Disrupting Binary Divisions: Representation of Identity in *Saikati* and *Battle of the Sacred Tree*

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ABSTRACT

By using two Kenyan films, *Saikati* (1992) by Anne Mungai and *Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994) by Wanjiru Kinyanjui, this thesis explores the representation of identity in contemporary Kenyan society. Through a theoretical focus on African feminist thought which stems out of literary criticism, this study posits that in order for an understanding of identity to take place, then the discussion must extend beyond the binary divisions of tradition and modernity. This study offers a history of cinema in Kenya from the colonial administration era till present day to illustrate that the legacy of colonialism has been very influential in contemporary Kenya. I have used film as a tool to expose the non-static nature of identity, contrary to colonial discourse present in films about Africans during colonialism. Although both films examine different social topics, this study highlights that the processes of determination and formation of identity, as represented in both films, are situational, circumstantial, and dependent on personal choice.

RESUME

En utilisant deux films Kenyans, *Saikati* (1992) d'Anne Mungai et *Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994) de Wanjiru Kinyanjui, cette thèse explore la représentation de l'identité dans la société Kenyane contemporaine. A travers une mise au point théorique de la pensée féministe Kenyane qui découle d'un criticique littéraire. Cette étude avance l'idée que pour permettre une compréhension de l'identité, la discussion devrait s'étendre au delà des divisions binaires de tradition et de modernité. Cette étude présente une histoire du cinéma au Kenya débutant à l'époque de l'administration coloniale jusqu' à ce jour et ce dans le but d'illustrer l'influence prépondérante de l'héritage colonial sur le Kenya contemporain. J'ai utilisé le film comme outil pour exposer le nature non-statique de l'identité et contrairement aux analyses coloniales présentes dan los film relatifs aux Africains durant le colonialisme. Bien que les deux films examinent différents sujets sociaux. Cette étude souligne le fait que les processus de formation et de détermination de l'identité tels que représentés dans les deux films, sont situationnels, circonstanciels et dépendent d'un choix personnel.

INTRODUCTION

> Africa is search of an identity. We are divided in ourselves between the past African tradition and the more recent, but widely approved, Western ones. In all walks of life, we are split (Wanjiru Kinyanjui, Kenyan filmmaker).

This thesis is a result of discussions and debates I have actively partaken or pensively watched throughout my university life. The debates themselves arose from the participants' own experiences with families, peers and authorities, fostered by the films and plays we watched, and the literature we read. Each of these experiences, in my own opinion pointed towards a common theme, which stressed progress towards modernization. Different channels, such as good education, were guides in meeting this achievement. Engaging in activities within Western edifices of education and religion, among others, was coupled with an underlying process in the need for determining and identifying oneself.

The assignment of an identity is in itself an impossible task. As human beings, we are in the constant process of redefining ourselves according to our experiences, background, gender, kinship, and even geography. Why do we need an identity? Apart from its function as an anchor, it acts as a scale to keep us balanced. The important term, for the purposes of this thesis, is "redefining" as the precarious nature of identity is key in understanding that we are between worlds or phases. We must bear in mind that "identities are never unified, they are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (Hall 1996:4). For once-

colonized people, identity is linked to aspects that are embedded in historical colonial practices and the aftermath of post-colonialism.

The presence of colonial structures in Sub-Saharan Africa engendered tension between constructed paradigms of tradition and modernity. This tension has formed the basis of cultural production as represented in literary work, film and theatre in almost all colonized African nations. Until present day, Africans straddle between these two "models". It is this state that this study calls *in-betweeness*, the idea of being and functioning between phases, dichotomies, and oppositional categories. The process of rediscovering and reconstructing identity by positioning oneself between oppositions has been very symbolic and thematic in both Kenyan cinema and literature.

This study's main objective is to explore how identity is sought and fostered in two Kenyan films, *Saikati* (1992) by Anne Mungai and *Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994) by Wanjiru Kinyanjui. This study will illustrate that binaries such as tradition/modernity, rural/urban are artificially created colonial products set by a Western and colonial value system which continues to prevail in post-colonial Africa as reflected in African films. Through this illustration, this study will link the prevalence of dichotomies in post-colonial discourse to cinema. It has been noted that the pervasiveness of these binary oppositions disallow difference and elide complexity leaving out "certain African social realities [which become]... open to arbitrary interpretation" (Akudinobe 1992:33). African feminist theoretical frameworks have been very innovative in streamlining these arbitrary interpretations, as their trajectory, especially in literary work, has been fundamental in dismissing the functioning of binary oppositions such as tradition and modernity. Subsequently, a secondary goal for this study is to consider the problems of

utilizing Western or Eurocentric theories to analyze African cultural products, such as film, as a means of exploring the representation of identity.

Through a content and textual analysis of the films, this study hopes to show that in pursuit of self-determination and self-definition, it is imperative to move beyond binary oppositions. African feminist conceptual frameworks resonate this intention by suggesting that individuals make use of their existing multiple identities and myriad of influences located on a continuum, instead of those within static binary structures. Through an application of African feminist theoretical frameworks, the analysis entailed in this study goes beyond the static settings of the dichotomies. For a theoretical framework, this study looks to what Jacques Derrida describes as thinking beyond the limit and at the interval as it is at this juncture where ambivalence is foregrounded. Significantly, it is noteworthy to consider that notions or characteristics not described or entailed in either binary structure could derive meaning that would contribute in an understanding of the processes of identity formation. This interval has the irruptive potential for the emergence of a new concept, which can either no longer exist or be included in binary structures at different temporal points (see Derrida, 1981).

I have engaged the work of numerous authors and many articles to facilitate the writing of this thesis. This thesis heavily uses African feminist literary thought to discuss the films and subsequently underscore that the relationship between African literature and African cinema should not be undermined. The work of Obioma Nnaemeka has especially provided me with theoretical underpinnings of African feminist thought (1997a, 1997b, 1995). In addition, Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi's theories of gender in African women's writing offers great insight into the fundamental importance of the politics of locations, margins and identities and their inevitable relationship with gender

(1997). Oyeronke Oyewumi's The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (1997) informs the underlying differences between African and Western versions of feminisms, differences which are essential in legitimizing this study's insistence on the application of African-oriented frameworks rooted in the experiences and consciousness of African peoples and cultures. On African feminist filmmaking, I have referred to Sheila Petty's articles (1992, 1996) where she elaborates on strategies used in African filmmaking, both by women and men filmmakers, in foregrounding gender relations and identity. These authors in their work concede and argue that binary oppositions are limitations in the processes of analysis that risk a reproduction of essentialist and static concepts of identity.

I also examine the theories of Third Cinema, specifically Teshome Gabriel (1989), which demonstrate the search for identity and its eventual formation as a thematic concern in most Third World films. I draw upon Gabriel's work as it effectively highlights the difference between Western and African aesthetics of filmmaking, which is resonated in interviews with filmmakers Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui. In my search for a history of cinema in Africa, I turn to Manthia Diawara's African Cinema: Culture and Politics (1992) and Nwachukwu Ukadike's Black African Cinema (1994); both texts map the beginnings and development of cinema in Africa, as well as its structure and political backgrounds. This thesis also relies on published interviews with Anne Mungai and personal interviews with Wanjiru Kinyanjui in an effort to contextualize the filmmakers' understanding of their own films. I also include email communications with academics in cinema and African studies that have provided their own interpretations and critiques on these films underscoring the need to disrupt dichotomies in African discourse.

This thesis engages numerous concepts that I feel are necessary to define in order to gain a deeper understanding of the representation of identity in *Battle of the Sacred Tree* and *Saikati*. For example, a semantically complex term such as 'post-colonial', one which is key to this thesis, cannot be utilized in a blasé manner without a theoretical explanation. Thus, this introduction serves to lead a discussion of the elusive concept of 'post-colonialism', illuminating the dire need to deploy an African feminist theoretical framework that rescues its shortcomings.

Before delving into the elaboration of both the meanings and theoretical usefulness of post-colonialism and African feminism, it is important to provide a synopsis of both films, the filmmakers' background, and to contextualize my personal experiences and understanding of being in-between dichotomies.

Battle of the Sacred Tree is primarily the story of Mumbi, a Kikuyu woman who escapes her husband's violent abuse. She leaves Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya for Githunguri, a rural town, to return to the home of her father, Mzee. Here, she discovers an on-going debate over the Kikuyu sacred tree, the *Mugumo*. The Christian women's union perceive the tree as a reminder of paganism and uncivilization, while Mzee and Mumbi feel that the tree is a reminder of pre-colonial Kikuyu history. What ensues is a struggle between the two representations of ideologies: Christian and indigenous religious practices. Eventually Mumbi wins the *Battle* of the sacred tree and the *Mugumo* remains standing in that area of Githunguri.

One finds that the relationship between tradition and modernity is also explored in *Saikati*. This is the story about a young girl called Saikati whose mother and uncle are asking her to get married to the chief's son. This would inevitably end her personal priority, her education, which is Saikati's priority. Her cousin, Monica, from Nairobi

comes for a visit and suggests to Saikati that they return to the city where Monica would arrange employment for her. When in Nairobi, Saikati discovers that her cousin is a prostitute and had in mind a similar position for her. She makes the decision to return to the village to face her mother and uncle. These two films revolve around women who find solace in *traditional* values while engaging in so-called modern practices.

African films, according to Manthia Diawara, "belong to a social realist narrative tradition that tends to thematise current socio-cultural issues" (1992:141) which in turn complicate the contestation and struggle for definition and identity. Saikati's and Mumbi's own processes of self-definition are inherently representative of the dilemma faced by post-colonial subjects in their personal identity formations. Although it may seem that tradition and modernity exist as clear-cut dichotomies, it is significant to note that through the colonial process - which did not exempt Kenya - these depictions are products of the events in Europe and their impact upon Africa. Terrence Ranger reminds us that tradition *per se* was invented in Europe in the last three decades of the 19th Century and that "African empires came so late in the day that they demonstrate the effects rather than the causes of European invented tradition" (1983:211). African literary and cinematic discourses demonstrate that ideas of invented tradition have been embedded in African practices and context through key references to a past history and a contemporary story. This concept 'tradition', for example, allowed the British in Kenya to impose new ways of life indigenous pre-colonial practices while condescendingly implying the subservience of Kenyans. Ranger highlights that

> the invented traditions from Europe not only provided Whites with models of command but also offered many African models of 'modern' behaviour. The invented traditions of African societies – whether invented by the Europeans or by Africans themselves in response – distorted the past but became in themselves realities which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed (212).

Drawing from this explanation, we can begin to understand the reinforcement of 'untraditional-ness' by both Europeans during colonialism and the African ruling class after colonialism. A constant effort was made to disengage from *traditional* culture as it was defined and expressed by the British. As this study will show, post-colonial subjects cannot successfully detach themselves completely from this 'invented' tradition, but instead are constantly redefining themselves by re-engaging with an indigenous past while engaging with concepts and practices of a contemporary African state, which may inattentively be defined as a struggle between tradition and modernity.

I will take myself as an example. Born and raised in Kenya, I have been educated in Western educational institutions and participated in Western practices of religion, medicine and so forth. There were interceptions of indigenous culture, mainly through speaking and understanding my mother tongue, Kikuyu. However, while studying in Canada over the past five years, I have had to identify myself as a Kenyan in part because of my displacement, and because of North America's preoccupation with easily identifying labels. While growing up and living in Kenya, I was not consciously or even physically aware that I was a Kenyan, and sometimes due to my social environments in urban Nairobi, a melange of ethnicities, I hardly had to nationally define myself. As we shall see later, in both *Saikati* and *Battle*, the mention of ethnicity is minimized as other identity formation processes are raised. The grooves they tread are similar in my self-naming process.

When I visited my relatives in the rural area where my parents were born, I was confronted with an awareness that I was somewhat *different*; *modern*, not *traditional*. Without knowing, and in retrospect, I had already prematurely constructed a dichotomy -

shags (a slang word derivative of the Kikuyu word *'gichagi'* meaning rural) and town. Among my peers, there is slang, *shags mudus*, a derisive term that translates as "backwards", "uncivilized" or "traditional". This is not surprising seeing that an association with underdevelopment and the rural domain is frequent in post-colonial discourse. As an aside, I should point out that this is not exclusive in post-colonial context; in the United States, for example, you have the (false) dichotomy between North and South. Although this may not necessarily be an artifact of a colonial experience, I intend to elucidate that the tradition/modern opposition is imported or foreign, but throughout time, which has been internalized and used as a mechanism to forge identities.

My ability to transform my identity was a mechanism operating in order for me to "feel at home" in both urban and rural spheres. When I visited my grandmother, I could live there for several days in absence of electricity and running water, usually out of the respect that this was where my mother was born and raised. Perhaps the ubiquitous saying, "the good old days" – although they were same "days" my parents incessantly account as "times of hardship" – allowed me to cherish the pre-colonial days whose history we were never formally taught and knew little about. I relied on relatives or my grandparents, like Mumbi's daughter in *Battle,* to learn about legends like Gikuyu and Mumbi, the mythical foreparents of the Kikuyu. My identity, like that of the characters in these films, is constantly in the process of defined transformation through the multiplicity of subject positions and practices of my everyday life.

When I came to Canada in the fall of 1993, my *modern* sensibilities probably allowed me to adjust faster in this *Westernized* world. At the same time, I continued to deeply root my philosophies in Western thought and ideologies. Progressively, I realized that these Western frameworks that seemed to encompass all cultures were actually

culturally specific to a modicum of North America. This project is a product of my extensive search for Afro-centric compounded frameworks. Here I bring to light my personal knowledge of the binary oppositions that frequent post-colonial discourse and my experiences of having to subconsciously define myself in the interstices, or intervals according to Derrida, of these seemingly set and fixed dichotomies.

There are also other issues at hand. My aspirations as an African woman scholar may be seen as a conflict against *traditionalism* or perceived as a threat to the stern and sometimes inflexible African patriarchy. Partly, because my upbringing and most of my informing ideologies have been considered *modern* or Western. I am adamantly working against being what Nnaemeka calls an "outsider-outsider" – one who is completely located outside an African sphere, the activities and understandings that operate in that space – and compromising and negotiating my identity in a Euro-centric realm. Inasmuch as the panache of the West may be enticing, it is often frivolous and insufficient in my own self-determination. Thus, while I do admit that it has been a major and significant part of my own identity formation, like the "insider-outsider", I have as a scholar interested in African studies, the theoretical expertise from the "outside" to engage in a critical analysis within a cultural understanding of the "inside". I take advantage of the multiple identities I have forged in both Africa and the West paying "equal attention to cultural contexts and critical theory" (Nnaemeka 1995:81).

Wanjiru Kinyanjui, in an interview aired similar concerns about locality in her own experiences as a Kenyan student in Germany. The epigraph that opens this thesis points to her assertion that Africa was in search of identity, and that "we [Africans] are divided in ourselves between the past traditions and the more recent, but widely approved, Western ones" (Personal interview 3rd June 1999). She points out that while

living in the West for 18 years, her vigilance on the home front was unwavering. It was after her return to Kenya, that she realized that she was alienated.

> [I never felt] at home in Germany and [I was seen] as a tourist at home. [I was] having to always find my balance between the two. I think this has contributed a lot to making an 'identity' a favourite theme of mine (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999).

