paramount, leaving no one behind. It is in this way of life that John S. Mbiti’s (1970, p. 141) famous quote “I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am” will be meaningful to the Africans. It is with this motivation that the early independent leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Senghor Leopold, Sekou Toure, etc. resorted to an Africanised version of Marxism aimed at disinfecting Africa from the scars of capitalism that colonialism came with.

It will be prudent to highlight salient examples of African political leaders who thought of Marxism as the panacea to the economic structure that Africa finds herself in. For instance, Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (1968) comes across as a localized version of Marxism. In this book, Nyerere describes the best structure that will help the growth of African society. One realizes that all the ideals being stipulated by Nyerere are no different from communism in principle. For instance, prior to Africa's contact with the white man, African societies did not know the notion of private property, and everybody engaged in some form of work. The land, which was the available property, belonged to the community. And it was the society that took care of everyone including the old, orphans, and even the widows. It was a society where no one ever worried about hoarding anything for his or her sole benefit. This African society Nyerere reflects on in terms of the organization and distribution of resources is one that Marxism shows us the scientific way to achieve (Alofun, 2014).

Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah is also a known figure who believes that Marxism has the tenacity of advancing the course of Africa's economic growth. Kwame Botwe-Asamoah (2005) avers that Kwame Nkrumah adopted Marxism as his guiding light to turn around the neocolonial economic conditions that dominate Africa in general and Ghana in particular. He further adds that Nkrumah was so impressed with the tenets of Marxism to the extent that Nkrumah found Marxism as the best adaptable solution to neocolonialism and its attendant economic predicament faced by Africa and Ghana. In *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy* (2005), David Rooney intimates that Kwame Nkrumah admits that the best way forward for any

newly independent state to fight capitalism is to resort to socialism. It must be noted that Nkrumah did not adopt socialism hook, line, and sinker. He advises that socialism be adopted and modified to suit the borrower's country. So, in Ghana especially, Nkrumah, says Rooney (2005, p. 254), adopted Marxism to suit the African condition through reforms.

To save the Ghanaian economy from the exploitative shackles of capitalism, Nkrumah established state-owned companies. The mission of these state-owned companies was to compete with both private and multinational companies and eventually keep them out of business (Nkrumah, 1963). Some of these companies established include the Kumasi shoe factory, Kpawulogu tomato factory, Bolgatanga rice mills, match making, soaps, pottery, and shoes, as well as the production of other goods and services (Rooney, 2007, p. 253). Tsehloane Keto (1994) as cited in Kwame Botwe-Asamoah (2005) supports the relevance of Marxism to African society. For Keto, Marxism comes across as

a social critique of the class conflict and other economic and social factors associated with the social organization for production that accompanies the development and maturation process of mercantile and industrial capitalism that began in Europe, insights from such historical critiques of society help analyse social change terrain as areas of the world occupied by Africans become affected by that process of industrialization and urbanization under capitalism (Bowte-Asamoah, 2005, p. 45).

A Marxist reading inures to the benefit of the African society because its aim of a classless society is in sync with the values of communalism. Marxism equally raises the consciousness of the African people to look beyond classism, inequality, and inequity that is fraught with the capitalist system. This also helps to make the readers aware of the erosion of the communal sense Africans once shared which has been largely eroded if not entirely by the capitalist system (Hallen, 2002). The way forward for Africans to ensure egalitarian living is to fight against the inhumane and exploitative capitalist system. There is the need to recapture the communal sense of living in this modern day. So, we need a scientific basis to take this path and Marxism gives us this hope.

Concluding Remarks

My goal in this research was to challenge established interpretations of Ousmane Sembene's film *La Noire de...* The term "challenge", does not in any way suggest that past interpretations of the film are erroneous. What challenge stands for in this context is the ability to provide evidence or reasons for us to rethink the focal film text in a new direction. The study has demonstrated that Ousmane Sembene's film is a Marxist narrative put into an intelligent visual demonstration. The attempt to expose the Marxist underpinning also shows how Marxism does apply to, and can explain, the day-to-day activities of people and their societies. This shows that the way Marxism interprets society is not an abstract ideology that has no relation to our actual day to day existential situations. Marxism cannot promise to solve all our problems. But it is certainly worth attention particularly given the context of African existential background prior to colonialism.