Kinyanjui was born in Githunguri, Kiambu, and the site of her film *Battle*. She studied filmmaking in Berlin (West) at the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), a professional school focussing on practical orientation and introduction in film. *Battle*, was her graduation project, which she feels was an ambitious attempt as all the other students, with the exception of one, made short films. The reason for engaging in such an enormous task was partly because she felt that she might never get the advantage of accessing facilities and equipment again, and partly because the success of the film would earn her the recognition as a filmmaker. Her film was funded, produced and distributed by two European film companies, Birne Film (Germany) and Flamingo films (France).

Anne Mungai, on the other hand, was trained as a filmmaker at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication, Nairobi, Kenya. Like Kinyanjui, capital to fund the film did not come easily. With poor financial support and distribution from the Frederick Engels Foundation, *Saikati* was finally completed. Like *Battle*, Mungai's film illustrates that the characters are caught between oppositional ideologies. The array of identities with which the characters in the films use to define themselves, and the *multiplicity of positions* to borrow Ella Shohat's term to place themselves, are prime in understanding that identity is discursive, precarious, and at times ambivalent. Socio-cultural issues in cinematic expression, and especially in reference to *Battle* and *Saikati* are laden with paradoxes and notions of dilemma inherent in the post-colonial discourse.

4.1 Defining Post-Colonialism

A discussion on Kenyan post-independence cinema cannot be fully understood without a reference and a working definition of 'post-colonialism'. Although there are many different versions in this definition, academics accede that it is "resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates as ... it addresses all aspects of colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1995:2). The debate over the terms 'post-colonialism' and 'post-colonial' has caused great anguish in the academy amongst scholars who predominantly work with so-called Third World cultural and literary work. This contention has generated more heat than light, putting forth vague and sometimes diverse definitions, which have served only to precipitate the complexity of the term, its expression, and use in any social science or humanities discipline.

Through a descriptive definitive process, this section hopes to elaborate on the contradictions and complexities within the post-colonial realm. This section illustrates the insufficiency of these theories in capturing the panoply and details of contemporary Kenyan concerns as reflected in both films. Through the interrogation in this section, one will see that discursive post-colonial theories are well complimented with African feminist theoretical approaches to curb the foundational ambivalence concerning identity formation inherent in post-colonial theoretical definitions.

The term 'post-colonial' can literally be taken to describe the general lifestyle and on goings of a country once colonized by a European imperial nation such as Britain, France or Portugal. It is of course much more complicated than this. Aparajita Sagar, in A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory, rightly observes that " post-colonial studies' would incorporate the study of all effects of European colonization in the

majority of the cultures of the world, and include all the academic disciplines in use in institutions of learning across the globe" (1996:423). Colonization here entails the instutionalization through an imposition of a Western value system, of education, religion, and medical practices, while marginalizing the local or native population of a given nation.

Ania Loomba in Colonialism/Post-colonialism insists that colonialism cannot be pinned down to a single semantic meaning but can only be properly understood by relating its "shifting meanings to historical processes" (1998:2). Post-colonialism in this sense seems to reference the indelible influences of colonialism on the lives of the contemporary African society and the emergent discourses. Consequently, economic, social and cultural factors in the history of colonial Kenya have undoubtedly been deterrents in its disassociation from the West, and its efforts in establishing separate institutions that reflect its divergent but yet intricate culture.

Memory and remembering, as articulated in Kenyan cinema reflects both the remnants and impact of colonialism. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media, agree when they note that "an awareness of the intellectually debilitating effects of the Eurocentric legacy is indispensable for comprehending not only contemporary media representation but even contemporary subjectivities" (1994: 1). To begin a study on the binary oppositions of tradition and modernity without a clear reference to the effects generated by colonialism is to ignore the power hierarchies assumed in a global context, and to override the Euro-American powerful position as arbiter of knowledge and ideology whether embedded in economics or culture (Mudimbe 1988:19). 'Post-colonial' can therefore be perceived at once as a period and an academic school of thought that houses and discusses cultural products

such as literature and film. This study is however more concerned with the basic meaning that engenders the academic school of thought studying material that reflects the period.

Criticisms of post-colonialism observe that it is essentially Eurocentric as it tends to focus on the history of the colonized nation as referenced by the dominant history and activities of Europe. As we shall see later in this thesis, Eurocentric tendencies are detrimental to the process of unearthing complexities generated by colonization and minimizes the "West's oppressive practices by regarding them as contingent, accidental, exceptional" (Shohat and Stam 3). Cultural practices that emerged under colonialism/post-colonialism must therefore be concerned not only with the text, but should contextualize the colonial practices and histories. Loomba observes that definitions derived from colonialism "quite remarkably avoid any reference to people other than the colonizers"(1). She also suggests that the term implies an aftermath of events with Europe at the centre.

Loomba's examination reveals the Eurocentricity of post-colonial practices in two ways. First, she points to the temporal factor that alludes to its *coming after* of colonialism. Secondly, she underscores the ideological implications significant in understanding the ineffaceable effects of the mechanisms of colonialism. Ideologies, with the intention to disseminate implicated by colonialism are well reflected in films made by Europeans during and after colonialism. These films served to propagate and perpetuate stereotypes of Africans to support Eurocentric ideologies. Examples of these films are *The African Queen* (1951), *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) and its several sequels, as well as documentary attempts such as *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1984) and *Daybreak in Udi* (1949) which ironically won an Oscar for best documentary that same year. These distorted images of Africa and Africans maintains Homi Bhabha's thesis that colonial

discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer (1983:200), which is highly restricted by language and Eurocentricity.

The language, in another instance, used to describe abstruse African meaning and consciousness is inadequately expressed through a linguistic code foreign to the specifities and intricacies of particular African cultures. Subsequently, African cultural views are misappropriated using colonial and Eurocentric discourses that are superficially superior. Western feminist theories, for example, that have attempted to describe African women's experience have been misleading in their comprehension of specific meaning affecting their theorization of the African woman. Gwendolyn Mikell in African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa, posits that "what it means to be an African woman differs radically from the ... conception of woman in industrialized Western countries" (1997:8). The post-colonial enterprise does not attempt to offer a unitary explanation without the consideration of the antecedents or consequences. These are strongly resounded within the contestation of identity in diverse locations in the post-colonial realm. Post-colonialism therefore, should be viewed more flexibly as a struggle against colonial dominance and because the inequities of colonialism are ineradicable, it is indicative of the struggle and agency for identity, self-definition, and status.

Similarly, the assumption that post-colonialism equates the demise of colonialism is a misleading fallacy that only seeks to produce false optimism of complete detachment from the colonial power and consequences. Loomba quotes Jorge Alva who "delinks the term 'post-coloniality' from formal colonization" because he believes that people once colonized and once colonizing countries are still subject to the oppression put into place by the original colonization (qtd in Loomba 13). Essentially, this is a new colonialism masquerading as independence.

Sagar, in his concern for the ambivalence of the term 'post', suggests that it should be understood to include the era of colonialism itself, as the term

> covers a vast terrain of decolorized/neocolonised cultures that may have witnessed the end of one phase of Western imperialism – the formal dismantling of colonial political/administrative machinery – only to enter the next phase, with Western imperialism now organizing them in the interests of its last capitalist economies (423).

The reproduction of colonialism by local elite constitutes the ideals of neo-colonialism. Hence, it is significant in understanding that the demise of formal colonialism did not necessarily mean unequivocal liberation for post-colonial subjects. In addition, it is important to note that the struggle for independence was enabled by the support of intellectuals from the metropole, engaging in a discourse produced, in the case of Kenya, within the British political and academic sphere.

Sagar warns that

> for post-colonial studies to retain its oppositional charge, it will be necessary that the ambiguity of the prefix "post" be kept in sight. And that specific differences within its rubric be actively mobilized and understood not just in terms of national origins but also of class, gender, race, sexual and ethnic orientations; and finally, that increasingly complex and rigorous ways be found to read cultural practices in their political contexts (424).

Kwame Anthony Appiah's discussion on the movement of African art and cultural products from the African continent to the West, furthers this line of thought by highlighting that " 'post-coloniality' is the condition of what we might ungenerously call *a comprador* intelligentsia. This refers to a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who meditate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery (1991:343). Later, in the same article, "Is the Post in Post-modern the Post in Post-Colonial," he maintains that post-colonial intellectuals

cannot escape the West as their "theories of their situation are irreducibly informed by their Euro-American formation" (348).

Political leaders during the eve of independence, as well as the elite who harboured a distinct colonial mentality belonging to this intelligentsia, expressed neo-colonialist attitudes through the foreign/colonial value system to which they adhered. The *compador* intelligentsia, it must be noted to avoid gross generalizations, may not necessarily be a trained or educated group of Kenyans located in an urban or 'modern' setting. The concerted effort to analyze and query the colonial machinery or mechanism that reproduced identity that resisted against colonialism through nationalism is not only a practice among the academy but through popular cultural practices such as film and literature. The struggle between the dichotomies, this study examines, cannot be discounted; they are both expressions and symptoms of the post-colonial state, and its context in a global context.

Coming from a different but valid perspective, Shohat argues in, "Notes on the Post-colonial" against the acceptability of the term 'post-colonial' in the Western academy as it serves to keep at bay "more sharply political terms such as imperialism and geo-politics" (1993:99). In other words, emphasis on the post-colonial deeply focuses on Britain's history in Europe and Kenya, rather than the Kenyan's record of the impact of colonialism and the effects that ensued. This is true, however, the record and documentation from the African point of view has been expressed through literature and film. In fact, the process of centering and re-writing Kenyan history has been the focus of literary and cinematic work, which simultaneously celebrate and criticize pre-colonial African traditions. Indigenous filmmaking in Kenya began as a formation of a counter-colonial discourse similar to that of Kenyan literary novels by authors like Grace Ogot,

Meja Mwangi and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. They are post-colonial in the sense that they are working against the grain of colonial discourses (forged as the norm) explicated in earlier British films and novels such as those by Rider H. Haggard.

Peter Hulme suggests that 'post-colonial' should not literally be taken as descriptive but as an evaluative term without completely leaving out aspects produced by the discourse (1995:120). These definitions seek to evaluate the indescribable factors and include those that would otherwise be lost. Central characters in these two films cannot be simply described; it is imperative that they are evaluated and analyzed to gain a larger understanding of the undercurrents of the discourses which eventually yield their identities within post-colonialism; a state where colonial influences are still effective charged with the complexities in contemporary African societies and people living within.

The characters in these two films are affected by both a traditional value system and that imposed by the *comprador* intelligentsia who adopted the colonizer's belief system and structure. Bhabha observes that the "colonial presence is always an ambivalent split between its appearance as original and authoritative, and its articulation as repetition and difference" (1985:150). The pervasive colonial presence, even after the independence of Kenya, is inscribed in the Foucauldian "code of knowledge"[1], which assumes an authoritative status in the hierarchy of knowledge and the consequent production of identity. Loomba vehemently argues the following:

> Both women and colonised peoples functioned in economies which rested on their labour, and both were subject to ideologies which justified this exploitation. So both feminists and anti-colonial movements needed to challenge dominant ideas of history, culture and representation. They too questioned objectivity in dominant historiography, they too showed how canonical literary texts disguised their political affiliations, and they too broke with dominant western patriarchal philosophies (40).

By aligning women with colonized peoples, Loomba suggests a shared struggle that Western versions of feminisms failed to address. Although the impetus of post-colonial theoretical assumptions is the resistant reading against power, in its complex, colonial patriarchal, discursive and material manifestations (Sagar 426), it was until recently that post-colonial theories incorporated feminist frameworks. Feminist discourses within post-colonial theoretical approaches addressed issues post-colonial theories ignored in their attempts to elaborate on colonized people's experiences. Significantly, through feminist application in literary work, it became clear that both colonialist and patriarchal ideologies and institutions subordinated the representation of gender relations. While Western feminist theories, essentially postulated and universalized "woman" as a single, unitary, and indeterminate category, "post-colonial feminisms" emphasized the particularities to project the incoherence of identity among post-colonial subjects.

African feminism, a derivative of "post-colonial feminisms" has distinguished itself by positing that differences within gender relations specifically in Africa are not fixed or exclusive to all African peoples and cultures. In fact, African feminist thought powerfully intervened post-colonial discourse to elaborate on the "significance of complexities, paradoxes, and possibilities of difference (Nnaemeka 1997b:30). Frameworks of African feminism, deriving out of literature, have used post-colonial theoretical assumptions as a springboard to analyze gendered subjectivities and competing identities.

The following explication of African feminist theories will inform that identity is a construct greatly influenced by eroded pre-colonial histories, the effects of the impact of colonialism, post-colonialism and the social, cultural and economic practice of neo-colonialism. As Nnaemeka puts it "African feminism establishes its identity through its

resistance – it *is* because it *resists*" (1997a: 6 emphasis in original). The trajectory of identity therefore emerges out in dominant discourses of colonialism and post-colonialism rooted in African experiences and logic, transcending the centrality of Western thought and exploration.

4.2 Towards an African feminist application

Nnaemeka agrees that "feminist scholarship remains one of the most powerful critical and analytical tools with immense possibilities for fostering intellectual maturity and social change" (1995: 81). However, its deficient application has caused African women theorists to profusely create a framework of analysis without the questionable and presumptuous dichotomies that external feminist theories presuppose on African experience. The intervention of African feminist theory, deeply rooted in African literary criticism, has challenged dominant discourses grounded in Western thought, while making a concerted effort to reclaim individuality and heterogeneity of the subjects. Oyeronke Oyewumi points out in reference to the Yoruba of Nigeria that "Yorubaland covers a vast area, and despite homogenizing factors like language and recent historical experiences, once can discern some significant institutional, cultural specificities in given locales" (1997: xiii). Similarly, to construe that Kenyans are a monolithic group, both fixed and static, is to deny difference and diversity that exists in the local milieu.

African feminism underscores that the "African woman is a creation of historical and current forces that are simultaneously internally generated and externally induced" (Nnaemeka 1997b: 14). The most important challenge to the African woman remains "her own self-perceptions since it is she who has to define her own freedom and her self-determination, which may be obscured by post-colonial definitions. In order to analyze

gender hierarchies within their own communities from the margins, within and against dominant power structures, the post-colonial African woman must claim specific identities that are in and of themselves transforming and subjective (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:31).

The difficulties entailed by post-colonial definitions, therefore, can be rescued by employing African feminist thought such as those presented by Nnaemeka and Nfah-Abbenyi who agree that it is misleading to argue about women in general post-colonial terms. Although African feminist theories have been deployed in understanding African literature and the representation of women, I have chosen to use them to understand the representation of identity in *Saikati* and *Battle* for two reasons. First, they provide a theoretical base in which the "gaze" is African rather than African filtered through Western eyes. Secondly, they certainly "break the dependence on Western theory" (Petty, email communication: 4th December 1998).

Nfah-Abbenyi states that although indigenous theory has always existed with literary texts it has not always been read as such (20). She seeks the primary site for the generation of African theory as the texts themselves suggest that the polysemous nature of their narratives that encode their own theoretical positionings. According to Sheila Petty, who believes that this movement is just beginning to gain momentum, the heated debates indicate that the African feminist framework can be applicable to African cinema especially since African filmmakers use devices, such as decentred narrative structures drawn from oral tradition, similar to those of African literary writers, to tell their story (Petty email communication: 14th December 1998). African feminist frameworks as used by Nnaemeka; Petty, Nfah-Abbenyi and relevant and applicable theoretical frameworks

from post-colonial discourse will facilitate the comparative content analysis of *Saikati* and *Battle* for the following reasons.

African feminist approaches examines the themes and topics which engage women writers and filmmakers, their language (literary or filmic), characterization, the forms they use and images. Although African feminist framework works to develop an African female aesthetic, it also demands new examination into the principles of composition and expression (Davies and Graves 1986:15). It also recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation (8). Furthermore, it takes into account that certain inequities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced these and introduced others (9).

Priorities which Western models of feminism mold as a form of oppression or victimization are central in African feminism: these include motherhood, the resilience of colonial oppression on men and women, woman-to-woman violence, and power hierarchies within women. Nnaemeka advocates a replacement of the male/female dichotomy with a "matrix of domination" for the reason that it "focuses on the nexus of interlocking systems of oppression where oppressor/oppressed positions shift (1997b:20). This approach is more useful as it transcends gender and provides a more flexible way of looking at hierarchies in both genders. Furthermore, in areas where matriarchy still exists in Africa, it would be useless to speak of *equality*, as difference is more critical in understanding this society.

African feminism polemically attacks the static binary divisions imperative during colonialism and neo-colonialism, as they conceal complexities and the diverse possibilities of difference of women. Indeed, African feminism is integrationist rather

than separatist but also insists that any objective assessment of the "modern" woman is based on its own realities and not that of the past or of other countries or *a priori* assumptions (Nnaemeka 1997a: 12). For example, how can we possibly assign an identity to market women who work and live in both rural and urban spaces even when they do belong to either one of these paradigms? These women are in fact functioning *in between* spaces, at intervals and interstices key in their identification. This brings to light Bhabha's notion of doubling (1985:153); the effect of ambivalence and being at two places at the same time at once generating dual identity. By conflating the oppositions and complexities present in both films, this thesis will form the idea of *in-betweeness* as being crucial in delineating the thesis of this study.

Chapter 1 seeks to contextualise Kenyan cinema by beginning to discuss how film entered Kenya and its function as an instrument of achieving progress and civilization. It will explicate how the films made by the British, in general, about Africans before and after independence pronounced in a very sound manner the so-called distorted psyche and culture of Africans. This chapter will also explore how the conventions and negotiations that emerged from socio-cultural, political, and economic facets of colonial processes influenced the growth and development of a standing Kenyan film industry, and the content of literature and films in Kenya.

Chapter 2, through a content and textual analysis of both films and an application of African feminist theoretical approaches will examine how binary divisions are represented and determine whether they present a hindrance in the process of identity formation. By examining the films by turn, this chapter hopes to reject binary divisions, and seeks to conflate the oppositions and complexities, a principal task in the emerging African feminist theories.

Chapter 3 functioning as a synthesis of the two chapters will highlight that Kenyan cinema, like its predecessor, the Kenyan novel, is representative of the vagaries encountered by post-colonial subjects. It will show that the effects of colonialism should be kept at bay while discussing the narratives that strive to break away from the divisive oppositions imposed on economic, social and cultural levels and their intersections with political vectors. This chapter will also show that contradictions and complexities are inherent in the larger contemporary society. It will finally consider the application of African feminist theories in attaining an understanding of the films within the context of the heterogeneity of Kenyan culture. This study, nonetheless, begins to address an under-represented area in film and media scholarship.

I paraphrase Nfah-Abbenyi's use of a quote by Adrienne Rich "who sees theory as nothing by the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees – theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell like the earth, it isn't good for the earth. (in Nfah-Abbenyi 22). It is my conviction that African feminist theoretical frameworks are recalcitrant drizzles that return to earth fully embodying all that is specific and good for African soil.

CHAPTER 1

From the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment to the Kenya Film Corporation: A Cursory Overview of Kenyan Cinema

> African cinema must be understood from the point of view of historical experiences spanning from colonialism to neocolonialism. That formal independence of African states has not been followed by economic independence shows a new form of economic and cultural strangulation emerging in the form of dependence on former governments, with the latecomer – the United States – playing an even larger role in Third World dominance (Ukadike 9).

The division of space, specifically, urban and rural, the imposition of Western values within these spaces, and the debasement of tradition are all characteristics of a post-colonial state. The circumstances in which cinema reached Kenya must be understood within the context of colonialism and the administrative processes of the British. Although Kenya has one of the oldest film industries in Africa, it continues to occupy a narrow space in film scholarship. In fact, the Anglo-African film scene in general, with the exception of Ghana and Nigeria, remains one of the most undertheorized areas in African cinema. To begin discussing Kenyan cinema, it is important to review the cultural context of cinema, while examining the circumstances in which film entered the Kenyan societies and the functions it was meant to perform.

Several writers and filmmakers have noted the development of cinema and most importantly, its first uses on the continent. Jean Rouch in "The Awakening of African Cinema" writes, "the cinema made its debut in Africa in the very first years after its invention" (1962:10). Although film may have entered the African continent circa 1894, African Anglophone countries were late comers in the business of film production. According to Nwachukwu Ukadike, mobile cinemas had already appeared in Francophone Dakar by 1905, while in Sierra Leone, missionaries had already started

using slide projectors (1994:31). Furthermore, Edward Horatio-Jones in "Historical Review of the Cinema" is certain that it was not until after 1925 that the cinema reached Africa, south of the Sahara (1979:74). Despite the lack of consensus on when cinema came to Africa, it is agreed that film was brought through colonialism. Thus, the circumstances in which cinema reached Kenya must be understood within the context of colonialism and British colonial administration process.

Art and cultural products such as cinema, literature, and theatre were secondary to other aspects of the colonial state that were more immediately beneficial to the sustenance of the British economy in Kenya. One of these crucial aspects was the production of cash crops. Although this example illustrates the more thriving financial facet of the Kenyan economy, the allocation of land ultimately led to labour grievances that engendered a difference of opinions between the settlers, administrators and Kenyans. In this chapter, we will see that the latter occupied a central space in the politics of British Kenya, and in turn, this affected the social and the cultural facets of this colonized nation. We will also see that other industries, such as those of agriculture and natural resources, were perceived as significant by the British colonial settler population. In hindsight, this acted as a handicap to the development of an organized film scene or industry. The exploitation of natural resources was linked to the vector of economics that dominated the period of colonialism.

This chapter seeks to outline the history of Kenyan cinema from its early beginnings under British *paternalistic* control to present day where Kenya is in the nascent stages of establishing a national cinema. In addition, through a brief socio-political mapping of the history of Kenya before independence in 1963, this chapter hopes to examine how cinema was first used by the British and later instituted by the Kenyans

after independence. Exploring the difficulties entailed in film production in Kenya, especially for women, will lead us to a better understanding of the politics of production and exhibition and the salient issues that women filmmakers like Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui are dealing with in their films. In addition, this chapter will briefly examine the different organizations and bodies that have been created to ensure the longevity of the cinema in Kenya. It serves to furnish the reader with background information that will be significant in gaining a deeper understanding of the issues raised in the two films discussed in this study, and the inexplicable relationship, evident in both films, between tradition and modernity.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides information on the socio-political history of Kenya alongside the development of administrative functionaries that guided the colonial processes in Kenya. As self-sufficiency in British colonies was prime, it will be clear that the industries that foregrounded the importance of local Kenyan art and cultures were marginal if ineffectual. In her thesis, The Role of the National Museums of Kenya in Defining Kenyan Culture (1999), Wangui Kaniaru agrees that cultural institutions such as the National Museums of Kenya, established in 1909, embedded Africans in an insidiously designed exotic and romantic Kenya to fit the colonial narrative of Kenya as nature lover's paradise. Since the prerogative of the colonial state was to secure a generation of finance, only economic and political structures were formed to oversee the success of this intention. Subsequently, the development of film, and even the establishment of museums was designed to reinforce the colonial narrative of society and culture, and failed to represent local Kenyan culture on its own terms. Although I do not delve into a discussion on decolonization in this chapter, I briefly discuss this process in order to understand its repercussions and

contextualise the formation of the post-colonial elite and the consequential construction of the polar oppositions of the modern and the traditional.

The second part will examine the nationalization of colonial institutions that dealt with film production and exhibition after independence in 1963. With colonialism, came the penetration of "modern" values, the formation of foreign infrastructures, and the group Appiah refers to as the *intelligentsia*, or the educated elite (1991). It will be clear in following chapter, that filmmakers in Kenya make a concerted effort to counter the aesthetics and contexts of foreign cultural products. This section will further discern that the urban and educated elite in government and administrative positions were less concerned with indigenous cinema and invested time and money on foreign films whose images continue to be embedded in discourses that deal with arts and culture in Kenya.

The third section will consider the construction of modern versus tradition within the colonial Kenyan discourse. It will introduce the subsequent chapter by showing that the dialectic ideologies this study terms as binary oppositions or dichotomies are creations specifically engendered by colonialism, and precipitated by post-colonialism, and imbued in the minds of the participants within this state. This section of the chapter discusses the implications of binary oppositions, and how the two films I use in this study are points of entry in beginning to understand post-colonialism and the formation of identity.

5.1 The First Wave: Colonialism and the picture in Kenya

It was in the Devonshire White Paper of 1923 that the British government declared that Kenya primarily an African country. Hitherto, it had been perceived as part of the British East African Protectorate. The British continued to maintain political control and governance over their colony on subordinating the activities of Kenyan Africans. The colonial state in Kenya was filled with its own tensions, for example, the erupting conflicts between the white settlers and the colonial administrators each with their own agendas and ideas on the methods of efficiently controlling the people of Kenya. A hierarchical relationship was constructed, becoming embedded in the intra-processes of the Colony. The British appointed themselves as arbiters of culture and politics assigning roles and responsibilities to Africans, disseminating their culture as bona fide, while stigmatizing and deeming as inferior anything that ran counter to their philosophy. In this regard, their ideology was reflected in films through the condescending attitudes of the British towards the African, "in order to instill in the Africans feeling of inferiority about their own tradition, culture and indeed, their whole being (Ukadike 43).

This logic was symptomatic of the general European attitudes toward Africans and non-Whites. A hierarchy that had already existed in Europe for over a century which manifested in Kenya[2] during the colonial period. Europeans generally saw it as their duty and responsibility to employ every medium available to save Africans from "barbarism". In order to achieve this, they took up the role of parenting or guides, akin to Hegelian notions of childhood espoused in relation to Africa (Ngugi 1972: 9). Such imagery is conjured by the work of Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), a Danish author who lived in Kenya for over a decade, writing in Shadows on the Grass that, "the dark nations of Africa [were] strikingly precocious as young children" (1960:13). Fallacies and

misconceptions created about the Africans, such as their primitiveness, imbecility, and their paganastic and highly sexualized nature were extended from the colonial system to the administration in filmmaking.

The French practice in Africa, despite manifesting similar results in its African subjects, had a remarkably different approach to colonization. French "assimilation" method of colonization in West Africa which while similarly premised African as backward offered him the chance to become more "French" like his colonizer. Contrary to the British, the French had no direct "policy of producing films that were especially intended for their subjects in Africa" (Diawara 1992:22). Although the French were opposed to the creation and development of an African cinema, collaboration between African film students and filmmakers like Jean Rouch existed, ultimately changing the policies that governed African film-making in French West Africa (23-25). This approach was dramatically different from the British paternalistic attitudes towards the development of cinema in Kenya and most of British Africa.

The diffusion of cinema in Kenya has its roots in the British colonial system and the governing imperial structures that served to channel British ideologies. Although they were established under the guise of training Africans in "proper" etiquette and providing practical experience in filmmaking, these films and the structures that governed them were nothing more than ephemeral edifices of imperialism. In 1935, the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment[3] was established under the International Missionary Council. Largely funded by the Canergie Corporation of New York, it was set up in British colonies in Africa to induce positive images of British lifestyle in the minds of African audiences. Furthermore, with the British consensus that Africa was a reflection of Europe's past, as Johannes Fabian (1983) put it, the cinema was to play educational

and informational roles in imparting to Africans key interpersonal attitudes, as well as the importance of Western systems of health and hygiene. L. A. Notcutt, founder of the Experiment claimed the following in support of its mandate:

> With backward people unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, it is surely in our wisdom, if not in our obvious duty to prevent as far as possible the dissemination of wrong ideas. Should we stand by and see a distorted presentation of the white race's life accepted by millions of Africans when we have it in our power to show them the truth (Notcutt 1937:23 in Diawara 1992:1)

While Notcutt's problematic and false belief that "wrong ideas" of the British were being "disseminated" through other media, he felt that the Experiment had it in its power to correct the distortion and curb negative stereotypes being perpetuated about the British in the colonies. The implication of this linear and simplistic observation deserves more thought. The manufacturing and perpetuation of African stereotypes by Europeans to qualify the list of reasons for educating and ultimately civilizing the native is not considered. The failure to recognize the traditions and cultures of Africans was obviously manifested in the content of the films produced by the Experiment. The relations of power configured between the colonizer and the colonized made this possible. The colonizer's experiences in this episteme, as observed by Shohat and Stam, are not seen as fundamental catalysts of the West's disproportionate power (3). The fact that the Experiment was created to "educate" the backward people displays an insidious effort on the part of the British to impose foreign values, practices, and belief systems.

This was nothing more than an extension of the myth-creation of European explorers and imperialists in an attempt to justify the legitimacy of institutions through their theories and discourses of colonial expansion and primitiveness (Mudimbe 20). Shohat and Stam make an interesting observation that imperialism, in the broadest

meaning possible, was not inscribed either in the apparatus or in the celluloid, but the context of imperial power shaped the uses to which both the apparatus and the celluloid were put. In this way, within an imperial context, the apparatus of cinema (or film) tended to be deployed in ways flattering to the imperial subject as superior and invulnerable observer (Shohat and Stam 104). Nevertheless, numerous films continued to be produced that went hand in hand with the propaganda machine.

According to Diawara, about 35 short films with commentaries in African languages were made within a year of the creation of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment. The empty rhetoric of civilizing the Africans through film was echoed in works like *An African in London* was juxtaposed with *Mister English at Home* to emphasize the correctness of British etiquette and mannerisms. From these two films, the binaries of home/abroad are conjured where the former connotes uncouth properties and the latter denotes civilization. The development for an African elite is implicit in the content of these films. In other words, what was represented as "proper behaviour" in these films predetermined how Africans were to be and behave. Interestingly, the educated elite who, after independence appropriated and adapted this "proper behaviour."

Films produced by the Experiment also focused on important economic aspects of the colonial project such as directives of growing coffee and other cash crops. This was fundamental to the functioning and sustenance of the political economy of the British colony. Other films commented strongly on health issues such as the prevention of disease while placing numerous caveats on the utility of traditional methods of healing and dismissing them as primitive and superstitious. It is important to note that although Africans were used as producers for these films, it was mainly for economic or financial

reasons to cut down production costs. Very few Africans were trained to handle filming equipment, and even fewer were in charge of screenwriting, direction or production.

In 1937, the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, after two years of condescending African cultures, was dissolved. The Colonial Film Unit was later formed in 1939 as a central body with branches in various British colonies including Kenya. Films produced were of better quality; however, they continued to precipitate stereotypes of Africans while simultaneously attempting to justify colonial administration activities. Colonial ideologies were further institutionalized through the films made by the Unit as they "extolled colonialism by showing the British way of life, to 'brainwash' the African psyche into accepting that progress was only attainable through colonial rule" (Ukadike 44). The binary oppositions where tradition was pitted against modernity began to emerge where the former was essentially associated with static cultural practice and the latter equated with ideas of Western civilization and progress.