Recommendation

Following the findings of my study, I proffer three recommendations for further studies. First, prior to this study, the film appeared to share little to know semblance with Marxist philosophy. This possibly accounted for why many interpretations of the film rarely included a Marxist reading. I suppose therefore that it is equally possible for other films of Ousmane Sembene to have unexplored richness of Marxist imprints. Only the academic interest may be required to illuminate, perhaps, such interesting underpinnings. I therefore urge scholars to take further interest in daring a Marxist review of other Sembene films as much as possible. This may be the beginning of a pattern that may inform a general characterization of his entire works.

This study examined the way that society transitions from one phase to the other from the Marxist point of view. The current study limited itself to historical materialism as the framework for understanding the film. Although the study dwelt a little on the economic aspect of society, it is suggested that further research can employ the concept of political economy to examine in detail the dynamics of the economic life of society and how this can help shape societies in general and Africa in particular.

Finally, the main characters in the film are women. So, further research may want to explore the power or otherwise Ousmane Sembene ascribes to women in his films more generally and *La Noire de...* in particular. To further grasp the representation of women in Ousmane Sembene's films, scholars may take to feminist criticism in analysing power relations in work and politics as far as the film is concerned. I suppose that these are interesting "fertile

grounds” which exploration would help shape our understanding of *La Noire de...* in particular and African cinema in general.



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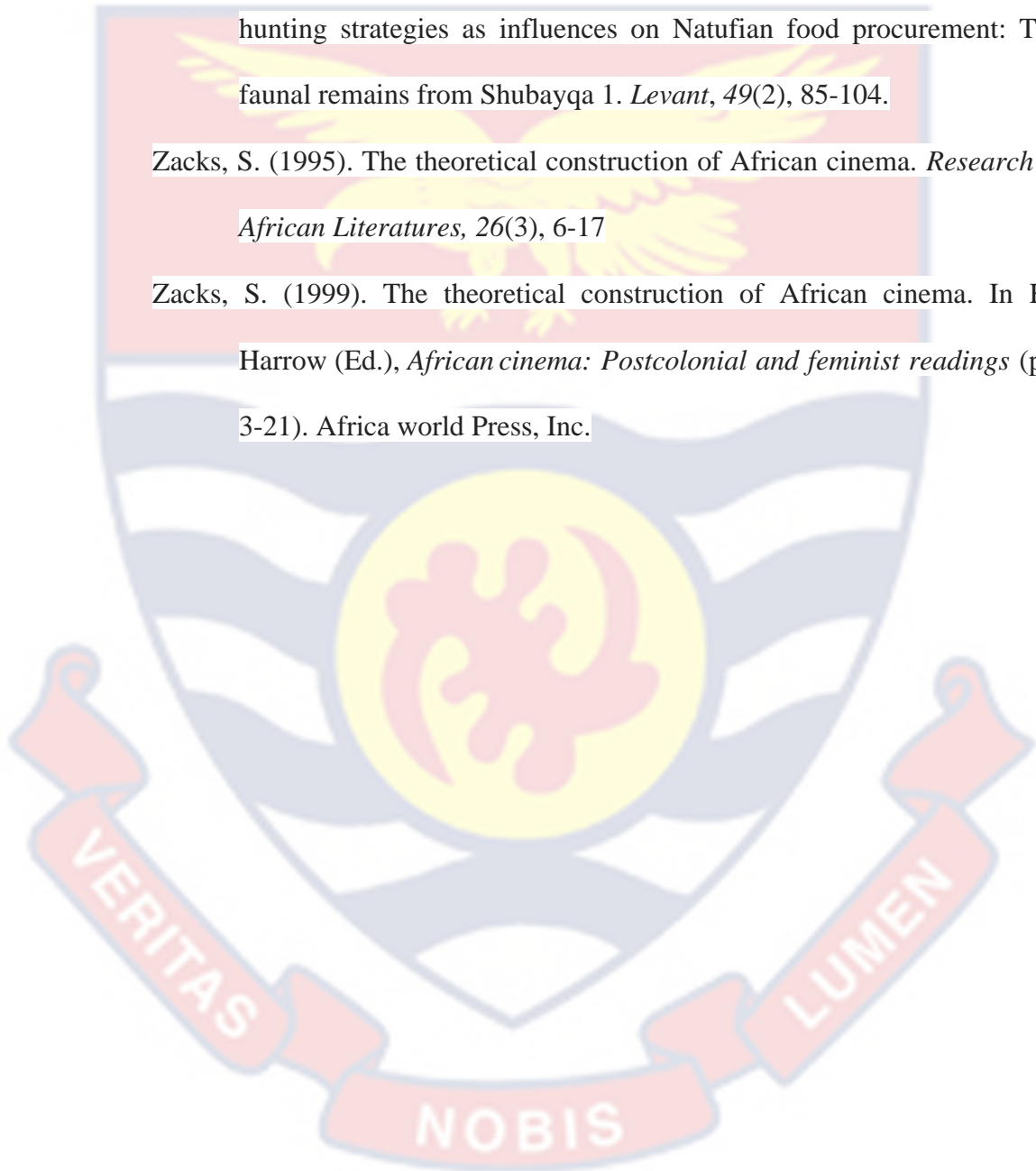
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LIST OF FILMS CITED