The 1940s, in Kenya, witnessed an influx of British technicians. The Hailey Report of 1942 directed the policy of the colonial administration to be aware of the rise of nationalism among the Kenyans, and to find ways to accommodate or suppress the vocal expressions of Kenyan politicians. The inherent contradiction of the report and British colonial rule in general, was that although education and the formation of an African elite class to adopt the governance of the independent colony was essential, it was the same group of educated Africans who recognized their subordination and subsequently drew up constitutions for change. This period was also marked by a growing number of anthropologists or ethnographic pastorals (see Clifford 1986) who entered Kenya to conduct research under the auspices of the Colonial Social Science Research Council (Berman 1991:187). The conclusions in the studies that they made in Kenya

complemented the official colonial discourse. Most importantly, their understanding of tradition vs. modern exaggerated the idealized functions of a traditional society, which later led to the making of anthropological films over next two decades in Kenya. Ukadike points to the "conventionally degrading modernist tendencies" in the films of David and Judith McDougall who in the 1970s set out to Turkana, North Kenya, to document the life of hapless Turkana people on film[4] (52).

In the early 1950s, the British reluctantly began to withdraw from the African colonies. In Kenya, political tension, mostly ensued by the growing nationalism phenomena and the Mau Mau movement[5], forced the British to step back and restructure the government for an inevitable transfer of power. Diawara observes that in "1955, the Colonial Film Unit declared it had fulfilled its goal to introduce an educational cinema to Africans"; ironically, the onus was now on African to "finance their own films" (1992:3). This was a unrealistic conclusion especially since Africans had little or no financial wherewithal to establish a standing film industry that would independently produce films remotely articulating their experience and consciousness. The dependency relationship inevitably forged between African filmmakers and European financiers continues to haunt Kenyan filmmakers who must rely Western countries for financial aid to initiate and complete film projects. Developing a film industry was secondary in the restructuring design of the new nation-state. After independence, culture and forms of identity were centered around political and government institutions, as well as the reclamation of lost land.

The outcome of both the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit caused the establishment of film and television schools which sought to train African filmmakers and television program producers. The pedagogy, as expected, was

deeply Eurocentric suppressing any potential infusion of African aesthetics in its instruction. This reflected one of the more blatant effects of colonialism in Kenya and much of Africa was confining the modes of education to European systems and thought processes. The films produced by the Experiment mirrored the inequality of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; this was not altered in film schools.

In this vein, Ngugi wa Thiong'o points out that

> the real aim of colonialism was to control the entire realm of language of real life. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world (1972:14).

The films produced by the Bantu Educational Film Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit perniciously configured a means of self-perception for the Africans. The films hinted at the "kinetic sense of imperial travel and conquest, transforming European spectators into armchair conquistadors, affirming their sense of power while turning the colonies into spectacle for the metropole's voyeuristic gaze" (Stam and Shohat 104). For the European audiences, the stereotypes harboured proved true further correlating the stories of explorers like Stanley and Livingstone. The content of these films justified the resentment of traditional ways of life through an imposition of language and methods of instruction onto a culture ultimately steering Kenyans into ambivalent groves of identification.

In fact, one of the major results of colonialism and decolonisation was the formation of an African elite "those educated Africans who had escaped the stultifying bonds of traditional society". The main dynamic of the process of this formation was the confrontation between the forces of modernity and the forces of tradition" (Gordon 1986:5). According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan elite

> harkened to the voice of the missionary's God, cried Hallelujah, and raised their eyes to Heaven. They derided the old gods and they too recoiled with a studies (or genuine) horror from the primitive rites of their people (1972:10).

It is important and necessary to note that this was not the ideology that all educated Kenyans stood by; however, it is a fundamental aspect when we consider what happened to the film scene in Africa due to these widely held beliefs after independence. I must once again underline that independence did not necessarily constitute full liberation in minds of Kenyans.

In the period leading up to the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Kenya Africa Union, with its own lawyers and trade and labour advisors, was drawing up constitutions demanding for African representative in the Legislative Council. Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of the Union, also an acquaintance of Black American actor Paul Robeson in the 1930s, traveled to Lancaster House in London to assemble with other Kenyans to represent a nationalistic front pleading for suffrage. On the 1st of June 1963, Jomo Kenyatta became the first Prime Minister of Kenya, and 5 months later on the 12th of December, the Union Jack fell to give rise to a Kenyan flag formally marking the end of British colonial rule. Local film activity was non-existent except for some British and American films made using Kenya strictly as a filming location which, reinforced the colonial image of Kenya as a nature lover's paradise. Immediately after independence, film activity in Kenya comprised of a surge of foreign production in Kenya and exhibition of foreign films in theatre houses. As this was the case during the colonial era, the film industry was once again deemed as secondary while other nation building industries were prime for development.

5.2 The Second Wave: Post-Independence and the picture in Kenya

At the Algiers Charter on African Cinema in 1975[6], the representatives of the African nations in attendance agreed that the state of film in Africa called for militant organization if it was to contend with other film industries of the world. Active filmmaking was synonymous with active development, and thus any passivity had to be discarded and new ways of representing Africans on the screen had to be quickly adopted and forged.

It was clear from the points raised at this meeting that Africa at large was still grappling with the pervasive ideological and economic stranglehold of her former colonizers, even after over a decade of independence. The measures that needed to be taken toward detachment from this stifling power, had to be critical and effective:

> [I]n the face of this condition of cultural domination and deracination, there is a pressing need to reformulate in liberating terms the internal problematic of development and of the part that must be played in this worldwide advance by culture and the cinema (In Bakari and Cham 1996:25).

It would be expected that the films produced in Kenya after 1963 would centre a reformulated and liberated representation of Kenyan cultures, contrary to the distorted reflections of Africans in pre-independence Euro-Western Hollywood films. This was however not the case. Although Kenyan politicians pointed out in their numerous speeches the need for establishing a local identity, Kenya acquiesced to the British and American film enterprises by silently offering her landscape as an exotic setting for foreign films, probably in the fear of financial dissent.

The introduction to this thesis underwrites that the liberation from the stranglehold of British domination did not entirely mean independence from the models and traditions imposed throughout the colonial era. In all sectors of government, efforts were made to

nationalize previously established structures and organizations overseen by the British. Some of the policies put in place were not automatically transformed to reflect the emancipation of Kenyans. In fact, minimal and usually semantic changes such as the replacement of "Britain" with "Kenya" were made within official political discourse.

Denouncing British imperialism did not mean the demise of colonialism in its entirety. It is this state that is post-colonial, simply a proliferation of colonialist attitudes working within a restructured local power hierarchy. The new framework of operations introduced by the British remained functional even after independence. Similar to other African nation-states, Kenya superficially sovereign, maintained administrative structures derived from colonial norms and value systems, which were dominated by expatriates, meaning that foreign values were still perceived as superior. Furthermore, the persistence of foreign-structured communication models and channels continued to be problematic. As Louise M. Bourgault, in her examination of the effects of political, historical, economic and social factors have influenced the emergence and development of media in Sub-Saharan Africa, points out, media structures such as broadcasting were created by colonial powers and their adoption by African elite contributed to the "fuzziness of purpose" consequently attributing "to its lackluster performance" (1995:42-43).

In Kenya, because institutions of media and communication were parastatals or partly owned by the government, the focus on politics and state in the content was inevitable. In addition, the inherited colonial ideologies with regards to media paralyzed the urgent development of films that would privilege question of representation of the myriad of Kenyan cultures by Kenyans. Instead, literary works brought these problems to the forefront by continually addressing the effects of colonialism on the social and cultural fabric of Kenya, while highlighting the value of indigenous cultures. African

cinema and literature share a concern to reflect the alienation from and the dissatisfaction with colonial and neocolonial regimes. Despite the colonial legacy, the Kenyan government sought to establish centralized and nationalized bodies to promote media and communication development, and to portray the consolidation of national power.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was created to deal with information services, broadcasting, television, licensing of film, video and publications, and censorship. The role of censorship in Kenya can be related to the government's plea or urge to create a single national identity meant that the state enshrined a cultural hegemony of it own. The Ministry also formed and continue to administer the Kenya News Agency(KNA), the official disseminator of news in Kenya[7]. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Kenya Film Corporation (KFC) was formed a decade after independence. KFC primarily handles national film distribution. An overwhelming majority of films and content deals with and exhibits in local theatres is foreign, primarily imported from the United States, India, and China. Until the early 1990s, KFC was also responsible for mobile cinema that showed mostly foreign films in both rural and urban areas.

In 1972, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in co-operation with the former Federal Republic of Germany formed Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC), the largest television and video training school in the country. It continues to train some of the forefront directors and producers of film in Kenya such as Sao Gamba and Anne Mungai. Until 1985, KIMC only produced tourist films with the intention of luring foreigners to Kenya. Diawara notes the students produced films such as *Passport to Adventure, Waters of Mombasa*, and *Immashoi of Maasai* with assistance from and supervision of the government (1992:117). There were few to none films that provided

insight into the intricacies of Kenyan culture, preferring to subscribe to foreign attitudes of Africa and the ideas of safari. It is interesting to note that educational and informational films similar to those produced by the Bantu Educational Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit were made by the Kenyans themselves usually with the cooperation of Ministries of the government. They focussed on issues of rural and women's development, agriculture and industrial activities, while others centered on politics and government.

It is hardly surprising that the developments of the national government and its establishment of media and communication structures were simultaneous with the development of the elite. This group of especially educated government officials formed the conduit that transferred the colonial activities into the post-independent era. The government's poor financial support of the film industry precipitated the impoverished status of film production. Nevertheless, similar to any discussion on creative cultural production in Kenya, such as literature, the pervasive British ideologies affected in a significant way an underlying effort to counter the working ideologies of the colonizer. This was demonstrated in the production of African culture in the narrative content, aesthetics of form and style. The Resolutions of the Third World Film-Makers' Meeting in Algiers in 1973 made explicit the power relations that existed between Third and First World nations as colonized and capitalist societies respectively. The role of cinema according to the Resolutions Meeting therefore:

> consists of manufacturing films reflecting the objective conditions in which the struggling peoples are developing, that is to say, films which bring about disalienation of the colonized peoples at the same time as they contribute sound and objective information for the peoples of the entire word, including the oppressed classes of the colonizing countries, and place the struggle of their peoples back in the general context of the struggle of the countries and peoples of

> the Third World. This requires from the militant filmmaker a dialectical analysis of the socio-historic phenomenon of colonization (in Bakari and Cham 1996:20)

The charter upheld that African countries were not attempting to catch up with so-called developed countries in the West, but that filmmakers should devote energy on constructing and firmly establishing a cinema with a vital role in "education, information and consciousness raising, as well as a stimulus to creativity" (25). Their cinema had to work against what they perceived as "the stereotyped image of the solitary and marginal creator" (*Ibid.*). This formed the basis of films produced in Kenya from the early 1980s until present day. The films expressed dialectic tension spawn by the conflicts of tradition and modernity that existed in the very lives of colonized Kenyan people. Although the Third Wave in Kenyan cinema is primarily marked by a struggle for financial support, it is distinguished by the filmmakers' incorporation of cultural and cinematic codes to explore the contradictory life in contemporary Kenya.

5.3 The Third Wave: *Kolormask* and the beginnings of a Kenyan film scene

The period of the 1980s was significant in the history of Kenyan cinema. Trained producers, editors and cameramen were getting to work producing videos and films that would form the beginnings of an indigenous national cinema. Even private production companies begun to appear with Dommie Yambo Odotte, the first independent Kenyan film producer, forming the first independent film company in Nairobi, Kenya, known as Zebralink.

It was also in the same period that Western films such as *Out of Africa* (1986), the love story of Karen Blixen and a White hunter Denys Finch Hatton, and *Sheena: Queen of the Jungle* (1984), a female version of Tarzan, were shot on location in Kenya. Very

much, like the arrangement of the Colonial Film Unit, Kenyan cameramen, assistant producers and directors worked on the production of the films. Meja Mwangi, a renowned novelist who's major works such as Carcass for Hounds, was an assistant director in *Out of Africa*. These films continued to either centre the narrative on European experiences (*Out of Africa*) or enhance stereotypes of Africans (*Sheena*). By employing Kenyan technicians and assistant cinematographers, an implicit standard of making films was engendered. Furthermore, the films responded to Western romanticism of Africa through the images, which reproduced the mythic, and mystic of the people and the continent.

In the celebrations of the Centenary of Film in Africa, it was made clear that the onus was on African filmmakers to change the negative images and representations of Africa by offering positive images and critiques of the realities of African cultures. *Kolormask* (1985), a film by KIMC graduate and first Kenyan director, Sao Gamba, became the first Kenyan feature film. Based on a Kenyan student who returns home from England with a White woman as his wife, this social realist film operates along divisions of tradition and modernity to emphasize the differences between foreigners and Kenyans. Exhibited in film theatres across the country and presented at the 10th Biannual FESPACO of 1987, *Kolormask* formed a cornerstone in the history and development of Kenyan cinema. In spite of its criticisms for being "too exotic in its emphasis on documenting African cultures" (Diawara 1992:117), it was paradigmatic in that it was an illustration of the potential of film production in Kenya. Additionally, it also continued what literary works had started; foregrounding the tragic clash between tradition and modernity, a theme echoed in consequent films made by Kenyans.

Before making *Kolormask*, Gamba produced and directed government-sponsored films such as the above mentioned *Immashoi of Maasai*. Other filmmakers such as Anne Mungai, Jane Lusabe and Dottie Yambo Odotte were students at KIMC. Their films, together with those produced by Kenyans training abroad (Wanjiru Kinyanjui and Njeri Karagu) began shaping the beginnings of a Kenyan national cinema articulating the history of the aftermath of colonialism and consequently linking the narratives with emergent post-colonial formations of identity. Upcoming film directors such as Kenneth Olembo, who worked on *Saikati II* (1998) as the assistant director illustrate the vibrancy of cinema in its growth and development. These filmmakers' contribution to the Third Wave in Kenyan cinema was not restricted to production alone.

By the 1990s, probably because the numerous trained audio-visual professionals feared competition, organizations and bodies were formed, with overlapping mandates and objectives. In 1996, the Kenya National and Television Association (KNTA) was formed by Kenyan filmmakers, film and television producers with "the aim of articulating the interests (of the audio-visual) and setting into motion the development of a viable movie industry" (Sorgo 1996:7). The Kenya Film Producers' Association was also formed, with Anne Mungai as chair, proclaiming as its objective the protection and development of the film industry in Kenya.

It was also in the early to mid 1990s that Kenyan films begun to receive acclaim in festivals and award shows. Dommie Yambo Odotte's edited film *An Offence like an Assault* (1992) earned her "Works of Special Merit" award at the Tokyo Video Festival in 1993. Three years later, her *Women's Agenda* (1995) earned her the "Special Mention of the Jury" at the Southern African Film Festival in Harare, Zimbabwe. Other films that were made during this time include *Saikati*, *Battle of The Sacred Tree*, and *The Ascent*

(1996) by Njeri Karagu. Women filmmakers have been very significant in forming the foundations of national cinema in Kenya. They comprise of more than fifty percent of filmmakers with men occupying positions of cameramen, members of the lighting crew and other assistant or behind-the-scene posts. Odotte points out, that "it is difficult to get into African cinema for both men and women, but it's harder for women. Women have lots of ideas at the moment about how to convey their problems and concerns on the screen" (Ouédraogo 1995:20). She asserts that the problem does not lie in the difficulty of women entering the profession but the lack of sources for funding is a great impediment for all Kenyan filmmakers regardless of gender. However, she feels that allocation of funds to African women professionals would prove more difficult, although they occupy a great space in the activity of filmmaking.

In a recent documentary, *Maisha* (1997), televised on Kenya Television Network station written and produced in association with Reuters, Kenyan filmmakers polemically attacked the government's lack of financial support. The funding deficiency has greatly affected the quality of films produced where evident technicalities are obvious drawbacks in the aesthetics. With this in mind, the ideologies explored in the films should not be blurred or eschewed all together, instead the sensibilities and tropes that guide the narrative of the films should be highlighted. Mbye Cham observes that "in *Saikati*, its numerous technical and artistic shortcomings not withstanding, Anne Mungai attempts a balanced look at female sexuality in urban Kenya and at both the "push" and "pull" factors that account for the rural-urban drift" (1994:94). Anne Mungai, in the article "Responsibility and Freedom of Expression", agrees by pointing out that "unfortunately ... most governments did not take the measures necessary to establish a national cinema industry, and did not appreciate the use of film as a means of recreation, information and

education, as well as a way of alerting audiences to the problems of social cultural development" (Mungai 1996: 65). In the making of *Battle*, Kinyanjui admitted to be "totally broke" and was fortunate to find a producer who was willing to invest in the film. She is currently working on completing her next film, *Sweet Sixteen*, while getting ready to begin her "expedition into the world of financiers" (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999). The economic dependency on foreign funds for films has caused films to succumb to the demands of the sponsor, consequently changing the script and format to dramatically to reflect these terms.

These films from Kenya, with their substandard cinematography and poor dialogue should primarily serve as a rich resource for understanding the complexities of the post-colonial, the multiple locations of post-colonial subjects, and the representations of identity through the use of the content and/or the diegesis of the films. Kenyan filmmakers begun to use the cinema as a "vehicle for social, cultural, political and personal discourse and praxis ... to critically engage, celebrate and interrogate certain aspects of cultural beliefs and traditions" (Cham 1996:4). The form and content of their narratives are indicative of the commentaries on the "contemporary social, cultural, political, historical, and personal realities, experiences and challenges" that they face (*Ibid.*). The allegories presented premise the symptomatic of the post-colonial state, which subsequently raises questions of identity through an investigation of the variables of age group, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

Most of the films, therefore produced and exhibited in Kenya before independence were made by White Europeans for White Europeans, and unsurprisingly concentrated on their experiences in both Kenya and at home. The post-independence cinema illustrated the contested aspects of contemporary and partially urbanized Kenyan society. It

struggles to visually present and represent indigenous experiences and psyche of a cross-section of Kenyans and their relationship to an ever-changing culture with complex and intrinsic "mechanisms for regeneration" (Akudinobe 1995:27). The following section restates that the inscription of binary divisions entailed in tradition and modernity are creations, which Kenyan films use as mechanisms whereby an understanding of identity as a construction is fostered in relation to the precarious Kenyan culture influenced by the activities of the colonizers and the discourses of a newly independent African nation.

5.4 The dialectic ideology in indigenous Kenyan films

Roy Armes, a British film historian and author on several articles on Third Cinema, observes that "the cinema was a product of late nineteenth-century capitalism born in a society in which the relationship between the individual and the state was very different from what we know today" (Armes 1978:17). Cinema in Africa is both entertainment and politics. Like literature, it is a means of education while providing an arena for discussion and criticisms of society and culture. Kenyan cinema, as we shall see, concerns itself with salient aspects of life and experiences representing the struggles of a people with the imposition of colonialism and neocolonialism, which is really an extension of colonialism. I use Nnaemeka's definition of neocolonialism as simply the prolongation of colonial paradigms and strategies that are generated both internally and externally (Nnaemeka 1996:266). Armes point on cinema being a product of capitalism in the nineteenth century is very important in contextualising the development of cinema in Kenya before independence. Nineteenth century capitalism manifested itself in Africa through colonialism and the relationship between the colonizer and the imperial state.

Mapping out the history of Kenyan cinema in this chapter supports Cham's observation that "African filmmaking is in a way a child of African political independence" (1996:1). The colonial administrative system, as this chapter informs, oversaw the establishment of a British-structured film industry in Kenya. The First Wave in the history of Kenyan cinema explicates that although during the colonial era cinema developed in a quasi-free environment without a direct interference of the colonial state, the content and images of the films represented imperial and colonial British ideologies . In the Second Wave, we see an attempt by the post-independent government to develop a general media industry. However, even in the efforts to nationalize the very workings of a newly independent government and state, it is clear that a detachment from the colonial structure is almost futile as the newly defined Kenyan structures stem out of the very colonial ideologies and mechanisms specific to the former colonial administration. Consequently, a distinguished financial reliance on Western aid is fostered; a relationship that plays an essential role in the current state of Kenyan cinema.

Franz Fanon once wrote, "a former dominated country becomes an economically dependent country" (1967b:77). If this is the case, and I believe it is, then this former country now independent must still inhabit values and systems of the power that formally dominated it, even as much as it attempts to break away from it. In this instance, tensions begin to emerge between old and new, between tradition and modern, between Christianity and indigenous religions. As film emerged and developed in the post-independence period, it coincided with "heady nationalism and nationalist anti-colonial and anti-neocolonial struggle" (*Ibid.*) and thus its content has integrated the consequential influences of both colonialism and neocolonialism. It is a reflection of the existing pluralities and ideologies that function within the imperial construction of Kenya. These

binary oppositions are constructions in and of themselves by the actions of colonialism and post-independent structures that complied with past institutions.

For example, the colonial city was modeled after the British metropole strictly for administration. Nairobi was first an administration centre before it evolved into a city. Kenyan men who went to work in the city were honored entry if and only if they carried a *kipande*[8], a piece of paper that served as a permit. Corresponding to this action, a division between rural and urban was not only constructed but also deepened. Preexisting Kenyan organizational structures were disrupted forcing a new process of negotiation to take place within the new forged paradigms. The social, political, and technological development of the preexisting polities located outside the metropole was made irrelevant by the imposition of colonial institutions (Bourgault 23). Their development inexorably "led to the development of centre/periphery model that placed urban centres ... in the centre and native reserves [in the rural areas] at the periphery" (Kaniaru 5). Through the prism of colonial administration, urban centres were perceived as the centres of modernization. It was therefore palpable that after independence, a mass migration occurred from the rural to the urban in search of money, stability and the coveted civilization that came in the form of attending church service and school.

The elite as a colonial creation and concept of the 1950s, affected in a powerful way the political, economic and cultural factors that epitomized Eurocentric hegemony after Kenyan independence. They occupied the urban centres where their "livelihood depended on the modern Western sector of the economy" (Bourgault 24). A new phenomena came into being; Kenyans with a colonial mentality, wanting that which had been forbidden to them. Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes:

> after independence ... the gold rush for the style of living for their former conquerors had started. Skin-lighteners, straightened hair, irrelevant drawing-room parties, conspicuous consumption in the form of country villas, Mercedes-Benzes and Bentleys were the order of the day. Clutching their glasses of whisky and soda, patting their wigs delicately lest they fall, some of these people will, in the course of cocktail parties sing a few traditional songs: hymns of praise to a mythical past: we must preserve our culture, don't you think? (1972:12)

Yes the culture must be preserved, but only that which is relevant, and that which will ease everyday living. The passage above forms part of the crux of this paper; the idea that even the Kenyan middle class elite cannot simply be in one state, but for the sake of retaining a culture and an identity, integration of both is mandatory. In Wretched of the Earth, Fanon underscores that traditional cultures were submerged and marginalized by the processes of colonialism through its channels of communication (1967a). The Third Wave is extraordinary in the history of Kenyan cinema because it links the representation of a non-static Kenyan culture to the larger post-colonial environment by using these same channels of communication, regardless of financial constraints, to criticize the contravention of binary divisions of tradition and modernity.

If cultural identity can be pursued and/or recovered through film then how does the interplay and interrelationship of tradition and modernity affect its formation? If it is useful to argue, as Diawara has, that previously submerged tradition is now being made explicit through film, how do *Battle* and *Saikati* incorporate the inexorable dichotomous canons that seem to permeate the socio-cultural dimensions of postcolonial Africa? Relating culture to the ongoing processes facilitates an understanding of the dilemmas faced by post-colonial people using cultural icons in communication to give rise to meaning. The following chapter in attempting to elaborate on this issue deploys African feminist conceptual frameworks that, as discussed in the introduction, are deeply rooted

in African thought and context. Both films reflect the search of a frayed identity that could have been lost during the colonization or decolonisation process, transformed during neocolonialism. The discussion on *Battle* and *Saikati*, in the following chapter, will help revitalize aspects of the past and the inevitable conflict with those of the present.

CHAPTER 2

Representations Of Binary Divisions In *Battle Of The Sacred Tree* And *Saikati*

> Because of the colonizing structure, a dichotomy system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed: agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies. In Africa a great deal of attention is generally given to the evolution implied and promised by the passage from the former paradigms to the latter (Mudimbe 4).

With colonialism disrupting and affecting the way of life of people living within Kenyan borders, it was inevitable that conflicts between tradition and modernity would take place. We have learnt from the previous chapter how colonialism asserted itself changing the very patterns and lifestyles that awarded Kenya's African peoples heterogeneous forms of identity. As much as post-colonial theories are criticized for centering the experiences of the colonizers, there exists the bitter truth that "although in African history the colonial experience represents but a brief moment from the perspective of today, this moment is still charged and controversial, since, to say the least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourse on African traditions and cultures" (Mudimbe 1). Despite efforts to negate that which does not describe African traditions and experiences within culture, there is a significant part in the process of identity formation inherently rooted in and influenced by the reality of colonial modernizing practices.

The premises of both films, forced marriage, in reference to *Saikati*, or religion, in reference to *Battle*, bestrides along the boundaries or margins superficially circumscribing the dichotomies of tradition and modernity, urban and rural, and educated and non-

educated. Therefore, it is important to note that both films are situated in contemporary cultural contexts that explain the pervasive forces of the effects of colonialism on the women, the immediate community, as well as efforts to restructure the cultural construction of identity and self-determination.

It is significant to underscore that post-colonial subjects are inevitably situated in paradoxes. As I pointed out in the introduction, my identity is defined by an intersection of a multiplicity of positions as I do not deny that my status is *in-between* the paradigms of tradition and modernity. This chapter maintains that *in-betweeness* is useful in understanding the difficulty in talking about the legacy and the reality of colonial and post-colonial encounters. By analyzing the content of *Battle* and *Saikati*, in the first and second section respectively, this chapter intends to begin the task of answering the following question with regards to identity using guideposts provided by African feminist theoretical frameworks. What is entailed in either tradition or modern practice? How are representations of binary divisions made apparent in both films? And do they present a complexity or hindrance in forming the characters' identity (ies)? Is tradition more oppressive for women, and modern space more liberal or emancipatory? Finally, in the movement towards self-determination, while venting the frustrations of being *in-between*, how does the African woman reflected in both films as agent reveal her self-perceptions and influences that affect her actions.

The third section will elaborate on the ways in which African feminist thought can be used to engage the cultural condition predominating Kenyan cinema in order to reject the spurious dichotomies and binary oppositions of tradition and modernity as constructs. It will serve to bridge this chapter with the subsequent concluding chapter.

6.1 *Saikati*: A Post-Independent Kenyan film I

Forced marriage and prostitution constitute the social topics elaborated in the narrative of *Saikati*. In an interview by Sheila Petty at the Biannual FESPACO in Ouagadougou, Mungai said the following on the conceptualization of the film narrative:

> I was born in a village and had to struggle for education. I read in the papers or could see instances of young girls getting married against their will and not being able to continue their education or pursue their dreams. When I got into the film school, I started thinking seriously about doing films that portray the feelings of women. These girls have no forum to talk. I have a chance to expose in film the "untold" feelings of these women (27th February 1993. Used by permission).

Through Mungai's own experiences of living and working between the dichotomies of tradition and modernity, her film exposes the depiction of being in this state and the representation of decision-making. Petty suggests that *Saikati* "offers a delineation of traditional women's role in society at different stages in their cultures' struggle for political, economic, and personal liberation" (1996:76) bringing to light the processes of self-determination occurring along the continuum of tradition and modernity.

Saikati is primarily the story about a Maasai girl called Saikati, who is being forced to marry the chief's son. The marriage would imply the end to her formal education. Her cousin, Monica, from Nairobi comes to the Mara (the rural region where Saikati and her family live) for a visit only to discover Saikati's unfortunate predicament. She offers a solution that Saikati returns with her to Nairobi where she would get her a job, which would financially help out the family in the village. After strong persuasion, Saikati's mother consents and early the next morning Saikati and Monica set out to the city.

Saikati later discovers that her cousin and her lover, Hamish, a British tourist, had covertly planned a job for her in the urban sex industry. Scared and alienated, she makes

the decision to return to the Mara and the comfort of her family. Alex, also a British tourist and a friend of Hamish's, with whom Monica had arranged to offer Saikati the virgin experience into the world of prostitution, feels badly about the turnout of events and offers her a ride back to her home. In the meantime, while her uncle inquires after her absence, the chief's son gets married to another woman. The journey from Nairobi to the Mara is met with obstacles; some posed by Monica's preference for the delicate pleasure of travelling and living like a tourist. Although the film suggests an undercurrent of attraction between Saikati and Alex, it is never blatant or explored.

Finally, Saikati returns and is greeted with joy by her family. We lose sight of Monica and the two men, and thus assume that she is trapped in the urban life and the profession of prostitution. There is an implied feeling from the village inhabitants of contentment towards Saikati since she has finally found her sense of self through the unprecedented journey to Nairobi and back. She views the journey as an "ill-conceived attempt to run away from forced marriage" (Petty 1996:85). Embarking on a journey constitutes the structural cell of oral literature and an important motif in African cinema. The quest defines itself as a movement from the village to the city and ends with the return to the village. Once can also interpret it as an alienation and a return to authenticity (Diawara in Bakari and Cham 1996: 215)

Saikati is undoubtedly replete with binary oppositions. Petty points out that "Saikati evolved from Mungai's own experiences within the dichotomies of tradition and modernity" (1996:83). In an interview with Mbye Cham at the Second Annual Festival of African Cinema in Milan, Mungai pointed this out about the women she had seen in the rural area,

> Most women marry early and sometimes not out of their own consent. Because they marry early and then start having children early, and these children in turn marry early, the trend of women getting no education just goes on and on. Okay, traditionally, the culture is one where every woman is born looking forward to getting married but you can still get an education and get a husband (1994: 99).

The generalization made in the last statement not withstanding, Mungai observes and places women with little or no education in the rural areas. Gaining an education is one of the most highly upheld achievements in almost every society in the world. In African nations, Western forms of education are predominant, and in fact, the lack of education has always been touted as an impediment to progress (Nnaemeka 1996:268). On the other hand, traditional education, such as narrating myths, is rarely ever integrated into the educational system, except in elementary levels where orality in the form of story telling is emphasized mainly in the efforts to develop verbal communication skills.

The opening of the film forecasts the dilemmas to be represented throughout the film. The very first shot of Saikati shows her arriving from school in uniform symbolizing the "so-called" modern institution of learning. Minutes later, when she exists from the manyattaa, the Maasai traditional dwelling place, she is wearing her Maasai dress. This is resonant of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's description of the schizophrenic colonial child, in his discussion in Decolonising the Mind (1986), who is taught English at school. When he or she returns to his or her compound switches to communication and cultural practices of the larger family and community, which in turn conjures notions of alienation from "traditional" practices.