<i>100Days</i> (2001)	-	Nick Hughes
<i>Asientos</i> (1996)	-	Francois L. Woukoache
<i>Attack on the Chinese Mission</i> (1900)	-	James Williamson
<i>Baara</i> (1978)	-	Soulaymane Cisse
<i>Baks</i> (1974)	-	Momar Thiam
<i>Birth of a Nation</i> (1915)	-	D. W. Griffiths
<i>Boubou-cravate</i> (1972)	-	Daniel Kamwa
<i>Camp de Thiaroye</i> (1988)	-	Ousmane Sembene & Thierno Sow
<i>Ceddo</i> (1976)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Cinq jours d'une vie</i> (1973)	-	Soulaymane Cisse
<i>Congorilla</i> (1929-1932)	-	Martin Johnson
<i>Day Break at Udi</i> (1949)	-	Terry Bishop
<i>Emitai</i> (1971)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Finye</i> (1982)	-	Soulaymane Cisse
<i>Flame</i> (1996)	-	Ingrid Sinclair
<i>Guelwaar</i> (1992)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Guimba</i> (1995)	-	Cheik Oumar Cissoko
<i>Heritage Africa</i> (1988)	-	Kwaw Ansah
<i>I told you so</i> (1970)	-	Egbert Adjesu
<i>Karim</i>	-	Moma Thiam
<i>L'exilé</i> (1972)	-	Marcelo Novais Teles
<i>La Noire de...</i> (1966)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Le bracelet de bronze</i> (1974)	-	Tidiane Aw

<i>Les tam tams se sont tus</i> (1969)	-	Philippe Maury
<i>Lumumba</i> (2000)	-	<i>Raoul Peck</i>
<i>Maanamizi</i> (2001)	-	Martin Mhando & Ron Mulvihill
<i>Mama Tumaini</i> (1986)	-	Sigve Endresen
<i>Mandabi</i> (1969)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Men of two Worlds</i> (1944)	-	Thorold Dickinson
<i>Moolade</i> (2004)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Mortu Nega</i> (1988)	-	Flora Gomes
<i>Muna Moto</i> (1975)	-	Jean-Pierre Dikongue- Pipa.
<i>No tears for Ananse</i> (1968)	-	<i>Sam Aryeetey</i>
<i>Pousse Pousse</i> (1976)	-	David Kamwa
<i>Saitane</i> (1973)	-	<i>Oumarou Ganda</i>
<i>Sambizanga</i> (1972)	-	<i>Sarah Maldoror</i>
<i>Sankofa</i> (1993)	-	Haile Gerima
<i>Sarrouinnia</i> (1987)	-	<i>Med Hondo</i>
<i>Saunders of the River</i> (1935)	-	<i>Zoltan Korda</i>
<i>Soleil O</i> (1970)	-	<i>Med Hondo</i>
<i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> (1918)	-	Elmo Lincoln
<i>The Mask</i> (1979)	-	Eddie Ugbomah
<i>The Sneaky Boer</i> (1901)	-	Not Available
<i>Touki Bouki</i> (1973)	-	Djibril Diop Manbetey
<i>Wend Kuuni</i> (1988)	-	Gaston Kabore
<i>West Indies</i> (1979)	-	Med Hondo

<i>Xala</i> (1975)	-	Ousmane Sembene
<i>Yaaba</i> (1989)	-	Idrissa Oudrago
<i>Yeelen</i> (1987)	-	Soulaymane Cisse
<i>Yombayomba</i> (1985)	-	Martin Mhando
<i>Zan Boko</i> (1988)	-	Gaston Kabore