Western education is continually associated with "modernization", engendering a constructed split between the educated and the non-educated. In this regard, Nnaemeka rhetorically asks whether western education is the key that unlocks the door to modernity

(1995:92). The assumption linking western education with modernity appears frequently in Western versions of feminism and operates within the constructed dichotomies of modern and tradition to read and understand texts rooted in African settings. Africans also reinforce these categories themselves by giving credence to "modernity".

In the current world order, education is essential for active participation and leadership in the development process in Africa (Nnaemeka 1996: 268), since active participation and leadership can be achieved either in the urban or rural areas, the essential desire for education need not be placed in either dichotomy. Nnaemeka intervenes in this deepening divide by examining the relationship between decision and location (1995:92). Understanding the context within which a character is situated offers more insight into the otherwise obscured reasons behind the decision-making. Saikati's choice to go to the city is enabled by her decision not to marry the chief, and is not invoked by rural-urban migration.

In *Saikati*, the journey to the city is functional in the determination of Saikati's identity. In African cinema, the city is usually represented as a site where traditional moral values and practices are tested, degraded, compromised or transformed (Cham 1996:7). When she gets to the city with her cousin Monica, we witness a physical transformation of her apparel and hairstyle. She sits in front of a mirror while Monica dresses her in French berets, earrings and lipstick. Her conversation with Hamish is reflective of the power relations when he asks her to order escargots, even when he is aware that she has no inkling of Western cuisine. In addition, the spectator realizes that she is dissatisfied with urban life when she runs through the hotel corridors and discards her red French beret.

According to Petty, "Saikati's desire for education is founded not in a desire for Western emancipation but for the desire to provide security for her widowed mother and sister"(1996:84). Saikati is distraught because she may never complete school and achieve her dreams of becoming a medical doctor. Her desperation heightens when she realizes that her mother and uncle are even more determined to marry her off. Indirectly, she views the city and Monica's *impromptu* visit as a means of escaping the marriage to a man she does not know or love.

If she remains in the village, she will have to marry. But if she leaves with Monica, she will have to find employment. In the same interview by Cham, Mungai agrees by pointing out that there are reasons that may have forced girls like Monica to abandon rural life for the city such and lack of tuition or early pregnancy. She maintains, however, that "Saikati could have *chosen* to follow the *good* city life but chose to go back home because she had *a goal* to achieve" (100 – my emphasis). An argument can be made that either way, Saikati would have to abandon her education. However, the pull factors seemingly inherent in urban life and its hedonistic pleasures are what lure girls like Monica to the city.

The condemnation of the city life brings one back to Diawara's argument, referenced in the introduction of this thesis, that social realist films use a traditional position to expose issues of difference. Mungai represents the disadvantages of rural life, as she is well aware that girls living here have no opportunity for education and ultimate betterment of the families and relatives. At the same time, Monica, the disenchanted urbanite who confuses liberation from the stranglehold of forced marriage with prostitution recedes to the background with Alex and Hamish, suggesting that she is trapped in the world of prostitution and has given up her educational opportunities.

Binary divisions would render an oversimplification shrouding and distorting the complex use of choice (Nnaemeka 1997a: 4). Both Saikati and Monica make decisions that relevant to their own experiences and immediate location. The decisions made have no real relation to either tradition of modernity, but to with realist encounters and situations in their respective lives. In conversation with Saikati, Monica explains that her reasons for becoming a prostitute were circumstantial. After migrating to the city from the country, she immediately became pregnant with her daughter, Melissa, ultimately forced to drop out of college. She contextualises her decision for becoming a prostitute by asserting:

> I'm not to blame if men make themselves indispensable and then they disappear. Take for example, Melissa's father. He was nice. We had all the fun. He promised me heaven. I was still in college. And when he realized I was pregnant he disappeared. I tried to look for a job but no one could offer me one unless I gave them my pay. Then one day I met this man who was kind, sympathetic and we decided to have a good time. And then in the morning I found a five hundred Kenya shilling note. I couldn't decide whether I should take it or not. And then I remembered Melissa and so I took it. That is how I started a relationship with Hamish.

Although the film does not openly condemn or glorify prostitution (Petty 1996: 85), it implicitly suggests that there other avenues. Mungai's awareness that prostitution is one of the least talked about social topics in Kenya compelled her to use Monica and her situation to foreground the some of the reasons why women choose this lifestyle. Mungai, on the idea of decision says,

> Prostitution is also a choice; you can choose to stay in it or you can strive to get out of it. Monica was not a prostitute by choice; she was a normal girl like any other girl; she got into a problem and became a prostitute in the city. Now she thinks that because her cousin is experiencing problems at home, the best way to get out [sic] this is to introduce her to prostitution in the city. I show this to say that you can choose to refuse. You do not have to be a prostitute (Cham 1994:100).

Effectively, *Saikati* goes beyond the oppositions of tradition and modernity. The binarisms portrayed in the film are constructions that have persisted since the advent of colonialism in Kenya, and have been reinforced by urbanization and other organizational forces that sought to alienate and disintegrate Kenyans during the colonial era. In the same vein, Nnaemeka observes that in the current world order, education is essential for active participation and leadership in the development process in Africa (Nnaemeka 1996: 268). It is my contention that questionable binary divisions should be avoided as they serve to obscure the real tensions that exist within the continuum, and undermine the engagement with other experiences or encounters in the interstice or grey area.

By leaving the Mara, Saikati gives up an aspect of tradition to continue her education thus embracing an aspect of modernity. She then comes to the conclusion that she must return to the Mara, embrace tradition, and find a solution for her desire to continue with her education, retain modernity, without losing her indigenous identity. The emphasis of locality as a site of culture is fundamental as Saikati cannot be indigenous if she in not in her rural home. Furthermore, she enters a cultural "no man's land" by being in the city. This notion points to Ranger's theory on the invention of tradition, specifically how colonialists sought to impose a dichotomy between the "real" African in the reserves and the "upstart" African in the cities who was more politically aware and empowered against colonial repression. *Saikati* strongly criticizes the existence of binary oppositions because they disallow the representations of contradictions that occur in the negotiating process for an identity. *Saikati* represents the cohabitation of values that are essential in the self-determination and formation of identity, which are influenced by notions of choice and rather than feminist ideals.

According to Petty, "African feminism is grounded in the certainty that African women are confident in their ability to determine their own feminist agendas" (1996: 86). Although Saikati's determination to gain an education should not be confused as a feminist agenda, there is validity in the idea that African women are in control of making their own decisions accordingly. African feminist thought argues that the notion of victimhood does not allow disengagement with patriarchy and thus deems the assumptions made by Western feminisms of African women's victimhood simplistic and sometimes irrelevant in the elaboration of the woman as an actor with agency. Monica cannot be simply seen as a victim of male "authority". Victims can also be agents who, in an environment and culture where contradictions and paradoxes are meant to exist, can decide to change their lives and affect the course of their lives in very radical ways (Nnaemeka 1997a,b, Oyewumi 1997; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997

Saikati presents itself as an examination of a woman oriented issue – forced marriage within the Maasai group. Because the clear oppositions between tradition and modernity are misleading, maintaining these quasi-divisions allows their criticism. It is my conviction that Mungai uses forced marriage and prostitution as pre-texts to forcefully critique the existence of dichotomies. By using an African feminist theoretical framework, we have seen the resilience in resisting penetrating modes of reading of African women's issues by Western feminists. I used Saikati to also show that while it uses African women to address issues first as they configure in and relate to their own lives and immediate surrounding (Nnaemeka 7) which is key in the conceptualization of African feminism.

6.2 *Battle of the Sacred Tree*: A Post-independent Kenyan film II

The missionary's discourse of "saving" pagans and introducing them to Christianity was powerful in facilitating the expansion of imperial empires in Africa. The superiority of Christianity is still largely felt in Kenya today because, as Mudimbe points out, it is identified with reason, history and power (51). Various versions of African Christianity are visible in Kenya; for example members of the Akorino Sect, a fusion of indigenous worship and Christianity can be seen on Sundays on the streets of urban and sub-urban Nairobi running in rhythm to their drum and percussion beats and chants. About 5 years ago, the Kenyan government refused to recognize an indigenous religion known as Tent of the Living God on the grounds that it failed to represent or express a larger consensus: furthermore, according to the government, it was a cult in disguise with underlying intentions of corroding modernity. Although the constitution claims a liberality of religion, the case of the Tent of the Living God was crucial in that officially, traditional religions were disallowed. What ensued was the continuation of a debate simply resembling a split between tradition versus modernity. Theories on Third Cinema inform that "instead of discarding religion as the 'opium of the masses' ... Third World filmmakers attempt to give religion or spirituality a special significance in their work" (Gabriel 1982:17).

Wanjiru Kinyanjui's *Battle* is a film reflecting the clashes between traditional Kikuyu religion and Christianity. In an interview, Kinyanjui admits that the tension between tradition and modernity did not initially form the basis of her film, but later realized that it was the root in the *Battle* of the sacred tree. The social issues she explores are remnants of a past mingled in with contemporary African aspects that entail the

defining and redefining processes of Kenyan identity. The film, in addition, attempts to rejuvenate Kikuyu tradition in a society imbued by so-called modernist attitudes.

The central character, Mumbi leaves Nairobi for Githunguri a rural town outside Nairobi to escape her drunken husband's physical abuse. Early one morning she leaves what seems to be a large house, with a Volvo parked outside and together with her daughter she returns to her father's house. Chagrined by her decision to leave her affluent husband, her father, Mzee, a traditional healer, demands an explanation for her departure. She explains that both his drunken behaviour and unreliability were deepening. But most importantly, she realized that she needed to be independent. Mzee failing to grasp this logic dismisses her by saying, "to be independent is to be proud." Kinyanjui points out that "according to Kikuyu custom, a woman 'runs' away to her parents if she has a conflict with her lawfully wedded husband. This facilitates a session of the elders trying to mediate in the conflict and hopefully resolve it. Mumbi does the first but doesn't want any reconciliatory efforts from her father" (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999). She antagonizes him, and in fact queries that which she feels deters her process of self-determination.

In her efforts to be productive in Githunguri, she opts to join the local Christian Women's Union, which is engaged in income-generating projects. The Union grapples with the fact that Mumbi dishonoured the Christian institution of marriage, and as one of women put it, "a woman who cannot keep a husband is definitely a prostitute." Subsequently, they ponder on whether they should admit her to the Union, bearing in mind that her reputation of a quasi-prostitute may pollute their regard in the immediate rural community. Meanwhile an old acquaintance offers Mumbi employment at his

Happy Bar, which she accepts. Reacting to her unrighteous decision, the Union rejects her application equating her newfound unchristian occupation to promiscuity.

A dispute over the sacred Kikuyu tree, the *Mugumo*, which seemed to have begun before Mumbi came to Githunguri continues with the Christian women on one side demanding the *Mugumo* tree be cut down. The women believe that it is representative of the backward and primitive ways of pagan worshipping and polytheism, in fact one woman strongly asserts that "the tree reminds us of the days of darkness." Mumbi and Mzee are against the cutting down of the tree because it is symbolic of a facet of the history of the Kikuyu. With assistance from the Chief of the area and the men at Happy Bar, they win the *Battle* and the tree remains standing in Githunguri.

Mumbi, like Saikati is caught between two ideological systems located at polar ends. In her blatant display of her alliance with indigenous religious practices, this stance is significant because as an agent she affects the reasoning of other characters in the film to fight for the *Mugumo* tree. The struggle between the Union and Mumbi presents an interesting case in point in the explication of the *in-between space* central to this thesis. The group in the Union by definition consists of *rural* women that places them in a traditional domain. This being said, it would only be logical to construe that they would align themselves with traditional practices of worship. Instead, the Union's held belief was that traditional religion and its symbols ran counter Christian civilization and deterred modernization.

Like indigenous religious practices, the practice of traditional medicine was dismissed as primitive and superstitious by missionary and colonial discourse. The women's skepticism over Mzee's traditional healing practices heavily influenced their decision to reject Mumbi's admission into the group as her father's ideology was not a

reflection of civilization and Christian ways. At the outset, it must be noted and clearly understood that the Christian women should not be conceived as a group of feminists mainly because they are women positioning themselves as working towards projects that elevate the position of women in Githunguri. As Kinyanjui argues, that the Union bear no credibility in their logic, and in the film there are no visual representations of their constructiveness or positivity (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999). This exemplary of so-called educated Africans have equally bandied about the prevailing notions of modernity without adequately engaging them, rigorously critiquing the premise on which they stand, and without interrogating the ideology that initiated and sustained them (Nnaemeka 1996:261).

In the same interview, Kinyanjui admits that the tension between tradition and modernity did not initially form the basis of her film, but later realized that it was at the root in the *Battle* of the sacred tree. The social issues that she explores in the film are remnants of a past mingled in with contemporary African aspects that entail the defining and redefining processes of Kenyans. The film, in addition, attempts to rejuvenate Kikuyu tradition in a society that is imbued by so-called modernist attitudes.

Oral tradition was the predominant mode of communication and retainer of culture before the medium of writing among the Kikuyu[9]. Literary work emerged and positioned itself as a container of culture, and in fact the first generation of writers of Kenyan novels functioned as recorders of the incompatibility of Western value systems with indigenous societal practices. Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian woman novelist points out that oral tradition is patronized and perceived as inferior to written information (1973 23-24) through an internalization of the credence assigned to permanency in writing. The juxtaposition of orality and literacy is addressed in the film through the characters of

Mzee and Mumbi's daughter. Oral tradition as represented by Mzee's narration of creation and the first man (Gikuyu) and woman (Mumbi) of the Kikuyu is remindful of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's The River Between, a novel that also observes the tensions between tradition and indigenous Kikuyu religious and cultural practices. Like Kinyanjui, Ngugi engages orality to narrate through his characters the mythical story of the Kikuyu progenitors. Below is an excerpt from Ngugi's novel of the conversation that takes place between a father and son, Chege and Waiyaki.

> Chege: You know Gikuyu and Mumbi –
> Waiyaki: Father and mother of the tribe
> Chege: Do you see that mountain showing through the grey mist on the horizon –
> Waiyaki: Kerinyaga?
> Chege: Yes, the mountain of He-who-shines-in-Holiness ... that is the seat of Murungu. He made Gikuyu and Mumbi.

Chege later adds, "it was before Agu; in the beginning of things. Murungu brought the man and woman here and again showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and the children of the children, *tene na tene*, world without end ..." (1965 17-18). Orality, in this case, plays a significant role in historicizing the genesis of the Kikuyu and relating it to the significance of the *Mugumo* tree, consequently fostering a collective identity.

African feminist frameworks have been consistent in asserting the dual-sex system, which according to Mikell was exaggerated by colonial and Western discourse as a relationship that generates the subordination of women (1997: 13). Nnaemeka asserts that African feminism resistance to gender separation is in fact "less a reaction to Western feminism and more a manifestation of the cross-gender partnership that is a prominent ... feature of African cultures, a partnership that is reinforced by colonialist and imperialist threats (1997b:9-10). Cross-gender relationships is significant in allowing women to

attain autonomy in their self-determining action, for example when Mzee asserts that Mumbi's desire for independence is a function of pride. African feminist thought, in addition, indicates that women's efforts must not be separated from the men's. For example, in *Battle* women and men work together to reject Union's demands. A replacement of the male/female dichotomy with an implementation of a "matrix of domination", mentioned in the introduction of this study is significant as it enables a focus on "the nexus of interlocking systems of oppression where oppressor/oppressed positions shift" (Nnaemeka 1997b:20).

Western versions of feminist examination of African cultures are preoccupied with subjects of the oppression and victimization of African women, ignore greater colonial oppressions on both African women and men. African feminist thought in its interventions acclaim that, not only has the colonial oppressions been overlooked, most importantly violence existing between women is a non-issue in Western versions of feminisms in the tendency to create a "sisterhood" between all "oppressed" women. Eliding this negative but realistic relationship in the "sisterhood" is to overlook the power hierarchies that exist within African women. The violence and conniving tendencies that exist between women is fundamental in the discussion of African cultures from an African feminist perspective.

This is especially noticeable in the tension between rural and urban women. The Christian women in Githunguri detest Mumbi because of her urbanity. A term that comes to mind to illustrate their feelings of lament towards her is a term in Kikuyu, my mother tongue, which I cannot find a translation in English: *nyira* (if there was one, I feel it would alter the vivacity of the term). Nevertheless, the women *nyira* her whenever she attempts to speak to them or work with them. Interestingly in a real life situation, when

Kinyanjui went to Githunguri to shoot the film, she was confronted by women who thought she was hoarding large amounts of money for three reasons: because she was a woman professional from the city, because she had studied abroad, and the fact that she had four *Wazungus* (Kiswahili for White people) working with her. She recalls. "I had a very hard time convincing people that it was hard enough to get any money to pay for all those services and that no-one, least of all myself, could get rich quickly from *Battle*" (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999).

In light of this, the Christian women, in *Battle*, are unable to comprehend Mumbi's desire to remain in the rural area when she can live in the city with a wealthy husband. Their conniving attempts on Mumbi are a surreptitious mechanism to portray their deluded power. They do not only refuse to honour her application to the Union primarily because she is not a born-again Christian, but because they have the authority to do so. Their discussion on this is loaded with comments like, "who does she think she is?" or "*aga mutimia uyu ni muitii*" (this woman is so proud). These are attributed to her status as a "rich" city woman, too proud and stubborn to sort things out with her husband. The feminine spirit of unity alluded by Western feminisms is queried upon my African feminist theories to uncover the heterogeneity of African women. Furthermore, feminist bias and the romantic idea of sisterhood shield abusive female characters from thorough scrutiny and reprimand (Nnaemeka 1995:90).

Western feminism, as much as it has touted the notions of the African woman's victimhood, has failed to address woman-to-woman violence, which is in itself key in disrupting the binaries of agent/victim that seem inherent in the treatment of women in cultural products such as literature or film. For example, we have seen in *Saikati* how Monica betrays her own cousin's trust, an act that begins a validation for Saikati's desire

to return home. African feminism is aware that interconnected aspects of power relations between rural and urban women operate in social and political models of African societies, which in turn seeks to integrate parts of systems mistaken as symmetrically divided by a thick and solid boundary. This binary axis dividing these systems only serves to blur the complex characteristics that exist within and external to them.

African feminism, in addition, informs that the "African woman is a creation of historical and current forces that are simultaneously internally generated and externally induced" (Nnaemeka 1997b:14). This is represented in *Battle* by the generation gap between Mumbi and her father. Mumbi challenges the position of an abused wife and detaches herself and daughter from what the characteristic shelter and security of family. A bewildered Mzee maintains that a wife should not leave the family and should instead withstand domestic violence and find ways to resolve their problems. To assert her resistance to wife-beating and most importantly objectification, she points to a goat obliviously chewing grass and asks him in Kikuyu, "*agoriri ta buri iria*?" translated in English as "did he buy me like that goat?"

The most important challenge to the African woman remains " her own self-perceptions since it is she who has to define her own freedom" (Nfah-Abbenyi 31) and self-determination. The point that colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonized lands, often because native men increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from public sphere became more tyrannical at home (Loomba 168) is valid. This pattern has, in fact, been carried over into post-colonial societies as seen in the opening sequence of the film. In *Battle*, Mumbi leaves an abusive husband, who later goes to Githungun to ask her to return. Kinyanjui in her exposing Mumbi's husband's violence and abuse does not neglect to expose the "pain and betrayal of woman-on-woman abuse" (Nnaemeka

1997a:19). Mumbi, in *Battle*, is confronted by the overwhelming distrust of the Christian women because of the choices she has made; leaving a husband, accepting a job a the bar "where men sin", and forcefully fighting for the *Mugumo* tree. In this regard, Kinyanjui posits that Mumbi represents the

> possibilities to exploit the oppositions of tradition and modernity in contemporary society. Mumbi does the opposite of what is expected: she goes back to the rural area instead of trying her luck in the city, with or without the husband. She leaves her husband (which is unusual as most wives will be scared of doing so as the possibility of getting another is almost nil!) who is abusive and a drunkard. Most women are thrown out by their husbands! She goes ahead and works in a bar despite what people will say. And she files for a divorce! (Personal interview. June 3rd 1999).

Like prostitution, these are contemporary social topics that are hardly overtly discussed contemporary African times. Mumbi, by making use of the array of identity and the multiplicity of positions, challenges both modern and traditional paradigms that would otherwise contribute to the concealment of history and personal experience. The position she takes, amidst derision from other women in the community, is one of the points in which she defines herself according to what she does and not what is expected from her. Identity is always rational and evolving, dependant on everyday life experiences. It can be constructed from difference. It is contradictory and situational (Hall 21). Mapping the dichotomies and their existence and the spaces that overlap them can forge elements of identity. Mumbi's desire to control and choose her own life has little to do with tradition, but has everything to do with the possibilities of embracing that which leads to her personal emancipation.

6.3 Negotiating between the Spurious Claims of Tradition and Modernity

In her article, "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa", Katherine Frank asks, "how can the contemporary African woman negotiate her way between the claims of tradition and modernization, how, finally, can she be rendered as whole again?" (in Nnaemeka 1995:91). This question is problematic because of its reliance on questionable dichotomies to engender wholeness. In addition, foregrounding gender is to claim that the negotiation is exclusive to women. As we have seen from the discussion in this chapter, the inscription of women as shown in these two films falls amidst clashes of tradition and modernity as well as the complexities of these spaces and their inherent contradictions. These artificially sustained binarisms are colonial products set by the Western value system post-colonial Africa and reflected in various ways in African cinema.

The characteristics assigned to tradition assume its reactionary and oppressive nature, while granting modernity progressive and emancipatory tendencies. These "fixed" features of either dichotomy contribute to the difficulty in foregrounding the multiple identities and resultant multiple oppressions experienced by post-colonial people (93). African feminism is relevant because it generates a counter-discourse which is forceful in arguing that cultural products, literature or film, must be contextualized (or decontextualized) to centre the knowledge and its construction to reflect the culture which the text seeks to represent. For African women, the task to negotiate identity(ies) within the capsulated experience of colonialism and African patriarchy should be regarded as an opportunity to explore the paradoxes inherent in contemporary African culture. In this regard Nnaemeka argues that the paradoxes existing in feminist analysis, that are not

rooted in African cultures or utilizing an African perspective, in the elaboration of texts, such as film and literature, force them into absolutist either/or molds (1997a:3).

Oyewumi criticizes the fact that differences and hierarchies are placed in dualisms are inexplicably related with power. She notes that these categories and their characteristics are dynamic and constantly changing (1997: 7). By focussing less on transcending difference, African feminism focus more on the challenges of living successfully with contradictions (Nnaemeka 1997b: 3). The alienation Saikati may feel from her own family when she returns from school dressed in a uniform is an everyday life experience that should be allowed to exist without questioning difference. The obliteration of this difference, according to Nnaemeka, is an impossible task (*Ibid.*). By allowing this difference to exist within her own life, Saikati creates the power that "energizes her becoming" (*Ibid.*). Interrogating binary divisions has been key in the strategies put forth by African feminist frameworks that insist that a totalized reality cannot be sustained in ambivalent modes of tradition or modernity. In consequence, the answer to Frank's question cannot be answered when an assumption is made that African women such as Mumbi and Saikati are not whole when they are situated in either paradigm.

Their negotiation takes place in grey spaces that map out both paradigms where tensions are meant to exist and co-exist. Saikati's decision for example to return home has less to do with the fact that her identity is fragmented in the city, and more with the fact that she is confronted with a specific situation that causes her to return to a space where her negotiation with everyday living is familiar and easier. Mumbi's decision not to cut down the tree, likewise, has more to do with her personal attachment to history, which is premised by examining an artifact from the historical past to formulate and

understanding of the present. Recounting to her daughter the historic and symbolic meaning of the *Mugumo* tree represents the integrity of the sustaining this facet of identity.

This chapter has shown that the dialectics formed as a result of the tension between traditional and modernity are thematic in Kenyan literature and films. Saikati expresses a tension between attending school and abandoning school for the traditional role of a wife. *Battle*, like The River Between, foregrounds the clash between Christianity and traditional Kikuyu religious practices. Mumbi and Saikati are redefining themselves by re-engaging with an indigenous past while embracing or maintaining contact with concepts of modernity such as contemporary or Western religion and education respectively. Their identities are inadvertently in constant process of transformation depending on their locations and positions.

A common motif is that the subject cannot escape the present in this post-colonial realm. Mumbi's and Saikati's actions in their respective pursuit of self-definition and self-determination, it is imperative that they move beyond these set dichotomies to make use of their multiple identities, and the influences located on a continuum wit tradition one end and modernity on the other. The questions posed in the beginning of this chapter are admittedly difficult (reiterate them). Their answers, however, allow the fostering of a precarious identity shifting between the constructed paradigms of tradition and modern.

CHAPTER 3

Formation Of Identity: Beyond Dichotomies And Divisions

7.1 Colonial hangover

> Without necessarily glorifying pre-colonial gender relations in [African] societies, it must be noted that most of the flexible gender relations ... were rigidified during colonial rule and have become part of the post-colonial heritage in African urban communities (Nfah-Abbenyi 23).

This study has insofar illustrated that the subject of African discourse begs an elaboration of the indelible effects of colonialism and its influences on the formation of identity. It has also observed that the cultural context of African cinema "rejects all vestiges of colonialism and acculturation" and strives to present the wide range of influences to restate African individuality (Ukadike 61). This individuality constitutes the (re)formation and (re)construction of identity which colonial processes stripped Africans. The development of post-colonial theories has foregrounded that a disjuncture with this colonial past is almost inevitable. In their usefulness in adequately dealing with the complexities encountered during the aftermath of colonialism have been framed within a Eurocentric context because of the pervasive nature of colonial practice and its manifestation even after formal independence.

We have seen in chapter 1 that the British constructed modern societies at polar oppositions to invent traditional societies while utilizing indices to point to the difference between the tradition and the modern. The distance between the tradition and modern societies was traversed by a universal and unilinear process of development towards modernization and as a result all existing societies were ranged according to their position along this "metaphorical road of social progress" (Berman 187). For example, in *Battle*, in Mumbi's journey takes the spectator to Githunguri from the city where she encounters

a conflict between "new" and "old". Undermining the "old" values embraced by Mzee and Mumbi, the Union perceives Christianity as synonymous with a higher status of civilization. In this case, the interplay of invented paradigms of tradition and modernity exists in both rural and urban realms, and separating them is an obvious detriment to uncovering the effects of colonization. The films' analysis and in their conceptualization and production, have illustrated that the structural and strategies of authority are visibly present and felt in Kenya, hence the deepening divide of binary divisions.

Chapter 1 also points to the endurance of colonial structures in the establishment of Kenyan government and eventually Kenyan cinema, which greatly affected cinematic practices in the country, fostering an inevitable dependency relationship with Western organizations and impoverished African filmmakers. In addition, colonial rule as we have seen, established institutions that would perpetuate Western domination for decades following independence. Post-colonial economic exploitation has forced Kenya further into an Euro/Western capitalist system, which in itself discourages indigenous contests of film production (Ukadike 61). Even up to the Third Wave in the history of Kenyan cinema, the dependency on Western funding is still felt. Despite this, relationship that exists between the West and Africa, the films produced have been useful in documenting the necessity to engage in indigenous practices specific to indigenous and local cultures. Film as a foreign technology has been manipulated by Anne Mungai and Wanjiru Kinyanjui to bring to the screen a possible representation of local discourses. Technology, as informed by Ursula Franklin is a social practice (1990). It can be restructured to complement the practices of society to operate in accordance with their specific needs of expression. In interviews, both Mungai and Kinyanjui although admit their reliance on external funding, have struggled to bring to the screen a representation of

their respecctive realities by using their own grammar of filmmaking. If cinema is storytelling *par excellence*,[10] the films made by these two women are serious narratives laden with personal experiences, encounters, and agendas which increase an understanding of the invariable destabilizing influence on post-colonial subjects.

Ukadike suggests that "the cinematic codes in black African movies are not completely foreign, only in the ways in which they are represented"(17). Thus the films made by the British about Kenyans, and themselves, before and after independence pronounced in a very sound manner the so-called distorted psyche and culture of Africans. In addition, we have seen in chapter 2 how the rise of anthropological discourses towards the end of and after the colonial period exaggerated idealization of "traditional" ways of life. The conventions and negotiation that emerged from the socio-cultural, political, and economic facets of Kenyan colonial history deeply impacted upon the lifestyles of Kenyan which continue to echo in both literature and films produced by Kenyans.

The films made thereafter, with the consequences of colonialism on individuals, addressed the specific socio-cultural issues. *Saikati*, through and examination of the significance of education for girls, and prostitution in urban Nairobi, begins a discourse that is inevitably connected to the effects of colonialism but in effect directs us to understand Saikati's real predicament without negotiating "between the claims of tradition and modernization," as Katherine Frank suggested in the previous chapter. In fact, Saikati renders herself whole again through her own personal actions and negotiation with the problems she confronts.

Although these constrictive paradigms of tradition and modernity as Akudinobe has observed, have been used to seek answers to "questions of identity and culture in

contemporary Africa" (25), they further obscure new and powerful forms of identity that effectively challenge colonialism. They are representative of a harsh hangover from colonialism. Contemporary Kenyans cannot rely on these divisions to define themselves. We have seen that Mumbi does not align herself with Christianity, a contrived ruler for civilization, but makes her choice in tandem with her struggle to attain her personal "peace of mind. A point worth considering, is her playful relationship with her Ugandan tailor friend. I asked Kinyanjui to elaborate on this issue, since the idea of a married Kenyan woman "flirting" with another man is risky.

While divorce is tolerated in the West, the contemporary Kenyan society is still not at terms with the rupturing of marriage – an attitude that could be misperceived as "traditional". Much to Kinyanjui's surprise the film did not receive criticisms from the Kenyan audience. She explains that her "provocative exploration of the question of divorce is only a projection of what is possible" (Personal interview, 3rd June 1999). She insists that it is a real possibility for women in abusive relationships to emancipate themselves by breaking away from the institution of marriage. In fact, one woman told her "yes, this is typical" contrary to the common held belief that divorce does not exist in Kenya! In this case, where do the divisions of tradition and modernity come in? They are functional in that they categorize actions; their execution however, cannot give any insight into the powerful individual subjectivity.

The notion of choice is an underlying importance in the process of doing away with binary division, or going beyond them in the formation of individual identity. In the explication of choice/decision-making, African feminist discourse highlights the monolithic nature of African women and their relationship with men and the larger community. Nnaemeka reminds us that the use of "simplistic analytical paradigms

oversimplify and distort the complex issues ... and the engagement of the central feminist issue of choice (1997b:4). Similarly, Petty notes that "female characters [are] negotiating identities within their own cultural milieus and by their own cultural standards" (1996:86). The plethora of contradictions present in this local milieu cannot be solved; moreover binary divisions are not a means for solution simply because this is the reflection of the nature of a society with a colonial historical past.

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks on post-colonialism have been queried to further inform the contradictions present in the films. The range of approaches employed by scholars demonstrates that debates striving to analyze the problems faced in describing the plurality of identities and challenges they represent. A caveat perhaps is to acknowledge that the process is neither comprehensive nor delimiting, but resonant with a diversity of possibilities. As much as these films employ a central character who functions as the vehicle for the plot, their point of view develops a sense of "relationship between the individual and community, of the collective and of history" (Gabriel 1985:24). This shared experience is significant in the explication of post-colonial assumptions to reveal that the impact of colonialism is felt in each and every subject. Highlighting the subjectivity of each subject is of great importance to African feminisms.

In rethinking post-colonial theories as used in African literary texts, Nfah-Abbenyi insists that the multiplicity of contradictions present in contemporary Africa can neither be misrepresented nor undermined (1997:22). Africans in general, and specific to this thesis, Kenyans are inherently living in an environment that is in itself contradictory. Mumbi and Saikati's representation as characters with imputed fickleness of identity is an expression and consequence of everyday living in a space where contradictions are meant to exist given the divergent historical and contemporary qualities.

7.2 Living with contradictions, living beyond divisions

Undoubtedly, African feminism positions itself against Western versions of feminism to strategically present experiences submerged by conceptual Western assumptions of both African women and men. One of the criticisms of Westerns feminism, as Petty has pointed out "is its apparent inability to satisfactorily address feminist issues outside of its own cultural bias, despite repeated attempts to do so" (Petty 1996:73). The language of Western feminist engagement in Africa (challenge or deconstruct), which exists largely in literary criticism, runs counter to that of African feminisms (collaborate, negotiate, compromise). By challenging through negotiation and compromise, Mumbi, in *Battle*, is able to correspond proactively to the unique situation is enabled by the fluidity and ever-changing identity, which involves processes of self-reflexivity. Thus, the idea that choice is a discursive and open-ended mechanism which yields individual autonomy and self-determination is key in transgressing the limitations of tradition and modernity.

Akudinobe, in turn, notes that the existence of binary divisions to examine notions of identity renders difficulty in seeing that

1. the demands of Euromodernity include overhauling African cultural system and the relegation of more diffuse aspects of cultural syncretism
2. the indices of cultural dynamism are evident in African cultural system, but their acknowledgment goes against the structures through which the observing (Western) self is undeservedly subordinated (27).

When examining African cultural products such as film, these divisions do not constructively function to increase our understanding of the multiplicity of paradoxes and contradictions that exist in the content. Instead, as scholars, we are forced to use

analytical tools to schematize cultural practices reflective of everyday living. The African cultural system, as Akudinobe has pointed out, is dynamic reproducing newly forged identities influenced by ancient and contemporary practices. Mumbi and Saikati, in their respective communities, make their choices in accordance to the context of their situatedness.

Furthermore, Mumbi's and Saikati's identities are inadvertently in a constant process of transformation depending on their locations/positions. With the ability to construct the 'other' alienating another individual is by default. The dialectics formed as a result of the tension between the traditional and contemporary (modern) value systems are thematic in most African film and literature. *Saikati* expresses a tension between attending school and abandoning school for a traditional role as a wife, *Battle*, like Ngugi's The River Between, foregrounds the clash between Christianity and traditional Kikuyu religious practices. A common motif is that the subject cannot escape the paradoxes present in this post-colonial realm. African feminist theories assert that African women (and men) often map both dichotomies of their existences as well as the space that overlaps them (Nnaemeka 1997a, Petty 1996).

Both films are grids or templates that arrange actions into a temporal narrative within which identity is figured (Shohat and Stam 102). Although both films engage central characters, we must note that, as theories of Third Cinema inform us, their "point of view" is in fact precisely, where the narrative finds its dynamic wholeness. The main characters in both films represent explicit ideological or social topics. They do no merely reflect the consciousness of subjectivity of a single subject (the protagonist's or the hero): but serves to develop a historical perspective on radical social change.

In fact, Ukadike rightly observes that Black African cinema is infused with an infinite variety of subjects and styles, as diverse as the people it portrays" (9). While contemporary issues must be addressed in these films, traditional issues must also be focused on as well. The complicated clashes are indeed the reflection of a peculiar reality. It is about being in-between one ideology and another or one history and another. The reflexivity that the films engage in demonstrates the negotiations and contradictions present

Akudinobe's caveat in the misinterpretation of tradition and ancient within the African context is of important consideration as it delineates the meanings of both tradition and modernity. He posits that different roles are assigned to 'tradition' of the west and tradition of Africa. In Europe, " 'tradition' is endowed with curatorial function – to the extent that it preserves a coherent, albeit idealized notion of self and continuity" (26). The meaning of tradition in Africa was deeply "related adversely to *change* and the associative ideals of *progress*" (27 – emphasis in original).

For example, that the "traditional" rural woman is perceived as dumb enough to live with a polygamist in a remote village and speak some Kikuyu, while the "modern" woman is one who is able to leave her husband in the rural area, move to the city and speak/write English is questionable (Nnaemeka 1997b: 10). Nnaemeka asserts that "such conclusions are drawn from these dubious categories whose validity is continually subverted in the ... text themselves" (1995:92.). It is the negotiation of identity, which takes place in between, in the grey ambivalent space in the continuum between "tradition" and "modernity" where difference is evoked. This is exactly the subject of African feminism and its interconnectedness with the discourse of post-colonialism. The forging and disruptions of these bonds must take place to allow and disallow others. Through an

understanding of the trials and struggle for Kenyan filmmakers to properly produce and exhibit their films, one discerns that in order to represent and locate identity, the process must go over and beyond spurious dichotomies. Furthermore, the contexts in which these films are made have shown that binary divisions are colonially posited structures. betweeness

These films must therefore be seen as attempts to portray accurate representations of a non-static and precarious Kenyan culture. They reflect the implications of colonialism, the resistance against it, and the consequences of independence fraught with considerations and negotiations of a divided space of urban and rural, and ideologies of tradition and modernity. The notion of *in-betweeness* is useful when we examine the post-colonial state as we begin to gain a sense and understanding of the difficulties of having a definite reality of colonial and post-colonial encounters. Narratives of Kenyan films illustrate that escaping from these underlying dynamics is impossible especially when the filmmakers and the environment these films are made are affected by larger structures which already insinuate paradigms of modernization and thrive on notions and values introduced by colonial domination.

We have observed that divisions replicated arrangements and structural organizations that do not resemble real life situations. These paradigms, in my opinion, will continue to evoke debates on the problems of setting margins, boundaries and axes. This study is seminal yet ambitious in its urge to disrupt discourses that maintain divisions as they do not produce a semblance of the cultural dynamism that exists in Kenya.

One of the problems, however, is the impossibility of not using the terms 'tradition' or 'modern' when engaging in a discourse related to Africa. For example,

Daniel Etounga-Manguelle has asked whether Africa should enter the train of modernity or watch the train pass by and content itself with picking up fallen products from it, or remain behind with its traditional wagon (1994:6). This question, and any answer to it conjures compartmentalized prison of modernity or tradition for that matter, existing without the influence of a whole range of discourses, which are at times incoherent and contradictory. It also perpetuates the static nature of Africans as coveting observers of "progress". This "transition" from tradition to modern, or vice versa eschews the local ideologies that influence the filmmaker in the conception and creation of plot, characters, and development of the story line. The ideas of both films used in this study were evoked by filmmakers' personal encounters. Reinforcing the growth and development of Kenyan cinema that encompasses the myriad of historical and political influences could be dependent on some of the fallen products, but the text of films represent the on-goings of the present relative to the past. For example, Mumbi's refusal to return to the city could be seen as an outright rejection of so-called modernity. But is she really? She is rejecting all that which interferes with her processes of self-determination which would not render her own oppression and powerlessness. The overcrowded train of modernity has no meaning for her. Saikati, by returning to the Mara, embraces a pillar of "modernity" – education. But why does she change into her the Maasai dress if her goal is to be a modern African woman?

Moving beyond binary divisions as a practice must therefore through a series of questions introduce new terms that do not perpetuate binarisms, which conceal the contradictory nature of contemporary Africa. African feminist theoretical practice has insisted on the elaboration of the politics of locality and situatedeness. Thus, by questioning the discourse entailed in theories that maintain divisions forces us as scholars

to reproduce work that is specific to our experiences and consciousness. My choice for using African feminist theories to understand *Saikati* and *Battle of the Sacred Tree* has been very productive in uncovering the multidimensionality of my own identity, and the politics of negotiation of Saikati and Mumbi in the formation of their respective identities.

African feminist theories, in their intention not to totalize the African woman's experience, strive to provide an analytical framework with feasible concepts which insist on locations of isolation in spaces that are full of complexities, paradoxes and possibilities of difference. To return to the epigraph in the beginning of this thesis, it is true when Kinyanjui says that Africans, such as Mumbi and Saikati, are in search of an identity. It is also true that all Africans are contemporary. All Africans, like myself, are socialized with contradictions that have plagued us since the colonial era. The formation of an identity is a laborious task indeed, and both films, in tandem with an African feminist framework, have powerfully provided a panel for the delineation of the contradicting, ever-changing, (re)formation of identity to take place.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1] We must bear in mind that although Foucault clearly offers a starting point in understanding the politics of the inter-relationship of power and knowledge, his conceptualizations remain Eurocentric and fail to completely help understand the intricacies of colonial societies. The individuality that Foucault grants his subjects is inapplicable in post-colonial and African feminist discourse as colonized people are perceived as unitary or a simple collective

Chapter 1

[2] See Memmi, Albert. The Colonizer and the Colonized. New York: Orion. 1965 for an in-depth discussion on this relationship.

[3] The original name was The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE). See Ukadike 1994:33.

[4] According to Ukadike, the McDougall's have made more than a dozen films. *Lorang's Way* (1977) is available and circulating in American museums and institutions of learning.

[5] The Mau Mau was a nationalistic and political movement/organization that emerged in the 1940s demanding for land rights. For an extensive study on the Mau Mau, you can consult Karari, Njama. Mau Mau from Within: Autobiographical and Analysis of Kenyan Peasant Revolution. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1966; Throupe David. 1987. The Economic and Social Origins of the Mau Mau. London. James Currey; and the more recent Marshall, Clough S. Mau Mau Memories, History, Memories and Politics. Boulder, Colo: L.Reinner, 1998. There are numerous academic papers published on this topic.
[6] This charter was adopted at the Second Congress of the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) in Algiers, January 1975.
[7] It is important to note that the Ministry of Culture was only established in 1981, and according to Ngugi, it facilitated the development of culture through cultural programs. Like the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, it concerned itself with censorship (see Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom. London and New Hampshire. 1993. 91).
[8] The *kipande* was essentially a piece of paper that African workers needed to carry with them at all times. It functioned to restrict and monitor their movements within cities and settler communities. It formed the basis of one of the grievances from African nationalists when demanding Kenyan autonomy.

Chapter 2
[9] Oral tradition has received a lot of attention in academic scholarship through the work of Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and Ian Watt. For a discussion on orality vs. literacy in African see . Also see Diawara, Manthia "Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African Film." Film Quarterly. 41.3 (Spring 1998).

Chapter 3
[10] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam use this statement in their discussion on shaping of the national identity to illustrate the imperial powers use of the cinema to "project narratives" of the strength and power of their respective nation. I use it here to illustrate the power of the image intertwined with narrative (the cinema) and not the power of the nation as reflected on film.

MAP OF KENYA

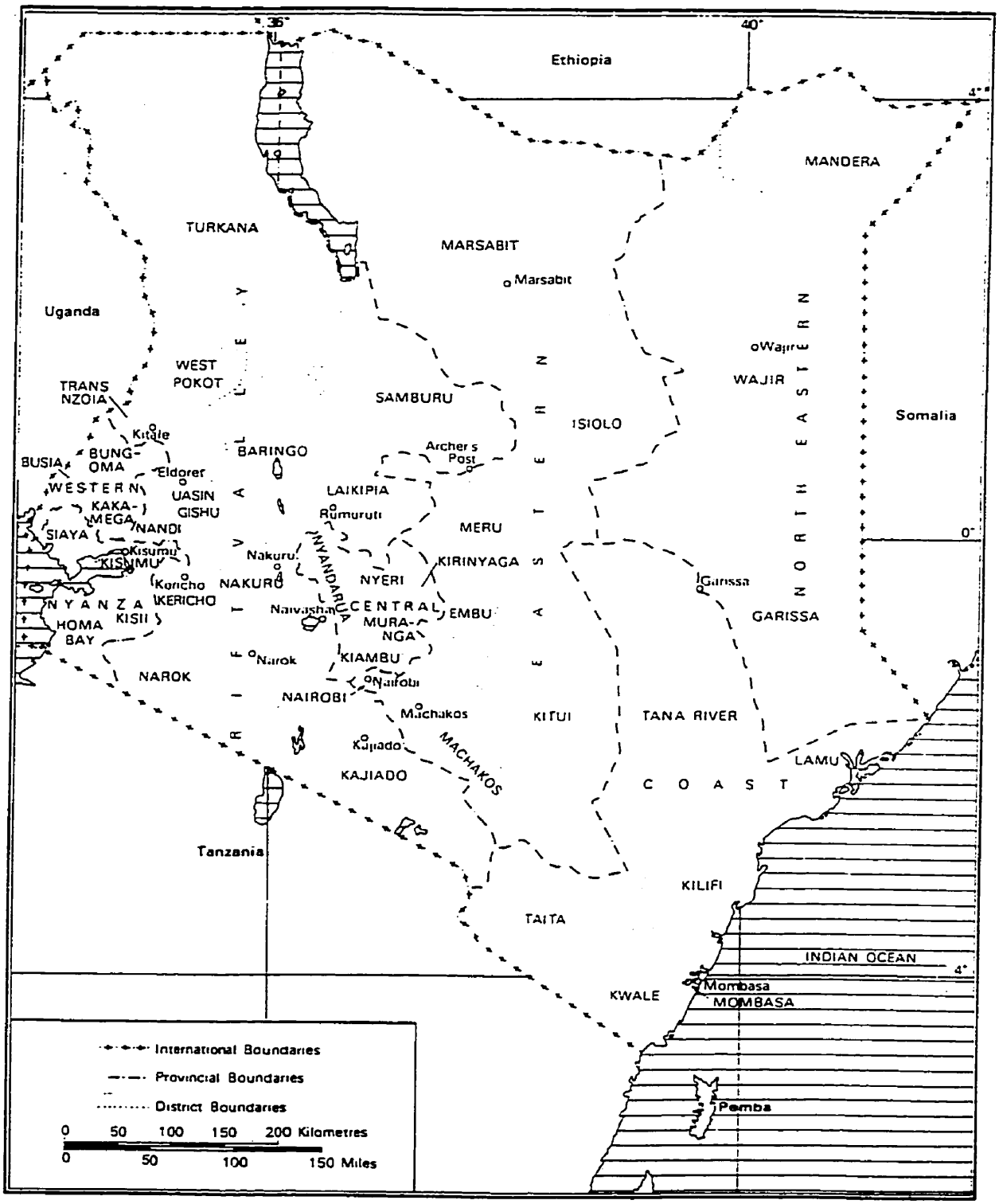

Fig. 1 Present boundaries as proclaimed at Independence. December 1963
From Ojany, Francis F and Rueben B. Ogendo. Kenya : A Study of Physical and Human Geography. Nairobi: Longaman. 1996. 16

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